

Introductory: Hyper-Modernity

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The science and scholarship that is the peculiar pride of civilized Christendom is not only international, but rather it is homogeneously cosmopolitan; so that in this bearing there are, in effect, no national frontiers; with the exception, of course, that in a season of patriotic intoxication, such as the current war has induced, even the scholars and scientists will be temporarily overtaken by their patriotic fervor. Indeed with the best efforts of obscurantism and national jealousy to the contrary, it remains patently true that modern culture is the culture of Christendom at large, not the culture of one and another nation in severalty within the confines of Christendom.

—Thorstein Veblen, *The Nature of Peace*¹

This project came into being by assembling a team of pacifist scholars and activists to take stock, collegially, of the current state of social and human affairs. The point of departure was for each, in his field, to assess the situation and describe the extent to which the Social Doctrine of the Church—and that is to say, to certain extent, the Holy See as a political actor—has failed to address the various issues in which the Church is supposed to play a leading role. The question, then, was to suggest

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how one may move forward and correct the trajectory in order to remedy visible shortcomings. This sort of project has coalesced into what we here propose as a methodological manifesto, as a choral approach to the social sciences and the humanities. It is not presented or intended to be a “Catholic thing.” Our appeal, instead, is to the entire front of progressive activism. We think it is a timely and necessary initiative—namely, to have a “platform” for sociopolitical research written from the progressive camp at a time when the so-called Neoliberal/Neoconservative consensus has virtually wiped out any kind of intellectual opposition, on the one hand, and, on the other, the so-called Left is, we believe, a wasteland ambivalently controlled by the postmodern movement, which seems no less conservative than Neoliberalism and, as such, disinclined to address what we think are the essential problems of our era: for example, the damages of nationally defined economic hegemony, the paean of individualism, and the unquestioned espousal of the “globalizing” culture.

THE PROBLEMATIC AREAS ARE ESSENTIALLY THREE: POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND DISCOURSE

Politically, the main contention here is that we now find ourselves living in a strident exasperation of the conventionally modern setting postdating the fall of the Berlin Wall. The geopolitical game has been the same for the past 100 years, with the USA carrying the torch of the former British empire in preventing (by whatever means it may take), as it typically must go, any kind of political coalescence along the eastern ridge of what could have been Walter Rathenau’s imaginary dukedom of *Mittel-Europa*. To this end, Balts, Poles, Czechs, and Romanians (and Ukrainians) are holding hands to form one long and hostile cordon, separating one sweep of Europe, the “good” one, from another, the bad, “Asiatic” one. NATO, of course, directs the choreography. In other words, the imperatives are to keep Germany on a tight leash, Europe austere, and Russia as far away as geo-spiritually possible. All of which has lately been garnished by a particularly distasteful intrigue, of the “Oriental” sort, fomented on our southern and southeastern reaches, by agitating anew Old Venice’s old Turkish specter, revamped this time around as the “Islamist” of the sinister Caliphate. The Islamist moonlights more often than not as a “terrorist,” or, when the deployment is thicker, as an “insurgent.” A convenient and obvious prop of destabilization, this “angered other” from the Mohammedan expanses is, in truth, but the bitter harvest of an idle, barbarized, and identity-less

sub-proletariat, fit to be manipulated in any sandy scenario whatsoever: anyone who has seen the Near East knows this. This alleged “Jihadist” has been thrown into the mix, so to speak, a decade and a half ago, to suggest, or better, to fulfill the “prophecy” that we would all be mired into an issueless Clash of Civilizations. As a learned characterization of the late international “situation,” this last, we know it, too, is hogwash; the Clash of Civilizations is a Western sport—all of it: the Arabizing screenplays, the deployments, the weapons, the “accursed” expense (Bataille’s *dépense*), and the (Westerners’) unremitting urge to *command* far and wide, for the disgraceful sake of which, all such foulness has been set into perpetual motion. Truthfully, this “Near-eastern” generalized geo-strategic morass, passed off by the current “Liberal” rhetoric as the unmanageable congeries of particularistic, ethnic-laden strife, is, of course, yet another “theater” of the self-same “game,” whose proximate object is to keep the Eurasian exchequer as thinly fragmented as possible, especially around those nodes—viz., the late case of Syria—through which further connectors and arteries—be they pipelines or vast highways—could be unrolled to tie the one forlorn swath of Eurasia to the other. Syria, to cite but one recent instance of such administered “shocks,” has now suffered near annihilation from a five-year, brutal, and disfiguring conflict plausibly motivated by the underlying exigency to cleave the zone into scraps,² or rather, bones, three of them: i.e., as many as the exploitable fault lines creasing the region, whatever they may be, will allow to excise: one to the Shi’ites, one to the Sunnis, and one to the embattled Kurds and their peacock. This and similar other conflicts are, as a rule, “Vietnamized,” so to speak, by expending hordes of these “Islamists,” vicariously armed, supplied, and regimented by Near-eastern satrapies, chiefly Turkey, and sheikdoms, which, jointly and severally, gravitate in the orbit of the USA and her European proximities. In this bearing, the state of nightmarish dereliction that has enveloped Iraq since its “second capture” in 2003, otherwise expected at the time to transform Mesopotamia into a proconsular jewel of “democratic pluralism,” appears, then, condign to the logistical decision to employ the area as the Spartan launching pad for laying waste to the vicinity.

One conspicuous by-product of these geo-strategic obscenities is the recent phenomenon of the massive migrant waves of indigents and asylum-seekers to the shores and gates of Europe. The migrant hemorrhaging from war zones has mostly come from Syria and Libya. Notoriously, these mass movements conjoin both economic and geopolitical dynamics, whose individual and separate reasons and histories, however, have been merged

in the ensuing public debate into one big blur. The European Right, whose electoral fortunes had hitherto suffered a marked decline, has been clearly boosted by what it could, enthusiastically, decry as the destabilizing onslaught of a barbarian invasion, whereas the institutional Left, presently deporting itself as the Pretorian guard of the supranational technostructure, while condemning the opponents as soulless fascists, appealed to everyone's good heart for "letting them all in." As it always is, the conventional polarization on this issue is fomented by the tactical scruple to conceal ulterior transactions; a surmise, this last, all the more instinctive as the suggestion of adversarial interplay between Right and Left generally is, even upon a distracted scrutiny, undone by the temperamental hypocrisies of the parties involved. When the business cycle allows it, foreign slave labor, with or (preferably) without papers, filters in effortlessly, above all cheered by Right-wingers, who thereupon rave to their constituencies about the unique opportunity for the community as a whole to enjoy the priceless cultural "diversity" which all such "others" bring to (the neatness of the toilets, lodgings, and hedges of) the Nation. The Left cheers so, too. When times are "tight," instead, such as they are now, the Right, in the goodly name of Law and Order, raises walls to keep "the other" out, yet the Left, usually buttressed by the conventional armada of international organizations and their coterie of non-profit satellites feistily pushing for the "effacement of nationhood," insists on absorbing as many as the situation compels it to, without truly offering, however, any rhyme or reason as to its admittance criteria, procedures, or logistical action-plans(s). By default, these loads of refugees and migrant workers, once inside, are shoveled into metropolitan ghettos, where, speaking of "ulterior transactions," they may be expected, under the current regime's tacit encouragement of interethnic and interreligious animosity ("respect for diversity"), to pigment all of Europe's urban peripheries, like America's (finally...), with the tribal marks of multi-ethnic and multi-religious apartheid. Out of ghettos thus remodeled, in turn, it might not be entirely unwarranted to presume that radicalized contingents of home-bred misfits of foreign origin and creed—a whole diversified gamut of them, in fact—could sprout in sufficient numbers as to provide "indigenous" material for an indoor game of provocation and ricochet under cover of an all-European "War on Terror"—itself, quite obviously, understood, officially, as the dramatic and unintended result of (unstoppable) ethnic "empowerment."

The other half of the migration issue is poverty, with Africa still providing the main egress to the diaspora. Whose fault? One wonders: it

has been at least 40 years since the West, in full global regalia, took a symphonic stand to denounce the hunger and the plethora of injustices surrounding the ravages of famines, dearth, and pandemics, which, notoriously, continue to this day, as potently as then. Allegedly, the consequent establishment of a colossal apparatus of financial and research institutions, public and private, devoted to “foreign aid” and “feeding the world” has colossally failed. Wars, exploitation, and genocide persist: in truth, the white absentees have never left their old, famished colonies. It must be so if, indeed, the chief two developments which have lately been hailed as the miraculous antidotes to hunger and poverty are transgenic food and microfinance. Though there have been plenty of sinister warnings as to the nefarious impact of so-called genetically modified organisms (GMOs), most of us, through personal ignorance and misinformation, remain in no position to assess definitely the biological valence of these organisms. And though we may not know exactly, we possess, however, enough intuition to shudder at the thought of what a manipulation so profoundly alien to Nature as a GMO could possibly wreak on the world’s environment and fauna, and, of course, on humanity’s health. Even better do we intuit, and shudder no less at the economic rationale behind the process, which is simply that of *patenting*, that is, privatizing, the earth’s and humanity’s common-core seeds, that is, the source of our nutriment at the very foundational level: a design which can only be construed as nothing short of monstrous. Microfinance, on the other hand, has been a clever ploy, not devoid of grand entrepreneurial foresight (it won its inventor a Nobel Prize). What it proposed was, factually, to harness the six billion have-nots to the proprietary banking grid of the one billion haves by an interface, a local banking outfit, whose “alluring” business proposition was, to put it coarsely, a tenfold reduction of three-figure loan-sharking rates to the more manageable two-figure usury of microcredit—a mitigation: two ounces instead of a full pound of flesh. More than anything, microfinance owed its political anointment to its shimmering promise of turning static misery into dynamic wretchedness. It, too, has been grandiloquently sold as yet another tool of female empowerment; poor females.

As for the economic condition of our time, suffice it to say in these preliminary pages that ours, if at all necessitous of a novel appellation, is the age of “offshoring.” Globalism/globalization does not exist; it is a self-gratulatory and bombastic label that was perhaps coined to occult the palpable lack of change in the basic routines of business enterprise, the only variation being, as said, the late practice of delocalizing anything

delocalizable: the fantastic odysseys of call centers that have set sail from California to Punjab or from Latium to Budapest, and of cowboy apparel stitched in Cambodia are sufficiently well known as to excuse further reflections on this count. Barring transformative occurrences of a drift wholly alien to the ongoing management of international affairs, American leadership appears, in the foreseeable future, to auspicate the regression of the world's economy into the compartmentalization of a vaster space of commercial exchange under its attentive supervision. Imagine such a space divided chiefly into an Atlantic and a Pacific sector, and crisscrossed by formidable fleets of chartered corporate outfits, seaborne and airborne. Pepsi's aircraft carriers with air cover from Procter & Gamble's squads of F-35s would course in the glorious wake of the East India Company to wage new Opium Wars, while flexible ground troops would be pushing upstream to quarantine Russia ever more stringently. For its part, finance, which never was the tyrannizing fetish recently reviled with culpable ingenuousness in pop iconography, will appositely continue to play its subaltern, though richly rewarded, role in keeping with the higher directives of the Elder Statesmen. This is a story we shall recount in Chapter 9 ("The Political Economy of Hyper-Modernity").

The discursive stakes of the game appear to be not inconsiderable. So much so that in order to deflect attention from the basic elements of the case such as they are, the propagandistic apparatus of the West has, for the past generation, taken remarkable pains to convince us all, instead, that ours is unequivocally the "postmodern epoch," the "postmodern moment." An epoch that is "complex," too complex, in fact, contradistinguished as it putatively is by the end of universals and certitudes; the exacerbation of "difference"; the invasion of "sculpted bodies"; all kinds of menacing "feminine" avatars out of Pandora's box; unrelenting ethnic and devout feuding; multi-polarity for lack of a single imperial "center"; and, impregnating it all, "liquidity." (Liquidity?) If anything, the world of, say, 1910, gauged in terms of complexity—what with its Balkan chicaneries, interlocked nebulae of Social Revolutionaries, the esoteric jockeying behind prewar alliances, and titanic industrial mutations—appears far more recalcitrant to linear theorizing than the contemporary era. If anything, the world of today is far simpler than yesterday's: as mentioned at the outset, it is but an aggravation of trends, traits, and vogues, which have come into full maturation over the course of the past century and are now suppurating in a state of pathological hypertrophy typically indicative of an unraveling *da fine impero*. Ours is not an era of difference but one

of flattening conformism, of uniformization; women are not empowered, they rather strive to comport themselves like men, who look ever more like machines. There is no menace from Islam, and unless deliberately and systematically instigated, which it is, ethnic strife, precisely because cultural difference substantially dissolves in the Anglophone mainstream, does not really belong to the common drift of things anymore. The view from the rooftops in Cairo, Amman, and Damascus yields a mirror stippled with satellite dishes all pointing West.³ There is nothing postmodernly awkward about any of this; we are moving toward the end of the line, before the next discrete leap along the ongoing descent. Culturally, America is, owing to her indubitable dynamism and unrivaled creative tempo, dominant; Europe is moribund, China, for the time being, a mere copycat, and Russia, who knows? Small wonder, then, that everybody craves a piece of the Anglophone mainstream; if one could only purge this unchallenged US standard of its idolatry of violence, and couple the cleansing with a genuine peace overture across Eurasia, there might be a chance after all.

And where does the Church fit in all this? It is hard to say, considering how in arrears she appears to be on virtually every significant front of social action. Except for its charitable undertakings, chiefly though not exclusively through *Caritas*, and the sedulous labor of its diplomatic corps, which allegedly never sleeps, Catholicism is at the forefront of nothing. Indeed, the Church suffered deeply the advent of modernism for obvious reasons; she suffered in particular the rupture of communal bonds via the creation of vast labor markets. And the culture of hedonism gave her the coup de grâce. “The place in men’s esteem once filled by church and state,” wrote Veblen in 1918, “is now held by pecuniary traffic, business enterprise.”⁴ Clearly, the acceleration, such as that characterizing “hyper-modernity,” of a transformative process, which the Church took in stride unsympathetically, could not but aggravate the discomfort. In this protracted state of general malaise, despite her best pastoral efforts, the Church seems to be suffering, more than anything, from a guilt-ridden presentiment of being, in the final analysis, completely insignificant. To begin, she has not been capable in over a century of producing a single influential intellectual,⁵ let alone a whole class of *maîtres à penser*, which she would have sorely needed. As a consequence, she has no science worth speaking of, despite Veblen’s solemn evocation of Christendom’s faded glories. Because her so-called Social Doctrine is, at heart, a compendium of homiletic platitudes—a form of “catechism on steroids,” as it were—the Church has not been able to form in her clergy a proper and structured sensitivity to socioeconomic analysis

and policy. In ecclesiastical universities, rather than being shepherded into the study of the social sciences, seminarians and priests, and the future diplomats in their midst, are obdurately cut to size, instead, by the grinding motions of a perfectly bootless trivium of philosophy, theology, and canon law. And, even worse than this, unforgivably so, is Catholicism's decision to subcontract the entire social science offerings of its own denominational schools to the Malthusians of the Liberal academy. And so it is that such colleges, Catholic only in name, presently pride themselves on the ranking of their heavily endowed business schools, where, for the most part, upper-middle-class scions are taught to blend the proprieties of pious decorum with a transcendental awe for the microeconomic principle of scarcity to the joint satisfaction of donors and chaplains.

It must be that the spiritual "quid" the priests-educators are asked in exchange for the pecuniary "quo" (the endowment) does not allow for more than this. In any event, Catholicism, at present, possesses no programmatic ideas of its own. Politically, as said, save for the diplomatic effort, which, in any case, is not the affair of the flock since it must remain *sub rosa*, Vatican pronouncements have not been equal to the gravity of the contemporary situation: as wars are exclusively fought to expand *imperium*, it would behoove world peace if a *center* as influential as the Holy See would denounce them overtly and punctually, *naming names* and exposing the belligerents' intentions, rather than taking refuge, instead, in such inaccurately reprobative adages as those according to which war is fought merely to enrich cannon-makers. That the Church would forthwith take the stance of unreserved *accoglienza* on the question of immigration, and rush to offer in support thereof the structure of her network for refugee assistance, is understandable; yet, having due regard for the cardinal political (and military) interests managed in Brussels, which is the chief instigator of this stance, again, it would have behooved the public at large if the Vatican had offered an equanimous appraisal of the terms of the crisis, by condemning the wars that drove these people from their homes and set them adrift. For Africa, where it recruits massively, the Holy See does not appear to have set forth or even endorsed an *original* and systematic plan for (agricultural) development; it has by no means condemned genetically modified crops; and, overall, microfinance has been looked upon with favor. The Church has, on the other hand, proffered a vigorous defense of the environment's protection in *Laudato si'*²; the move was appreciated but very long overdue. In any event, it remains to be seen whether the exhortation to entrust organs of "international cooperation"

with the cure of our planet's debauchment, as recommended in the encyclical, will offer any guarantee whatsoever against the policy of deliberate inaction hitherto so scrupulously enforced. On the cultural front, bent on appeasement rather than guidance, the Church seems compassless and prone to utter non-committal statements from all sides of the ideological divide as if she were offering principle: she does not understand or is simply not interested in economic reform and grassroots monetary activism, sociological mutation, a systematic comprehension of the nature of violence in today's shifting contexts, or even the very basic elements of the modern/postmodern polemic, not to mention sexual ethics.

To conclude, much, actually most, remains to be done. This anthology proposes a seminal attempt to provide what could be the future guidelines for redesigning the curricula of new, non-denominational schools, in which a proper awareness of our surroundings and the best means of building upon them for the general benefit of all could be developed. We need to study history, good sociology, and agronomy; we need to understand the earth, physics, and the human laws of collective motion; and most importantly, what makes us capable of sabotaging it all. On these bases alone shall we eventually be able, paraphrasing Melville, to indulge in the proper latitude of philosophizing and compassionating (*The Confidence Man*, XIII).

PRESENTATION OF CHAPTERS

Of the themes treated in the anthology, the progression is the following: communications, sociological methodology, historiography, politics, cultural studies, and economics. Peter Lah's "Blasphemous Speech in a Secular Society: An Anachronism?" brings into relief the spiritual inconsistency of the alleged clash between the Liberal view of the West and the "religious" outlook of Europe's Muslim *Gastarbeiter*, the thesis being that all the acrimony and alleged cultural enmity that have been decried on this count stem in large part from the greater intolerance of the West's new secularist creed, which—and here lies the gist of the communications' analysis—by abolishing the juridical notion of "blasphemy," has allowed needlessly dangerous provocations to occur.

The dogmatic substrate of Liberal intolerance is plumbed in methodological detail in the successive piece, "Epidemiological Research, Individualism and Public Health." Jacqueline Azetsop advances in this essay a grounded argument for the unconditional rejection of rational

choice theory as an approach to the social sciences from the particular slant of epidemiology. He maintains that the ideological imposition upon the various techniques of social inquiry of a mechanistic metaphor such as that of individualism—whose pedagogical object is the suggestion that all behaviors are the result of a hedonistic calculus—has the ultimate effect, not only of impeding the advance of knowledge per se, but, no less damagingly, of leading, through a conservative falling back on the options of the status quo, to the persevering adoption of policies detrimental to the body social as a whole. The dogma of individualism, in other words, prevents a coherent understanding of the social metabolism, and, therefore, of the particular sort of care needed for its nurture.

Equally impatient with the metaphoric overstraining of methodological individualism is Eric Wilson's treatment of the works of James W. Douglass: "Unspeakable: James W. Douglass, Non-Violence and Political Murder." This is a martyrological exposition of the political vicissitudes of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, whose chief narrative line is the contraposition of a heroic commitment to the Good, as embodied by these historical figures, and the mercilessly homicidal response of the structures of power in the face of organized popular defiance. Because it is unmarred by the constraints of blind loyalism, which, as a rule, impose the effacement of political or national responsibility in the perpetration of (mass-)murder(s), the essay transcends the etiological happenstance of Liberal historiography's conventional accounts, in which "everything happens by chance and error." Not so here: via an original political approach that doubles as eschatological hermeneutics, political assassinations are shown to be the institutional counterreaction of a deeper, self-protective layer of (hyper-)modern bureaucratic apparatuses.

These apparatuses exert control also by wielding various forms of soft power such as patriotic suggestiveness, which forms the theme of the fifth installment: "The Neoconservative Influence on American Catholics, 1950–2015: Smothering Pacifism in the Cradle." Using Veblen's depiction in *Absentee Ownership* of the American regime as backdrop, Jeff Langan recounts the story of the jagged relationship between US Catholics and the American Republic, from the recalcitrant days of the pre-WWI to US Catholicism's fervent backing of the War on Terror after the complete surrender to Reagan's Neoliberal swerve of the 1980s. This story is here retold to show how US absentees employed the propagandistic arm of Neoconservatism to absorb the Catholic constituency into the patriotic, warmongering consensus in two stages. First, Neocon publicists succeeded,

via John Paul II, to talk Rome into bestowing upon “the ethos of business” a sort of sacral sanction; upon securing the insider’s fast track into Catholicism’s “sovereign seat of power,” they then proceeded to skim the Catholics’ allegiance by surreptitiously appealing to their traditionalist attachment to paternalist authority and familial clannishness.

This sort of alliance, cemented in the name of belligerence between the elites and the masses, no matter how deviously obtained by the former at the expense of the latter, cannot succeed, however, unless a particular psychological “bias” pre-exists in the common apprehension of both groups. And that is the conviction, itself the by-product of a barbarous, and animistic mindset, that evil, or “the enemy” *always* resides “outside of us,” and, at a further remove, outside our community, however defined. All organized violence, such as a nationalist empire routinely musters for its ends, is, in fact, a ritualistic “thrusting outward” of the “evil within,” which can only be effected through the conduit of an extraneous enmity: something, someone hostile “other than us.” The set of societal practices built around this ritual, which French scholar René Girard referred to as “scapegoating,” is employed by Thaddeus Kozinski to explain, in his “René Girard and Modernity’s Apocalypse,” the physiognomy of America’s contemporary mindset, especially as the Nation came to embrace unquestioningly the War on Terror after 9/11.

Scapegoating is but one of a several manifestations of the “language of violence,” which is, in turn, a chief attribute of the so-called problem of “evil.” The contemporary author that has contributed possibly the most original discussion of the mysterious coexistence of good and evil is Georges Bataille. More than a poet with a knack for the social sciences, Bataille was an aspirant counter-initiate who sought to fashion a modern renaissance of Dionysian worship, complemented by an original anti-Catholic mythography. What is fascinating in this connection is that a number of key sociological insights from Bataille’s oeuvre, re-confected through the plagiaristic “theories” of French philosopher Michel Foucault, have come to be adopted in the USA as the scholarly basis of the postmodern movement, especially of the so-called “discourse of diversity,” which ultimately serves as a politically correct instrument of divisiveness. “On the Science of Discord: The ‘Diabolic’ Idiom of French Postmodernism and the ‘Politics of Diversity’ in America” traces the late construct of “diversity” to Bataille’s sociology by way of Foucault’s academic re-digestion of the latter, with a view to defining the forthcoming challenges for civil society vis-à-vis post-modernism’s conservative policy of “multicultural” fragmentation.

In 2000, 2004, and 2005, the Vatican issued doctrinal censures against the works of three Catholic theologians, Roger Haight, SJ, Jon Sobrino, SJ, and Peter Phan, respectively. The aim of “The Political Scripting of Jesus: Utilizing the Savior Story to Exercise Power—The Debate over Vatican Censures, Apocrypha, and Literary Interpretations” is to fathom the political stakes behind the disputation, and, by interpreting in turn the particular objectives of each dissentient opus vis-à-vis the established prerogatives of the Roman incumbent, to reassess aesthetically the various narrative strands of Christology at a time of quasi-complete Catholic disaffection in the West. The thesis is (a) that Sobrino’s “affront” is an idiosyncratic yet wholly legitimate *ŷaccuse* of the Vatican’s geopolitical line during the last phase of the Cold War; (b) that Haight’s and Phan’s Christological “deviations,” on the other hand, are something altogether different—namely, hermeneutical poses masking a schismatic overture to the new postmodern Church of US academia; and (c) that these notifications are but another symptom of the Holy See’s ongoing incapacity to find what ought to be one of the leading voices in the world movement for social justice. The main concern of this long monograph within the anthology is to *question the nature of belief* in relation to one’s quotidian, political action in society. Relying exclusively on sociological and aesthetic categories, I ask what the Savior Story, in its essentials, actually signifies; and what that story itself truly signifies for the existence of an institution such as the Catholic Church in this day and epoch all over the world. The discussion of all such topics is, in connection with the inquisitorial notifications, accompanied by a great variety of literary tropes and anthropological digressions, such as the Gospel of Judas, Veblen’s institutional peregrinations on primitive Christianity, Tolstoy’s meditations on the Gospels, and, when touching on multiculturalism, the novels and aphorisms of Japanese Catholics, such as Akutagawa and Endo.

The final two essays are devoted to economics. The ninth chapter, titled “The Political Economy of Hyper-Modernity: A Tale of America’s Hegemonic Exigencies Recounted through the Undulations of the US Balance of Payments (1946–2015),” was conceived to offer a long-term account of the main dynamics of international political economy, within which one could intelligibly locate, in an orderly sequence, all the major economic events of the past 70 years and thereby acquire a crisp vista of the fundamental economic dilemmas and controversies of our time. The article attempts this grand synthesis through the statistical and graphical projection of a single economic variable, the US Balance of Payments,

which indicates the commercial and financial position—positive or negative as it may be—of the leading economy, America’s, vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Traced and annotated over time, this measure yields a peculiar narration of events from the system’s post-World War II infancy to the present day. The picture that emerges from this sequential collation of data, policies, crises, and serial cycles of transformation suggests that everything seems to be revolving around two US imperatives: viz., to maintain and promote international trade exclusively as a means to binding allies closer to Washington; and to manage financial strategy in such a way as to obtain foreign direct investment and the upkeep of foreign U.S. military bases abroad for free.

Finally, all of the foregoing could not have found a fitting finale without the disclosure of a plan of our own: “The Blueprint: A Modest Monetary and Organizational Proposal for Re-launching the Economic Welfare of Communities.” In the “blueprint” we sketch, in very broad strokes, the economic contours of the ideal, communal district as we imagine it. In essence, the plan comprises a few corrective measures that, we believe, would improve the functioning of the economy. With an eye single to social justice and to the damages of exploitation, the project seeks also to release creative potential by advocating (1) a system of monetary management based on the issuance of time-dated regional currencies (2) an organizational model of the firm in which individuals are not employees but “self-entrepreneurs” remunerated according to an agreed upon and detailed grid of roles and responsibilities; (3) the assignment of community-owned capital usage to an entrepreneurial leadership democratically elected and answerable only to the community; (4) bio-agriculture, environmental conscientiousness, and a zero-waste policy; and (5) a redefinition of the approach to consumption by which the final user is systematically embedded in the productive process.

NOTES

1. Thorstein Veblen, *An Inquiry into the Nature of Peace and the Terms of Its Perpetuation* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 39.
2. Robin Wright, “Imagining a Remapped Middle East,” *The New York Times*, 28 September 2013.
3. I had previously evoked this image in a discussion of the phony discursivities of the West in connection with the War on Terror, see Guido G. Preparata, *The Ideology of Tyranny, The Use of Neo-Gnostic Myth in American Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 208.

4. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America. A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918), 48.
5. “Dira-t-on que, si chaque grand publiciste fait son public, chaque publique un peu nombreux se fait son publiciste ? Cette dernière proposition est beaucoup moins vraie que la première : on voit des groupes très nombreux qui, pendant des longues années, ne parviennent pas à faire surgir l’écrivain adapté à leur véritable orientation. Tel est le cas du monde catholique à présent” Gabriel Tarde, *L’opinion et la foule* (Paris: Félix Alcan, Éditeur, 1901), 15, fn.1 (“Can it be said then, that if a great publicist creates his own public, every public, albeit small, creates its own publicist ? The latter proposition is far less true than the former: there have been indeed very large groups which, for several years, have not been capable of grooming a writer truly attuned to their orientation. Such is presently the case of the Catholic world”).