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# Ramon Valls (1928-2011): The agonist of «we»

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### summary

Like the rest of his generation, Valls was marked by the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist repression. Therefore he viewed humanity from *realpolitik*, pessimistic and agonistic; he searched to give a philosophical base to an “we” which would end the struggle of one against another. We analyze his attacks on “we” built on class, culture or nationality, civil society or the “I” individual, emotivism or moralism, which are impotent and feed the natural human “agonism”. Instead, Valls first thought he’d found the “we” in the church, but then changed radically and only trusted the Hegelian version of the state. In this article we take a balance of the work and teaching of the recently departed professor.

### key words

War, State, Hegel, Church, Class, Nation, I, Moralism

## The Man, the ideal, the fear

Ramon Valls Plana is, without a doubt, a fascinating philosopher because of the difficulty and need to create a “we”. It is not merely because in his highly influential 1971 book he interpreted Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as a process of “From I to we”. This is not simply a good metaphor (although it is an excellent one), nor merely a very good interpretive line, or even a line of academic research (which it also is). “From I to we” makes explicit the main personal and philosophical concern of Ramon Valls: how can a “we” be possible? What sort of “we” can pacify the “I”s and avoid a war of all against all?

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Valls is not interested in just any kind of “we”, but a very specific one, political, real, effective, and most of all, one which reins in violence, and he forcefully rejects other attempts to construct a “we” based on church, class, culture or nation, a civil society of “I”s, as a moralist option and, ultimately, as an emotion.

All of Ramon Valls’s work, personality and intellectual activity has been deeply marked by the thinking of the need for a “we-state”, a legal and co-active institution seen as the only effective alternative to the barbarianism always found among humans. As a realist in politics, Valls does not deceive himself, and knows that the conflicts of interest exist within the institutions of the state itself. But as a Hegelian idealist he believes that the state makes the conflict objective and in the end can pacify it (even if it is through the “peace of the cemeteries”) and carry it over to the “judgment of history” (Weltgericht). This question was omnipresent in his classes and debates, and can be seen between the lines of many of his public speeches.

The need, yearning or “saudade”<sup>2</sup> that Valls considered the true “we” is a vital clue to his personality and biography. A Catalan without a country, marked from his early years by a brutal civil war and postwar period, he entered the Jesuits (traditionally accused of being “a state within a state”, from whom he would later separate, among other things because, like Hobbes, he accepted the state as “God on earth”, that is, as the only real and effective human absolute. Like many of his generation, Valls suffered for a long time from the absence and the anguishing impossibility of a “we” worthy of the name, able to peacefully shelter the “I”s which were pitted against each other.

## The impact of history

The generation that came about during the Civil War of 1936-1939 and the post war period was fascinated by the need to create a “we”, which would avoid social fragmentation, was profoundly marked by the barbarity and executions without trial on both sides, soon replaced by the barbarity and executions with a mockeny affair of justice by the victors. To the “Cainism” between the “two Spains” or the protogenocide against republicans, “reds”, anarchists, liberals and historical nationalisms like the Catalan, the Basque or Valencian, one must add hunger, fascism, systematic discrimination and corruption, contraband... and World War Two. As if that were not enough, the Catholic church, together with the traditional oligarchy, controlled the political, economic and cultural current.

2 A more appropriate Portuguese term, with positive and negative connotations, which no doubt perfectly describes Ramon Valls’s relationship with the “we”, since one can’t notice the lack of what one has never enjoyed.

As the Francoist regime lengthened the impact of these conflicts and shortages until well into the transition to democracy, the metaphor of “we” or “from I to we” fascinated generations of students. The choice of this metaphor permitted Valls to connect with and explain Hegel in simple everyday language, with common sense and, as we will see, a provocatively brutal manner, in conscious contrast to the abstruse Hegelian panlogicism.

Evidently, Valls is not the only one who needs a “we” which avoids social fragmentation and a war of all against all. This need presides over a period of more than 50 years. It profoundly marked the generations that lived the “era of catastrophes”, as in Eric Hobsbawm’s excellent metaphor. They were whole generations marked by a very strong fear of war, but also a need for a true “we”. The two things were correlative and so strong that they tended to turn authoritarian drifts into a lesser of two evils, as the pacifying and disciplinary effect of “we” was seen as more important than its effect on liberation or recognition.

## Brutal style

Without a doubt, one of the features we most admired in Ramon Valls’s classes was the contrast between the very speculative and convoluted Hegelian philosophy (the core of his teaching and research) and the forceful, direct, colloquial style with which he explained it. A “lectio microphilosophica”<sup>3</sup>, worthy of the finest universities and a perfect interpretation which didn’t miss a concept, comma or dot over an i, and was contrasted with a lively style of everyday examples, up to date and macrophilosophical, which avoided academicism.

This was a strategy he chose to make himself understood, not to become prisoner of the cryptic, wrought Hegelian language and to demonstrate that he could be understood clearly. At the same time, his argumentative style was very personal. Valls was not a Hegelian in his manner of expression; both in his teaching and the major part of his written work, he shows a style closer to common sense than to Hegel. We could offer many examples, but few are as clear (and so often repeated orally and in written form) as the sarcastic, pedagogical comment of the dialectic between the serf and the noble after they found two “monkeys riding”<sup>4</sup>. Throughout this article there will be opportunities to show this style. Now we move on to our main theme.

3 To see the contrast between microphilosophy and macrophilosophy, see G. Mayos, *Macrofilosofía de la Modernidad*, dLibro, Rota, 2012.

4 In addition to using it in many classes, it also appears in some writings, such as Valls 2003, p. 77.

## Panlogicism and panagonism in Hegel and Valls

“Attributing Auschwitz or the Gulag to illustrated reason is, more than an exaggeration, a provocative falsehood (...). Barbarities should never be blamed on reason, but on the lack thereof”<sup>5</sup>.

Both in Hegelian thought and in its expression two great arguments and approaches to reality are superposed; the panlogical and the panagonistic<sup>6</sup>. Panlogicism is the essential supposition that reality is rational, and therefore logos is the presiding entity. Reality can be explained speculatively by showing the logical links that unite all and form the philosophical system. On the other hand panagonism has the underlying supposition that reality moves dialectically and that, as a result, it is shown through negativity, conflict, agon, struggle, war and the Heraclitian polemos<sup>7</sup>.

The difficulty in understanding Hegel lies in two viewpoints and discourses that need each other and progress as a result of a dialogue between them. We tried to show this in our thesis (counterposing the logic and empiricism of the story) which Ramon Valls supervised. He had masterfully shown how the awareness that comes from experience in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* lives in a “panagonic” way (to use our terminology) which is totally diverse from the “we” who coldly narrates the “scientific” result of the experience of that awareness, showing the underlying rationality and “panlogicism”.

So our main thesis is that Ramon Valls has a similar structure in his thinking. He can only conceive reality as an “agon” and human nature as inevitably panagonist<sup>8</sup>. Undoubtedly linked with the traumatic experiences indicated before, this profound panagonism, with its corresponding anguish and despair, made an alternative necessary to minimize the “terribleness”. We believe that this is the role of “we” in Valls’ thinking and, because of the shared social traumas, in that of his generation.

5 Valls 2003, p. 142. If there is no note to the contrary, all translations from the Spanish are by G.Mayos.

6 To speak of Hegel’s “panlogicism” is a well known stereotype; on the other hand it is not so to contrast it to “panagonism”. In fact, this terminology is one we developed from the evolution of G. Mayos’s “empíria” in, *Entre lògica i empíria*, PPU, Barcelona, 1989, and from «pantragicism» to G. Mayos, *Hegel. Vida, obra y pensamiento*, Planeta DeAgostini, Barcelona, 2007 especially the sections “From Pantragic to Panlogical, «De pantrágico a panlógico», «Reducción de la Fenomenología en la construcción del sistema panlógico» and «El sistema panlógico», 2007, pp. 34, 54 i 58).

7 Valls (1983, p. 422) considers one of Schelling and Hegel’s major contributions to be “putting negativity into the absolute”.

8 In *Del jo al nosaltres* (Valls 1971, p. 52) he reminds us that even absolute knowledge, the “field of reconciliation of consciences” (...) is the result of a long road of pain and struggle, with oneself and with others, to overcome the isolation of individual consciences. It is a process of freedom from the partiality of perspectives.”

It is possible that something similar occurred to Hegel himself, but it is clear that the panlogicist option, with the construction of a totalizing system absolutely framed by the logical dialectic, would seem incredible even to a convinced Hegelian like Valls. Possibly he would end up closer to a Heraclitian dialectic or agonism, which is more open than the Hegelian and doesn't presuppose a synthesis or panlogical reconciliation; or even a Fichtian one, which assumes the uncontrollability of the personal agonism<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, one cannot say that the effective, political institutional "we" with a monopoly on violence, which Valls aspired to, was Hegelian "panlogicism". It seems that both the Hegelian "panlogicism" and the "we" of Valls are responses to a similar shared "panagonism", as are Hobbes's Leviathan or the long road to Kant's "cosmopolitan society"

Ramon Valls's thinking is characterized by a profound panagonist vision of humanity<sup>10</sup>, pacified by a forceful (but also desperate) rationalist discourse. Undoubtedly, this is not Hegelian panlogicism, and we believe that the "brutal" style also shows a profound discomfort with both this panagonism (we're merely monkeys on horseback", he said) and the real possibility of a better solution in a "we" worthy of the name.

## Philosophy of Human History and Panagonism

Starting from this panagonistic view of human nature, Ramon Valls made a scheme of the philosophy of history that makes a pacifying and completely humanized "we" conceivable.<sup>11</sup> Valls thinks of human history from a dialectic perspective in three stages: first a political, imposed and educational "we"; second "I's" which are individual, subjective, conflictive, with a dangerous tendency toward the most naive moralism and which resists the political "we" (which continues, however, for otherwise we will relapse into the war of all against all); and third, a new a true political "we" which differs from the earlier ones because it is formed by free recognition, reconciliation and mutual pardon among people<sup>12</sup>.

This dialectic, the last key in the story, only makes sense if one presupposes that human nature is radically agonist, that is, based on and driven by struggle, egotism, conflict and war<sup>13</sup>. So Valls sets himself within the realism

9 Valls 1981a, p. 19; Valls 1981a, p. 149.

10 Clearly emphasized in the title of the article «Som conflictius...» (We are conflictive...) (2011).

11 We use this word although Valls, unfortunately, never developed it in detail.

12 See Mayos 1989, pp. 188ss, chapter 7.7.

13 As Valls says (2003, p. 217): "Therefore politics is constantly fighting against passions and interests and must keep the flock peaceful. A flock which often becomes lively and turns into a pack. Then they kill the suspected lambs and feed on each other ... as is natural". (Our italics)

which from Plautus to Hegel, passing through Hobbes, considers that “homo homini lupus est”. We recall that the first contact between humans in “The Phenomenology of Spirit” leads to a struggle to the death or the complete submission or dominance of one and another. The dialectic of the noble and the serf, master and slave, is significantly the prime collective figure seen as such as a diverse response to agonism.

Even more, just as he begins his commentary on the prime figure of “Phenomenology”, the awareness of the senses, Valls (1971, p. 54) exclaims, “We have here the starting point of all diversities and all struggles. The irreducible diversity.” Overcoming his earlier attempt of thinking of absolutes as loves, “Phenomenology” is guided by agonism and the harsh lessons which come from each of the figures of awareness. Each feels itself die just as it surpasses itself.

We are, then, faced with the collision between the concept on one hand, of human nature as struggle and egotism without “natural” limits and on the other hope (or despair) for an absolute, objective, final “we” of human existence which can control and overcome the agonism. Valls shows this (2003, p 219, cf 120s) referring over and over to what he calls “the Kantian golden line” (Metaphysics of Morals, “Conclusion of the Doctrine of Right”) “war is not necessary: neither war between you and me in our natural state nor war between us as States (...); because this is not how one procures his rights”.

## Controlling Human Agonism and more Powerful Agonism

So it is very difficult to control an antagonism so deeply engrained in human nature; it is never completely eliminated and always returns. But Valls thinks that this is the primordial political task and the sense of history, and can only be done by laws and the State. As human nature is terrible, the monopoly on violence which every hegemonic regime has (be it despotic, totalitarian, democratic...) is legitimized because it tends to “end the terrible war”. Therefore, and significantly, Valls (2003, p 147) defines “the political and juridical as insurance of stability”.

As Hobbes showed, human agonism is so irreducible that it can only be pacified and controlled by counterposing a stronger agonism, the Leviathan. It is cruel, but the only possible route to pacification of society is the basic political mechanism defined by Hobbes<sup>14</sup>. To illustrate the case Valls (1981a, p 95) evolved in a way similar to that theorized by Hegel: a first stage of distrust of the State, then finally realizing that the State “is where we can accomplish

14 Valls was always clear that “justice, when it opposes the egotistical aims of the individual, acts as an equilibrium between law and power”. (1983, p. 397).

the reconciliation which civil life can not achieve. (...) Meanwhile, it is better to have the State. By virtue of law our liberty is guaranteed here and now, it serves as arbiter between personal interests and egotism and guarantees an education for its citizens.”

Valls presupposes that the defining characteristic of the State is its monopoly on violence, which automatically creates an identifiable norm known as justice. He considers this a great characteristic/mechanism, and therefore does not distinguish between the State and what scholars would consider simple, non-institutionalized spontaneous leadership.

We analyze the metaphor of the first humanized monkeys; from fear they said “We both want the banana, but since we don’t want to die for it, you tell us what to do and we’ll obey”. The State has been invented. Monkey C has been called to impose law and order” (Valls 2003, p 77). Here Valls ignores that spontaneous leadership tends to be temporal, based on consensus, accepted without much resistance and more linked to the person than to the social role occupied, and therefore tends to disappear with the specific person; the simplest State, however, presupposes a strong institutionalization of power with a permanent division of social functions: power depends more on the structure and place occupied than on the person occupying. In fact, the whole dynamic complex (which fascinated Machiavelli) leads a few spontaneous leaderships to institutionalize themselves in a self-sustained power structure which, in the end, is indisputably a state.

Valls himself recognizes this when he continues “monkey C knows he is not equal to monkey A or B. (...) and as he is not ready to tolerate daily challenges to his position, he is obliged to maintain a fine balance the always precarious consensus of the representatives and a certain despotism (...). Such things may seem unpleasant, but they are true” (Valls 2003, p 78). Surely the simplified caricature of “the monkeys”, where one sees his “brutal” and provocative style, has the function of reducing the essence of the State to the control of the agonism of its subjects thanks to its monopoly on violence (in which it is of secondary importance how it got and how it uses the power). Therefore he follows in the same style, “the State’s movement, as legislator and in sanctions, is necessary whatever its territory, if we don’t want to claw ourselves to death”.

## Legitimacy of the violence of the “we”

Within this framework, Valls coherently argued the legitimacy of coercion and violence by the law or its “armed part”, specifically because it was necessary to control the “natural” violence of those who violated the law. Following

Machiavelli, Valls accepts the fundamental truth that “without a strong power there is no good legal order. This is so because of the constant danger of the collapse of the political organization. Its equilibrium is unstable because, in function of its congenital weakness, the violence which comes with the state of nature is always about to reappear” (Valls 2003, p 70).

In short, the always uncontrollable human agonism can only be pacified by a stronger agonism with the right to use violence. As he says on repeated occasions<sup>15</sup> (Valls 2003, p 220): “in the republic of men, where lack of respect for the rights of others is inevitable, the law must always be coercive. We state clearly that politics cannot renounce violence against one who uses natural violence.” This means that for Valls politics has nothing to do with the image of the moralists and the naive because “in synthesis, the common good and soft dialogue are moralizing and, in politics, barren. Political dialogue, if it is realistic, is always hard” (Valls 2003, p 186).

Human agonism and the perpetual tendency toward violence generate and legitimize the use of force by the State in the sense that “Law is coercive, but one cannot say that it uses violence. It is coercive because it can force one to comply with it, it is not violent, however, because this force is the inevitable consequence exercised by those who do not comply with the law” (Valls 2003, p 189, 219s, author’s italics). For Valls civil peace must be “undoubtedly armed, for without the sword the law is no more than words” (Valls 2003, p. 189; també 219s).

## The dialectic of history

The agonism inscribed in man’s animal nature makes necessary, defensible and legitimate a “we” which imposes peace, albeit violently. As we have noted, it is basically a ternary dialectic, with the first stage corresponding to a political “we” which is imposed but educative.

More or less, this corresponds to the Hegelian vision of the Oriental world (where only one is free: the despot) but, surprising as it seems, it also fits the beautiful Greek “we” and the harsher, more disciplined Roman Empire. Opposed to the simple application of the metaphor “from I to we”, the historic starting point does not correspond to individuals and “I’s”, for individualization and subjectivization are modern developments for Hegel and Valls, with little presence in antiquity.

15 Without exhausting the subject, we refer you to three passages where this idea stands out: Valls 2003, pp. 117, 189 i 219s.



Both the prehistory of the hordes and tribes and the ancient empires and the Greek cities are stages where the “we” and not the I dominate. An educative, political “we” imposes itself, but it is still spontaneous. Thus it is in the fortunate and beautiful Greek era when, according to Hegel and Valls, a marvelous but unstable equilibrium is achieved, which will have a short lifespan and will not survive the polis<sup>16</sup>.

The second great stage in history corresponds to the long process of individuation and subjectification which make possible the constitution of an “I” which is autonomous and capable of recognizing another. It is a typical second stage of the dialectic (alienation, negation, excision...) where the “I” will finally enter the struggle against the disciplinary and educative “we”. This historic dialectic stage simultaneously develops and disciplines the individual “I’s”, directing them toward free recognition and mutual respect.

Due to its dialectic nature, during the second stage the “natural”, imposed “we” collides with the increasingly individuated “I’s” which, on the one hand demand the essential value of autonomy and personal liberty but on the other, according to Valls, fall into the worst errors of anarchy and moralism. We will show later that Valls is tremendously critical of naive, ineffective, failed, utopian “beautifully souled” moralism and, like Hobbes, he considers inevitable the persistent and despotic “we” and its violence to avoid the war of all against all.

Valls is very sure that only in the end, in a third stage, can a superior, true “we” appear. It will be produced by reconciliation and, at the same time, surpass both political discipline and the full development of autonomy, liberty and recognition of the “I’s”. In fact, this third stage is an ideal; if not inaccessible, at least it is never completely achieved, for it is very difficult to have a complete match of free, universal recognition, reconciliation and pardon among people (that is among completely autonomous individuals capable of spontaneous mutual respect).

As is normal in Hegelian dialectic, the maximum complexity lies in the second stage, marked by the agonism between the “I’s” as well as the increasing individuation, subjectification and autonomy. There are three largely opposed determinations here. First, it is a reaction against the insufficiency of the initial authoritarian “we”<sup>17</sup>. Second, it is an agonist movement of excision, war and negativity<sup>18</sup> which will finally be overcome by determination already implicit and developed from that exact initial movement (Valls 2003, p218s).

16 To grasp the fortunate but unstable nature of the Greek world for Hegel and Valls, see G. Mayos (1990, pp. 323ss).

17 Valls says (2003, p. 218): “From this moment on, anyone who accepts this ideal legislates above the legislators”.

18 “In our interactions with others and the pleasant and useful relations we have with them, it’s not all a bed of roses. (...) We also hurt and hit. And this is a constant threat to the relation of recognition and can destroy it. It’s personal conflict. It’s war.” Valls 2003, p. 219.

Influenced by present bioethics with Kantian roots, Valls, in his last book, shows himself to be strongly in favor of the idea that “ethics is the obligation and that the supreme human dignity lies in the ability to take the law upon oneself (autonomia) and thus auto-obligate oneself”. But he immediately clarifies the role of the autonomous individual to avoid any appearance of individualism: “The establishment of moral law, in fact, cannot lie on the isolated individual, but must be based on mutual and respectful interaction of several” (Valls 2003 p 100) . At no time does Valls have the slightest doubt of the superiority of the ethics of the State (Sittlichkeit) over Kantian Moralität<sup>19</sup>.

For our purposes, the third stage of reconciliation in a political “we” requires one to assume the experience of the previous moral autonomy and “raise it to the law” (Valls 2003 p 219). In agreement with Rousseau, Valls argues that individual autonomy, will and liberty need not collide with general political will, but must recognize and submit to it. Thus, politics could be recovered as an authentic “we”, where the various autonomous “I’s” freely recognize each other and overcome, now adequately, the dangerous agonist tendencies: “if we oblige ourselves to universal respect, we understand that the will to end war is associated with the birth of the moral, the birth of the humanity of humans. So we make a transition to the political with the moral demand to end war” (Valls 2003, p 219).

## Overcoming “we” as the Church

“what is my view of Christianity versus the official Catholic version I run into constantly: (...) for me the quintessence of Christianity is simply to respect the sacredness of one who suffers unjustly. The rest is of little or no interest to me. I save the incense around Theodore and Justinian’s speeches and the candles for the ending and the strange dress for the Gothic paintings” (Valls 2003, p 222).

It is not surprising that the young Ramon Valls first searched for the “we” he needed so badly in the Company of Jesus, and later left them with a criticism which was strong and systematic. Significantly, the Jesuits prompted Valls’s studies of Hegel, directing him to study the “intersubjectivity” where “the religious also converges, because religion was always the harbinger of the spirit” (Valls 1976, p 376). The Company was aware that it was necessary to seek a “we” like the Hegelian, which favors the spirit but demands of the institutions effective accomplishment of “real objectives”. Somehow the Church and the Company tended to consider themselves as the Hegelian spirit which “moves itself and engenders itself, not alone, but through common action” (Valls 1971, p 210).

19 Although it is known that in earlier versions of the Hegelian system Morality appears at a later and higher stage.

In this line, his doctoral thesis “From I to We. A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology” investigates “intersubjectivity” as it “pertains to the community of the spirit” which includes the epistemological experience<sup>20</sup>, as well as the “social” (Valls 1971 p 27), which refers to a “collective subject, a community and its world” (Valls 1979, p 31). In many senses, with “From I to We” Valls was the best in presenting this necessity which inspired his generation and the Jesuits. Thus Valls says, for example, “Despite its absoluteness and its identification with divine understanding, human understanding does not create the world, but understands it in God to the extent that it is true”.

Finally, going deeper into *Phenomenology of the Spirit* ended up distancing Valls from the ideal of the “we” as the Church, and brings him closer to a Hobbesian thesis. For a long time, unlike other secularized Jesuits, Valls avoided open polemics with his old order and the Catholic Church. He maintained a respectful but effective distance, despite approaches of the Theology Department of the Ramon Llull University and the influence on Jesuit scholars studying Hegel, such as the philosophy professors Gabriel Amengual to a greater extent and Eugeni Colomer to a lesser. He also coincided with faithful Marxists such as José Maria Valverde<sup>21</sup> (with whom he spoke of these things), who considered religious faith and lay revolutionary faith as inseparable.

As time went on, however, the distance between Valls and the Church became clearer and sharper. This could be seen in the prologue that he wrote in 1989 to my book *Between Logic and Empiricism* (Valls 1989, p 9s), where, however, he still “holds his tongue” (as happened with so many). Despite the advance of the “democratic transition”, intellectual fear and self-censorship was patent. Valls, however, was ever more unbelieving and critical with the Church’s historic role. In the 1989 prologue he interpreted Western history as a collision between politics and religion, between the superior models of Pericles’s Athens and Christianity. He even interpreted the Spanish transition years as a struggle between the nostalgia of Hegelian synthesis and those who wanted to refute it (I include myself in this group, adding amiably “but not as quickly as others”<sup>22</sup>).

More specifically, Valls lamented his failure to create a synthesis between the pagan politics of classical Greece (Valls 1983, p 441) and Christianity, as the heirs of the best effort to date, by Hegel, miss the full experience

20 Because the epistemological project shares the objective of “giving consistency to the philosophy of liberty”, says Valls (1983, p. 455).

21 Valverde accepts the idea of revolution in a Marxist vein and the theory of liberation theology. He was very close to the social victims and more disposed to defend their demands to the end without worrying about the chaos that could result from their ire.

22 Valls (1989, p. 10) was certainly aiming at the potent Marxism of the times with these words.

of either pagan Greece or of Christianity<sup>23</sup>. In other words, the political and religious “we”s are incompatible because, as Tacitus said, it seems impossible that Christianity, “that strange spiritualism, could adapt itself to the realism of Greek politics”(Valls 2003, p 50).

Obviously, in Valls thinking the political “we” prevails over the religious, and even more so over the Church. Therefore, states Valls (1989 p 11), Nietzsche, the philosopher he most taught after Hegel, must decontaminate Hegel and the philosophical tradition of its “theological blood” and Platonic dualism. Later Christianity will accentuate the dualism and the sacrifice of the terrestrial, political world for the fictitious angelical and antipolitical world. Valls (2003, p 51) lamented that “the homeland of Roman Catholics was heaven”.

Now, if in his 1989 prologue Valls interpreted history as still marked by debate, conflict, excisions and dialectic between Greek pagan politics and Christian religiosity<sup>24</sup>, later he explicitly took on “the typically modern task of undermining the independence of ecclesiastic power” (Valls 2003, p 72). Therefore he forcefully denounces that the “absolutist stream was trying to re-establish the alliance between the altar and the throne, which in Spain meant the continuation of the Catholic moral ethic, in a hardline form, as the rule of social life, and that the civil power would have to assure compliance through laws, up to and including penal laws” (Valls 2003, p 127).

As this presupposes that “the conviction that the civil legislator must establish a fixed moral code, decided in an authoritarian manner by the ecclesiastic hierarchy, in the juridic ordinances” (Valls 2003, p 210), Valls sees a “theological fallacy” in this viewpoint, which has been systematically used by those “from the Pope to the faithful of Opus Dei long for the alliance between altar and throne” (Valls 2003, p 56). Very critical with the Catholic hierarchy (2003, p 47), Valls demands a new “we”, a new (modern) Ethic which, without being a simple copy of the old one, returns to its social and political base.. This base was no longer the classical polis, of course, but the State in the modern and contemporary sense of the word” (2003, p 63).

- 23 Valls (1989, p. 11) asked himself if both theology and the “Hegelian reconciliation” are no more than “a paralogsism, as the middle ground is always a mistake, for they pertain to two different discourses”.
- 24 Valls (1989, p. 12) thus ended his prologue, “I invite you to read Hegel in this way. (...) This can be understood at the stage of analyzing the logical core of the development of the philosophy of the history of the two stages (Greek and Christian) which center the discourse and problems. Then the rest of the stages are subordinate and in a secondary position.”
- 25 Valls (2003, p. 162) denounced that “one doesn’t seek the source of morality in nature (as do the naturalists) but in God. (...) [and sets] obligations considering religious faith to be their source. And for the nonbelievers who want to pass them off as natural law, these obligations are superfluous.”

## Against “we” as a class

As we have seen, in his intellectual evolution Valls completely abandoned the idea of the Church as “we” and, although he qualifies it, we believe he also abandons the “religious we”. He never identified his political “we”, always more speculative than of daily praxis, with the sociopolitical class as did Marxism, which he had to coexist with for a long time in the university<sup>26</sup>.

One must remember that Valls considered any social class, even the broadest worker or proletarian class, to be merely a part of the whole confronting the other part (the “capitalists” or Bourgeois) and therefore cannot be a true, universal “we”. Undoubtedly for Valls and many of his generation the “class struggle” seemed too much like a “civil war” and therefore inhibited the effective existence of a pacifying “we”.

On the other hand, the class struggle and the revolution fomented the dangerous agonist impulse which Valls so feared in humanity. In addition, because of his political realism, he considered revolution to be more the violent, lawless chaos of the “during” than the perfect, utopian order of those who only look at the “after”. Therefore for him class struggle and revolution represented the most dangerous triumph of war and the dissolving of all “we”s.

Similar to his distance from the Church “we”, Valls (2003, p 131) becomes more and more ironic with “historical materialism”, which he called “philosophy of history or whatever one wants”. Although he can (Valls 2003, p 134) understand the “ethical protest” present in Marxism, he clearly leans toward Hegel instead of Marx (Valls 2003, p 134) who he accuses of being utopian<sup>27</sup>, moralistic<sup>28</sup>, lacking in rigor, a creator of misunderstandings<sup>29</sup> and now left behind by history<sup>30</sup>.

26 His pragmatic realism, although not really Marxist, his abandoning the Jesuits, his growing anticlerical drift, without a doubt his having specialized in Marx’s “teacher” permitted Valls to be considered an ally by many Marxists. Some kept their distance, such as Manuel Sacristan’s and Paco Fernández Buey’s group. Among those who are closer philosophically, we must mention José María Valverde, secondary school professors María Rosa Borrás and the professor of the UNED José María Ripalda. Not as close were Gustavo Bueno and his group from Oviedo. Valls confronted the Marxists, like Universitat de Barcelona professor José María Bermudo and Manuel Cruz, and secondary school teacher Lluís Alegret. He was even more opposed to those who rapidly evolved from the extreme left to right wing positions which, for Valls, are frivolous and postmodern (like Eugenio Trias).

27 One shouldn’t confuse this with Bloch’s “that which isn’t yet” which Valls praises (1981a, p. 134). Here the accusation is far harsher, says Valls (2003, p. 135): “the prophecy for the future (...) the so-called scientific socialism won’t be able to avoid utopianism”.

28 Valls (2003, p. 134, our italics) criticizes the Marxist concept of alienation to the extent it is “completely pejorative in this sense and has, in our view, moral resonances”.

29 “As far as the originality of this doctrine and its attempt to be scientific, I think it has produced uncountable misunderstandings, because science is a blessing but scientism is a plague (...) The work is full of philosophemes” (Valls 2003, pp. 135s).

30 “Nowadays, when residual groups sing the Internationale with their fists raised, the idea that this struggle is the final struggle is a bit pathetic” (Valls 2003, pp. 135s).

Valls's harsh political realism or pessimism cannot conceive the satisfaction and pacification of human agonism nor effective justice, equality and solidarity. He says, "No State has a stupendous solution for everyone. The cleverest, best implanted equilibrium will be temporal and unstable because it must always deal with the hungry waiting to come to the table. The art of politics, by definition, is to administer the discontent, for the only way to stave off conflict is alternating those who applaud and those who protest" (Valls 2003, p 78).

### Mistrustful of civil society and the dynamic of "I's"

Undoubtedly it was very difficult to be a liberal in a Catalonia marked by the civil war and Francoism, and even more so in a Spain which had never been through a liberal revolution or industrialization. So it is not surprising that the majority of his generation considered the attempts to build the sought after "we" on a base of civil society and the dialectic (immanent and without higher supervision) which the "I's" set themselves to be dangerous. For Valls, both civil society and the dialectic of the "I's" are frankly weak as well as intrinsically dangerous.

Valls, although he feels that agonism is a natural impulse in the human species<sup>31</sup>, is not a liberal. As a result he cannot accept that the so-called civil society can generate a peaceful, industrious "we" by its own simple dialect. He dedicates a chapter to civil society but, ironically, he calls it "uncivil society" (Valls 2003, p 176s), highlighting that it is based on competition and a sort of civil war (or at least the threat thereof).

He cannot accept the claim of "civil society" opposed to the State and its "objectively" superior institutions, be it because he underestimated their effectiveness and power or because of the negative, totalitarian drift of the former. In addition, thought Valls, the State is far stronger and more effective, which makes the liberal pretension of civil society as a counter to the State seem ridiculous.

Theses like Mandeville's "industrious hive", Adam Smith's "invisible hand" or Locke's definition of the civil state seem to Valls to be erroneous, false and inefficient. Maintaining himself loyal to Hegel, he accepts the relevance of civil society, but always subordinate to the State, the true "we", as the interests of the civil society and the I's "must be disciplined" (Valls 2003,

31 Despite this, the panagonistic realism made him evolve toward liberalism. Valls (2003, p. 164) came to defend the "moral value of the network of economic interests. These interests are not only legitimate in principle, they are essential for giving real content to the value of dignity."

p 179) and the State is the only “effective representative of the general interest” (Valls 1983, p 455).

Definitively, Valls cannot accept the final basis of the liberal view, which is a profound mistrust of the State as such. Citing the liberal pluralist Isaiah Berlin, he recalls, “nothing assures us that the conflicting interest can be reconciled. In fact, we know that within their plane they are irreconcilable” (Valls 2003, p 186). Like Hegel, Valls thinks that only by climbing to a higher level of objectively effective institutions (among other reasons, because of their monopoly on violence) can the agonistically conflicting human interests be reconciled.

Valls (2003, p 84s) highlights that the liberal separation of powers does not rupture “the unity of the State” and that “although there is a mellowing from the separation of powers and the limited democracy of the lower house, it is still an absolute State. To inflict capital punishment, the true absolute master according to Hegel, is still an absolute power (...). I repeat, the king is no longer absolute, but the State still is”.

Certainly the true “we” is not something given, simple, natural... but must be built with difficulty, tragedy and discipline by the “I’s” of the citizens and individuals. Valls knows that if they abdicate their vigilance as democrats and citizens the State can drift to authoritarianism and the “we” ceases to be a “we”. But, as we have said, one always presupposes that the human panagonism never rests and therefore one is always vigilant, controlling, keeping things from getting out of hand. For Valls this danger is so terrible it makes him distrust the agonist power (praised by the liberals) of the citizens when they watch themselves, because inevitably they depend on something doubtful like an impulse, and on top of that, an agonist one!

Therefore Valls not only distrusted the choices of the classical liberals (like Mandeville, Adam Smith and Locke), but also from much more tempered Kant (an author he praises in other aspects). Valls does not accept the human “unsocial sociability” as the “driving force of history”, because that presupposes that the panagonism (unsociability) can be offset by human need to live with others (sociability)<sup>32</sup>. Also, we think he disliked it because it is too limited to the second stage of the dialectic, to the individualized and conflicting “I’s” (although here Kant sets a distance with “moralism”<sup>33</sup>) and therefore to the free competition of “agonistically” opposing interests of liberalism.

32 Kant’s 1784 work, *Ideas for a Universal History in a Cosmopolitan Key*. For information on this, G. Mayos, *Ilustración y Romanticismo. Introducción a la polémica entre Kant y Herder*, Herder, Barcelona, 2004, pp. 172ss, 338ss i 398ss.

33 Valls and Requero, in the end of their 2011 article, highlight the similarity of Kant and Hegel in valuing the role of the State to dominate human agonism, but they also highlight the Hegelian phobia to any argument related to moralism.

Distancing himself from any option which thinks that, autonomously and by its own dynamic, the “I’s” can lead to a true “we”, Valls opts for considering the first stage of the dialectic to be a “we”. Therefore the inevitable condition of the whole dialectic, the original, undifferentiated unity, would be a “we” which is political, disciplining and educating, but also effective, affective and protective. It is a natural “we”, not chosen or imposed; that is, an authoritarian and coercive “we” that pacifies and exercises a monopoly on force. Without this natural, imposed, coercive, effective, pacifying authority with a monopoly on force the individualized “I’s” wouldn’t even have a model or the slightest experience of moral law, free recognition or an authentic “we” (Valls 2003, p 219).

Certainly, the fear that everyone has when faced with the aggression of another, and the rational calculation that sooner or later he will be defeated are key in individuals freely accepting the cession of their power and freedom to the Leviathan. But for Valls that is not enough for two important reasons: the first is that the assumed “contract” which provides access to the Leviathan is not real, as Hobbes himself recognized. On one hand, in the “natural” situation of the war of all against all, there is not the slightest chance of rational deliberation. On the other hand the “sovereign”, by being sovereign, neither makes nor is bound by the contract. The second reason is that the individual “I’s”, facing each other and with no experience of “we”, cannot build a true “we” (with free mutual recognition) simply forced by mere authoritarian restrictions. Some experience of “we” and of free recognition, albeit natural and insufficient, is necessary. This experience of free recognition (albeit limited and not universal) can only be produced, in the first stage of the dialectic to be developed, within the “tribe”: the first law of moral autonomy can only be dictated within the heart of one who has already adopted, as a maxim of his personal behavior, respect for the other (...) We think that if the law must first be a maxim of conduct, this means that respect for all humans, and with it, true and formal morality, can only be achieved after education in the practice of mutual recognition within the limited circles of the tribe” (Valls 2003, 218).

As we see, Valls rejected the liberal presupposition that the simply negative confrontation between “I’s” could provide spontaneous recognition and respect for the other, obviating the need for any other principle. Quite to the contrary Valls (2004 pp 172s, 338s, 398s) accepted another principle, in the form of a natural “we” is necessary so that the historical dialectic can finally culminate in a “we” which comes from free recognition.



## Against culture and nation as “we”

The romantic German Herder, and Hegel himself, shared with Valls the thought that the “we” cannot come simply from the Hobbesian fear of constant competition nor from the mutual agonism among individual “I’s”, but must emerge from a natural “we” which is present on family and community life. In fact, this is the key in the German concept of nation which Valls always viewed with reluctance.

Certainly Valls recognized that within the human condition there is the principle of sociability and its contrast: unsocial agonism. But he does not see this dualism as more or less equal (as did Kant and, more optimistically, Herder), but as a disequilibrium with a near complete domination by agonism. For Valls this is a far more powerful principle than unsociability, so that sociability is nearly irrelevant when confronted with the dangerous human agonism. As a result the human condition is dual, as Kant said, and needs sociability and community impulses, as Herder noted, but the predominance of egotistical agonism is so great, according to Valls, that the duality or sociability are marginal.

Therefore, in none of his analyses does Valls start from the impulse of sociability to legitimize the “we”; but always thinks of it as a protector (with a monopoly on violence) against the war of all against all, which is inevitable without the resistance of the “Leviathan-we”. For Valls it is a mistake to think of the “we” as a nation, cultural or linguistic community, etc. This radically separated him from many of the Catalan and Spanish nationalists of his generation. He always refused to consider that the true “we” could be limited (which is different from incorporating some of the secondary characteristics) to such a feeble base which is linked to the dangerous animal human nature such as community, cultural, linguistic, historical ... links.

Even more, Valls couldn’t accept this “German” concept of nation, but he couldn’t accept the “French” version either (where the privileges are limited to institutional and political elements), although this is closer to his thinking. The key problem is that he associated any nationalism to the dangerous, primary animal impulses and the catastrophes of the civil war and the Franco era.

As the realist that he was, Valls could understand that culture or nation habitually form a powerful and necessary base for institutional politics, but he considered them weak and dangerous without armed institutional vigilance. Only the State can effectively pacify the agonist impulses which are omnipresent in the human condition. As a student of modern history, Valls understood (and could defend) the coinciding of nation and State, but a bit naively and despite knowing the setting of the struggle for power, he considered that the State was necessarily the rational element of control and pacifi-

cation while the nation was inevitably an irrational element of agonist chaos. We must note that this idea was widespread among his generation for reasons previously mentioned.

As a result, although he was never in the Spanish nationalist movement, which at that time was inseparable from Francoism, Ramon Valls did not fully coincide with the growing Catalan nationalism, which was unequivocally democratic. He accepted leading the Catalan Philosophy Society (part of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans) from 1982 to 1985, where he collaborated with pro-Catalans of varying ideologies such as professors Jordi Sales i Coderch, Xavier Rubert de Ventós, Pere Lluís Font, Francesc Gomà, Francesc Fortuny, Joan Leita<sup>34</sup>, Salvi Turró and me. Then he was an active collaborator in the first publications of *Col·loquis de Vic*, where he was an important presence with various lectures (Valls 1997c, 1998, 1999) and as a member of the science council of the *The Catalan Philosophy Society Yearbook*. Despite his resistance to any sort of homages, he accepted the presidency of honor of the first Catalan Philosophy Congress, organized by Catalan, Valencian and Balearic Philosophy Societies and celebrated in Barcelona on March 21, 22 i 23 of 2007<sup>35</sup>.

Despite the indisputable democratic pacifism of Catalan nationalism which embodied a potent modernizing project, Valls never really felt close to it. No doubt he remembered the traumatic shocks he'd had with Basque nationalism in the new Basque Country University he'd helped to found. And his unease grew with the consolidation of political autonomy and the emergence of Catalan nationalism from the marginal position where Francoism had put it.

In addition, to understand the proud solitude and relative silence of his last years, there are two decisive academic events. The first is that Ramon Valls had to give up his hope to be rector of the University of Barcelona. For some years he had been vice-rector of the professors and was considered, in pectore, the successor of rector Josep Maria Bricall. Poor health, however, forced him to resign, thus cutting off an aspiration inspired in Hegel, and in which he'd placed his dreams.

The second was the serious confrontation with the major part of the department of the History of Philosophy<sup>36</sup> of the University of Barcelona and his old mentor (professor of the UNED and soon member of the Academy of Spanish Language) Emilio Lledó, the result of a famous and polemical opposition.

34 With whom he maintained a strong difference of criteria during the joint edition of *Fenomenologia de l'esperit (Phenomenology of the Spirit)*.

35 Josep Monserrat (ed.), *Actes del primer congrés català de filosofia*, Societat Catalana de Filosofia, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona, 2011.

36 He even left the classes in the Philosophy Department and taught in the Law Department, specifically in the philosophy of law. For years he hardly used his office in the Philosophy Department.

All this embittered his last university years and impelled him to shut himself in. He began to lose friendships and academic/intellectual alliances with professors like Raul Gabás, Victòria Camps, Felipe Martínez Marzoa, Félix Duque, and even ones who were closer to him like José Luis Villacañas, Francisco Jarauta and Víctor Gómez Pin.

We believe, and it would be interesting to see an in-depth biography confirm it, that his increasing isolation was the result of the sum of his own character, his failure in his hope to become rector, his academic conflicts and his profound disappointment and distance with respect to the three most powerful social and intellectual groups of the time. As we have noted, Valls never completely connected with the liberal sector, he distanced himself moodily from both the religious sector where he had been formed and from the Marxist sector which had been so influential in his university years and from the modernizing Catalan nationalists, who were regaining their traditional cultural and social central position.

In short, for various reasons Valls forced himself to proudly and increasingly retire into himself, his solitary study and translation of Hegel. This had the lamentable consequence of minimizing his direct intellectual impact on the new generations of students and philosophers.

## Against moralism

“It can be clearly perceived that Politics without Ethics comes to be cruel and frighteningly unjust. However it is equally so that Ethics without Politics is reduced to celestial music. It degrades the moralizing to immoral because its sermon is ineffective in causing the good in this world” (Valls 2003, p. 151s.).

The conscious, willful distancing from the model of “we” in the church, classes, civil society, the agglomeration of “I’s” or the culture-nation (and its supporters) was key in the later evolution of Ramon Valls. We have also seen that these four rejections were firmly rooted in his agonist vision of human nature and the fears and dangers associated with it.

For a realistic pragmatist, convinced of human agonism, as was Valls, moralism (not morality or ethics) is a total error. Valls thinks that moralism is necessarily naive and inefficient because it proposes a world and humanity which denies its agonist condition, or at least as if this condition could be overcome by limits, penance or will. The human evil and tendency to conflict do not disappear simply because one realizes that it is bad, counterproductive and violent (and it is!). So he states forcefully, “Moralism deals as well with senseless topics. For example it says that if the whole world were good there

would be no need for laws. Or if we all loved each other the world would be goodness and light. (...) We won't say trivialities and we repeat that ethics without politics is a children's story. (...) In short, moralism is immoral. It is an ideal refuge which is condemned to never come down to reality. (Valls 2003, p. 176, our italics).

Valls's denouncing of abstract moralism goes back to an idea very close to Kantian doctrine, of Christian origin, of the "radical bad": man is made of such twisted wood that there is no way to straighten him out, much less maintain himself straight. Valls is very clear that no moralizing will can effectively and enduringly transform the agonistic human nature. As we have seen, he considers the harsh discipline exercised by a real, institutional "we" (even a despotic one) to be far more effective over the course of history: "We know that Ethics doesn't fall from the heavens. Its origins are far more modest. It is born from politics as an organizational technique which is always imperfect" (2003, p. 151, our italics).

Coinciding with Hegel, Valls constantly accuses the moralists of being utopians, dreamers, abstract... Or "idealists", in the worst sense of the word<sup>37</sup>. His basic criticism is that they are not only ineffective and simply boastful, but they often hide their perverse desire to avoid the authentic problem and difficult task at hand. Heavily influenced by Nietzsche, Valls sees there the most common socioethical error of our times and one of the worst inheritances of religion. That is why he says that "moralism impregnates the mixture of beliefs which form the ethical pasta of the world, to use that phrasing. Its origin is clear. (...) The clergy especially seems to enjoy putting others in positions that they can't reach" (Valls 2003, p. 175s).

In the decisive opening of the "Conclusion" of his last book Valls recalls significantly the "Parable of the Grand Inquisitor" that Dostoyevsky included in *The Brothers Karamazov*. As Valls says in his direct, unmistakable style, "In short, the grand inquisitor says to Jesus, "you act like the good guy, and everyone's happy with you. I, on the other hand, act like the bad guy and am on everyone's bad side. Despite that, you don't do anything and I have to do the work." and it's the dirty work, of course. To say it abstractly: morality is clean and politics is dirty. But morality is clean because it only preaches, without ever getting involved while politics is dirty because the human world is dirty."

Ramon Valls's volleys against moralism were a constant in his classes and his writings. He even included a new type of fallacy which he called the "angelical" fallacy to denounce the "moralist cliché, which as moralist is in-

37 See the chapter "What is Hegel's Idealism?" «¿Cuál es el idealismo de Hegel?» a G. Mayos, *Hegel. Vida, obra y pensamiento*, Planeta DeAgostini, Barcelona, 2007, pp. 80s.

effective” which “demands that politics convert itself in the arm of morality despite its own interests (Valls 2003, p. 165). Until all humanity is educated and has controlled its agonist tendency, Valls thought necessary (2003, p. 219s) a strong coactive force which imposes peace and the empire of law. So he formulates an imperative, which in many classes and debates created misunderstanding, “It is a moral obligation to take the step from morality to politics to demand the right to do so” (Valls 2003, p. 188).

## Against the emotional we

Precisely because he linked the dangerous agonist human nature with more animal, irrational and emotional impulses, Valls is strongly opposed to arguments based on feelings or that include emotional aspects. With rational Hegelian coherence he identifies “sentimental” romanticism as another example of moralism, as it limits itself to proclamations of sentimental content without paying attention to concrete mechanisms which could effectively make that content work.

Undoubtedly this is what Valls saw implicit in even the most valid versions of religion, nationalism, romantic Marxism like “salt of the earth” or an anarchical liberalism of “people without a State will do it better”. He saw well-intentioned naiveté, “beautiful spirits” putting themselves in a dangerous dead end street, or “angelical” mentalities that try to change the world without knowing it.

Coherent with his conception of the agonist human condition, Valls saw emotions and feelings as more of a danger than a solution. He saw more the Sadducean trap which ends up enveloping everything than the intended good impulse which will finally save the world. Therefore he considers the emotional and sentimental attempts to reinforce the “political we” we have described to be dangerous and counterproductive. He believes that they normally strengthen human aggressiveness more than they limit it (which is the prime task of the juridic-state “we”).

As we could see in his classes and some conversations, Valls tended to reduce all Romanticism to a sort of sentimentalism, thereby minimizing the romantic bases of German idealism<sup>38</sup>. He accepted that Romanticism seeks an absolute and it includes a potent ethical “we”, but, he counterattacked, al-

38 For this reason, as well, Valls reduced postmodernism to a sort of romanticism for spoiled children: “The postmodernist writings give off, in fact, a sort of conceited fatuity, typical of spoiled children (...). Youth who apparently are revolutionaries, but deep down they are yuppies who, possessed by a yearning to break things, take the revelations of their uncentered subjectivity to be brilliant thoughts”.

ways thought of as natural and too often leaning to solipsisms and individual “genius” and the elevation of grand passions. For Valls, Romanticism doesn’t realize that it wants to construct an absolute or a “we” with the most dangerous part there is in humanity. This leads to its inevitable failure, even more dangerous to the extent that, whether it wants to or not, its efforts attack and destroy rational, juridic, “objective” barriers, which are the only effective ones. They are, in short, the only truly effective “we”.

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*Translation from Catalan by Dan Cohen*

