

# Descartes and our philosophies

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## Abstract

We propose to show that, although we think of Descartes as a "modern Parmenides" or as the "father of Modernity", otherwise for excellent reasons, this condition is at least as ambiguous as different are the cultures or societies that arose from the breakdown of Christianity. Where the Protestant Reformation triumphed, the dominant conception of philosophy is manifestly anticartesian (Wittgenstein and Heidegger), although they recognize, curiously, a debt to Cartesian philosophy. Neither empiricist nor rationalist, neither analytical nor continental, nor national or identitarian either, more than a "French", "European" or "Western" philosopher, Descartes would be a philosopher of ours, that is, a philosopher of the universalist Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation. Also, even if we stick to what the professional and hegemonic practice of "philosophy" means today, Descartes would be known as a pre- or paramodern philosopher, that is, an *filósofo del arrabal*, an outskirts philosopher.

Keywords.

**Christianity, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, philosophy, Modernity.**

I believe that one of the best ways to take advantage of an encounter like the one we have right now is to put forward, above all, our most evident or most significant differences, and prejudices, before our coincidences as academics and researchers. We are living in an increasingly McLuhian era in which, until yesterday, what remained distant suddenly comes into contact, at least, in electronic contact right now, because of the unfortunate coronavirus pandemic. For that contact to be proper, or genuinely fruitful, at the level of ideas, it seems necessary to put forward those distances that may persist as a testimony that the world continues to be, for its part, genuinely tremendous and diverse, despite the banal metaphor of the “new normalities” for which they now want to understand the whole world.

Thanks to this circumstance, I can propose to you some specific observations that I have been making in my last publications<sup>1</sup> on Descartes, which, from the north, reaches our bookstore’s en masse; and what a better way than to do it in English-speaking Canada.

At the time, I had a very brief exchange with Richard Watson himself, from whose 2002 *Cogito ergo sum: The Life of René Descartes*, begun my general confirmation that, in the cultured or semi-cultured Western imaginary, in our day, Descartes is misrepresented (in the Protestant north and the corresponding secularist south, let us say) nothing less than with Voltaire. Also, I have the suspicion that this confusion comes from an identity campaign organized within the Western imaginary that I have just pointed out. Nothing is surprising in this, François Azouvi warns in his *Descartes et la France*, also from 2002, by the way, as a result of the very successful operation that, of the figure of the so-called father of Modernity, carried out the great captain of the illustrated.

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<sup>1</sup> Mainly in *Vindicación del cartesianismo radical* (Anthropos, Barcelona, 2010) and *La religión de Descartes* (Anthropos, Barcelona, 2015).

However, Richard Watson presents himself as an expert on Descartes, and Russel Shorto reaffirms it, in 2009, in his also highly promoted book *Descartes' Bones* where Shorto writes that "Richard Watson is perhaps America's leading Descartes specialist."<sup>2</sup>

Well, for Richard Watson now (or until recently, since writing this article I discover on the Internet that he died in September 2019), as for Richard Popkin from *The History of Scepticism*, from 1979 (he died, for his part, in 2005), Descartes is for now, or was, nothing less than a sceptical and fideistic thinker.

The amusing thing about this is that Descartes himself did not in fact take the problem of certainty seriously. He never thought we could have certain knowledge of the world about us, neither did he worry about it. As for God deceiving us, he said that the demon hypothesis is metaphysical and hyperbolic, which means just what you think. It would be very rash to doubt God's existence, and it would be really dumb to worry about not having certain truth when you have to make a living. For God's existence, we have faith. For practical affairs, we have always gotten along with probable knowledge and always will.<sup>3</sup>

As if to wonder what Richard Watson has read, or from what prejudices or preconceptions, or from what spiritual background he has read it since his Descartes is certainly not that of the *Discourse on Method*, *Metaphysical Meditations*, and *Principles of Philosophy* but indeed, that of Voltaire's Philosophical Letters.

Against such a deformation (or, if you want, against such a "refraction"), which, in the realm of philosophy itself, or in that of severe and rigorous Cartesian studies, hardly needs to be refuted, I believe that for now, it will enough just remembering, from the

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Russel Shorto, *Descartes Bones: A skeletal History of the conflict between faith and reason*, Double Day, USA. P. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Richard Watson, *Cogito, ergo sum. The Life of René Descartes*, second edition (first in 2002), David R. Godine Publisher, Boston 2007, pp.9-10.

first part of the *Discourse on the Method*, that obvious autobiographical and vocational phrase that defines the Cartesian project like few others:

And I constantly felt —we read in (AT VI 9)— a burning desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false, to see my actions for what they were, and to proceed with confidence through life.

Completing it of course with that famous passage in Part Six of the *Discourse on the Method* itself, in which he alerts precisely that, thanks to the fact that his Method, and the physics-mathematics derived from it, allows him to do what Watson says that he never can worried:

knowing the power and action of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that are around us as distinctly as we know the different trades of our craftsmen, we could put them to all the uses for which they are suited and thus make ourselves as it were the masters and possessors of nature. (AT, VI, 62).

Moreover, this is something that later texts will only confirm, although with anti-rationalist, anti-idealist, or anti-positivist nuances as well, which expresses that highly understandable “how”. For example, the letter to Picot in which philosophy is described, mainly, as the study at the same time of moral wisdom and technology with the explicit requirement that both be rooted in the specific knowledge of things; precisely, that which is possible thanks to the principles of philosophy (id est: the existence of a good and faithful creator God, of the *ego cogito* or *res cogitans*, and the intelligible material world or *res extensa*).

Returning to Watson, and to Voltaire, a couple of paragraphs not from the letter that the latter dedicates to Descartes and Newton, but from the one he wrote to expose the doctrine of his hero John Locke, give us a clear antecedent, also very flagrantly anti-

Cartesian, from the curious and significant text by Richard Watson that we have just quoted.

Locke doubts, as the authors of the Sixth Objections do, that the attribute of thought can be denied to a purely material being (*id est*, to *res extensa*) and that to the highly cultured, or the highly skilled Voltaire it certainly seems that it is exceptionally meritorious and even wise.

Some Englishmen, devout in their way, sounded the alarm. [...] They affirmed that Locke wanted to overthrow religion, and yet it was not religion that was involved in this matter; it was a purely philosophical question, very independent of faith and revelation; It was only necessary to examine without acrimony if there is a contradiction when saying: “matter can think”, and if God can communicate thought to matter.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to ignoring, displaying its proverbial lightness, the distinction between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* that, as we know (and as Elisabeth, Spinoza, Leibniz and very long etcetera knew), are central in Cartesian thought - or in addition to confusing, and obscuring, Gorgias revived, the clear and different principles of philosophy—, Voltaire takes us back here, in the middle of the Age of Enlightenment, to a frankly too little luminous Averroism.

For the rest - Voltaire insists a little later, in that same text dedicated to Locke - one must never fear that any philosophical sentiment can harm the religion of a country. Although our mysteries are contrary to our demonstrations, they are still revered by Christian philosophers who know

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Voltaire, *Mélanges*, Gallimard, Paris, 1961, p. 39.

that the objects of reason and those of faith are of different natures.<sup>5</sup>

We face, here, an Averroism or theory of the double truth; we are at the faces of fideism, in the first or most superficial level of reading at least. Furthermore, that is the lens with which, for example, Richard Watson will come, scrutinize, and exalted at the dawn of our century the figure of Descartes (to whom, according to Watson, the modern world owes from individualism and democracy to genetic engineering, through personal computers, neurophysiology, and the atomic bomb as well).

And although the text of Richard Watson that we have just cited comes from the introduction to a book of excellent circulation, or dissemination or propaganda, everything indicates that his statements are not a matter of mere negligence, or incompetence or lack of depth - or mere adaptation to the taste of consumers - since, for now, they advertise very well what is going to be read throughout the whole book, in which we note the effort that Watson makes to assimilate Descartes to his own philosophical position of late Illuminist orientation and even to his own religious, personal or cultural stance; meanwhile, for him, Descartes could not be anything other than a barely masked Protestant.

Throughout its more than three hundred pages, Watson interprets in favour of that last thesis, or that recovery, how far or near it lends itself, or seems to lend itself to it. Even that clear and precise declaration of his Catholicism that Descartes made to Revius when he exhorted him, in the rebellious United Provinces, to convert to Protestantism.

I also remarked above that in 1641 in Holland when being hassled to convert to Protestantism by Jacob Revius, Descartes replied that he was of the religion of his king and his nurse. His king, the king of his youth, was Henri IV, formerly the Protestant king of Navarre, who contributed the property for the Royal College at La Flèche where Descartes went to school. Descartes saw the deposition of the actual heart of Henri IV in the chapel in La Flèche

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<sup>5</sup> *Cfr. op. cit.*, p. 42.

in 1610. When Henri de Navarre converted in 1595 to become Henri IV, the totally in-character story was spread that he quipped that Paris was worth a Mass. He was also the master politician who promised his people a chicken in every pot. So Descartes's king was an opportunistically converted Protestant. In 1610, Henri IV wore a green silk suit and was known as the Green Gallant. When Descartes left for Sweden in 1649, he wore a green silk suit in the highest fashion of Henri IV's days.

As for Descartes nurse, in either La Haye or Châtellerauld, it was perfectly possible in 1596 that he could have been a Protestant. Given that Descartes was born and spent his childhood in free Protestant towns and then spent the major part of his life in Protestant armies, Protestant lands, and Protestant courts, one has to consider the question of whether or not he was a Protestant, in sympathy if not in fact. It is neat joke about his king and his nurse. I cannot imagine that Descartes was not aware of it.<sup>6</sup>

Although frankly inadmissible for those familiar with the life and work of Descartes, all these conjectures have the double interest of, on the one hand, convincing, as I have already been able to verify, and commenting myself, even academics — or Epistemons - more unwary, and to convince, on the other hand, the author himself of those assumptions and by extension, perhaps, also convince his own or immediate cultural environment. And this is significant, for now, of how, here and there, both the corpus itself, or tradition, as well as the current exercise of “philosophy”, and of ours, for the same reason (for that spiritual background that encourages or discourages them), divergent or different philosophies.

Watson's book created a kind of school, or the situation, or the urgency that provoked or inspired it, and in 2005 the controversial University of London professor Anthony Clifford Grayling - an active militant, by the way, of contemporary atheism - published the exciting and significant book: *Descartes. The Life of René Descartes and its Place in his Time*. In it, prolonging Watson's

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Richard Watson, op. cit., p. 59.

“refreshing mischief”,<sup>7</sup> as one who nevertheless corrects this excess of assuming that Descartes was a masked Protestant, Grayling now suggests that the great philosopher of Touraine was instead, in the Netherlands above all, a spy at the service of the Jesuits, and of the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs (that is, of the defenders, precisely, of Christianity or the pre-Westphalian theological-political order).

The exciting thing, for our purposes now is that, despite that elementary correction that Grayling makes to Watson regarding some established and verifiable biographical data (not his fantastic spy status, but his catholicity), deep down Grayling shares, in his reading of Descartes, the same fundamental error of perspective, so to speak, that we find in the work of Richard Watson.

Attentive above all to the issue of desacralization (or the de-divinization that Heidegger would say, and for which in his opinion the transcendent God of *Genesis* would not be the immense progress that he was, and that is, but an obstacle), Grayling compares Descartes not with Parmenides, but with Thales of Miletus:

What Thales attributed to man in antiquity, says Grayling, Descartes attributed to the early modern age. That is why he is sometimes rightly called the "father of modern philosophy" for comparison. He played a central role in rescuing research on sublunary things from the stifling and rigid rule of religious authority. He did not do so, he emphasizes, by rejecting that authority, for by his testimony he was a devout Catholic throughout his life, but by separating things in heaven from things on earth, so that scientific reason could investigate the latter without anguish over orthodoxy. The things of heaven were left intact, without being threatened - as Descartes thought and hoped - by what scientific investigation discovered.<sup>8</sup>

I am afraid not, that Descartes never separated things in heaven from things on earth, at least physically speaking. Moreover, as for the theological or metaphysical level, as I have just said, the separation that de-divinizes nature and makes it the object of human investigation, that in reality is

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<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Anthony Clifford Grayling, *Descartes. La vida de René Descartes y su lugar en su época*, Pre-Textos, Valencia, 2007, p. 25, n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Grayling, op. cit., p. 20.



rooted in the creator and transcendent God of Genesis, whose role is central in Cartesian thought. Four years later Russel Shorto, a columnist for the *New York Times* who is also dedicated to philosophy, reaffirms and publishes — taking up, without saying it, by the way, the subject of an excellent book by Philippe Comar— another biography of Descartes, or his "relics" instead, in which he acts as the champion of a faltering enlightened, liberal, and undoubtedly post-Christian western civilization (or "modern", or "post" or "hypermodern")<sup>9</sup>

He too corrects Watson's first excess, and in him also emerges, for now, that strange, and consensual or cultural dualism that we have just found in Grayling. From the perspective, then, of Russel Shorto:

Descartes himself was so devoted in his faith, and at the same time so convinced of the legitimacy of the investigation of the natural world, based on reason, that the division of reality into two distinctly different halves seemed to him the only logical conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

Again, we wonder which Descartes did they read, or from where or with what lenses they did so. I argue that after such a strange assessment - quite marked, that of Grayling, by the anti-Catholic black legend, despite its recognition of the genuine catholicity of Descartes - there are above all, on the one hand, that Lutheran dualism, which I have already dealt with in other works<sup>11</sup>, and on the other (or by the same, only that at another level) Lockean or liberal dualism, which in reality have nothing of Cartesian. Descartes, in fact, very carefully separates philosophy from theology, but by no means does he do the same with its "objects." Revelation illuminates us through grace, on the same creation that, for his part, the philosopher studies applying the Method and understanding aided by the rest of the faculties, as nature.

It would be enough to stop, for example, in the physics of transubstantiation to show that the separation that Grayling and Shorto speak of has certainly not taken place.

When Jean Frère asked me, in my early years as a student at the Strasbourg University of Human Sciences, why I was doing my thesis on Descartes and not on Plato, I replied that albeit to

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<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Juan Carlos Moreno Romo (Coord.), *Modernidad, postmodernidad, hipermodernidad...*, Fontamara, México, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Juan Carlos Moreno Romo, "¿Y si el filósofo enmascarado fuese en realidad Lutero", *Filosofía e teología* I / 2017, pp. 65 – 73.

understand Plato, I had to provide myself with a whole cultural, and religious context, to which I did not have access (I do not know what Plato means when he speaks of the gods, and I do not know if there is anyone who understands it), the world of Descartes was, instead, with minimal differences, mine.

Reading works such as the ones I have just reviewed confirms that same opinion on a side that I did not see much of at the time. We are better armed, in the catholic and baroque south, to understand Descartes insofar as, deep down, he is one of us. With the rest of the great modern thinkers, things change almost entirely.

An interesting detail in this regard: Russel Shorto, makes a significant effort to understand our Catholic culture and the role that the body, the relics - those of the saints, and those of Descartes himself - have primarily, and above all, the Eucharist. "The body," - notes Russel Shorto, - "remains the touchstone of Modernity."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he is right, and here we could linger on Heine, on Nietzsche, and on what Ortega ends up understanding about the body and Catholicity, precisely around his reading of the great German thinkers. "The Protestant Reformation was," - Russel Shorto continues, - "an attack on transubstantiation, and on the earthly power it conferred on the Catholic Church."<sup>13</sup> Further, a little later he makes a quite Nietzschean or highly "Platonic" observation which, in these days of "confinement" and the total or partial closure of churches, resonates with a special meaning:

Allegedly, - he notices it - the soul of Christ was not substantial enough to support the edifice of the Church in the world. The Catholic authorities also needed the body.<sup>14</sup>

If Grayling compares Descartes with Thales of Miletus, and we with Parmenides, well, Russel Shorto goes much further because, for him, what Jesus Christ is for the Middle Ages, or Christianity in general, Descartes is for the Modernity. In addition to exaggerating excessively, I think that he is awarding Descartes the merit, or the demerit of a quasi-contemporary of his, in a moment we will see, who is the one who, in replacement of the body of Christ, proposes nothing more and nothing less than the body of the Leviathan. A couple of lines, before moving on to that topic a little more specifically, about another of those books wrote in the wake of Watson's: *The Enigma of the Death*

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<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Russel Shorto, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. op. cit., p. 83.

of Descartes, also from 2009, by Westphalian Theodor Ebert, in which is also sustained by the very significant enormity that Descartes, in the court of Cristina of Sweden, and more precisely in the house of Ambassador Pierre Chanut, was poisoned by no less than a Jesuit, Father Viogué —using the hypothesis itself is already a sacrilege, and the sign of a very gross misunderstanding—, whit the Eucharist, supposedly because it was hindering them - although she has declared just the opposite - the conversion of the queen.<sup>15</sup>

The Pandora's box that Luther opened, if we take up the old Richard Popkin metaphor —or rather the wound, inflicted since then on Christianity—, is still open. Furthermore, this, which affects our Christianity, of course also affects, I insist, our philosophies. In contemporary France which, as we recognize is known and redefined as "Cartesian", a philosopher as representative of her as Pierre Manent, - and the political thought that dominates everything in the West- in his *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme 1987*, affirms the essential opposition that exists among the West as a successor or substitute for Christianity, and the search for, or compromise with, truth. That liberal scepticism, which in the wake of Locke and Voltaire Watson goes and attributes it to none other than Descartes (and with him also, for example, those Colombian colleagues with whom I discuss in the first part of *La religion de Descartes*), and how well things are seen - the fundamental liberal scepticism - frankly anti-philosophical, in general, and even quite specifically anti-Cartesian, it is above all and above all anti-Christian, or anti-Catholic.

It is on the problem posed, or the challenge presented by a particular opinion, Christianity - writes Pierre Manent - that the liberal disjunction between power in general and opinion, in general, was operated.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, is Christianity a "private opinion"? or the efforts all philosophical, reduced since then to the condition of mere doxa. That is what liberalism tries to do with it, disarm it, and in that same operation of transmutation of Truth into mere opinion, destroy all truths, wipe out all episteme properly so-called, or to all philosophical endeavours, reduced since then to the condition of mere doxa. Doxa tolerated, and even encouraged, and even of a certain prestige, especially if it is post-metaphysical and rejects, in one way or another, the archaic concept of Truth

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<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Theodor Ebert, *L'énigme de la mort de Descartes*, traduit de l'allemand par Claire Husseman, Hermann, Paris, 2011, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Pierre Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme*, Calman-Levy, Paris, 1987, p. 14.

(or if at least a new one is invented, like the *clercs* those denounced by Julien Benda, or as Alain Badiou is doing right now), but doxa after all, or ideology. The more sects there are, Voltaire will advise in Chapter V of his emblematic Treatise on Tolerance, the less power each of them will have. The more opinions, the less Truth: *Plus il y a de sectes, moins chacune est dangereuse; la multiplicité les affaiblit (the more sects there are, the less dangerous each one; multiplicity weakens them)*.<sup>17</sup>

Which again is in apparent contradiction with the philosophical project in general - with Platonic Socrates and his fight against the Sophists, for example - and with the Cartesian enterprise very especially; and what can already be seen is not, of course, due to a conceptual neither straightforward nor editorial nimbleness, such as one would be tempted to attribute to the prevalent, entertaining and even exciting book by Richard Watson. It is necessary to ask what has happened, also in the strict field of philosophy, in the passage from Christianity to the theological-political order that succeeded it — the Westphalian International Order — precisely in the lifetime of Descartes. Furthermore, about this, the Spanish Jesuit Carlos Valverde gives us, in his book *Génesis, estructura y crisis de la Modernidad*, from 1996 (in which he is not too fair with the great disciple of his predecessors, or with his comrades in La Flèche ), a decisive clue.

The Peace of Westphalia, ending the European religious-political wars, was signed in Münster on October 24, 1648, two years before Descartes died. It meant the final collapse and the final failure of the attempt to regain European unity under the sign of the Catholic faith and the imperial sceptre. Spain, under the leadership, above all, of Emperor Charles and later of his son Felipe II, had made a matter of honour and conscience to achieve once again the religious and civil unity of the European continent lost since the Reformation. It was an impossible undertaking in which Spain exhausted its men and its treasury and only won the antipathies of all Europeans. Singular was the antipathy of French to Spanish and, in turn, of Spanish to French. In the Peace of Westphalia, the Spanish project definitively failed, and the French project triumphed. The idea of the Christian Empire is gone forever. It had to give way to the new plural, religious and political

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<sup>17</sup>Cfr. Voltaire, op. cit., p. 581.

situation, constituted by the balance of States and religions that, only in the second half of the 20th century, seems to have achieved a relative climate of peace and, it must be said, of philosophical, religious and moral scepticism. Europe was then divided into different states and religions, which led to the loss of prestige of all.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, this, that Professor Carlos Valverde (who died not long ago, in 2003) was able to see so clearly from Madrid, did not escape at all to Richard Watson from Saint Louis Missouri. For him what was at stake then was the opposition between the "Catholic absolutism" of Richelieu and Louis XIV - in which Descartes could have found, thanks to his well-situated family links, a constantly uncomfortable accommodation - and French republican Protestantism, exiled in the (on the other hand allies of that same French absolutism, regalist and post-Catholic rather) United Provinces.

But Descartes ran out on it all. His was not a flight from family and social responsibility. His move to the United Provinces —forever— was a revolutionary political act. He abandoned France almost at the precise moment that France began to be the first modern state. Descartes could have been in on the beginning of the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV. He could have been a highly positioned courtier. For whatever reason, he chose not to. I don't know that Descartes himself saw it that way, and certainly most French Cartesian scholars do not, but it is plain as can be that Descartes's move to the United Provinces at the end of 1628 was an act of solidarity with republican French Protestation against royalist Catholic totalitarian oppression, and of liberal Christianity against the Spanish Inquisition. He was not opposed to the Catholic religion: he was opposed to the Catholic state; he was afraid of the oppressive nature and acts of the Catholicism that was the state religion of France.<sup>19</sup>

It is curious how, in Watson's opinion, freedom is on the side of those who so radically and so anti-Cartesianly deny it. Watson says that Descartes went to take refuge in Holland fleeing from Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, in 1628, but the Truth is that he instead went to Sweden, in 1649,

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<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Carlos Valverde, *Génesis, estructura y crisis de la Modernidad, Cristiandad, Madrid, 1996*, p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. Richard Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

fleeing from Voetius and his coreligionists. The *enjeux*, which was theological-political, had, however, a much greater scope than Watson attributed to it (and I wonder if Descartes fell, at the time, fully aware of it).

Henri Kissinger explains it very well in his recent book *World order*, from 2014. In those years, the very "international order" was being gestated in which, despite such tremendous and continuous turbulence pointed out by Carlos Valverde, we are right now, all, still.

Religious unity had fractures – explains Henri Kissinger - with the survival and spread of Protestantism; political diversity was inherent in the number of autonomous political units that had fought to a draw. So it was that in Europe the conditions of the contemporary world were approximated: a multiplicity of political units, none powerful enough to defeat all others, many adhering to contradictory philosophies and internal practices, in search of neutral rules to regulate their conduct and mitigate conflict.

The Westphalian peace reflected a practical accommodation to reality, not a unique moral insight. It relied on a system of independent states refraining from interference in each other's domestic affairs and checking each other's ambitions through a general equilibrium of power. No single claim to truth or universal rule had prevailed in Europe's contests. Instead, each state was assigned the attribute of sovereign power over its territory.<sup>20</sup>

In the new theological-political order power prevails over truth, and especially over "metaphysical" or "religious" truth, degraded to the rank of opinion. So, the state operates, more and more efficiently, by the way, as a true *malin génie*.

While René Descartes, then, like a true modern Parmenides, renewed philosophy - in his Ulm barracks, next to the Danube, or in his Dutch retreat - from its deepest foundations, the powerful France of Richelieu and Mazarin, through their Allies, the Protestant powers, was gestating a world in which philosophy itself was going to be of more, like religion itself, or as all truth itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Henri Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Group, USA, 2014, pp. 8-9

From the Peace of Westphalia, what was truly important was to be the nation-state, that European invention that Pierre Manent also highlights in the wake of the absolute monarchy, as a political device that remains equidistant from the city and the empire. That, on the other hand, they are much more “natural”, and for whom what matters is above all, above all “opinion” or all, uncomfortable or demanding truth, his conatus, or his pure and naked “interest”.

With the Treaty of Westphalia - we continue reading in the book above by Henri Kissinger - the papacy had been confined to ecclesiastical functions, and the doctrine of sovereign equality reigned. What political theory could explain the origin and justify the functions of secular political order? In his *Leviathan*, published in 1651, three years after the Peace of Westphalia, Thomas Hobbes provided such a theory.<sup>21</sup>

The modern world, then, much more than Cartesian (even if the trace of Descartes is in Hobbes himself), is Hobbesian. We notice this, for example, in Spinoza, whose rhetoric is Cartesian from top to bottom, but whose underlying ideas are more of Westphalian or Hobbesian roots. For example, that statement, in the last paragraph of the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which he proclaims that

I do not write anything that does not subject it very willingly to the examination and judgment of the supreme powers of my country. If they judge, in effect, that any of the things that I say, is opposed to the national laws or that it hinders the public salvation, I take it from now on for unspoken.<sup>22</sup>

The *imprimatur*, from then on, the "truths" or "opinions" that can be published are a decision of the state and not of the Church, since the sovereign state, that "mortal god" that Hobbes says or that marvellous "way" of the Spinozist Substance, he has consecrated himself, and has taken over, among many other essential things, the truth, and science and philosophy. And, of beauty, let us not forget it, and that is expressed very well, for a century, by the so-called "contemporary art"!

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<sup>21</sup> <sup>21</sup> Cfr. Henri Kissinger, op. cit., p. 34

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Spinoza, *Tratado teológico-político*, edited by Atilano Domínguez, Alianza, Madrid, 1986, p. 73.

Meanwhile Descartes, that thinker who, in his books, is concerned with being "useful to some people without being harmful to any" (AT, VI, 4), and receiving approval, mainly regarding his *Meditations on First Philosophy in which the existence of God is demonstrated and the real distinction between the soul and the body of man*, on the part of the deans and doctors of the sacred faculty of theology in Paris, Descartes is, as I already explained, evidently quite a pre-Westphalian philosopher. Let us look at it precisely to a paragraph of that introductory letter to which I just alluded:

I have always considered that these two questions, of God and the soul, were the main ones that should instead be demonstrated for the reasons of philosophy than for those of theology: because even if it is enough for the faithful of the Church to believe by faith that there is a God and that the human soul does not die in any way with the body, It certainly does not seem that infidels can ever be persuaded of any religion, and not even of any moral virtue, if these two things are not first proved to them by natural reason. (AT, IX, 4).

All this is undoubtedly very Catholic, and highly little Westphalian, and really little Protestant. I am hastily weaving my argument, and I have not yet remembered, let us do it right now, that for the theological anthropology that spreads throughout northern Europe since Luther - and that in the Holland of Descartes' first stay the Gomarists defend it to death, against the Arminians - the man who is incapable of virtue, is also incapable of truth, and therefore of philosophy. Although they have tried to make Descartes something like the Luther of philosophy, the real Descartes, the Descartes of his texts, his concepts and intuitions, and his arguments, or the Descartes of History that Henri Gouhier opposed, on the trail from Etienne Gilson, to the Descartes of the philosophy of History, the truth is that he does not fit very well in his role as Father of Modernity, or the modern or post-Christian West.

It is not for nothing, then, that, as the Mexican-Anglo-Canadian scholar Tom Sorell has pointed out, to the continental (Heidegger) and analytical (Wittgenstein) philosophies the caricature of Descartes is essential.<sup>23</sup> These ideas are confirmed, in our case, in the Westphalian philosophy of

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<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Tom Sorell, "Pertinence et limites de la caricature en histoire de la philosophie: le cas de Descartes", en Yves Charles Zarka (Dir.), *Comment écrire l'histoire de la philosophie ?*, PUF, Paris, 2001, pp. 113-128.



our subcontinent, where Enrique Dussel falls back, for example, on his - quite Heideggerian- "Anti-Cartesian Meditations"<sup>24</sup> and on the prevalent sport of ridiculing Descartes.

I have already dealt with that text by Dussel, especially in September 2013, at the University of Burgundy, in my contribution to the *Rencontres Franco-Sudaméricaines Autour de Descartes* —or in my *Filosofía del arrabal*, too—, and for reasons of time, I'm not going to delay in it now. I will only point out that, despite their apparent program of "philosophical emancipation" and of the fight against "Eurocentrism", those philosophies of identity or presumably typical of "our region", deep down cannot be more Eurocentric than they are (all they derive, by the way, from the Ortega program of "Europeanization of Spain"<sup>25</sup>), and are, above all, frankly Westphalian.

In his very recent book *Philosophy in Mexico in the 20th century*, from 2018, Gustavo Leyva, a colleague of Enrique Dussel, makes it crystal clear: after our "independences", the task of "our philosophies", or of the historian philosophies for him, in those more than a thousand pages in which our Catholic philosophers are conspicuous by their absence, was that of our "insertion into an international order that had the United States and Western Europe as its axes."<sup>26</sup>

Kissinger also explains that very well: "independencias" always go through the formation, in the image and likeness of the European colonizers, of a "mortal god" of those who make up the new international order, or the Hobbesian jungle. That is why the search for an "own" Mexican or Latin American philosophy is flawed in origin. And that is why Descartes is so uncomfortable for our "typical" Westphalian or identity philosophy. Where we would have to claim it, it is rejected; and where he is claimed as the great hero of the Enlightenment or Modernity, he is falsified. And then it is more than evident that the enigma "Descartes" has too much to do with prejudices, or with the fundamental presuppositions of "our philosophies".

I have no time left to develop it, but at least to point out — I have also already dealt with that, in *Descartes alive*, in "Moral and history in Descartes" - the unique attempt that the American Richard Kennington, a Disciple of Leo Strauss, he already did in a very suggestive text of 1963 to

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Enrique Dussel, « *Meditaciones anti-cartesianas : sobre el origen del anti-discurso filosófico de la Modernidad* », *Tabula Rasa*, Bogotá. Colombia, No. 9: 153-197, julio-diciembre 2008.

<sup>25</sup> An aspect that I deal with in my book *Ortega y la filosofía del arrabal*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Gustavo Leyva, *La filosofía en México en el siglo XX*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2018, p. 17.

transmute the pre-Westphalian or the Catholic René Descartes, no less than a Hobbesian philosopher and, therefore, thoroughly modern, or adept at the very modern world order.

Kennington very cleverly twists Descartes' work too, to make his strange thesis plausible. A disciple of the author of *Persecution and the art of writing*, and in the wake of the famous cliché that of the "masked philosopher", he insinuates to reveal to his readers that, "in his private correspondence", Descartes "considered politics in Hobbes' *De Cive* as superior to his metaphysics (that of Hobbes) "and this of course in a positive sense, ignoring or hiding to what extent Descartes' judgment of Hobbesian metaphysics is negative."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Juan Carlos Moreno Romo (Coord.), *Descartes vivo*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 2007, p. 254, n. 11.