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Louis Dumont On The National Variants of the Modern Ideology: II*

Leonidas Donskis

The National Variants of Modern Ideology

Dumont’s strategy of research is based on his deep sense of the relationship between a part and a whole in the history of ideas: “The history of ideas in the modern Occident would be considered as a whole, along its main lines of development, in the fundamental unity it could not fail to disclose when viewed against the background of a different civilization. [...] The subject may be approached along three relatively concrete lines: one historical, one that I would call configurational, and one national or ‘sub-cultural.’”

In this essay the subject will be further approached along one of these three lines – namely, along the subcultural line. Dumont, I should say, employs the sociological term “subculture” by stressing the interdependence of national cultures within the general ideological framework of modernity.

These national variants of modern ideology, or national subcultures of the modern European culture, may well be called the national ideological discourses, or ideological languages, of modernity by stressing the exceptional significance of national languages within the general ideological framework of modern nationalism (as shown above, the latter is perceived by Dumont as merely hypostatized individualism). He writes:

It may be objected that such an ideology [the modern ideology] does not really exist, for what might be so called varies from one country or one major language area to another. There are, for example, English, French, German subcultures within European culture. But the fact entails simply that we ought to take those subcultures, or the corresponding ideologies, as so many variants – of equal status – of modern ideology. Ideally, a concrete knowledge of modern ideology would be attained if we could pass from one variant to another in a systematic fashion, as if by applying a set of transformations [...].

It should be noted that Dumont’s introductory note about “so many variants – of equal status [sic!] – of modern ideology” is not accidental. In spite of the emphasis he has placed on the interdependence of the above subideologies, not on these subideologies themselves, Dumont has come to stress the equal status of the national subcultures of European culture. As will be shown below, such an equality of cultures, that is, the principle of equality, is considered by Dumant as but a manifestation of nominalistic thinking. Does this reflect the flexibility of Dumont’s approach which allows him to employ deliberately the elements of nominalistic discourse by placing them into the framework of holistic thinking, and thus by absorbing them into a sphere of hierarchical complementarity?

We should say a few words about how a Dumontian study is analytically organized before following Dumontian thought approaching Herder’s and Fichte’s ideas. This study is directed first to the problem of German identity, as it has been exposed in Herder’s idea of Volk and Fichte’s of Nation. According to Dumont,

[... ] the basic procedure consisted in a comparison of configurations of ideas; the study was therefore essentially static and morphological, neither dynamic nor directly concerned with inter-action. As the study developed, however, it appeared with increasing force that German culture should be looked at not in isolation but as involved in a vital relationship with its environment.

The first national variant is being associated with Herder’s Volk and Fichte’s Nation. It is interesting to note that the former is here conceived as a major polemicist against the English and particularly the French Enlightenment and thus a pure phenomenon of the German national variant of the upcoming modernity, while the latter is seen as the philosopher of the French Revolution. Dumont is deeply concerned with the short-lived Sturm und Drang movement at the time of which Herder had published Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte. This book (and especially its title) is something like a reply to Voltaire who had introduced the term “philosophy of history.”

Herder rehabilitates everything that the French and English eighteenth century rejected or ignored: the barbarous Middle Ages, Ancient Egypt sacrificed to the glory of Greece, and perhaps most important, religion. Instead of history consisting in the accession of reason, a reason disembodied and everywhere identical to itself, Herder sees in history the contrasted interplay of
individual cultures or cultural individuals, each constituting a specific human community, or Volk, in which an aspect of general humanity is embodied in a unique and irreplaceable manner. The German Volk, bearer of western Christian culture, is the modern example of the category. In the flow of history there is not only simply progress (Fortschritt) but, within each of the two civilizational complexes, the ancient and the modern, what one may call a succession of ‘forward strivings’ or blossomings (Fortgang, Fortstreben), all ‘of equal necessity, equal originality, equal merit, equal happiness’ [...].

At first sight, Herder may be perceived not only as a critic of the modern universalist rationalism and of the one-dimensional belief in never-ending progress mainly expressed in the French Enlightenment, but also as a polemicist against the individualist French culture, as it had been shaped mainly by Voltaire and the authors of the Encyclopédie. One would think that Herder’s definition of man would affirm this statement: to the contrary of the theoreticians of the Enlightenment, Herder speaks of man belonging to a given cultural community (as Rousseau did), not of the abstract and historyless individual, a representative of the human species.

It is, however, nothing but the first impression obviously lacking in attentiveness to the important details of Herder’s theoretical discourse. His Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte may be defined neither as simply a call for collective identity in the age of universalist individualism totally despising all the cultural differences and civilizational diversity of humanity nor as an intrusion of holism into a civilizational discourse dominated by nominalism. To state this would be to simplify the reality of ideas produced by Herder. It is small wonder, then, that Dumont points out:

In traditional holism, the society is exclusive, humankind coincides with the society formed by us, and strangers are devalued as being, at best, imperfect men. By the way, even modern patriotism is tinged with that feeling. With Herder, on the contrary, all cultures are recognized as equal in principle. It should be clear that such an assertion is possible only because cultures are viewed as so many individuals, equal among themselves notwithstanding their difference; cultures are individuals of a collective nature. In other words, Herder on the one hand discards individualism in favor of holism on the level of the elements, that is, when he considers individual human beings; but on the other hand he uses the individualist principle by transferring it to the level of compounds [...] when he considers collective entities that before him were unacknowledged or subordi-
nated. It would therefore be wrong to see Herder as rejecting wholesale the individualist – mainly French – culture, for at the same time he accepts a major feature of it in order to assert against that very culture the existence and value of German culture and, with it, of all others that have flourished in history. Therefore, taken globally, Herder’s reaction must be located within the modern value system. His holism must be seen as contained within the individualism that he fiercely attacks – and the circumstance may well account for the style of the book, which is tense, screaming, almost panting.\(^3^4\)

In spite of the emergence of the notion of Humanität – which evidently refers to that of universality – in his Ideen, Herder is seen by Dumont as the theoretician combining the elements of both holism and individualism, or, at least, allowing Dumont to formalize the constituents of his discourse in hierarchical terms. “The superior level, for Herder himself, is the global level of consideration, on which all cultures are present as individuals with equal right. As against the ethnocentrism of naive holism, this shows adherence to modern individualism – transferred from the elementary to the collective level. Holism is here encompassed in individualism; it is a case of the encompassing of the contrary by which I defined hierarchy elsewhere [...].”\(^3^5\)

Although Dumont’s efforts in interpreting Herder’s philosophy of history may be evaluated as indeed interesting and, to be sure, unprecedented theoretical experiment of the hierarchy-oriented discourse, Dumont’s exemplification of the principle of hierarchy in action with the creation of Eve from one of Adam’s ribs in the first book of Genesis seems to be more convincing.\(^3^6\) The same may be said about its exemplification with concentric circles.\(^3^7\) Religious texts serve for Dumont as the more convenient and relevant intellectual space for his analytical thought – at least, in employing his hierarchical terms – than the field of social philosophy which inevitably comes into existence under the sign of the unique individuality and individual experience of its authors.

One of the most fruitful distinctions in Dumont’s analysis of the first national variant of modern ideology, as represented by Herder, is that between the “ethnic theory” of nationalities and the “elective one.” Since Herder’s and Renan’s theories are pretty often considered as almost identical, or, at least, representing the same paradigm of Romantic nationalism, Dumont’s sharp distinction may throw a new light on this issue. He notes:

It may be said in all rigor that Herder posits a German sub-culture by the side of the French one within modern culture.
Moreover, in doing so he lays the basis for what will be later the 'ethnic theory' of nationalities as against the 'elective theory,' in which the nation rests essentially on consensus, on Renan's 'everyday plebiscite.' We have just seen that the ethnic theory rests at bottom on the same equalitarian – i.e. individualistic – basis as the elective theory does. The two theories are therefore not completely independent of each other as is often assumed nowadays [at the same time, they both are more often taken without any distinction, as noted above; this is to say, they are often taken for granted as almost identical theories]. They both apply, albeit on different levels, the same modern principle of equalitarian individualism.38

Dumont's analysis of the main trends of German social thought seems to have been consciously localized by choosing Herder's philosophy of history as the typical case. Herder, however, was not the only German theoretician who has seen cultures as individuals, i.e. as the ontologically and socioculturally unique, indivisible historic entities. Heinrich Rückert's conception of Culturtypus, Leo Frobenius' notion of Paideuma conceived of as the mysterious substance of every living culture, and Oswald Spengler's theory of what he called the "historical morphology" show us how deeply this theoretical tradition is rooted in both German Geschichtsphilosophie and Kulturphilosophie.

Let me take an example. In his Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte in organischer Darstellung, Rückert has defined culture as "die Totalität der Erscheinungen... in welcher sich die Selbständigkeit und Eigenthümlichkeit der höheren menschlichen Anlage ausspricht."49 It is extremely important - at least, in the context of this essay - that Rückert, in his theory of the organic growth of culture, has employed such key terms as Culturkreis, Culturreihe, Culturtypus, and Culturindividuum (!). The latter seems to be of exceptional importance to grasp how deeply the so-called cultural individualism (rather in the methodological sense, that is, in taking culture as an individual sui generis, not as some sort of social whole) is grounded in essentially German theory of the organic growth of culture. Though Dumont applies his analytical equipment to comment upon Tönnies' distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, he might have discussed this lineage of German social thought which is not so simply detachable from the main tendencies of contemporary theoretical discourse.

The same may be said about the case of Spengler. One can see Spengler's Der Untergang des Abendlandes as a certain culmination of Herderian discourse except for their basic difference in general ideological emphasis, or rather in overtones of metaphysical mood: Herder's highly pos-
itive and even optimistic vision of the realm of historically unique cultures has been transformed by Spengler into the extremely negative and pessimistic theory of the inexorable cul-de-sac and doom of Western civilization by exemplifying its alleged historic destiny with that of a number of non-Western civilizations passed away from the historic stage.

Spengler’s theory as well as Frobenius’ notion of the mysterious and mortal ontological nucleus of every culture (the latter, in fact, preceded Spengler’s “historical morphology”) may be seen as the fall, or even as the logical end of the life-cycle, of a Herderian discourse. And though Spengler refers, from time to time, to the enormous influence of Goethe’s natural theory of morphology, as consciously contrasted to traditional natural science, on his own historiosophical construction, one may easily find a crucial role of Nietzsche in the above fundamental shift of the German theoretical thought.

Spengler’s opus magnum, however, came to mean not merely a simple and weak echo, or reminiscence, of ideas produced by Nietzsche one generation earlier, as it has been pointed out by a number of Spengler’s critics, but a quite new approach to the phenomena of Western civilization. Spengler has uncovered a remarkable field of studies for both current civilizational sociologists and cultural theoreticians, to say nothing about his contribution in urban studies. It goes without saying that the real value of Spengler’s apocalyptic philosophy of history as well as of his so-called morphological approach lies neither in his generalizing scheme nor in his summarizing concepts, sunk in the ocean of Spengler’s heavyweighted, elegant discourse, but in his throwing a new light on what seemed to be clear and unquestionable for a long time.

Spengler’s efforts to draw a strict line between mögliche Kultur and wirkliche Kultur may remind us of the theoretical necessity of distinguishing between culture as an idea and culture as a body. (In Spengler’s version of cultural individualism, one may find its most radical shape: culture as an idea precedes culture as a body; moreover, the former is explicitly taken as ontologically prior to the latter.) An introduction and articulation of these two dimensions of culture may help the theoretician in avoiding the confusion of both concepts and terms.

Finally cultural individualism seems to have eventually transcended its primary German theoretical background, or, in Dumont’s own terms, its German subcultural frame, by entering the anglo-saxon cultural anthropology. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn, both German morphologists of culture, Frobenius and Spengler, have elaborated the modern theoretical framework within which a culture may be defined and described as the autonomous dimension.41
Although Dumont stresses the parallel presence of two lineages in German thought (his note about a Herderian – historicist or monadic – lineage sounds as if it were expressed by Dooyeweerd or Collingwood, i.e. by a philosophical critic of the so-called radical historicism: the latter is, as a rule, being identified with what is treated here as cultural individualism rather than radical historicism conceived in its Hegelian – universal and global – sense), he might have shown the evident tendency of these lineages toward the transcending of their original subcultural boundaries. This statement may be exemplified with the interdependence between German cultural morphology and Toynbee’s historic-cultural monadology.

The second lineage in German thought – according to Dumont, that which Fichte, Kant, and Hegel belong to – has also been subculturally translated into, at least, three subcultures of European culture: those of England, Italy, and Russia. The latter, likewise the phenomena of Russian Slavophiles and especially of Danilevsky’s historiosophical theory of historic-cultural types that have specifically reflected the historicist and monadic lineage in German thought, has always tended to absolutize the basic presuppositions of the initiating lineage, while the both of the former have theoretically enriched the second lineage by placing it into their subcultural discursive contexts. The substance of the Hegelian philosophy of history, which probably can be found in Hegel’s winged expression Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht, has been quite differently grasped by those subcultures. This is why the Hegelisms of Bradley and Collingwood, of Croce and Gentile, and of Herzen and Russian Westernizers seem to be quite different phenomena: these basic differences obviously lie in the historical and (sub)cultural backgrounds of the adopting (sub)cultures, not only in individual differences between the Hegelians.42

To the contrary of Herder to whom Dumont refers as a true exponent of the German search for collective identity contrasted to French individualism, “Fichte explicitly set out to be the philosopher of the French Revolution.”43 As the latter is taken by Dumont as a phenomenon of the whole European culture, not only of French (sub)culture, it is small wonder that “[...] he has often been considered in Germany, notably by the historian Meinecke writing before the First World War, as a precursor of pan-Germanism or of the theory that binds the State to the collective will—to power of a people,” while “[...] Martial Guéroult, the French philosopher who has given a painstaking exegesis of Fichte’s system, has been deeply concerned with showing that Fichte throughout his life and writings remained perfectly faithful to the Revolution, and that whatever else is found in Fichte on that level is quite secondary, whether it be his deeply German manner of thinking and feeling, or his ‘German messian-
ism,' not to speak of the misunderstandings and falsifications he has been submitted to [...]."

It should be noted that Dumont fails to show how the basic ideological principle – namely the secularizing individualism – works in shaping, or reshaping, the deepest structures of theoretical thought. For instance, it remains unclear how the will-to-transcendence within German thought transforms itself into the will-to-culture. It might shed a new light not only on how the upcoming Geschichtsphilosophie and Kulturphilosophie eventually took the place of the classical metaphysics and particularly of ontology, but also on how philosophy itself has acquired the totally secularizing force throughout the history of ideas.

We should understand why Dumont contrasts – mainly from the viewpoint of employing the elements of hierarchy within social thought – Fichte to Herder. Though Dumont finds Fichte a true equalitarian on the political level, Fichte is seen by him as a bearer of a hierarchical form of thought. Dumont states:

[...] Fichte is on the whole a stranger to the Herderian and romantic notion of the diverse characters of cultures or peoples as so many facets of the richness of the universal Whole. When he does use this notion in a passage of the thirteenth address [in the Addresses to the German Nation], it is part of a clever argument directed precisely against the romantic dream of a new Christian-Germanic Empire. More generally, it is true that Fichte adopts in that period the current stereotypes of the excellence of the German character, of the German language, etc., but he does so essentially in order to state a hierarchy among peoples in the name of the very values of universalism. Now I contend that, apart from any borrowing from the Romantics, it is possible to show the presence in Fichte’s thought in general, alongside of a strong individualistic-cum-universalistic stress, of a holistic aspect and more especially of a hierarchical component. I shall leave out here the holistic tendency, very strong in the authoritarian socialism of the Closed Commercial State, and which could be found also in passages of other texts – uneasily cohabiting with individualistic features, but this is after all an ubiquitous trait in modern thought, including sociological thought. [...] What is more noteworthy is the emergence, all along the works of Fichte, and in clear contrast with the Enlightenment and French revolutionary thinking, of a hierarchical form of thought."

It may be true but, nonetheless, a question arises: how could
Dumont explains the strange similarity between Fichte's *Addresses* and messianic theories that in turn also state a “hierarchy among peoples in the name of the very values of universalism?” And why Hegel's notion of the historic nations is no longer hierarchical? Dumont probably would say that the point is that Fichte’s approach implies, more or less, the *encompassing of the contrary* that lies at the very basis of the hierarchical relation, while messianism, or even Hegelism, is nothing but the dangerous confusion of hierarchical ambition and individualism.

In spite of Dumont's emphasis frequently placed on hierarchy as a pure theoretical construction, a principle in accord to which the social whole should be designed (for Dumont, a hierarchy as such has in principle nothing to do with politics), one may easily find a number of dangers that result from his principal rejection of a clear distinction between methodology and ideology. The numerous advantages of Dumontian thought may turn into dangerous disadvantages. This problem will be discussed below.

It is not enough for Dumont to uncover the elements of hierarchy on the ideological level of Fichte's thought. He is going forward in uncovering that on the methodological, or metaphysical, level. This is to say, Dumont finds Fichte's system of philosophy hierarchically organized.

The examples of hierarchy I just referred to are yet details, local, almost anecdotic occurrences. Far more weighty, decisive indeed in my view is the presence of the hierarchical opposition at the very heart of Fichte's system of philosophy, in that dialectic of the 'I' (or self) and the 'Not-I' (not-self) which constitutes the foundation of his *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), the 'transcendental dialectic,' as Philonenko calls it, that establishes the conditions of all knowledge. The demonstration lies at hand, for it is the 'I' that posits the 'not-I.' As in the case of Adam and Eve, there are two levels in the relationship: on the first level, the I or self is undifferentiated, it is the absolute I or self; on the second level, the self posits within itself the not-self; and *ipso-facto* posits itself as against the not-self, so that we have, facing each other, the self and the not-self. The not-self is on the one hand contained within the self, on the other hand it is the opposite of self. This strictly hierarchical disposition of the Fichtean dialectic is noteworthy from many angles, especially perhaps with regard to Kant and to Hegel. On the one hand it is the hierarchical disposition that allows Fichte to integrate into a whole Kant's two Reasons, pure Reason and practical Reason. On the other hand, Hegel's dialectic will be no more hierarchical.

Although Dumont is undoubtedly profound and, in many respects,
quite right in defining the "very heart of Fichte's system of philosophy," we should take the just quoted passage critically. Everything here sounds fascinating but exactly the same can be said about almost every case – at least, about the Cartesian one – of solipsistic thinking. Solipsism, if taken in its classical, or paradigmatical, shape, consists of the same principle of hierarchical complementarity, as it has been successfully exemplified by Dumont with concentric circles. The point perhaps is that solipsism as such is, by its logical and metaphysical nature, a phenomenon of hierarchy *par excellence.* How could we explain, for instance, the Cartesian principle of *lumen naturale intellectus* by avoiding the hierarchical relationship between human consciousness (in Descartes' own terms, *ens cogitans*) and the supreme guarantee of true knowledge (the Supreme Being)? Thus the basic difference between Cartesian solipsism and the Fichtean one lies in their theoretical destination, not in their hierarchical qualities: solipsism of Descartes is epistemological, while that of Fichte is ontological.

Does it not mean that the problem of hierarchy lies not only in *Weltanschauung,* or, to use Dumont's analytical language, in ideology, but in the internal organization of theoretical thought *per se*? Is it accidental that the classical German idealism (Kant, Fichte, and Hegel), as shown by Dumont, is – in all respects – oriented toward universalism (though Dumont recognizes Fichte as the only hierarchical thinker among German idealists), while the *Sturm and Drang* movement, or the German preromanticism, arises – especially in the case of Herder's *Volk* – as the "historicist or monadic lineage" essentially representing a (con)fusión of holism and individualism? Is Dumont able to explicate this only by showing that Fichte and Hegel have been obviously magnetized by the French Revolution? Or is it merely a problem of theoretical discourse and of its inner organization?

Every analytical interpreter, or rather exegete, of Dumont's theory of the national variants of modern ideology should address these questions to himself rather than to Dumont. In light of Dumont's impressively coherent theory, the above questions seem to be neither complicated nor crucial. They become problematical if translated into a different theoretical framework or into a different analytical language.

The second national variant is being associated by Dumont with the German idea of liberty according to Troeltsch. Dumont begins his analysis from Troeltsch's definition of the German idea of liberty: *state socialism and culture individualism [Bildungsinindividualismus].* Later Dumont formalizes this sharp definition by reducing it to the formula "self-dedication + Bildung."

It is quite enough to pay attention to a few of Dumont's introductory notes on this issue to grasp how distinct the German idea of liberty is in
comparison with the French or the English tradition—"for brevity we shall call it Western, as he [Troeltsch] does"—of liberty. According to Troeltsch, it springs up as "an organized unity of the people based on a rigorous and at the same time critical devotion of the individual to the whole, which is complemented and legitimized by the independence and individuality of the free spiritual culture [Bildung]."

The spontaneous adhesion to the social whole seems to have been deeply grounded in German thought, including also sociological thought. For Dumont, "this spontaneous adhesion to the social whole is exactly what Toennies called 'spontaneous will' (Naturwille), for him the characteristic trait of the community or Gemeinschaft as opposed to the 'arbitrary will' (Kürwille) of the individual subject in the society (Gesellschaft) [...]"

In other words, the German idea of liberty refers to, as Troeltsch would say, "service by the individual at his place in the function allotted to him," not to equality. This is why, Troeltsch sums up, "the liberty of the German is willed discipline, advancement and development of one's own self in a whole and for a whole." It is obvious that such a notion of liberty is incompatible with the paradigmatically accepted French or English, i.e. Western, tradition of liberty. Small wonder, then, that Dumont points out:

Troeltsch knows very well, and he says so, that the French or English tradition [...] cannot see liberty in that formulation but only autocracy, slavery, etc. [...] He simply maintains that that is how liberty is according to Hegel, and how it is expressed, one way or another, 'in all the great German creations of the century' [...], and in the Socialist party as well as in the army. Troeltsch traces the origin of this disposition back to the seventeenth century [...]. It results from the transformation of Christian submission to the patriarchal–absolutist State under the influence of the Western spirit of Enlightenment. The State was modified, and 'the submissive believer turned into the freely obedient and devoted citizen, who participates in the general will by fulfilling his duty in his place and freely exercising his criticism' [...]. German liberty is thus a 'secularization of the religious sense of duty and, in particular, its intensification into an activity of creation in common [mitgestaltend]'. Here we perceive a recognition of acculturation: we are dealing with a traditional holism that was modified or transformed under the influence of 'the spirit of liberty and independence [Mündigkeit]' [...].

This devotion to the State, nevertheless, leaves the place for the purely internal individualism that derives from Bildung, or the free spiritual
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culture based on the idea of self-cultivation. This split between the external world (basically represented by the state and its policy) and the internal one (essentially conceived as Selbstbildung, i.e. self-construction, self-education, or cultivation), or, in Dumont’s terms, a deep separation between externality and internality, may throw a new light on the exceptional place and character of the German intellectual whose prototype is Luther. “It is impossible not to see a descendant of Luther in the Bildung intellectual. Not necessarily a follower – he may even be an atheist – but a descendant.”

In other words, the German idea of liberty based on the paradoxical combination of state socialism (the idea of the omnipotent, universal State) and culture individualism – that is, on the German formula “self-dedication + Bildung” – is merely an inversion of the Western idea of liberty. It is not accidental that the German intellectual has come to subtract politics from the realm of culture, while the Western (respectively the French and English) intellectuals have considered it to be not only a phenomenon of culture, but also a true space of freedom. According to Bruford, even “the ordinary middle-class man here [in Germany], if he ever thought about culture, never considered politics to be part of it, and still does not do so today. To ask him to transfer his allegiance from inwardness to the objective, to politics, to what the peoples of Europe call freedom, would seem to him to amount to a demand that he should do violence to his own nature, and in fact give up his sense of national identity.”

Where does this phenomenon come from? And is the great theme of a nonpolitical man, expressed by Thomas Mann and other German intellectuals of the twentieth century (especially by Hermann Hesse and the Bildungsroman in general), the logical continuation of the crucial tendencies of German ideology that sprang from the Reformation? Dumont suggests:

In more ways than one, Luther is the prototype of the German intellectual. He is so in particular as a writer, in his basic contribution to the development of the German language, but also as the representative of the German people in relation to the Catholic Church and hence on the world scene, as witnessed by his popularity, which means that to a great extent the Germans recognized themselves in him. This function of representative or mediator between the German people and the ‘Western’ or universal culture passed on to the German writer and thinker. Troeltsch indicates or implies this, and others have noticed it, even Lukács. It comes out clearly from Thomas Mann’s analysis in his war book [Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen] [...], and the role is essential. If we are to understand it, we must reflect that in a period when there is no political but only cultural unity,
the function of representative devolving elsewhere upon a head of state or an ambassador quite naturally falls on a Goethe, a Hegel, or perhaps a Beethoven. Besides, the German themselves are well aware of this when, as so often, they tell us that Germans have achieved in ideas what others have accomplished on the world scene. And so did Marx. We cannot understand German literature and thought if we neglect this role of representative or mediator in the German intellectual at the height of his renown [...].

Both a deep separation between externality and internality and the function of the representative or the mediator between the German people and the "Western" or universal culture may be found in the Bildungsroman that appears to have been designed as a pure German phenomenon. In his Das Glasperlenspiel, Hermann Hesse deals with a fatal separation between vita activa and vita contemplativa that seems to be merely a variation of the same great theme of German culture. It is extremely important that Hesse has obviously enriched the above function of mediator by directing him (in the symbolic identification of narrator and himself) to a civilization of the East.

At the same time, we should grasp why culture as such has been frequently identified by the German philosophers of the nineteenth century (basically by the exponents of Lebensphilosophie and by neo-Kantians) exceptionally with spiritual culture. Dumont might have concerned himself with how – and whether – a strict distinction between Naturwissenschaften and Geisteswissenschaften (in the case of Dilthey and neo-Kantians) as well as that between culture and civilization (from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Oswald Spengler) emerged nowhere but in Germany. Dumont also might have supplemented his studies of German culture with the case of Spengler who has come to emphasize the self-dedication of the intellectual to the State, instead of insisting on the priority of Bildung or Selbstbildung over devotion to the State. This kind of analysis, however, remains to be done by someone who would be able to employ Dumont’s analytical equipment in the studies of German culture.

Shall we go back to Dumont’s analysis of the German idea of liberty, as it has been interpreted by Troeltsch and then by Thomas Mann? The latter has noticed a few things of great importance for a Franco-German comparison. In his Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man, Thomas Mann states:

Out of the liberty and sovereignty of the Germans Luther made something accomplished by turning them inward and thus keeping them forever out of the sphere of political quarrels.
Protestantism has deprived politics of its spiritual goad and has made it a practical matter [...] .

Dumont generalizes this statement in the following way:

Here, in the author's own language, is a deep insight supported by Hegel and Carlyle. ‘Hegel said that France would know no rest for lack of a Reformation’ [...] , and Carlyle saw in the Revolution a ‘bad substitute’ for Reformation [...] . It is worth trying to grasp the matter more firmly in our own language and to characterize the two contrasting forms of individualism. That of Luther is located on the religious plane. It is directed against the religious division of labor and against the hierarchy: all Christians become priests and retrieve from the Church the responsibility for their own salvation. There results an internalization and the subordination of everything else to the inner life of the Christian. Politics, especially, is subordinated, the State is subordinated, and by the same token it is accepted as life and power, with its division of labor: there are specialists in government because it is of no import.

If this is so, can we say, slightly modifying Thomas Mann's thought, that the German Reformation immunized the German against the Revolution, i.e. against the extraverted French individualism, while the French Revolution has done something vice versa by immunizing the Frenchmen/Frenchwomen against the experience of the German Reformation, i.e. against the introverted German individualism? According to Dumont, this would be but a too hasty conclusion: “Even if Lutheranism has had an effect on the political constitution of Germany, it is not entirely responsible for it. The crucial fact on the ideological level - hitherto not clearly singled out, it seems - is probably the emergence in the West of the modern type of sovereignty – territorial sovereignty – and its absence in Germany.”

The internal, or introverted, individualism, i.e. the politics-free culture individualism, we have just recently discussed unavoidably led to a purely elitarian notion of culture that resulted from a deep split between intellectuals and ordinary people (the commoners can submit themselves to the omnipotent State, while the elite finds its high destination in submitting itself to Bildung). This fact may explain a number of the many-sided phenomena that appeared in modern social history (a Dumontian model of the history of ideas seems to be extremely fruitful in doing so), and among them that of an acceptance of totalitarianism (or rather the non-resistance to it). We may easily find this phenomenon not only in Germany, but also in other...
national variants, particularly in Russia. Isaiah Berlin, in his brilliant study *Russian Thinkers*, has shown how a deep split between the average people and the so-called Russian intelligentsia has promoted both the utopian stance and the ideological isolation of the Russian cultural elite.60

Dumont sums up the hidden, invisible correspondence between the German idea of liberty and the upcoming German imperialism (and then totalitarianism) as follows:

In my view, we have here a major fact that has hitherto been concealed by the overestimation of material aspects and the neglect of the ideological dimension, together with insufficient comparison with the Western neighbors. It follows that Germany, once unified by Prussia, was Janus-headed: on the international level it was a national or territorial State among others, while at the level of internal representation it was a resurgence of universal sovereignty. Such is perhaps the deepest explanation for the will to dominate inherent in this ‘Empire’ or, in other words, for pan-Germanism as a concomitant of the German idea of liberty as defined by Troeltsch in 1916.61

In his analysis of the national variants of modern ideology, Dumont provides us with both an incisive analytical perspective and unusual but nonetheless amazingly precise and inclusive formulations. I would even say that we are able to uncover the different variants within the same (sub)culture, not only within European culture, by using Dumont’s approach. Alas, it is not enough to employ his terms and then to go further in the search for the basic ideological principle of a particular civilization in one’s comparative study, as Dumont himself would do: in doing so, one needs to become an expert on at least two comparative civilizations. Dumont’s attentiveness to empirical evidence is a part of his method. And Dumont’s fallacies that are to be discussed seem to be nothing but a continuation of his virtues.

This is why we should take his *locus minoris* critically. The latter seems to acquire a certain arbitrariness by exemplifying the basic thesis and insisting on a hopelessly unconvincing argument. This may be said, above all, about his conception of totalitarianism.

The Totalitarian Disease

It goes without saying that one should welcome Dumont’s *conditio sine qua non* in throwing a new light on the origins of totalitarianism. It may be defined as the emphasis placed on the modern origin of totalitarianism, on the one hand, and as the principal rejection of historical continuity as an
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explanation of this issue, on the other.

Too much has been done using historical continuity as an explanation. The continuance of anti-Semitism since the Middle Ages no more explains the sinister invention of extermination than an undeniable continuity in German ideology explains the catastrophic episode of the Nazi degeneration [italics mine]. Aside from French interpreters, who have a feeling for this ideological continuity (but to feel is one thing and to reason is another), there has been a tendency either to link Hitlerism directly to German romanticism or to reject everything in German culture that diverged from the straight line of the Enlightenment and its claimed extension in Marxism as ‘irrational’ and as automatically paving the way for National Socialism. [...] These are partisan and mutilating views, which in the last analysis show an inability to understand not just the Nazi phenomenon but German ideology itself and its necessity as a national variant of modern ideology.82

In other words, the quintessence of both the racist anti-Semitism and National Socialism, according to Dumont, lies in the continuity of German ideology, not in historical continuity. Social history as such is unable to uncover the deepest ideological structures: this is why Dumont’s methodological preference is made by referring to the history of ideas or intellectual history.

Generally speaking, Dumont finds German totalitarianism nothing but the logical and even necessary continuation of the German national variant of modern ideology. Totalitarianism thus is neither a pure expression of some metaphysical evil nor merely some sort of social pathology. A solution of this horrible enigma of our time can be attained by rediscovering the mysterious link between German culture and the German State. Dumont puts it in the following way:

We found, first, that the introverted individualism of the Lutheran Reformation had allowed the Germans to resist the extraverted individualism of the French Revolution and, second, that they had remained adepts of a primitive type of sovereignty, namely universal sovereignty. The first feature accounts for the sharp separation between culture and politics and, incidentally, for Thomas Mann’s suspicion of social–political questions. The second feature explains how the Prusso-German State found support for its aggressive foreign policy among German intellectuals, as if pan-Germanism was the only – or the main – attribute of the State that German culture accepted as genuine, in
other words the only – or the main – positive link between German culture and the German State. 63

But it should be noted that these are the most convincing parts of Dumont’s conception of totalitarianism. The issue seems to become something like a cul-de-sac for Dumont’s analytical discourse. His analytical language works somewhat until it becomes clear that Dumont’s key concepts – those of individualism and holism, – after being placed in such an unusual context, lose their original incisiveness. “The hypothesis is that totalitarianism results from the attempt, in a society where individualism is deeply rooted and predominant, to subordinate it to the primacy of the society as a whole. It combines, unknowingly, conflicting values.” 64 Kavolis writes on this issue:

The least convincing part of Dumont’s critique of modernity is his derivation of totalitarianism from ‘individualist-artificialism.’ It is not in the most ‘individualist–artificialist’ parts of the West – those with a strong Calvinist influence – that totalitarianism has acquired power but rather in those in which cultural tradition contained strong holist–hierarchic elements. Totalitarianism is favored by an encounter of political modernization with a deficiency of cultural modernity in the deeper sense. This may yet prove to be true of technocracy as well. 65

We can agree with Dumont when he shows not only the basic similarities between the Nazi movement on the one hand, and the Marxist and Bolshevik movement on the other, but also the basic differences between them. In spite of his fallacies that are to be discussed, Dumont’s comparative study of the above totalitarian movements is of exceptional value for the further studies of this subject. Among other things, he notes:

In Mein Kampf, Hitler explained very clearly that he designed his movement as a sort of antithetical copy of the Marxist and Bolshevik movement, replacing, among other things, the class struggle by a race struggle. We are here confronted with an international process. What strikes one as a modern trait in the broadest sense is a historical chain of successive outbiddings or, I would say, a kind of hubris of the will. Marx inherits the titanic speculation of the German philosophers [...] and intensifies it: instead of interpreting the world, he is going to change it by means of an alliance between philosophy and the proletariat. Hence the ‘professional revolutionary,’ Lenin, who goes one step farther: Russian populism has proclaimed the possibility of the
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Russian people's overtaking bourgeois Western civilization, which leads Lenin to the idea that the small group of conspirators who call themselves the Bolshevik party will be able to skip the capitalist stage of economic development altogether and lead Russia directly from Tsarism to Socialism [...]. Along comes Hitler, who rejects the Bolsheviks' ideology but picks up the instrument of power they have forged and combines their party model with a quite different ideology. What is increasing here from stage to stage is the ambition of a few men to impose their will upon history, and their actual power to manipulate people [italics mine].

This may be true but, nevertheless, one wonders why such a profound thinker as Dumont has reduced the phenomenon of totalitarianism to that of German National Socialism. It goes without saying that the concept of totalitarianism is too broad to reduce it to the Nazi movement. The Russian Communism (to use Berdyaev's term), or the Soviet totalitarianism, as a matter of fact, in many respects (the omnipotence of the State and the absolute powerlessness and weakness of a particular individual, the complete elimination of even a partial economic freedom, an exercise of the universal State Control) has even surpassed its German alter ego. We can respect the personal — in fact, the uniquely individual — experience of a scholar and to take it seriously in our considerations; however, from this point of view, Dumont's analysis of totalitarianism remains merely a pars pro toto.

Let us refer once again to Kavolis' review. After he has made Dumont's formulation we are discussing here more precise and adequate ("When an illusion about the nature of society becomes identical with power over it, totalitarianism results"), Kavolis states:

This would seem to be a more adequate formulation than Dumont's own, which is so urgently directed to accounting for Nazism that it does not explain the conquest of power by Communism in Russia or China. [...] Individualism has never been the dominant emphasis in either Russia or China, and Communist efforts to subordinate it to the primacy of the society as a whole were directed at what was perceived as either the anarchy (in Russia) or the inefficacy (in China) of recently intensified individualist challenges (including revolutionary ones) to traditional holism. Totalitarianism is more likely to be a reassertion of traditional holism in a new guise against the threat of rising individualism than an effort of previously subordinated holism to suppress traditionally dominant individualism [italics mine].
Russian Communism seems never to have been grounded in Western modernity *sensu stricto*. Although Russian intellectuals, or rather the Russian intelligentsia, has been under the spell of ideas produced by German philosophy (especially by Herder, German Romanticism in general, and Hegel89 for a long time, Russian Communism, by a historical paradox, has in principle nothing to do with either the social history or the intellectual history of the West. In fact, Russian Communism sprang from the Byzantine heritage of caesaropapism and the phenomenon of *sacrosanctus* (the complete fusion of ideological authority and political power that unavoidably led to, as Dumont would say, the civilizationally “abnormal” situation).

It is extremely important that Russia has never had the ideologically, not only religiously in the narrow sense – secularized society. Russia seems to have always lacked what Eisenstadt calls the autonomous cultural elite. Although the ideological function of the Russian intellectual slightly reminds one of that of the German intellectual in being something of a *mediator* between his own culture and that of the “West,” it springs up, in the two cases, from quite different sources: as Dumont has shown, all the modern phenomena of German culture derive from the deeply rooted cultural individualism (obviously contrasted to political individualism) and the German idea of liberty formalized in the German formula “self-dedication + Bildung,” whereas the Russian intelligentsia seems to have always been fighting for the acceptance of the *foreign* ideas, instead of producing its own sociocultural projects.

But the graceful metaphor that Russia appears as the anti-scenario, or as the inverted mirror, of the West (since Ivan the Terrible has consciously inverted social structure into anti-structure by subverting even the symbolic meanings of Western civilization) may explain nothing in either the comparative approach or the analytical perspective based on the history of ideas. The Russian messianism, if taken without a pejorative connotation of this term, is in turn nothing but the powerful resistance of Russian culture (it would be quite enough to recall, for instance, the Russian Slavophiles) against the political modernization basically represented by the politics of Westernization, introduced by Peter the Great, and, in part, by the so-called Russian Zapadniks (Westernizers).

This is why we, in taking totalitarianism in its broadest sense and not reducing it to Nazism, should agree with Kavolis that “totalitarianism is favored by an encounter of political modernization with a deficiency of cultural modernity in the deeper sense.”

Finally, are the German cultural individualism and the German ideological formula of liberty the only reasons to explain the wide acceptance
of totalitarianism among intellectuals? The history of modern political ideas shows us how widespread the acceptance of reactionary and totalistic ideas was among the French intellectuals. How should we grasp the cases of Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras, and Georges Sorel? The ideas of the radical and integral nationalism and of syndicalism were even more popular in France than in Germany.

We should also recall the phenomenon of racism which Dumont refers to as a part of the German national variant of modern ideology. Though Dumont demonstrates how Gobineau’s racism (*Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*) has been eventually transformed by Hitler from a purely negative doctrine to the highly positive one, racism in his theory remains explained neither as an internationally widespread and then accepted doctrine nor as a phenomenon obviously transcending the boundaries of a particular national variant.

In spite of this critical assessment, Dumont seems to belong to those rare and exceptional thinkers whose fallacies may enrich the modern theoretical discourse incomparably more than one’s banal truth. He provides cross-cultural studies with both his sharp, precise analytical language and an unprecedentedly incisive analytical perspective. No one engaged in current studies of ideology, including civilizational sociologists, intellectual historians, philosophers, and cultural theoreticians, will be able to pass by Dumont’s theory which has come to uncover the hidden phenomena (and unpredictable inspirations) of the empirically invisible ideological-historical drama of humanity.

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NOTES


29. To use Philip Bagby’s terms, Dumont’s “national variants” should be called “cultures,” while “subcultures” might be perceived as the different variants of the same “culture,” or of the same “national variant.” In this case, the modern European ideology should be treated as a “superculture” rather than a “culture.” Dumont has obviously introduced these key terms as the specific constituents of his theoretical construction.

30. Unfortunately, this problem seems to have been left outside of Dumont analytical concern. The dissemination of the basic ideas and values of modern ideology within – or their transmissio to – the national variants inevitably depends, more or less, on the national language. The latter, sooner or later, the various waves of modernization (particularly by the modern nationalism as the modernizing factor). An ideology always manifests itself as the *logocracy*, i.e. as the domination of prescriptive, or, at least, prescriptive, language. It may be said, first of all, about the *manifesto ideologies* eliminating all the possible visions of the world.


36. *Ibidem*.

37. From this point of view, a Dumontian interpretation of the Christ’s sermon (“render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar”, but unto God the things that are God’s” in hierarchical terms is a brilliant example of his method in action. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.


41. Ibid., pp. 290-291, Kluckhohn notes:
The danger in the construal of culture as an emergent level evidently lies in the consequent tendency to reify or hypostatize culture, to view it as a distinctive substance or actual superorganism, and then to assume that it moves through autonomous, immanent forces. Spengler certainly believed this; so did Forbenius, at least at times; and Kroeber has been flatly charged with the same errors by Boas, Benedict, and Birdney, besides incurring opposition to the concept of the superorganic from Sapir and Goldenweiser.

42. For instance, Alexander Herzen, one of the most prominent Russian Hegelians, has never believed in the alleged historic laws. His emphasis, placed on the history-free human morality, can be grasped only within the historical-cultural background of Russia in the nineteenth century. Isaiah Berlin, Russian Thinkers (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 95, referring to Herzen’s From the Other Shore, writes:

Man ‘wants to be neither a passive grave-digger or the past, not the unconscious midwife of the future [. . .].’ He wants to live in his own day. His morality cannot be derived from the laws of history (which do not exist) nor from the objective goals of human progress (there are none such - they change with changing circumstances and persons). Moral ends are what people want for their own sake. ‘The truly free man creates his own morality [. . .].’


45. Ibid., p. 123.


47. Dumont, Essays on Individualism, op cit., p. 133.

48. Ibid., p. 146.

49. Ibid., p. 135.


51. Ibid., p. 134.
52. Ibid., p. 135.


54. Ibid., pp. 139-140.


56. Ibid., pp. 140-141.


58. Ibid., pp. 144-145.

59. Ibid., p. 145.

60. Berlin, Russian Thinkers, op. cit., p. 117, points out: “Most Russian historians are agreed that the great social schism between the educated and the ‘dark fold’ in Russian history sprang from the wound inflicted on Russian society by Peter the Great.” Further on this issue, see pp. 114-135.


62. Ibid., p. 150.

63. Ibid., p. 153.

64. Dumont, From Mandeville to Marx, op. cit., p. 12.


68. Ibid., p. 138.

69. The Russian Slavophils may be described – in may respects – as the successors of Herder and of the German Romanticism, while the Russian Zapadniks (Westernizers) seem to have been the move complicated and many-sided case in the intellectual history of Russia. Their mainstream has been deeply influenced by Hegel and in part, his German disciples, while a number of other Zapadniks were under the impact of the French Enlightenment and, to be sure, of French positivism.

Both the Russian organicism and even the reactionary pan-Slavism (the latter has culminated in Danilevsky’s Russia and Europe), not to speak of the so-
called apocalyptic philosophy of history, sprang from Heinrich Rückert's ideas, not only from Herder's historiosophical theory. The most magnetizing impact of German philosophy to Russian philosophy, however, has been made through Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.