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Are family and nation « natural » communities ?

We have to manipulate these words with great care. Community, for example, has to be taken in the general sense of “a human group” without the connotated meaning of “communitarism”.

What does the word “naturally” means? The excesses of the word nature are well known : stiffed essence, “given essence”, in the name of the myth, a religion, etc.... All the silly things we may have said in the name of “Nature” : women can not be engineers because it is not in their nature, we find in a magazine article at the beginning of the XXth century... Man is a metamorphic being, this meaning of nature is therefore impossible : metamorphic, but to what extent? Here I will not talk in the name of a religion, but I will start from anthropology : from the characteristics of mankind as we see it appear in History.

We have to differentiate two types of anthropology : philosophical and cultural. Philosophical anthropology, if we single it out, brings characteristics to the human condition beyond cultural differences. We realize that what unites man through time and space are certain fundamental questions : why should I die? Where do good and evil come from? Some

may think that a philosophical anthropology does not exist (philosophy of *desconstruction* : man is a fading track on the sand -Foucault, or the subject of a grammatical fiction - Borges-).

But then, it would mean that anything is possible to mankind, that by consequence it may become too many (Arendt). Since the totalitarian governments, one can not object to the existence of philosophical anthropology anymore. The totalitarian regims, by building a new kind of human being using a voluntarist manner and mistreating him, have shown, by default or abandon, the importance of anthropology. Robert Redeker has correctly demonstrated that the main result of these totalitarian regims is to bring to light the existence of anthropology : we can not do anything we want with man. It does not mean however that we know who is this human being. But that he should be a constant interrogation to us before deciding such and such experiment concerning him. Not everything is possible with man, it in deed means he must have a face.

In return, cultural anthropology is diverse, relative and uncertain. It brings answers to fundamental interrogations. Each culture percieves man in its own way from the shared point of view of philosophical anthropology. Every man asks the question of death (beginning with the "Neanderthal man"), but the various cultures answer this concern towards death with different religions or wisdoms.

Our remarks on family and nation stand in this difference between the two anthropologies.

Philosophical anthropology tells us that man is an animal which:

- thinks about about ephemeral nature.
- knows the separation between good and evil, the latters presenting the same general characteristics (evil always stands on the side of separation and good on the side of union)
- lives within a time scale and seeks to last

- answers its interrogation with cultures (ways of life and thinking)
- transmits this culture to its lineage
- is different and search its own identity and the one of the group he belongs to.
- works for the permanent metamorphosis of his situation to try and improve it.

Then, we may say that

- a group is necessary to a human being for **transmission**, in order to differentiate the subject from his kinsmen
- a large group called community or society is necessary to the human being to incarnate the identity of the culture he belongs to.

Regarding this, family is natural in the philosophical anthropological meaning and nation is too. But these two groups are metamorphics.

I will then answer progressively to the question.

There is no humanity without a form of family nor without a form of government. Nevertheless, family and nation may change forms. The question, then, is to know which will be the consequences of these transformations. For each culture is a coherent world : a type of family corresponds to a type of human ideal, a type of joint identity corresponds to a vision of society (what I mean is for example that we can not develop simultaneously a religion with an authoritarian God and tolerant politics or independant individuals and a welfare State, etc). A lot of different models are possible : but before we start defending one model, we must know to which cultural world it belongs to. The two institutions we are discussing will bring here two typical examples.

In his work The Origin of the Family, Private property and the State (1884), Engels relied on the work of the

ethnologist Morgan to stress that the oldest forms of families are polygamous or polyandrous, and that conjugal marriage recently appeared in history. Ancient times are characterised at the same time by group marriages and collective propriety. Marriage appears with property and corresponds to the expression of male domination. Engels, and after him marxism, justifies the abolition of the middle class family type because of its alienating nature, but he goes further: he justifies this abolition by establishing that this family type appeared historically after other types which could therefore reappear.

Today's discussions on family types base themselves on the same premises. The book written by the ethnologist Cai Hua about the Nas in China (*A fatherless and husbandless society*, PUF, 1997) describes a matriarchal society living in the Yunnan province today, and in which the "system of visits" prevails, a sexual system both polygamous and polyandrous. The author's conclusion is eloquent: "marriage doesn't appear as the only sexual way of life institutionalized as possible anymore. Without marriage, a society may perfectly keep on and work as well as others." (p. 360), "the Nas case is a testimony of the fact that marriage and family can't be considered as universal nor logically or historically anymore" (p 359).

If marriage in groups or polygamy/polyandry have existed before or exist somewhere else, it demonstrates that the institution of classical European family have only a relative value and could easily be abandoned. It does not represent a fundamental human constituent, it is not part of a "human nature".

Here appears a matter of cultural anthropology. The problem set by maternity is not: can men live without the European scheme of marriage or family? Obviously, they can, it is confirmed both historically and geographically. But the problem is: what are the consequences on this kind of family, in what cultural world it establishes , or inversely, which world would it arouse if it establishes itself.

The case of the actual Nas, where the man is only a “water-cart man”, as they call him, and where paternity does not exist, is frequently found in primitive societies. The major characteristics of the matriarchal pattern are the absence of marriage, birth control by the mother, eviction of the father and sacralisation of pleasure (cf. Michel Rouche, “Is matriarchal family back?”, in Family, from science to ethics, Institute of family science, Bayard, 1995, p.84).

Today’s obliteration of the father in favor of a modern form of matriarchism is done in the name of Progress. However, the whole of this Evolution consists more in a movement backwards to ancient forms from before the apparition of the patrilineal and patriarchal patterns.

Must we consider as a progress an evolution which has made us progressively closer to ancient matriarchisms? It is by starting from the criteria of the referents we believe in that we are able to define what is a regression and what is an improvement. What are the essential justifications of the stable biparental family, which our tribes are replacing? We will set ourselves outside the religious standards which are not consensual anymore: conjugal faithfulness, for example, can not in itself require any justification anymore.

The stable biparental family can recognize itself only one justification: it aims at raising children endowed with autonomy, that is to say, subjects.

The subject is not a fundamental idea of nature. The person grows as subject, recognizing by himself the hard law of reality. In order to do this, he has to take in, consciously, the category of possible. It is only from this awareness of possible that he becomes able to make choices. The subject used to initiative receives the fatherly law, and the one of substitute authority, to be able to pass on his own law later on: he becomes autonomous. A human being becomes an autonomous person only when he makes the law his own, if he accepts to think for

himself the limitations, even if it means he has to grope around to search constantly its outlines.

In other terms, personal autonomy only establishes on the awareness and the responsibility of the limitations: we only give ourselves our own laws because we hope to master our own end, something we do not give to others to take care anymore, like the child do in the mother's almighty realm. The human being could not become autonomous without making the sacrifice of the principal of pleasure in order to inhabit the reality of his own limitations. If he does not step forward in the recognition of these limitations throughout education, he won't free himself from the category of the impossible or of his own restrictions : because that, nobody can do it for him. On the contrary, he will have to undergo the exterior law of reality: the community law in holistian communities. A mathriarcal society is not capable of sheltering personal autonomy. This, because it lies within the double logic of protection and submission, where autonomy is absent.

The raising to autonomy is a task of closeness, affection and patience which is accomplished by making attempts and mistakes and where risk is accepted. Only a family where the roles of authority are shared and lasting can take on that risk. The family possesses the means to propose an education of "initiatives", essential to the subject's construction. The State can only provide an "initiation".

Yet, the disappearance of paternal authority, if not of the father, will not make global authority disappear and won't protect the individual from oppression. Because the individual eventually needs a law and the government, no matter which one, will impose it upon him. In order not to undergo paternal authority anymore, he will be under the influence of an anonymous one. This second authority will be different from the first: governmental law will fall directly, strong with its legal power, on a defenseless individual's neck. Whereas, parental law may have a few chances, if we pay attention to it, to aim the learning

of freedom which will develop a subject capable of mind independence when facing all the types of power.

It is even easier to understand that nation is not “natural” in the philosophical anthropological meaning. The phenomenon of nation is recent, and perhaps there is in Europe only a few nations that really are one in the Renan meaning of the term. We know to which historical need the nations answered to, the model they aroused (see Hegel’s regrets concerning the German constitution and the attitude of his country towards France). We also note that the Westphalian model is, more or less, fading away in favor of larger groups including in themselves more limited ones, here in the name of efficiency, there in the name of worldwide competition. We see that nation, as a model which the Occidental people tried to export all around the world, failed in establishing itself and has even created sometimes harmful or dangerous situations. Nation is a model of cultural anthropology that answers the problems of a given historical situation in a given culture (for example, it is antithetic with tribes). It corresponds to a size and type of society which answered during long centuries to the European needs (the Chinese and the Russian on the contrary needed an Empire).

In the structure of philosophical anthropology, human beings need to gather in groups more than autonomous or independent (in the Greek autarchy meaning or the bodinian sovereignty meaning, which are not the same but similar in some ways), to live in their cultural melting pot and to defend it if necessary. These groups go from tribes to Empire passing by all sorts of models, including nation. The interrogation is not: can nation disappear? Obviously, it can. Moreover, it is possible that it already is only a speech: of what independence does she really dispose, and even more, of what real autonomy (France is governed mainly by European laws today) ? The question is better: what will be the changes of our cultural world if we replace nation by bigger and/or smaller groups?

To answer that interrogation, we would need further developments which would have to answer the following interrogations:

What is the coherent size of a group which fulfills the identity need today? (does an individual feel more Basque, French or European?)

What is the coherent group size that guarantees independence or sovereignty in the bodinian meaning? If it is not nation anymore, is it Europe? Or both, each for different needs, in which case we need to change the definition of sovereignty and come back to plural and relatives sovereignties from before Bodin?

These interrogations are all the more intricate that the meaning of identity need has changed: individuals who more and more feel they are “world citizens”, and have become travellers, fear to have to identify themselves to framed groups. They do not accept to dye for the group they belong to anymore, no matter which one, but maybe for fundamental human values even if those are scorned outside of the group.

Finally, the idea of independence and sovereignty have become a great deal abstract. Isn't there only one country today entitled to claim it, the United States? Has the idea of territory, in which nation takes its roots, the same meaning as before?

In other terms, concerning nation, we find ourselves in a period of transition. We know that men need to root their identity in framed groups but we do not know which one anymore.

The hesitations of cultural anthropology should encourage us to explore deeper philosophical anthropology instead of denying its existence.