

## **Debt Economy and Faith Philosophy in the Contemporary Age**

**Abstract:** This essay reflects on the current status of Western Philosophy vis-à-vis the renewed importance of religion in the field of global public politics. It contextualizes the relationship between “faith” and “knowledge” as developed by canonical authors — such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger — by analyzing the failure to detach philosophical reflection from religion, especially Christianity. Departing from this discussion, the essay attempts to situate philosophy in the contemporary age. The question at its core is whether philosophy is still able to elaborate a “critical theory,” considering how, under the current the global dominance of economic power, the material structure of the economy is still permeated by elements such as *faith* in the markets. Further, the contemporary global economy is based on a system of *credit* intended to feed infinite debt.

### 1. The Public Role of Religion and the Political Function of Economy in the Contemporary Age

Any reflection on the current status of philosophy in the West cannot avoid an analysis of the relationship between philosophy and religion, starting from the importance religion has been re-gaining in the public sphere. To tackle this question in critical terms, one should start from the recent attacks against Western democracy, which are unprecedented. In this regard, the major problems that have emerged relate to religious radicalism, which has characterized the terrorist attacks of the last few years. The most important achievements of secularism have been going through a crisis: Western societies, which believed they had confined the religious dimension within the private sphere, must once again confront the public resurfacing of religion.

We might discount religion as merely a pretext and suggest that the true motives of the tensions should be found elsewhere, in line with the theory of the “clash of civilizations,”<sup>i</sup> which has also seen a comeback.<sup>ii</sup> In many ways, it is true that identifying religion as the sole explanation for the crisis would amount to a superficial level of analysis. However, it is hard to ignore the powerful return of religion in the public debates over the last decades.

After the fall of the Eastern bloc, with the resulting changes in the global political spectrum, faith and religious affiliations have been seen as the main elements of cultural and political identification. Think for instance of former Yugoslavia and the 1991-2001 wars, in which nationalism emerged through religious claims. Further, religious affiliations played a

decisive role in the fall of Communism itself, as in the case of those forces linked to the Catholic world that were active in Solidarność.

Such phenomena are worthy of attention, and not only to unmask their underlying ideologies — which in many cases were unmistakable, as in the Yugoslavian wars in which religious affiliations functioned as the basis for nationalistic discourses. More significantly, we should pay attention to the processes through which religion has been regaining a public role in the post-modern age. Perhaps, in order to discuss this issue, it is not enough to acknowledge the crisis of nation states, which, in the modern era, served as guarantors of the secularization of politics, typical of Western societies. Rather, to understand the origin of the processes at stake, it will be useful to recognize the concurrent phenomenon of the planetary dissolution of politics into economics. In fact, the huge changes politics underwent through its merger with economics may be key to explain the renewed dominance of religion in the global public sphere.

One of the most problematic features within this framework, is the religious component of some acts of intolerance, which are connected to new forms of “Islamic fundamentalism” understood to characterize the recent terrorist attacks. From these episodes, the political role of religion has clearly re-emerged. Secularized Western societies that thought they had left religion in their pasts, now had to deal with a problem they were unprepared to face again.

In fact, after the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, the problem of the relationship of terrorism and modernity came back at the center of international debates.<sup>iii</sup> Such debates were at first centered on Islamic radicalism within the Western world, which had grown among the youth raised at the margins of major US and European cities. French scholar Oliver Roy has focused, correctly, on the “Islamization of radicalism,” rather than on “Islamic radicalism” as the root of the resurgence of terrorism. According to this view, the Islamic radicalism of Western cities would be the reaction to the vacuum of power at the core of Western politics. In the current crisis of nation states, this vacuum emerged as a delegitimized, unstable, and fluctuating sovereignty. Terrorism sought to fill this void with a politico-theological configuration entirely different from the political theologies of the Modern West because this new form was neither founded on the theological origin of politics, nor connected to a potential process of politicization of religion. Rather, this new theologico-political form of terrorism seems founded on the political nature of the Islamic religion itself, which tends toward the development of a “universal theocracy.”<sup>iv</sup> In this sense, the different forms of radicalism are not simply the manifestation of forces

antagonistic to the global proliferation of forms of life, which Western democracies tend to promote. Instead, the new forms of radicalism are connected to globalization, of which not only are they the effect, but also, in certain ways, the engine. If, on the one hand, Islamic radicalism presents itself as the antagonist of a unified planet (in a Western sense), on the other, it manifests similar “rhizomatic” and “liquid” modes of global supranational proliferation.

After such considerations, it is possible to highlight a close connection between these forms of radicalization and the hegemony of the global economic power because the latter also owes its power to its “liquid” and “rhizomatic” nature. In addition, capitalism itself, as I suggest, functions according to religious logics. In fact, as Walter Benjamin wrote in 1921, capitalism *is* a religion.<sup>v</sup> If its religious logic has been a fundamental characteristic of capitalism since its origin, today this has become even more evident: Even Vladimir Putin recently supported the notion of a Biblical origin of Communism, as part of a strategy to affirm a State capitalism worthy of a globalized economy without, however, negating the Soviet past.<sup>vi</sup>

The religion of Capitalism has been reaffirmed thanks to neoliberal policies, which have been taking over the most advanced countries over the last forty years, thus triggering an economic, political and social turn. In this way, elements that were traditionally considered unrelated to economic life have moved progressively to the foreground. At the same time, a dynamic similar to the faith of religious experience has taken over what were once strictly economic mechanisms. This has allowed the nexus of uncertainty and trust [*fiducia*] to emerge as the predominant *dispositif* of the global economy and the market to emerge as the predominant institution of the globalized world and the reference point of political norms themselves. Religious affiliations have taken center stage as a way to affirm political and cultural identities. After examining these phenomena, one notices a close correlation between faith in the market and the growth of religious affiliations. If Philosophy wants to be relevant, actual, it must confront this issue and ask whether and how this correlation relates to current conflicts and what religious faith and the religious experience at the basis of finance might have in common.

In order to do that, I will contextualize problematically the relationship between “faith” and “knowledge” developed by classical Western philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. I will tackle the problem of the unresolved influence of religion, especially Christianity, on philosophy, which will emerge during my discussion. Then, I will highlight the problematic connection between modern, enlightened reason and Christianity. From here, it will

be possible to grapple critically with the renewed grip of religion on the global public sphere, exactly when, thanks to neoliberalism, capitalism has fully become the religion of our times.

## 2. Faith Between Debt and Credit

In the last decades, with the global dominance of neoliberal policies and with the hegemony of economics over all aspects of the social and political life, we have observed an unprecedented relationship between individual lives and the global economy. The extraction of value, based on the ability to provide specialized labor, has aimed more and more at involving every moment and every aspect of individual lives. This process has been facilitated by the political direction undertaken by the most advanced countries, which have identified their own ends with those pertaining to financial economy. On the one hand, economic policies have been entirely abstract and influenced by financial transactions that ended up swaying the world economy independently from the real economy and from individual lives. On the other hand, a close connection between abstract financial transactions and individual lives have been at the basis of this phenomenon. New forms of entrepreneurship are thus profoundly connected to the financialization of everything in the economic sphere characteristic of neoliberalism.

With neoliberal politics, entrepreneurship [“*impresa*”]—or, capitalist entrepreneurship, more precisely--has become the center of all social relationships. In fact, we witness a dominance of a peculiar form of “self-entrepreneurship [“*impresa di sé*”]” The ever closer connection between business and finance, the gradual abstraction of the most important global economic operations, and the growing influence of finance on markets, could not have reached this point without the progressive transformation of each individual life into “human capital.” It is precisely in this context that a special kind of *faith* has grown at the core of the global economic sphere. As the self-entrepreneur [“*imprenditore di sé*”] has become the central figure of economic power “belief” in oneself--or more specifically “belief” in oneself as “belief” in the market--has acquired a disproportionate relevance today. Within this process, the mechanism of valorization that is at the base of the financial community has become progressively more self-referential; implicit in the same beliefs that move the stock market, more than ever dependant on a peculiar type of *faith*: the “trust” of the share-holders is not founded in any direct connection to any real economic value of assets traded.

That faith might be at the center of economic processes is a much-debated topic, at least since Georg Simmel, who, in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), emphasized the fideistic [fiduciary? Faith-based?] character of money's spending power and its close relationship with "credit." According to Simmel, any currency is in the end nothing more than credit. Its value is based on the trust that the currency will be able to buy a certain amount of goods. The equivalence, though, is imperfect, or better, as Simmel put it: [LOOK FOR QUOTE...].<sup>vii</sup>

Despite the fact that Simmel's work dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting from his considerations on the social nature of currencies, economists have struggled with the element of faith at the core of their discipline. For the most part they have attempted to carve out a sharp separation between "economics" as theory and science, and "economy" as a social practice. Only rarely has the fideistic nature of money surfaced in the debates.<sup>viii</sup>

In the past, the value of currencies was determined against a specific quantity of precious metals; in particular, gold, until the end of the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1971. One of the outcomes of the Agreement was the complete de-materialization of currencies and the emergence of "scriptural money." From this moment, gold ceased to be the universally accepted method of international exchange and the value of currencies ceased to be based on gold reserves. A special form of debt has then emerged, one that is basically destined to circulate indefinitely, and which has replaced the gold standard, as the radical manifestation of that in which one must place faith.. [this is well-known: maybe summarize more succinctly? OK]

Starting from the end of the gold standard for the US dollar in 1971, markets could officially be based on fiduciary money, which is to say based on *sola fide* or the materialization of faith as the basis of credit and debit. As a consequence, this transition has led to a dominance of the relationship between creditor and debtor in economic transactions, which has acquired ever more significance in politics. This is the case of China, creditor of the United States, or of the relationship between the European Union (with its economically stronger states, such as Germany) and some Southern European countries, such as Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, the so-called PIGS. However, this process has also highlighted the ways in which the relationship between creditor and debtor is so essential to the global economy as to be inscribed in the very relations of production. In fact, on closer look, because relations of production are social relations, they always imply a molding and control of the involved subjectivities based on the relationship between debtor and creditor.

With the advent of the “debt economy,” officially created with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, labor in its classical sense has become progressively de-materialized and has been reconfigured as “work on the self,” a form of investment of “human capital” that requires valorization. An unprecedented investment in life has entangled individual existences in the construction of a global enterprise, whose pinnacle is nothing less than the financial market itself. Some of the most evident signs of the radical changes of the modes of productions in the last decades are the increased flexibility and precarity of labor, as well as the emergence of new forms of self-employment. In this context, such changes characterize economic development as one in which its components are no longer simply related to the amount of time necessary to complete a task but also to specific qualities of the worker who performs it. The resulting credit of the workforce (because it consists in the advance on its use value), which has always been at play in the modes of production, today is turned explicitly into the “moral” condition of debt: the indebtedness of the subject who is constantly in search of the trust necessary for the valorization process that infects his existence in a radical sense.<sup>ix</sup>

As a consequence, elements apparently unrelated to the economic realm have been coming to the fore, and among those, faith has become more and more the *dispositif* that has allowed the economy to affirm itself globally. It wasn't simply a question of false belief, an illusion that could be unmasked for the system to reacquire solidity. Instead, what is at stake is the real functioning of a mechanism, intimately related to the role of faith in the religious experience. Focusing on such a mechanism may lead to new analyses that could contribute to the understanding of the current difficulties, analyses that help think the power of economics beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries.

At this point we return to the question we began with: What is the role of philosophy in the current state of things? Can philosophy produce forms of “knowledge” able to grapple with the problems I have just described? Can philosophy count, for instance as “critical theory,” when the material structure of economics is drenched in what are clearly superstructural elements? It is probably time, I suggest, to question once more the classic relationship between “faith” and “knowledge.”

### 3. Faith and Knowledge: A Challenge for Our Time

In the modern era, philosophy has had the tendency to think itself as the overcoming of religion. In this context, the question is whether (and then, to what degree) there is clear dichotomy between faith and knowledge, that very dichotomy on which philosophy has based its overthrowing of religion. The task is to verify whether it is ultimately possible to identify within philosophy a type of knowledge that would be able to defeat what philosophy has framed as the fragility of faith. Today more than ever, such fragility have been deployed against rational thought, for instance by fomenting terrorist attacks that end up undermining from within the so-called achievements of Western democracies. Moving away from certain trajectories of modern philosophy, rather than focusing on the dichotomy between faith and knowledge, it would be perhaps more productive to highlight a productive tension between the two, as a way to reappraise their respective strengths and weaknesses.

There are many ways in which philosophy could approach religion. For instance, it is possible to focus on the logical qualities and of the meaning of religious affirmations.<sup>x</sup> It is also possible to investigate the psychological components and individual behaviors that could “explain” religious phenomena analytically.<sup>xi</sup> However, this approach risks failing to account for the very “social fact” or efficacy of religion<sup>xii</sup> as recent events have shown. Instead, it would be more productive to grapple philosophically with what one may call “belief,” “trustiness” [“fidatezza”], “faithfulness,” “trust.” Finally, it would be useful to reflect again on the kernel [istanza] of faith that characterizes religion, not just in relation or in contrast to logical truths, but as a phenomenon in itself, effective and able to produce truth; to initiate processes that influence philosophical knowledge itself, especially if one does not confine its relationship to truth within the narrow confines of the truth of logics.

When reflecting in general on the appearance [istanza] of faith, and more specifically on faith as central to religion, we should frame the problem of truth in a philosophical perspective, not as exclusively defined by universal truths or characterized by a universally valid formal criterion. Rather we might consider truth as a binding mechanism (*dispositivo*), as a connecting system, independent of the fact that a certain point of view or a certain content might be considered true or false. In this sense, it is worth discussing Foucault’s “regimes of truth.”<sup>xiii</sup>

With “regimes of truth” Foucault refers to what binds individuals to certain actions, and to what establishes the necessary conditions for such actions to be performed and produce specific effects. Broadly, a “regime of truth [designates] the set of processes and institutions by

which, under certain conditions and with certain effects, individuals are bound and obliged to make well-defined truth acts.”<sup>xiv</sup> This happens because truth, besides manifesting itself, also produces binding forces. According to Foucault, in this sense truth does not only relate to logical evidence but also that set of socio-political and cultural processes whereby individuals are bound to produce “truth acts.” Being bound to “truth acts” also implies the necessity to focus on the different types of relations that, through specific processes, bind different truth acts with the subject that performs such actions, with their witnesses and potentially also with the objects of such actions. For Foucault, then, it makes no sense to separate science, “the triumphant autonomy of truth and its intrinsic powers” from false ideologies.<sup>xv</sup> Rather, we take the multiplicity of regimes of truth into consideration and the fact that every regime of truth, whether scientific or not, entails specific, more or less constraining ways of linking the manifestation of truth and the subject who carries it out.<sup>xvi</sup> This is the premise from which Foucault can discuss the Regime of Truth of Christianity in terms of “acts of faith” and “acts of confession (*aveu*).”<sup>xvii</sup>

From this basis, it’s possible to understand more clearly how truth, despite the numerous attempts of philosophers to limit this term to knowledge itself or to its formal structures, as a binding force, an obligation and hence a political form, develops a relation with a broader field, from “belief,” the need to adhere to a particular truthful content, to faith, which is what is at stake in the religious experience.

It is true that modernity has coincided with the urgency to place “religion within the boundaries of mere reason,” as Kant put it.<sup>xviii</sup> Kant’s intention was to reason on what remains inconceivable within reason itself, in order to unbind rational truth from any type of dogmatic faith. However, Kant distinguished moral religion (*moralische Religion*) from religion as cult, as the practice that leads to a moral life, because it provides a compass for action and subordinates knowledge to it, insofar as it prescribes how to become better human beings by simply acting towards this aim. This is what Kant defines as “reflective faith” (“*reflektierender Glaube*”) because it only coincides with the rationality of pure practical reason. “Reflective faith” nurtures good will beyond knowledge. Faith and knowledge, in this sense, refer to the schism at the heart of metaphysics, the schism between being and doing, which Kant reformulates.

For the scope of this essay, it is relevant that, among all the “public religions,” the only one Kant considers truly “moral” is the Christian religion, the one invested with the mission to release the “reflective faith.” In Kant’s view, pure morality and Christianity are bound together.



Moreover, for Kant, there is no Christianity without pure faith, but, in addition, the Christian revelation teaches something so essential about the idea itself of morality that it would be absurd, a contraction in terms, to conceive of a non-Christian pure morality.

With a similar, and in some ways opposite, move, Hegel aimed at reconciling the schism between “faith” and “knowledge” that Kant formulated. Kant’s “religion within the limits of pure reason” becomes in Hegel the “religion of modern times,” based on the sentiment that “God himself is dead.”<sup>xix</sup> However, it is precisely from this fundamental loss of the divine, from the deepest *Gottlosigkeit* (“godlessness”), that the most serene freedom of absolute knowledge finds its resurrection in Hegel. Modern philosophy, which is *Verstandesphilosophie* (philosophy of understanding), is the philosophy which, while trying to free itself from the primacy of faith, risks falling into a partial and finite subjectivity. The risk is especially high if, in its drive toward comprehension, modern philosophy does not also try to embrace all reality, which, according to Hegel, was Kant’s limitation. In this way, Hegel preserves the practical dimension that comes from faith, however not as individual and subjective dimension, but as historical praxis that itself generates truth, expression of the Logos incarnated in the plurality of the world and of historical individuals. It is important to consider how Hegel terminates the moral sacrifice of empirical existence with the absolute Passion, the speculative Good Friday (*spekulativer Karfreitag*).<sup>xx</sup> The Calvary of the Spirit. Even though distinct from faith, the Absolute Knowledge on which Hegel speculates, paradoxically ends up shaping a theological transformation of philosophy, in which the connections with the Christian religion remain deep, as is the case, although in a different way, in Kant.

#### 4. Christianity, Philosophy and the Contemporary Age

The “moralizing” movement of Christianity, praised by Kant and both overcome and at the same time preserved by Hegel, is at the core of Nietzsche’s undoing of metaphysics. He was the first to highlight the philosophical, political, and religious significance of the relationship between debtor and creditor, so important in today’s debates. According to Nietzsche, the debtor-creditor relationship is the archetype of any bond, and of any social organization. As a binding relationship, it is genealogically at the root of every regime of truth characterized by faith in

truth. This depends on the fact that, for Nietzsche, truth is not a value that exists in itself. Rather, it exists and comes into existence through “valuation,” which is to say through the possibility to *believe* in a certain regime of truth.

The Nietzschean genealogy goes back to the economic configuration that characterizes each bond – not an economy of exchange, though, but of credit, which is to say the indebted relationship of whoever might be called to respond to credit received. Within this relationship, being in debt means to be a subject resulting from power dynamics, in which the prevailing force might create a passive and resentful, or an active and excessive dimension. According to Nietzsche, everything depends upon the transition from the non-human animal to the human animal: if, in the internalization of the instinct that characterizes this transition, a lack or an unpayable debt from life is formed, or instead something “new, unheard.....” is created (75). We are in front of a radical mutation that does not happen once and for all in each species, but instead occurs periodically in different forms, hence characterizing anthropogenesis phylogenetically and ontogenetically as a repeating interplay of power dynamics.

There could be, at the origin of human life, a subject posited as lacking who then interprets his own precarious nature as an payable debt. Nietzsche suggests that it was because of Christianity’s “strike of genius” that, through a complex process of internalization and moralization, material debt (that is, the expression of the precarious bond characterizing human life) could be transformed into an unpayable debt, and, as a consequence, into a guilt that has no atonement. This is the clear expression of an all-encompassing guilt-producing power that has characterized the Western world and that today has come entirely to the fore.

The Western world has shown a tendency to separate being from acting, morality from knowledge (*conoscenza*), and faith from knowing (*sapere*). Such dichotomies, though, have amounted to creating *dispositifs* of power in which the two terms are continually interdependent. The current primacy of economic power is nothing less than the highest expression of this process of intertwining.

As is well known, the major critics of 20<sup>th</sup> century metaphysics, above all Heidegger, have continued in Nietzsche’s footsteps. In the case of Heidegger, his most famous encounter with Nietzsche came right after the well-known “turn.”<sup>xxi</sup> However, at this point, it is useful to refer to his most famous book, *Being and Time*, and precisely to paragraph 58, in which debt is considered in its ontologico-existential character as the “negativity” that has always marked

human existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger insists on the pre-moral and pre-religious character of “conscience” (*Gewissen*) pertaining to being-guilty/responsible/indebted (*Schuldigsein*).<sup>xxii</sup> In this way, as it were, he aims at overturning, what for Kant melded morality with religion, and in particular with Christianity. It seems, in fact, that Heidegger’s intention in *Being and Time* was to repeat the Nietzschean genealogy of morality by uprooting the Christian matrix from the finite dimension of Dasein, which is hence philosophically entirely based on the call of being. Along this path, however, one encounters the difficulty of separating the active and creative dimension of human life from what Nietzsche called its “negativity.” Heidegger never completely hides the implicitly Christian motives of its own discourse, despite a more explicit reference to Paganism that he will develop after the publication of *Being and Time*.

How much influence does this failed attempt to assert autonomy of philosophy from (Christian) religion play in the present? To respond to this crucial question one should first take into account how Christianity has been since its inception a form of power: not just juridical but, fundamentally, also an economic power. In fact, the Christian *oikonomia* is the administration of faith in Christ as the experience of a debt which, through the gift of grace, does not need to be repaid but that, as such, need be administered in the form of an investment.<sup>xxiii</sup> It is in this context that, for the first time, the life of the individual takes the form, simultaneously moral and economic, of an investment: such is the dimension that, in different ways, has emerged in the modern philosophical discourse regarding the connection between philosophy and religion, faith and knowledge, in Kant, in Hegel, and also in Nietzsche and Heidegger. Then, it is not hard to recognize in their discussions the prototypes of the current economic *dispositif* of “human capital,” that mechanism which, in Christian-inspired Kantian morality, presupposes the universality of the categorical imperative: “you must improve your life!”

The question that arises is, then: what is the sense of a philosophically-oriented knowledge and action in the era in which an unprecedented investment on life itself has involved single individuals in the construction of global power? What is philosophy in an age in which the connection between credit and debt has emerged radically as the economic relation at the core of the making of the subject itself and of its condition qua “moral” subject? What is the role of today’s philosophy vis-à-vis the return back of religion as powerful *dispositif* of power?

In the first place, perhaps, the time is right for philosophy to finally recognize that rational knowledge, far from being the opposite of religion or from having definitely left faith

behind, has instead supported and even presupposed its own relation to religion. In particular, rational knowledge has supported the connection of modern and enlightened reason with Christianity.<sup>xxiv</sup> This bond has contributed to define the white and patriarchal identity at the basis of the Western world. On the one hand this has happened by aiming at a homogeneous universality which has in fact excluded many. On the other, it has happened by repressing the elements that were harder to govern, but also more innovative, elements that are still part of the Western world.

It is also time for philosophy to include the common origin of faith and knowledge, their common and bonding dimension that is not limited to its capacity to order infinite guilt-creating pursuits, but that can also open up new creative practices of freedom. Here what is at stake is not an exclusively logical but rather, a pre-categorical dimension that emerges from religious experience. And this is also at the core of philosophical knowledge. It is not by chance that this dimension has been invoked by the twentieth-century criticism of metaphysics. It would suffice to think, for instance, of Heidegger's 1920-21 courses on the phenomenology of religion, in which the inherently philosophical status of the pre-categorical dimension of religion emerged clearly.<sup>xxv</sup> Here the *logos* expresses a practical need, even before constituting the domain of logical judgment, and never definitely resolved in absolute knowledge. This is the dimension from which a creative and dynamic force could emerge, which would yield possibilities to be explored.

A determinant factor in this potential outcome is Nietzsche's analysis of debtor and creditor, which is to say the fact that through the debtor-creditor bond, the human animal is revealed as one "who is allowed to make promises." The ability to make promises is the symptom of its being fundamentally a temporal animal; an animal with the capacity to improve its faculties, which have been stripped of life instincts. At the root of the condition from which guilt and resentment arise, there is also the chance to exercise active forces, capable of nurturing trust rather than rancor.

Following Nietzsche, then, we can say that in the debtor-creditor bond at the origin of human life it is possible to recognize not just the obligation to pay back – what coincides with implicit relation of infinite indebtedment, but also the capacity, both individual and socio-political, to strengthen the creative modalities that the promise contains, and which characterize the

debtor-creditor relation. This is an element that is present in Nietzsche, but which has been often overlooked.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Hannah Arendt is one of the few thinkers to have highlighted the active modality within the promise, as discussed by Nietzsche, and to have granted the promise its due political value. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt wrote that the role of the ability to promise is to control the unpredictability of human matters. The promise is the active response to the impossibility for humans to be solely and in isolation, responsible for their actions. The promise is also the active modality to live in a plurality, in a world in which one's own reality is guaranteed by the presence of others, with their diversity and pluralism. In Arendt's terms, "the sovereignty of a body of people bound and kept together," is based on reciprocal promise. This is the possibility to leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the human unreliability as they are, living with them, and, at the same time, creating small "island of predictability," as Arendt put it. This would create the possibility for a type of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty; a certainty that is not immutable and that does not exercise sovereignty but is the result of daily practices that are able to cope with the tensions emerging from the plurality of human beings, without giving up the truth, of which it is indeed an expression.

Referring to Nietzsche, Arendt stated: "This superiority" – the superiority of a body of people bound and kept together through reciprocal promise – derives from the capacity to dispose of the future as though it were the present, that is, the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement of the very dimension in which power can be effective."<sup>xxvii</sup> Such a process can only be born of the desire to live with others, of the ability to "act" and "speak,"; to initiate genuinely new processes. Perhaps the task of philosophy today is to nurture the active capacity to make promises. This is the nucleus of what it means to be human. It would also be its task to nurture the dimension in which power can be effective as a tool fundamentally oriented toward the future, one that can be used in the present to strengthen common existence through plurality and difference. This is perhaps the task of philosophy if it wishes to still have a role in contemporary societies, and in those that are at risk of ill-placed faiths but that today more than ever need to believe and to hope.

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- <sup>i</sup> See for instance, A. Badiou, *Notre mal vient de plus loin*, Fayard, Paris 2016. The theory of the “clash of civilization” was introduced by Samuel P. Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, London 1996.
- <sup>ii</sup> See Davide Orsi (ed. by), *The ‘Clash of Civilization’ 25 Years On*, E-International relations Publishing, Bristol 2018.
- <sup>iii</sup> See, for instance, two books by Olivier Roy: *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah and Jihad and Death. The Global Appeal of Islamic State*.
- <sup>iv</sup> See Donatella Di Cesare, *Terror and Modernity*, Polity, New York 2019; and Andrea Mura, *The Symbolic Scenario of Islamism. A Study in Islamic Political Thought*, Routledge, New York 2015.
- <sup>v</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion.”
- <sup>vi</sup> Damien Sharkov, “Putin Says Communism Comes from the Bible, Compares Lenin to a Saint.”
- <sup>vii</sup> Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 178 {Verify page number}.
- <sup>viii</sup> As in André Orléan, *The Empire of Value*.
- <sup>ix</sup> See Maurizio Lazzarato, *La fabrique de l’homme endetté*; David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*; Richard Dienst, *The Bonds of Debt*.
- <sup>x</sup> For example, see C. Hughes, “Aquinas on the Nature and Implications of Divine Simplicity.”
- <sup>xi</sup> Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained*.
- <sup>xii</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Cfr. M. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 93–113.
- <sup>xiv</sup> M. Foucault, *cit*, 94.
- <sup>xv</sup> M. Foucault, *cit*, 100.
- <sup>xvi</sup> M. Foucault, *cit*, 100.
- <sup>xvii</sup> M. Foucault, *cit*, 102.
- <sup>xviii</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. On the topic of religion in Kant, see Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant’s Religion*.
- <sup>xix</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253 {VER pg. in English}
- <sup>xxi</sup> . Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vols. 1 and 2.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (add note on translating “*Schuldigsein*”)
- <sup>xxiii</sup> See Elettra Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living*, and *Debt and Guilt*.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Exemplary in this sense is the dialogue between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, completely part of Christian discourse, in Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization*.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> An exception is Gilles Deleuze, in Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 245.