

# STATE AND PUBLIC SPHERE IN SPAIN DURING THE ANCIENT REGIME

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# ASP Research Papers

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## 1. The character of the state and of politics

Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the Spanish state followed a path marked by a series of challenges and crucial choices and their (largely unexpected) consequences. Spain's public sphere during that time can be understood as an ongoing conversation between the political elites who made those choices, and the cultural elites who helped them to define the challenges and responded to their choices with a mixture of support and understanding, detachment and criticism. In this paper, I will outline, first, my general argument by reference to two sets of topics which underlie that conversation: the character of the state and of politics (section 1), and the territorial dimension of the state and the construction of a political community (section 2). Then, I will discuss Spain's historical situation and the main currents of its public sphere under the Hapsburgs (sections 3 and 4), as well as the Bourbon state and the *ilustrados*' response to it (sections 5 and 6).

The trajectory of the Spanish state and its public sphere may be better understood if, as suggested by Michael Oakshott (1990; 1996), we examine it through the prism of a contrast between two ideal types of states, a 'nomocratic state' (or the state as a 'civil association') and of a 'teleocratic' one (or the state as an 'enterprise association'), and between two forms of politics, the 'politics of faith' and the 'politics of scepticism'. In its ideal-typical form, the nomocratic state would limit itself to providing society with *tranquillitas et iustitia*, thereby guaranteeing the application of formal rules to the operation of social orders. Such a state would not pretend being the bearer of historic missions, and would require a relatively modest power apparatus. By contrast, the teleocratic state would place society in a subordinate position and consider it as a sphere in which (economic, social or cultural) resources are generated to be coordinated and used by the rulers in order to fulfill collective missions, be they religious or temporal, such as their subjects' salvation, moral growth or material prosperity; and it would tend to create a powerful apparatus to achieve its aims. Oakshott's distinction between the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism parallels that between the teleocratic state and the nomocratic one. The nomocratic state would foster an interpretation of politics as politics of scepticism, or of reduced expectations, and discourage dispositions of

extraordinary deference on the part of the subjects vis-à-vis the state; conversely, a teleocratic state would promote a conception of politics as politics of faith, by this nurturing its subjects' disposition to place high hopes in the state's activities and to have an exalted view of its position in public imagery.

Of course, in real life, the European states have come only more or less close to these ideal types. However, if the distinction between the politics of faith and that of scepticism is based on the presence or absence of the will to place political power at the service of a project for systematic intervention in the social body to mould or perfect it in accordance with a belief (or faith) in what is truly best for it, which the statesman supposes he knows, then, we may conclude that, in general terms, medieval authority was not exercised in terms of the politics of faith. Its objective was not to perfect the world but to preserve the existing traditions, laws, customs and institutions. Its responsibilities were limited to guaranteeing the functioning of that order by means of applying justice and defending it against its enemies. No special mission justified obtaining the permanent collaboration of its subjects, or coordinating their activities in order to accomplish it; neither was there any reason for accumulating more resources than necessary for the tasks of justice and defence.

In Spain, the character of the medieval kingdoms was affected by the eight-centuries long experience of reconquest of the land against the Muslims; then, between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the character of the state and of politics followed a complex and ambiguous trajectory. On the face of it, these centuries were the scenario for the development of an absolute monarchy (the Hispanic or Catholic monarchy) conceived as the key piece in a teleocratic order. It began to take shape late in the fifteenth century, gathered momentum under the Hapsburg dynasty during the period (of the rise and fall) of Spanish hegemony in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was then redefined and given new impetus under the Bourbons in the eighteenth century. However, on closer examination, the lines became blurred and an undertow running in the opposite direction can be ascertained.

Though the Hapsburgs did largely respect the socioeconomic order in place and went along with the constitutional tradition of the medieval state

they inherited, they were nonetheless committed to some collective goals that required systematic intervention in the social fabric. For two centuries, the Hapsburg monarchy took some decisive steps towards reinforcing the kings' authority and towards formulating and developing a politics of faith. They did so, partly at least, by redefining the initial impetus received from a tradition of reconquest peculiar to the peninsula and, in particular, from the Catholic Kings, as these had aimed at the creation of a homogeneous socioreligious community, hence the establishment of the Inquisition, the expulsion of Jews and the segregation of the *Morisco* population.

Building on this, the Hapsburg state accumulated and mobilized resources for the purpose of defending the catholic faith and of moulding the moral character of its subjects, making membership in the church the key to acceptance in the political community, and it watched over and sanctioned their subjects' behavior to that effect. It forced them to conform, undergo punishment, go into exile, and silence their convictions and sentiments. Thus, it replaced an intermittent tradition of almost eight centuries of reconquest (or 'divine war': Sánchez-Albornoz, 1973), which had been associated with the extension of political rule and the occupation of land, but which had, also, accommodated a complex relationship between the communities of the three religions of the book (wherein frequent contacts and prolonged phases of peaceful coexistence and tolerance alternated with war: Castro 1983; 1985), by a strategy of indoctrination, violence and thought-police. The monarchy aspired to legitimize itself not only as the guarantor of justice, peace and defence, but also as an instrument to serve the goal of the religious and moral perfection of society; and it achieved its aim up to a point, insofar as those practices of coercion and indoctrination were incorporated into the uses and customs of the community. Nevertheless, even though a teleocratic discourse of sorts dominated the religious and artistic culture of the Golden Age, the public sphere included other currents of opinion which never dared to oppose the grand strategy of the Hapsburgs, but introduced reserves, distances and critical commentaries with regard either to the rationale or to the feasibility of those missions. These opinions were mainly shared by the Erasmians and the School of Salamanca, great writers such as Cervantes and the Baroque moralists, and the political commentators known as

*arbitristas* (in late sixteenth and during the seventeenth century).

The very success, however, of the politics of faith in persuading people to raise their expectations with regard to the state laid the ground for its later ruin. The Spaniards got used to the idea that their prince, together with the church, were the bearers of extraordinary missions they were expected to carry out, and could withstand prolonged failure to do so only within limits. Beyond a certain point, the depth and the duration of the monarchy's failure tested the foundations of the politics of faith. Thus, faith, overstretched, left room to doubt, and doubt eventually gave way to a mood of melancholy prevailing in the seventeenth century. Recovery was not easy, and it was even impossible in the sense of coming back to the very high expectations for so long associated with the state. The turn of the century brought a new dynasty and a redefinition of the state (both in its character and in its territorial dimension). In the course of this process, the monarchy revised its relationship with the church and reduced the intensity of its commitment as defender of the faith, allowing for a profound change in the character of the political community as it moved in the direction of a secular state.

Thus, the Bourbons tried to restore the high expectations associated with the state by changing the grounds of politics. The (partial) secularization of the state attempted to half-substitute, half-complement the religious grounds for the politics of faith with an appeal to a 'reason of state' which, this time, would apply to the social and economic perfection of society. The monarchy was to define a new, relatively complex, temporal goal which would bind together the enhancement of royal power and the prosperity of the kingdom, its social stability (the maintenance of the proper institutional distance between the privileged orders and the commoners) together with its demographic and economic development and its exploitation of the colonies. Its proposal to the general public, represented to some extent by the *ilustrados* (men of the Enlightenment), was to consider politics as a privileged instrument for achieving a more advanced state of progress *cum* stability, understood in terms of material well-being, conservation of the *statu quo* and the civilization of customs. At the same time, their subjects were required to develop private and public initiatives of an ambiguous character, which might or might not be at odds with the politics of faith. On the one

hand, the state encouraged them to accept its lead, and to expect a confused mix of transformative and conservative results from the state's action in the new domains of socioeconomic and educational policies. On the other, at least from the viewpoint of some segments of the state officialdom, the state seemed oriented to shrink from an overly interventionist role in the economy to a regulatory one aimed at removing obstacles to the free play of economic agents; in the short run, the state had crucial tasks to fulfill, only to put itself into the backseat once the structural reforms were enacted.

Thus, the very fact that the new state affirmed (within limits) its commitment to promoting the economic prosperity of the country and the kind of education coherent with that aim led it away from the pure type of a teleocratic state into an uncertain territory. It provided a modest impetus to a policy of encouraging experiments with open markets and with a secular and rational (enlightened) education so as to develop public discussion and civic engagement: two basic tenets of a nomocratic order. At the same time, it also exalted the figure of the absolute ruler and left almost untouched the system of *Stände*. Thus, an ambiguous understanding between the monarchy and a new generation of *ilustrados* was established, which was to set the tone of major debates in the public sphere during the eighteenth century.

## **2. Constructing a territorial state and a political community**

There are two ways of understanding the relation between the polar types of a nomocratic state and a teleocratic one. They may be seen as opposing each other (what they do as ideal types), or we may look for ways in which they combine to produce hybrids which may be closer to the real existing states in European history. The second path may help us to better understand the process by which states such as the Spanish one moved from a project of imperial rule couched in a language of universal values and norms into a state which used a language of particularism and centered on matters of national interest. The key for this transition was the development of a political community aware of its own particular identity and its own particular interests to defend on the world scene, and also aware of the fact that this particularity was based not so much on a common religious faith as on its attachment both to a particular ruler and the corresponding political

institutions, and to the particular territory which marked the boundaries of the rulers' proper authority and which was the scenario for the community's ongoing (and eventually ever-growing) mutual exchanges.

The relatively recent definition of peninsular Spain (excluding Portugal) as the appropriate territory for a political community merits attention. It came only at the end of a protracted transition from empire to regional power in its way to a national state (which took place in the nineteenth century). The Hispanic monarchy of the Hapsburgs or the Bourbons may have had the kingdom of Castile as their preferred nucleus or instrument, but it was never reduced only to it. In fact, the political horizon of both dynasties and their Castilian subjects themselves, was imperial by definition.

To a large extent, relevant public opinion in Castile accepted this definition of the polity of reference, although with the counterpoint of intermittent attempts at identifying Castile's (and in due time, Spain's) own interests within that whole. It was assumed that such interests entailed a certain primacy, manifested in the form of official posts and favors, and a symbolic preeminence. It would have been difficult for Castile to go much further in this hazy, tentative definition of its own interests. Its multi-secular tradition was that of a political entity with open, movable borders, which progressed from out of nowhere (a small corner in northern Spain, half-deserted as a result of muslim *razzias*, repopulated by peasant-warriors and punctuated by castles, hence the name of Castile) to predominance over the northern meseta, then Andalusia, and finally, the Americas. Then, at a critical juncture of Castilian history, the path was blocked for a Castilian nation state, as the army of the *Comunidades* (a league of Castilian towns) was crushed by the imperial armies. At this point, the Hapsburgs offered a second best to the Castilian privileged orders, a sort of historic compromise: Castilians would give relatively low priority to their collective interests in exchange of playing a central role in the empire, this including the other kingdoms in the Peninsula, even though, in fact, the attempt of the Hapsburgs to castilianize the rest of Spain was weak and erratic.

However, unexpectedly, the very crisis of the empire in the seventeenth century gave additional impetus to centrifugal tendencies which paradoxically provided the basis for a Spanish

nation-state. The separation of Portugal settled once and for all an ambiguity in the relations between Portugal and Castile, while the unpleasant experience of Catalonia with their allies-*cum*-invaders, the French, at the time of its attempted secession in the mid-seventeenth century had the unforeseen effect of the Catalans making a second, sober appraisal of what a de facto dependence on France could really mean, thus creating the foundations for an improved coexistence of the different regions in Spain. The effects of the War of Succession in the early eighteenth century did further reinforce that coexistence. Castile, which felt exhausted and impoverished under the Hapsburg dynasty, sided with the Bourbons, while Catalonia, which still remembered the French experience of the preceding century, sided with the Hapsburg pretender. This crossover of disillusionments and of political sentiments had the unexpected effect of creating a common attitude of uncertainty and suspended judgment on the part of public opinion towards the first moves of the new Bourbon state. In fact, this state coincided with a gradual demographic and economic improvement which included significant steps to create a unified market in the Peninsula and opening up the American markets to Spaniards of all regions. In addition, the Americas were explicitly defined as colonies that the metropolis, that is, Spain, had to exploit in the most efficient possible way with an attempt by the monarchy to find common symbols and homogenize the administration, and with the diffusion of an enlightened culture receptive to that effect.

Thus, a modicum of national sentiment evolved in Spain. Some crucial steps towards the creation of a political society, or a community of citizens, were linked to two related developments. First, a continuing debate focused on the better ways to handle socioeconomic and cultural problems which were supposed to be at the roots of the decline of Spain and her recovery: a debate led by the *arbitristas* and the *ilustrados*. Second, there emerged a public composed of people concerned about these matters all over the entire Spanish territory (not just Castile) which, instead of exhausting themselves in trying to persuade the prince and his ministers, did engage in a conversation among themselves conducted by means of rational discourse and by reference not so much to faith, tradition or political authority but rather to general principles and practical experience.

However, the final impulse for the formation of a political community defined by Spanish territory did not take place under the *Ancien Régime*, but only after its disappearance. When the country was going through the trauma of the War of Independence, the fundamental cleavages between the *Stände* collapsed, and the Spaniards discovered a fairly strong community of feeling in their opposition to the French invaders. At that moment, society, or a large part of it, unencumbered by the state of the Hapsburgs and Bourbons, seemed to acquire a strange, transient confidence in its ability to define itself, to establish its political institutions, and to commit itself to permanent civic and military activity which had Spanish territory as a whole as its frame of reference. This experience was probably a crucial formative stage in the development of the Spanish national feeling we may observe in the following centuries.

It also happened that, in spite of the declarations of the liberal politicians in the Cortes of Cádiz about a unified nation of Spaniards and Hispano-Americans (Fradera 1995: 338), the vagaries of the war made people focus their attention on the Peninsula and probably also generated a state of relative indifference to what might happen to the colonies. Public opinion certainly responded in this way to the independence movements in South America. In 1820, debating whether to embark in an expedition to fight the insurgents or to lead a military coup to install a liberal political regime, General Riego, with part of the Army concentrated in Cádiz, chose the latter. When the American colonies were lost in the twenties, Cuba and the Philippines remained in the power of Spain but were never integrated with her, either under the absolutist regime (up to 1833) or the constitutional ones up to the end of the century, in what was, by that time, a clear application of the principle of territoriality in the definition of the political community.

### **3. The Spanish empire: from hegemony to decline**

The first Hapsburg, Charles I (later Charles V, Emperor) received an institutional and cultural heritage which Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Kings (and the Regent Cardinal Cisneros), had built up between 1474 and 1520. The Spanish monarchy, primarily that of the kingdoms of Castile, consisted of the office of a monarch

responsible for dispensing justice and ensuring public order, with a government apparatus that included royal councils and a quasi-permanent army. It respected a medieval constitutional tradition whereby it frequently convoked the parliament, or *Cortes*, and governed with them. It presided over a society of Estates, with the nobility and the church as privileged orders, and a number of cities and corporate villages. Castilian agriculture was based upon an open-field system which combined the semi-collective arrangements of corporate villages with regional markets. There were an important sector oriented towards the exportation of wool, a fairly dynamic textile industry (above all in Segovia, but also artisanal centers in Toledo and Avila), and a driving commercial and financial sector inserted into a system of national fairs and international circuits (García Sanz 1998; Kamen 1984).

Society was still relatively plural. The coexistence between the three *castas* of Christians, Muslims and Jews had still not entirely broken down (Castro 1983; 1985). After the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, those who remained became New Christians, or *conversos* and continued to wield considerable sociopolitical and sociocultural influence, and there was still an abundant population of Moors or *Moriscos*. The transformation of the country into a homogeneous society by means of coercion, expulsion, persuasion or social incorporation was to come only later. The world of the Old Christians and assimilated converts (Netanyahu 1995; Caro Baroja 1968) formed a society in which a complex and contradictory relationship existed between the *hidalgos* (or lesser nobility) and the common people, with a modicum of distance and rivalry between the two estates, but also of some cultural homogeneity and social mobility, which was the result of long common experience of centuries of reconquest and armed occupation of the land, wars and, later on, opportunities in the *Indias*. At the same time, the main political community of reference of these people was located in each one of the kingdoms which together made up the Spanish monarchy. Spain existed as a significant cultural referent, but a rather weak political referent. Castilians perceived themselves as quite different from Aragonese (including Catalans). But even Castile was a confederation of cities all equal to each other, among which there was no

recognized or permanent capital (Kagan 1995: 73; Thompson 1995: 127ff.).<sup>1</sup>

The legacy of Ferdinand and Isabella offered a mix of historical possibilities. The possibility of a unified 'Spanish' realm of the various kingdoms was never seriously considered. The nobility lost part of its political power but its privileges were left intact. The kings decidedly reinforced their authority by imposing religious uniformity on their subjects. The Catholic Kings' exclusion of Jews and Moors in favor of a homogeneous society,<sup>2</sup> and their adoption of a religious mission, diverged from that tradition of subordination of Moors and Jews to Christians which had laid the foundations for a teleocratic activist state. But that same legacy could have resulted in a civic (and somehow ethnocentric, domestic-oriented) path which could have reinforced the constitutional tradition and, eventually, consolidated a more open and commercial economy. In turn, this might have led to a more flexible society as long as there did not seem to be immense distances between the privileged orders and the commoners, and to a cultural space open to development thanks to the extension of higher education (Kagan 1982). This could have favored the emergence of a political community with a relatively well-defined territorial base, under a limited public authority. This is no mere speculation; indeed, this was, to an extent, the path which the leaders of the *Comunidades* had begun to map out by the arrival of Charles of Hapsburg, the grand-son of the Catholic Kings. The *comuneros* confronted him with political demands such as the regular convocation of the *Cortes*, effective co-decision on taxes, and the primacy of Castilian interests over those of international politics (Maravall 1970), although they left their vision of a desirable socioeconomic order unarticulated. Confrontation led to war, which ended with the *comuneros'* defeat in 1521. This defeat was a watershed in Spanish history: it closed down one path and opened up another.

Even though Charles made prudent use of his victory, and the state which he began to set up, at

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<sup>1</sup>Madrid, chosen to be capital by Philip II, was, in fact, to develop as a city of more than one hundred thousand souls later in the second half of the eighteenth century (Ringrose 1983).

<sup>2</sup>About 300,000 Jews and Moors went to exile as a result of the Kings' policies of forced conversion or de facto exclusion, out of a population of c. 5.5 million (Bennassar 1979: 143, 162).

a rather erratic pace dictated by circumstances, respected the constitutional tradition and Castilian sentiments, the new king, soon to be German emperor, drew up the equivalent of a historic compromise with the great institutions of Castile, the church and the nobility (including the *hidalgos*) so as to involve them in his imperial strategy. Although the change between the first phase of ascendancy of the major Hapsburgs (Charles and Philip II) and the second phase of decline of the minor ones (Philip III, Philip IV, Charles II) was considerable, the entire trajectory may be seen as that of the relative success and final failure of the project of construction of a (teleocratic) state as the bearer of extraordinary missions to which society must be subordinated.

The Hapsburgs recognized certain constitutional limits, convoking the *Cortes* with regularity, and attempting to manipulate and persuade them in order to obtain funding for complex foreign policy operations. To do so, the monarch made use of various instruments. He could resort to other financial means (like silver from the Indies, or loans from financiers, first Spanish, and once ruined by abusive state practices, German, Genovese and Portuguese). He could appeal to the interests of the privileged orders (official posts, favors and tax exemptions), and he could take advantage of powerful cultural motives.

The monarchs' attempts to reduce the importance of parliamentary institutions met with some remarkable resistance, at least until the last third of the seventeenth century (Castellano 1990), and tensions in the *Cortes* could eventually run high. For instance, the king might defend war against the Dutch rebels (a fateful decision that took years of debate in the king's council), but some members would point out the distinction between the interests of the king and the interests of the kingdom, and remark that the question of the salvation of Dutch souls was not a matter of interest to the kingdom of Castile; as one member of the *Cortes*, Francisco de Monzón, declared, "if they want to be damned, let them be damned" (Thompson 1995: 143). The Aragonese political institutions offered even greater resistance (Gil 1995). Although Philip II ended the crisis of 1590 with the intervention of the royal army and (nothing less than) the summary trial and execution of the Chief Justice of Aragon, Juan de Lanuza, the king had to return to the earlier status quo. In general, the *Cortes* of the peripheral kingdoms

made impossible the imposition of taxes on a scale similar to that in Castile. The attempts by the Count-Duke of Olivares to increase fiscal pressure in the mid-seventeenth century ended in failure, were resisted by the Castilian cities and led to a war in Catalonia which took almost twenty years to put down (Elliot 1990a).

The kings tried to enlarge their power-basis through several means: the judiciary system and local power, a peculiar institution for sociocultural and political control (the Inquisition) and a complex military-tax machinery. The monarchy tried to ensure control of the system of justice by making judges dependent on royal authority, averting the consequences that the venality of those offices had in France in the long term. It prevented the formation of a *noblesse de robe* and the relative autonomy of the magistrates and members of the legal professions who, as members of parliaments, were the main power base for resistance to the absolute power of the kings of France and developed a public discourse that prepared the grounds for the momentous cultural and constitutional changes of late eighteenth century (Bell 1992; Schama 1989). It also tried to control local government but did so only intermittently and with poor results. In fact, the monarchs witnessed a devolution of power to seigneurs, landowners and local oligarchies throughout the seventeenth century (Thompson 1981). Their failure in this respect was related to their limited capacity of control, but also to their relative lack of interest in the matter, particularly in view of the fact that the nobility, entrusted with large local and regional powers, lacked the will to challenge the royal authority (which the French nobility eventually had).

The Hapsburg rulers did not seem to have any clear-minded goal to shape the whole of Spain into a continuous territory with clearly defined borders, and uniformly subordinate to its rule. Neither were they interested in the development of a Spanish national sentiment. It is symptomatic that the attempt by Olivares to impose Castilian institutions in Catalonia, Portugal and other kingdoms was unconnected to any idea of establishing a feeling of national community. Olivares sought to promote good relations between the various kingdoms but he explicitly denied doing so in terms of a national objective (he claimed, even contemptuously: "I am not 'national', that is for children"; Thompson 1995: 147), thus showing a lack of concern with the emergence, and the



potential uses, of a national sentiment (which shows a contrast with Richelieu's greater awareness and use of it) (Wedgwood 1962: 33).

On the contrary, the Spanish kings were firmly determined to ensure the religious homogeneity of their subjects, as a precondition (at least, a facilitating condition) of their own rule. The Inquisition provided the monarchy with an excellent instrument for centralized, uniform, social control under its direct supervision, as it was present in all the kingdoms and was subject to the king and not to the pope. Yet its main purpose was to create less a unified political community than a socioreligious homogeneity that would facilitate the exercise of the king's authority. Although the Inquisition began by persecuting the heterodoxes (*conversos* and moriscos suspected of keeping their old faith, and protestants), after a time its main object was to police the thoughts and customs of Old Christians. The Inquisition set up a machinery of control that worked with no interruption for three centuries, and accomplished its goals with remarkable efficiency, not so much for the relatively low number of executions but by the high number of those tried and sentenced to minor sanctions (only about one fifth of those prosecuted were absolved), with the consequent stigma and intimidation (Bennassar 1979; Caro Baroja 1968). The action of the Inquisition was reinforced by religious missions in towns and villages, by forbidding the study abroad (in 1558) and by the censorship on books (first civil and ecclesiastical censorship, and then censorship by the Inquisition). This was complemented by the prohibition on importing books from abroad or printing, distributing, selling, reading or even owning books which were on the Index of prohibited books (on possible death penalty) (Schulte 1968: 70ff.).

These policies were successful from the rulers' viewpoint, but in the long run had quite negative consequences on the development of the public sphere. They tended to reduce the plural, diverse nature of society; they also led to the dissembling of intimate beliefs (Bennassar 1979: 187; Caro Baroja 1970), to the *takiya* or habit of dissimulation of the remaining *Moriscos* (Bennassar 1979: 187), the cryptojudaism of some of the *conversos*, or to silencing the personal opinion (as indicated by Luis Vives in a letter to Erasmus in 1534: "we live in difficult times when we can neither speak out nor remain silent without danger"; Bataillon 1966: 490). This caused philosophical books and reading to be associated

with dangerous and suspicious objects and activities, and reduced the frequency, intensity and freedom of debates in the heart of society on a wide range of matters.

Yet, in the last instance, Spain was to be kept under control for reasons that went beyond the domestic interests of its rulers. Politics was dominated by international or foreign policy concerns. Most of the domestic politics of the Hapsburgs was subordinate to a crucial role on the world-historical scenario: that of defending the intertwined goals of promoting the interests of their house and of defending the catholic faith and, therefore, containing the Turks and the protestants. Spain was crucial in this regard, and the main instrument of Spanish hegemony, other than diplomacy and religious propaganda, was a permanent army, the *tercios*. Though a model of outstanding organization, logistical capacity and military efficiency (the Spanish infantry was invincible until the battle of Rocroi in 1634), it was always burdened by the problem of getting paid given the permanent fiscal crisis of the state (Parker 1979; Thompson 1981). That brings us to the crucial point of the economic basis of the Spanish imperial power.

As some authors have pointed out (Alston, Eggertsson and North 1996; North and Weingast 1996), the princes face the dilemma of choosing between a strategy of maximizing resources in the short term, using all the means at their disposal, or trying to increase the prosperity of their society, thereby increasing the tax base so that, although income might be reduced in the short term, it increases in the long term. It is assumed that the fewer the institutional limitations on the prince, the more likely it is that he will adopt a short-term predatory attitude towards his subjects. The likelihood increases when he has reason to fear for the future because his survival is threatened. Actually, the Hapsburg state lived on the edge between total victory and complete disaster, imminent triumph by force of arms and financial bankruptcy, and by expedient behavior in order to obtain resources in the short term to meet the next challenge. This finally led to an endemic fiscal crisis, and a crisis of confidence on the part of both its subjects and possible moneylenders about the financial commitments of the state, in view of its currency manipulations, expropriations, fraudulent bankruptcies and forced renegotiations of loans. Perhaps carried away by past conquests and victories, the monarchy overstretched itself and

adopted the motto of *plus ultra*, harboring dreams of universal domination, favored by divine providence (Parker 1995: 259). It ended up obsessed with enhancing its reputation abroad.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the monarchy let its internal reputation be irreparably damaged by apparently violating its own rules (Braudel 1996; Carande 1949-1967), exploiting its subjects and dislocating the country's economy (which only began to recover in the last third of the seventeenth century). This greatly diminished the state's ability to finance its military apparatus, and to face the rivalry of France in the second half of the seventeenth century. (To some extent, the decision of the last Hapsburg, and his *entourage*, to select a Bourbon as his heir, was a recognition of this new balance of power.)

The political, social and cultural life of the country was also negatively affected. Neither the public authority nor the parliamentary institutions (with different degrees of responsibility) were able to check this process, and they also had to suffer the consequences of a loss of reputation and confidence. The political elites lost confidence in themselves and in the viability of their world. They started with a feeling of exceeding power and ended up with one of gloom and melancholia, as fitting to people bound to a duty impossible to fulfill. If Olivares, in a letter to the Count of Gondomar, regarded himself as a man "determined to die bound to the oar till no piece of it was left unbroken" (Elliot 1990a: 199), Philip IV felt himself in a ship that was about to go down (Maravall 1980: 436). Indeed, both the state and society declined. The economy contracted, the processes of social mobility slowed down, the *Stände* became more rigid (due partially to the growing obsession with the *estatutos de limpieza* or purity of blood (Maravall 1979; Domínguez Ortiz 1973; Bennassar 1979), and the long decline of the university (Kagan 1982; Linz 1973) was not balanced by other institutions of learning.

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<sup>3</sup>A reputation already suspect in the eyes of Benito Arias Montano, a counsellor of Philip II who favored a policy accommodation in the Low Countries, when he declared "they [the Spanish rulers and their associates] have taken to calling reputation ... pride" (Kamen 1984: 223).

#### 4. Erasmians and Schoolmen, great writers and *arbitristas*

In their own way, the two currents of thought represented by the Erasmians and the School of Salamanca facilitated the historic compromise between the Hapsburgs and their Castilian subjects after the *Comunidades'* defeat, and helped to manage the unstable temporary equilibrium between the legacy of the relatively nomocratic order of the past and the new demands and opportunities of imperial strategy and the Hapsburg monarchy's sense of mission. As Bataillon emphasized, Erasmus' influence in Spain was extraordinary, especially in the 1520s and 1530s. It spread to a wide circle of magnates, high-churchmen, noblemen and royal officials, university scholars and humanists (particularly, at the new imperial university of Alcalá de Henares), and educated readers, but it also reached more humble sectors of the population. His visible influence was reduced after the 1530s although it can still be traced up to the early 1600s (Bataillon 1966: 160, 172, 404, 435).

In essence, Erasmus' explicit sociopolitical message emphasized the traditional missions of the prince, such as those of ensuring domestic peace and justice (Bataillon 1966: 80). It went on to dissuade him from using his temporal power to coerce the conscience of his subjects, and encouraged him to listen to their advice and seek their acquiescence. Moreover, it suggested a foreign policy aimed at insuring a similar world-order of peaceful exchanges and mutual toleration, thus providing a model to the role that an imperial authority could possibly perform. Equally important was Erasmus' support and understanding for a way of life centered on individual self-awareness and self-confidence, and on the individual's disposition to hold a dialogue and cultivate his individuality. It was a message which proposed dialogue with God and with his fellow men, thereby committing individuals to interactive relationships of relative equality and reciprocity. It suggested that individuals should trust their own reason and sentiments, engage in a trusting relationship with the world and in a benign and well-tempered form of religiosity, renounce intermediaries (in particular, the clergy) and relegate the arguments of authority. Erasmus' eulogy of the reading of books (either sacred or profane) should be seen in the context of his moral exhortation to man's sociability and self-confidence. Reading was, so to speak, a way to

enlarging the men's circle of social interaction, of asserting his powers to understand God's words and God's signs, to discriminate between good and evil and to choose freely (Bataillon 1966: 209).

This moral message appears to have borne an elective affinity with the predicament of large sectors of the Spanish population in those moments, hence its success. It offered them a language in which to express their disposition to live in freedom and take decisions by themselves, at a time when many Spaniards had still not been tamed by the converging pressures of the state and the church (and, possibly, to some extent, by a seignorial regime). In contrast, they had the opportunity of expending their individual energies on the imperial adventure (in both Europe and the Indies), as they experienced a general sensation of distant horizons opening up before them, in which anything seemed possible. That is why Erasmus' opinions permeated as much into the political discourse of Alfonso de Valdés, as into the Christian humanist discourse of Juan de Valdés, Juan de Vergara, Archbishop Carranza or *El Brocense*, and into the more humble, mystic discourse of the *alumbrados* or *illuminati* of Pastrana (Bataillon 1966: 160-184).

Erasmus' influence met increasing resistance on the part of the church. Caught in between the immense conflict that was to set catholics against protestants for the next two centuries, Erasmus was to become either irrelevant or suspect to both sides. In fact, after a time, the church, alerted by the mendicant orders (Bataillon 1966: 237), came to recognize in his lukewarm attitude to the ecclesiastical institution a hostile discourse which would have to be marginalized and silenced. The School of Salamanca, including Francisco de Vitoria himself, lost no time in playing the anti-Erasmian card to the full (Bataillon 1966: 247; Skinner 1978: 141), once it defined the irreconcilable division between catholics and protestants as turning around the question of the importance of institutions, the visible church, its administration of the sacraments and the church's authoritative interpretation of the Bible, hence its suspicions of a personal reading of it (Skinner 1978). The theological debate of 1527, in Valladolid, around Erasmus' position was inconclusive (Skinner 1978: 241ff.), but from then on pressure mounted inexorably. The final victory of the Schoolmen over Erasmists reflected a moment of historical change and coincided with the major decisions of Charles in favor of a

rapprochement with the Papacy, support for the counter-reformation, and steps in the direction of a powerful state with a mission to defend the catholic faith *ad extra* and *ad intra*. In the end, this meant defining the international scenario as a permanent (latent or declared) war both in Europe and the Mediterranean (Braudel 1996), against protestants and Turks (and France, if necessary, as she was a potential ally of both), and embarking upon a program of social and ideological control of his subjects.

The program was clear, and aimed at controlling the reading of books and unregulated forms of religiosity. Lack of sympathy towards pietism and mental prayer came together with a refusal to allow people to have access to theological debates and the scriptures in the Castilian language. This provided the rationale for Melchor Cano's attack on the jesuits and for the inquisitorial trial against the Archbishop of Toledo himself, Bartolomé Carranza (Bataillon 1966: 703ff.; Pérez 1995: 114). Translation of the Bible into vernacular was plainly forbidden (the first authorised translation in Spanish came only in 1791-93); and even translations of the fragments of the Gospels and the Epistles to be read in the Mass were prohibited by the Inquisitor Sotomayor in 1640 (Julia 1997: 286). As is known, the Trento Catechism was addressed to the priests (*ad parochos*) not to the laymen, and, of course, the Mass was conducted in Latin, and, characteristically, the crucial words in the Mass (those of performing the miracle of transforming the bread and the wine into the body and the blood of Jesus) were pronounced *submissa voce*, that is, in such a way that they were barely heard by the faithful. Suspicion of reading was not restricted to religious books, but spilled over to other literary genres, and particularly to novels, comedies and works of fiction, which were subject to frequent interdictions (Chartier 1997: 325; Eisenstein 1983: 160).

Nevertheless, as often happens, implementation of that program took time, was mixed up with other considerations and had to run against opposing trends. To begin with, the very thoughts of the School of Salamanca, and those of Spanish Schoolmen in general, were not reduced to assisting the monarch in the legitimation of his imperial goals or domestic policy, nor can they be merely understood as part of a grand design for the creation of a closed or submissive society. Rather to the contrary, in both the sixteenth and the

seventeenth centuries, a substantial part of scholastic thought was devoted to problems of the redefinition of the constitutional tradition, active participation in the public debate and a better understanding of the extended orders of economic life and international politics.

The School of Salamanca developed a reading of political power (grounded, through Thomas Aquinas, in the classical authors) which emphasized the fundamental nature of the community as the depository of that power. By means of some form of tacit contract or pact, it would then delegate or alienate this power to the incumbent magistrate or monarch. The School saw an internal debate between adherents of two opposing theories: one that emphasized the irreversible nature of this delegation of power (as in the case of the jesuit Francisco Suárez), and another that stressed the dependency of the prince on his community, the importance of the consent and advice of the *Cortes*, the right to resist the unjust magistrate if necessary and, in the extreme, the justification of civil resistance and tyrannicide (as in the case of Juan de Mariana, also jesuit; Skinner 1978: 173, 345). The debaters shared a commitment to a grand strategy that put together matters of principle with the interests of the Hapsburgs (and Spain) and of the Pope, thus providing with different rationales to the legitimacy of the rule of the catholic prince over its own people and against his external enemies (Gui 1989: 26, 92). At the same time, these debates took place within a tradition with a strong constitutionalist component (and without any aura of holiness attributed to the kings), and not within a tradition of apologists of royal absolutism as in the French case (to culminate in figures such as Bossuet later on) (Skinner 1978: 113).

Their reading of civil power as originally emanating from the community explains their position in the celebrated controversies over the Indies when it came to justify the Spanish conquest. They refused to justify it by reason of the Papal Bull that bestowed the right of conquest on the Spanish and Portuguese kings. Vitoria considered this to be an unacceptable argument, since, in his judgment, the pope exceeded his authority in giving or bestowing something over which he had no power. They also denied that the natural inferiority of the Indians, because of their incapacity to rule themselves (due to their slavish nature), was sufficient reason for the Spanish dominion. They noticed the Indians' practices of

self-government and their acceptance of most of the customs associated with the *ius gentium*, including those of commerce and property rights. Only after a highly elaborate reflection did the scholars recognize the authority of the monarch over the Indians, but even then, that authority was seen as limited and conditional in respect of Indians' property and the monarch's duty to protect the Indians against usurpation of that property by the *encomenderos* (owners of estates in Latin America) (Skinner 1978; Pagden 1990, 1995).

In general, the Schoolmen's view on the international order and on constitutional issues was coherent and homologous with their thought on the functioning of the economic order as one of the extended orders. They were the acknowledged forerunners of the modern quantitative theories of money and of the subjective theory of value. Their reflections were based partly on a previous scholastic tradition and partly on close observation of the commercial and financial practices of the time (Schumpeter 1982: 138), which enabled them to understand price movements, and what Luis de Molina referred to as the 'mathematical' or 'natural' price, on the basis of unforeseeable particular circumstances resulting from a combination of scarcity and human wants (Hayek 1978, 1983; Schumpeter 1982; Vilar 1964; Grice-Hutchinson 1998), and to explain inflation by pointing at the amount of money in circulation (and, some believed, the uncontrolled use of deposit contracts by banks: Huerta de Soto 1996).

The writings of the School of Salamanca must be seen within the context of its members taking part in debating and advising on public affairs, as churchmen acting in the role of experts in predicting the consequences and the moral connotations of public policies. As councillors or confessors, their advice was solicited by the king and his officials, the noblemen of the Royal Councils, members of the *Cortes*, town councillors, and judges in the *Audiencias*, whenever any important measure had to be decided (including a petition for a tax, or voting in favor or against it) (Jago 1995: 48). But, at the same time, both Erasmians and Schoolmen must also be seen in the even broader context of a country which had undergone an extraordinary economic and demographic growth (García Sáenz 1998; Bernal 1998) as well as cultural expansion (that the Inquisition and other similar practices of thought control by church and state would eventually check, and partially reverse). Spain was immersed

in a process of adventure, social and geographical mobility (Linz 1973: 71), world discovery and cultural enrichment associated with the imperial experience itself, and the university system expanded accordingly, partly at least to meet the needs of the imperial administration. In fact, in the sixteenth century, Castile likely was the country with the highest proportion of university students in Europe and where approximately one third to one quarter of the *hidalgos* (about one tenth of the population) had some university experience (Kagan 1982; Linz 1973; Rodríguez-San Pedro 1995). Literacy was common among the middle strata of the peasantry (twenty to thirty per cent of the Castilian male population was literate by the end of the century), which made ample use of these skills in frequent litigation and appeal to the royal courts at least till mid seventeenth century (Kagan 1991: 149), and, as the inquisitorial records suggest, popular readership of *novelas de caballerías* was fairly widespread (Chartier 1997).

The contents of public debates gradually adjusted to the evolution of the Hapsburg state and society. Yet, as we enter the seventeenth century what stands out is the presence of an extraordinary body of expressive culture, an extremely important religious and artistic current devoted mainly to legitimizing the Hapsburg state and its historical project. A multiplicity of cultural messages were designed to justify and make visible the monarch's authority, by exalting its image and making plausible its pretensions to being the key to social order. They supported the state's aims of salvation or perfection of society, and justified an extension of its competences and its grand strategy. The messages would articulate the reasons, carry out the exhortations and stir up the appropriate sentiments. This was achieved by means of religious activities such as *autos-da-fé*, sermons, processions, sacred plays and popular missions (Domínguez Ortiz 1983; Christian 1991; Caro Baroja 1978); as well as profane dramas which, directly or indirectly, exalted the figure of the monarch and the alliance of church and state, and the principles of a society based on Estates and the corporate village (as in the rural dramas of Lope de Vega and Calderón) (Maravall 1980; Salomon 1965). Something similar occurred with painting, which cultivated religious and courtly genres, often with a clear political intention of this kind (Brown and Elliot 1980; Elliot 1990b).

Nevertheless, the discourse of legitimation had to coexist with more complex components of the

public space. Among them, I wish to highlight two very different groups whose voices mingle, though they use different genres and address different audiences. First, the 'generalists' such as the great writers and artists who intervene obliquely in this space, as well as some baroque moralists like Francisco de Quevedo and Baltasar Gracián; and second, the 'specialists' such as the writers on political and economic matters known as the *arbitristas*.

Miguel de Cervantes epitomizes a group of writers and artists who sent a complex message of distance from the sociopolitical order of Hapsburg Spain. Cervantes' formative stage was marked by his experience at the Battle of Lepanto (1578) when the empire was at its height, and in his work, mostly done at the turn of the century, traces of the Erasmian influence could still be found (Bataillon 1966: 777ff). He has mixed feelings of irony and sympathy towards his heroes and his world. He leaves the phenomena of authority and the privileged orders, the church and the nobility, in the background. Between jokes and home truths, and through the incessant dialogue of two stylized figures, the *hidalgo* and the peasant, Don Quichotte and Sancho, he invites the reader to acknowledge the equivocal nature of a world of heroic deeds with scant foundation in reality (Bakhtin 1984; Vilar 1964), and he also takes an oblique stand with regard to the society of Estates as his novels touch upon the inadequacies of the ethos of honor, or reputation, one of the basic tenets of that society. Analogous messages to distance, reflectiveness or perspectivism can be found in other mystic or lyrical figures and in the painting of the period: in Santa Teresa de Avila, San Juan de la Cruz, Fray Luis de León or Diego Velázquez. All of them share their detachment from the heroic modes prevailing in the world. Velázquez, for example, humanized the royal family and ridiculed the classical gods (Ortega 1985 [1916]). In the imagination of her compatriots, the figure of Santa Teresa served as a counterpoint to that of Santiago, patron saint of Spain and warrior against the Moors: in fact, she would come to dispute this patronage with him in the seventeenth century, a matter which caused the most intense debate (Castro 1985).

In the first half of the seventeenth century, one crucial contribution of baroque moralists like Quevedo and Gracián to the public space was the reminder of the limits to reality, which, in the case of Quevedo, was associated with an acute sense of

the decay, last agony and death of his world (Maravall 1980: 339). They continued the political thinking of Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, who had been interested in rationalizing the strategic choice between 'Milan' and 'Flanders', which should limit Spain's imperial commitments to a manageable size. Although of very different temperaments, Quevedo and Gracián partially coincided with his diagnosis. Knowing full well that the age of the heroic stand had passed, Quevedo mourned it, making the present the object of his ridicule (as authors of the picaresque novel, like Mateo Alemán, generally did), while Gracián advised discreet adjustment to the new circumstances. All of them (including cultivators of the picaresque novel) coincided in describing a social order subject to moral decay, whose resources of social trust (or 'social capital', to use a present day concept) had been reduced to a minimum, and in which generalized distrust (and, hence, manipulation of human exchanges, cultivation of mere appearances and an extravagant sense of honor) reigned supreme. We find this theme of generalized distrust as a sort of (paradoxical) social norm or practical standard of prudential behaviour in the title of a work at the end of the sixteenth century, the *Discurso contra la confianza* (*Discourse against trust*) by Guillén de Castro (Maravall 1980: 335). For those moralists, the world was like a theatrical stage, a world of appearances, intrinsically unstable, subject to continuous and unpredictable mutations, in which every certainty was but a form of delusion: a confused labyrinth in which the individual had to find its way.

A growing and inescapable sense of the limits of the Spanish power set in the last period of Philip II, after the fiasco of the *Armada* in the late 1580s and the combination of plagues and famine in the 1590s. The very symbol of a king enchained, so to speak, to his self-appointed, never-ending, task of minute control of the large administrative machinery of the empire, and to El Escorial as his chosen place of work and death, suggested a king and a country training behind the events and put on the defensive.<sup>4</sup> The Spanish rulers had harbored messianic aspirations in the past; the Spanish *motto* of the 1580s was *non sufficit orbis*, and in 1577 the Council of Indias thought that it was [merely]

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<sup>4</sup>This may help explaining the ambivalence, possibly the irony, of writers such as Cervantes and Quevedo towards Philip II: (Castro 1983, 264, 613).

inappropriate to discuss the conquest of China at this [particular] time. Knowing that these expectations could no longer be sustained, and in view of the fact that the divine providence refused the miracle the Spanish kings had hoped for (Parker 1995: 248, 259), people like Saavedra (or neo-tacitists such as Basltasar Alamo de Barrientos) advised some prudent adjustments: to renew the state, to contain the damages and to preserve what could still be preserved. Thus, a gradual change of focus took place, away from the outside world and into domestic policy. This led to the development of a new and different breed of political and economic writers.

The *arbitristas* of the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century wrote in Spanish and tried to reach out to a wider audience, still used to some public debate on secular matters (Kamen 1984: 370; Caro Baroja 1970: 17), but concentrated their efforts in persuading a community of decision-makers (courtiers, noblemen and officials) of the need to give priority to domestic problems, and to accept their proposed solutions. In general, they shared the cognitive and moral premises of the political elites they were trying to influence. They were driven by the desire to avoid the decline of the monarchy by averting the ruin of its various kingdoms, first of all, Castile. Those who believed in an interventionist public authority in socioeconomic life (putting more emphasis either on trade, industrial activities, cattle-raising or agriculture) debated with those who seemed to think it was better for the prince to espouse a policy of incentives for society with results in the long term and thus hoped more for a change in attitudes and customs (so that Castilians would become more like other European peoples: more "like merchants"). Several of them combined both recommendations, as Olivares did when it came to outlining projects for reform or renewal, but not when it came political decision-making, for he always lacked the time and patience to adopt institutional measures which would bear fruit in the long run (Elliot 1990a).

However, most *arbitristas* failed to understand or underestimated the importance of some of the basic causal links between Spain's decline and the Hapsburgs' institutions and cultural legacy. The relative weakness of the constitutional limits on monarchic authority eased the way to fiscal and financial policies that put an ever increasing burden on merchants, industrialists and peasants, and blocked the development of a market economy.

The high prize put on the socioreligious homogeneity of the country, which (in the view of most contemporaries) made governance much easier in Spain than in France, made, also, for a far more rigid society. The strict maintenance of a society of Estates perpetuated networks of patronage and clientelism which weakened the *Cortes*, interfered with the administration and corrupted the system of justice. The effects of the ethos of honor combined with that of the statutes of *limpieza de sangre*, aimed at excluding the *conversos*, and with that of the stigma, in some milieus, against manual labor (the *vileza de oficios*) (Maravall 1979: 103). This aggregate of norms of social exclusion created a climate inimical to commercial or industrial entrepreneurship, reinforced a pattern of social conformity (particularly among the middle classes and the intellectual milieu), and made it quite difficult for the country to move towards a system of generalized social and cultural exchanges. Religious homogeneity, closely watched over by the church and the state, together with the gradual reduction of external contacts and the decline of the universities (ever more focused on legal studies, useful for attaining a bureaucratic position), led to the relative cultural impoverishment of the country, which further weakened the public space and, in turn, made the return to the constitutional tradition impossible.

## 5. Redefinition of the state in the eighteenth century

The change of century brought about a change of dynasty and a drastic redefinition of the state. While the fundamentals of the teleocratic state went unquestioned, a further strengthening of royal authority and a partial secularization of the state and society took place, and an attempt was made to define the state's objectives in a more realistic though no less demanding way. The Bourbons arrived in Spain with the mentality of absolute rulers who had very little interest in the maintenance of a constitutional tradition. They belonged to a monarchic tradition for which the *pays d'ordres*, with their own constitutional framework, the *états généraux* and judiciary parliaments were but institutional obstacles to their project of absolute monarchy (Venturi 1971), which comprised an increase in discretionary authority, administrative centralization and greater territorial uniformity; and they came prepared to

eliminate those obstacles. Furthermore, this was a monarchy defined by an ambitious and systematic regal project to utilize the church as an instrument of its political will.

Thus the triumph of this French tradition over and against the Spanish Hapsburg tradition,<sup>5</sup> of Richelieu against Olivares (and over the Spanish or devout party in French politics) (Wollenberg 1985), and of Louis XIV against Charles II, culminated with the accession of a Bourbon to the Spanish throne. The supreme test of real politics, survival and replacement, so to speak, seemed to corroborate the sound foundation of the French political vision. Under those circumstances, the Spanish Bourbons believed that the lesson to be learnt from the decline in Spanish power was that of the failure of the Hapsburg political tradition, not because it had gradually weakened the earlier constitutional tradition, but because it had not entirely destroyed it; it had not been absolute enough and had not reinforced sufficiently the presence of a centralized state.

The Bourbons proceeded to perform this task in a continuous and systematic way.<sup>6</sup> They took advantage of the War of Succession (between 1700 and 1714) to put an end to the constitutional regime of the kingdoms of Aragon. They did not convoke the *Cortes* for a whole century except on a few ceremonial occasions (even though the memory of the *Cortes* survived in the collective imagery: Castellano 1990). They benefitted from the absence of judicial parliaments, or a legal profession, which might have challenged their authority or supported the constitutional tradition (as in France). They reversed the process of the devolution of power to local authorities and reinforced the presence of royal intendants in the provinces, even though the actual reach of these measures was limited (Lynch 1989). More in general, they kept in place the society of Estates, and they left the basic structure of the corporate village intact.

Their policy of sociopolitical control was complemented by their policy vis-à-vis the church.

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<sup>5</sup>In fact, the Spanish monarchy was more in the tradition of the European monarchies, as Leibniz observed (Frémont 1996).

<sup>6</sup>This was due not so much to the resolution of the kings, most of whom went half-mad or mad during the first half-century, as to the successive ministers who served them over a prolonged period of time.

Unencumbered by the presence of a substantial jansenist opposition (Sánchez-Blanco 1991: 306ff.) and protestant enclaves, as those existing in France, the Spanish Bourbons carried the subjection of the national church to the state much further with the expulsion of the jesuits in 1767 (always suspect of finding either good reasons or excuses for not being submissive enough to the secular authority), with a view at transforming most clergymen into state fonctionnaires of some sort. They maintained the Inquisition, with a waning enthusiasm, as an instrument of control or intimidation (particularly evident by the end of the century when they tried to combat French revolutionary propaganda) (Caro Baroja 1968; Sarrailh 1957). Given the priority of controlling rather than developing cultural institutions, some reform was attempted (by civil servants such as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, Pablo de Olavide and others) but little actually done by the monarchy to improve the system of public universities.

In imitation of the administrative monarchy of their French relatives, the Spanish Bourbons tried to foster economic growth as a way of broadening their tax base and being able to finance the cost of an army and a navy to service their imperial policy. Yet, their interventions were erratic and had little effect, though some of their late plans for reform suggested that they were receptive to ideas of limited economic freedom, that were later to capture the imagination of future generations. They benefited, however, from the spontaneous evolution of the economy, and the increases in population and agricultural production observable from the last decades of the 1600s and above all, from the 1740s onwards (Lynch 1989). In general, the state leaned towards preserving the social statu quo and the position of the privileged orders, while increasing public revenues.

Making a virtue of necessity, by signing the Treaty of Utrecht, the Bourbons renounced part of the old Spanish dominions in Europe.<sup>7</sup> This did not mean to renounce to the imperial project, but just a retrenchment and a redefinition of the possessions in America and the Philippines as colonies which had to be economically exploited in a more systematic way (Pagden 1995). However,

this apparent rationalization of the imperial policy was to have unexpected and counterproductive effects. The attempt to preserve an imperial colony that the metropolis could exploit as a monopoly led to wars with England, which were the main cause of the fiscal crisis from which the state was unable to recover (Lynch 1989: 325ff.). Furthermore, the desire to exploit the colonies more rationally meant increasing their tax burden while excluding, or at least marginalizing, the Creoles in favor of Spaniards in public offices. This alienated the local elites and prepared the way for the independence movements one or two generations later (Lynch 1989: 339ff.).

## 6. The *ilustrados*' response

In the Spanish public sphere of the first half of the eighteenth century, there was a number of interesting figures, the most important of whom is probably Benito Feijóo, who continued the tradition of the *arbitristas*.<sup>8</sup> They were people who took part in *tertulias* or small meetings at which they discussed general affairs, and who appealed to a large audience through the diffusion of their writings. The remarkable success of Feijóo's letters in the 1720s and 1730s represented a milestone in the formation of the public space (Domínguez Ortiz 1990), but in the second half of the century the formative process of an attentive public accelerated. It coincided with a moderate expansion in the printing of books and newspapers (a phenomenon observable in countries like France, Germany, England and her American colonies) (Darnton 1992; Schulte 1968; Wittmann 1997; Sánchez Aranda and Barrera 1992). The semi-spontaneous emergence of the *Sociedades de Amigos del País* (or associations of 'friends of the country'), local academies for discussion and the promotion of education, occurred at about the same time, partly in imitation of events in France. They originated in the Basque provinces and were later encouraged by public authorities (Carande 1969; Sarrailh 1957; Anes 1969). These academies were gatherings of the local nobility, lawyers, the clergy and some merchants, but they were generally short-lived, possibly due to their submissiveness to the authorities and these same authorities' change of attitude towards them as a result of the French

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<sup>7</sup>Though they managed to recover some of the old Spanish possessions in Italy for the Bourbon family, though not for the kingdom of Spain.

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<sup>8</sup>And the lesser figures of the writers called *novadores*, or lovers of novelties, of the seventeenth century (Sánchez-Blanco 1991: 28ff.)



Revolution. For a period of twenty to thirty years, the diffusion of newspapers and printed books, the growth in a reading public, the *tertulias* and the tolerance of the public authorities laid the foundations for a moderate current of enlightened opinion on public affairs.

This was a new generation of professionals and civil servants interested in learning from the cultural repertory of their time: mainly from the experiences of France and England (as a result of the direct influence of the writings of Adam Smith or David Hume, or indirectly through French writers' interpretations of the English experience). In fact, they were respectful towards the king's authority, careful about the church, and conservative regarding the society of Estates. But they also tended to agree on the advisability of establishing a system of incentives for private initiatives in the economic sphere, by means of extending individual property rights and the rules of the market, and in the cultural sphere by the spread of a technical, humanist education (Sarrailh 1957; Maravall 1991). In a way, they were close to adopt the critical judgment of some of their European contemporaries on the disastrous results of the grand strategy of the monarchs of the past, insofar as the formation of a 'polite and commercial society' (Langford 1989), the creation of commercial confidence and the development of a *vita civile* (Pagden 1990) had been made extremely difficult if not impossible. To some extent, they were recovering part of the Erasmian program in favor of an ethic of cultivation of the individual, encouraging confidence in his own resources, judgment, feelings of sociability, and industry. But while the Erasmians were daring men addressing a society of people with an elective affinity with their message, the *ilustrados* were more timid and faced a society of men (and women: see Perry 1990) tamed, so to speak, by state and church through two and a half centuries of weak constitutional controls, socioeconomic rigidities, massive indoctrination and a closely watched public space.

In any case, these men of letters felt they had access to resources which their immediate predecessors had lacked, or enjoyed in a far lesser degree: a wider reading public (as there was a partial recovery of the rates of literacy in the eighteenth century: Egido 1995) and a more closely-knit network of relationships and organizations dispersed throughout the country. Both circumstances sketched the first hazy outlines

of a Spanish political community which appeared to integrate (at least the elites of) local societies from the center with those of the peripheries (Aragonese, Asturian, Catalan or Guipuzcoan, for example) around a common language: Spanish; and a common political discourse: of subjects who were becoming members, possibly citizens, of a common polity. Also, for a period of time, they considered themselves fortunate in having relatively easy and continuous access to high officials (such as Campomanes: Lombart 1992) who seemed to share some of their ideas. In fact these ministers favored a mix of small dose of economic freedom and heavy dose of government activism. The *ilustrados* understood this as an opportunity to translate their ideas into actual reforms, such as those relating to the free internal trade of grain, and the disentanglement of (some) ecclesiastical lands; or into projects for reform in local government, popular education or the universities (which were still resisting any attempt to teach Newton's physics as late as the 1780s: Sánchez-Blanco 1991: 97).

The real possibilities of these *ilustrados* were fairly modest not only because of the proclivities of the ministers, but also by the general conditions of Spanish life. It is true that there were encouraging signs of economic and demographic recovery already in the last third of the seventeenth century, a relaxation of the rigors of the Inquisition, a network of *tertulias* and a small minority of *novadores* (Kamen 1984; Domínguez Ortiz 1973). Yet, Spain remained a backward society and polity throughout the eighteenth century when measured against the standards set by the British experience.

British prime ministers were accountable to parliament and public opinion, as they had to govern by a mixture of official patronage and party attachment, and in an uneasy relation with the popular press. They deferred to kings whose control of foreign policy was limited, their patronage reduced and their independence of legislature minimal (Langford 1989: 23, 686). They could not control the common law courts or local government. They had to accommodate a vibrant and tumultuous society and, willingly or unwillingly, they allowed room for a tradition of cautious tolerance of popular protest to develop. They presided over the growth of commercial agriculture partly based on a sequence of Enclosure Acts that covered about 20 per cent of total acreage in England and Wales between 1750 and 1810. The century witnessed a flurry of intense activities of

information gathering, propaganda campaigning, petitioning and lobbying (Langford 1989: 721, 435), and an explosion of associations of all kinds, including religious associations outside or to the margins of the established church (and often led by lay preachers). By contrast, the most enlightened of the Spanish rulers, Charles III (who never overcame his fear of any form of popular protest after his experience with riots in 1766) was extremely jealous of his absolute prerogatives. There was no parliament activity for almost the entire century; and when some limited activity took place, in 1789, the *procuradores* were asked not to reveal the results, which were only published in 1830 (Castellano 1990: 228). Disentailment of a limited amount of the church's lands only became a possibility at the end of the period. The Inquisition was kept in place, experienced a modest revival in the 1720s and at the end of the century, and was used on a few but significant occasions (for instance, against the *ilustrado* Olavide). The press was subject to censorship and continuous interference by the government (only slightly attenuated between 1762 and 1788) (Schulte 1968: 99ff.), which made impossible the growth of a critical journalism (Sánchez-Blanco 1991: 165). Even though there was a partial recovery of literacy (Egido 1995), there were few bookstores (only one bookstore in Madrid until 1720: Domínguez Ortiz 1990: 104; Sarrailh 1957: 55ff and 303ff.). Fear of censorship or even the Inquisition was endemic, and was felt by Feijóo, in the first half of the century (Maravall 1991: 343) as well as by Jovellanos, in the second half (Sarrailh 1957: 306). That fear made a remarkable geographer such as Jorge Juan not to feel free to express his opinions in favor of the Copernican theories until 1774 (Sarrailh 1957: 497); and made authors such as Leandro Fernández de Moratín, José Cadalso and Juan Pablo Forner to renounce publishing some of their work in their life-time (Domínguez Ortiz 1990: 481). No wonder that Voltaire wrote in 1767, in a letter to his Spanish friend the Marquis of Miranda: "you do not dare to tell to a courtier, from mouth to ear, what an Englishman would say publicly on the floor of the parliament" (Sarrailh 1957: 315).

The point is that there continued to be a gap between the *ilustrados'* rather confused dreams of Spain's catching up with Europe and the hard facts of Spanish life, of which the *ilustrados* themselves were only half aware. Two questions show the limits of the *ilustrados'* understanding of the situation, and the ambiguous nature of their place

in society and of their relationship with those at the top and those at the bottom of it: with the Bourbon monarchy, and with the low orders of society, particularly the peasant population.

The *ilustrados* believed that the key to change resided at the apex of the social pyramid and not at its base. This was a logical premise for people which were part of a long cultural tradition based on the principles of the (teleocratic) state and educated in the unquestioned submission to the monarchy (rather the opposite of its English counterparts of the same period which had been educated in the critical dialogue and occasional confrontation between Court and Country: Klein 1994). It seemed that every transformation required political will at the top: the economy would depend on it, and culture should be directed from the central government (a view shared by Jovellanos himself: Sarrailh 1957: 87ff.). The sensation that it was unimaginable for any sociopolitical coalition to possess the necessary will or carry out reforms without the assent of the monarch encouraged in many *ilustrados* a tendency to attribute the Bourbon monarchy and its governments with two virtues: an enormous capacity for transforming the country, and its being inspired by an enlightened spirit, thus constructing the imaginary figure of the 'enlightened despot'. They failed to see that the capacity of the king and his ministers was, in fact, limited and their power of transformation, modest. Neither did they understand the absolutist logic of the Bourbon tradition, nor in consequence, that it was to be expected that the will of the monarch and his civil servants would always be oriented mainly to the conservation and extension of royal authority. This would incline them to adopt a strategy which carefully preserved the essentials of the status quo and, in particular, to cultivate their relationship with the privileged orders of the church and the nobility. The crown was always mindful of the defence of the lands of the nobility, its seignorial jurisdictions, its tax exemptions and its monopolies or quasi-monopolies of public office; as it was always careful to assert the catholic faith, to uphold the church's place of honor and to keep, and use, the Inquisition for its own purposes.

On the other hand, the *ilustrados* only glimpsed the nature of the society around and below them, and in particular of the corporate villages, their institutional arrangements, local power structure and traditional culture; hence, they could not anchor their appeals to a social morality

(Sánchez-Blanco 1991: 323; Maravall 1991: 259) into a realistic view of contemporary society. Despite their keen interest in agrarian reform, they failed to understand the depth of the distance between the urban world they belonged to and the rural society they were supposed to educate and transform. The Castilian village had undergone a process of economic, social and cultural decay due to fiscal pressure and dislocations of economic life, and forced submission to military service (Domínguez Ortiz 1985: 30ff.). The levels of economic prosperity and wide-ranging commercial exchanges, of literacy and frequency of access to the royal courts, went down or remained low for a prolonged period of time; and this led to a situation that struck the *ilustrados* for their remoteness, inertia and ignorance (at least with regard to the large majority of the rural population: Sarrailh 1957: 20-83; see also Jovellanos' diaries: 1982 [1790-1810]). Neither did the *ilustrados* understand the ambiguous character of the remaining intermediary structures between the two worlds. Peasants might have an interest in getting a hand over the local lands (church's, noblemen's or common lands), which might lead them into a collision course with churchmen and seigneurs; but still they were attached to their religious beliefs and sentiments (which had been reinforced by systematic religious indoctrination), that inclined them to follow the clergy's lead in some political matters, and, above all, they were dependent on networks of patronage and clientelism that linked them to these privileged orders (to be partly replaced by urban professionals in the next century), and made them reluctant to accept an open market economy and to ask for the government's regulation both of the corn's price and of the land's rent (Anes 1990). On the contrary, no large intermediary segment of commercial farmers was in place, nor such a social class could be produced by administrative fiat (as the ministers of Charles III tried to do by importing some colonies of foreign farmers: Caro Baroja 1957: 205ff.). Thus, the corporate villages' culture and institutions as well as their political distance from the centers of power allowed for the persistence of a tradition of local self-government in many parts of the country, unknown or misunderstood by the *ilustrados* and the king's civil servants, whose vitality was to be demonstrated in a dramatic way very soon at the time of the French invasion. At the same time, this made things difficult for a later revival of the constitutional tradition.

## 7. Final reflections

By the late XVIIIth century, while England was developing into a 'commercial and polite society', giving actual reality to the dreams of a *vita civile*, Spain was still lagging far behind, even though there was economic and demographic growth, and the *ilustrados* were trying to appeal to a community of citizens and to play with the concept of a civil society. As I close my argument let me go back to my initial distinction between the nomocratic and teleocratic forms of the state, and to a peculiar 'social hybrid' that would put together the basic elements of a nomocratic order with the particular character of a given community. I would argue that the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment referred to this peculiar social hybrid by the name of 'civil society' (Pérez-Díaz 1993; 1996; 1998). It was nomocratic in that a public authority and its administrative apparatus were limited by and subject to the rule of law, respectful of open markets and of social pluralism, and accountable, in a public space, to a community of concerned (enlightened, polite, civic-minded) citizens. At the same time, it referred to a *particular* society or community (national or multinational), with a distinct identity and precise territorial boundaries, which stood apart from other particular societies within a larger international system. Because of this particularity, the members of that particular *civitas* were urged (most emphatically by writers like Adam Ferguson) to develop a sentiment and a virtue of civic patriotism, and its state was bound to have the *telos* or mission of upholding that particular identity and defending those borders, even though the consequences of doing so for the international order remained characteristically uncertain. In fact, the civil societies that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic at the end of the Old Regime oscillated, in this respect, between what we may call a civil kind of foreign policy and an un-civil, or predatory, one. Thus, the question was left open whether the state's mission was that of making room for the voice of the community it represented, so to speak, to be heard in the conversation of mankind, or just to do so while silencing the rest.

From the viewpoint of the formation process of a civil society of this kind, a double and contradictory movement took place in Spain under the *Ancien Régime*. On one hand, the transition from empire to regional power, in its way to a nation state, eased the way for the creation of a citizens' community, as it helped the would-be

citizens to focus their public concerns on this particular community, thus reinforcing the moral-political bonds among them. On the other, that same transition helped to create the conditions for a new brand of a teleocratic state, and the corresponding politics of faith, this time around a definition of the national interest that posited nations against nations, and, in most cases, had a fairly weak connection with the constitutional tradition of the past. Thus, some of the potential for a vibrant and powerful civil society, which seemed in place at the beginning, was lost in the course of the events. In the early sixteenth century, Castile's leading strata oriented themselves towards an open and expanding universe, defined by a world-wide economic order, a broad political space, the *ius gentium* in the international arena and a constitutional tradition in the domestic one, and a religious faith still open to the influence of a cosmopolitan humanism. At the end of the road and two and a half centuries later, the *ilustrados* had narrowed the scope of their civic engagement to fit the framework of a French-style orderly society which was subject to a half-despotic authority, and of a nation-state which was set to play a game of prestige, riches and military power with competitors of a similar character. It is significant, in this respect, that the *ilustrados* were so much at pain to recover the sense (that the Schoolmen of the sixteenth century had) of what an economic extended order could mean, as demonstrated by the way they understood, or rather misunderstood, Adam Smith's message. *The Wealth of Nations* (whose translation was delayed for nearly twenty years) arose no interest among Smith's readers in his explanation of the way in which the economic system worked or in his underlying theory of human action. His work was interpreted as a study in politics, and as a useful instrument for government (Schwartz 1998; Perdices 1998).

The story of Old Regime's Spain has a telling and significant ending with the collapse of the monarchy at the time of the French invasion and the war of 1808-1814. While the Bourbon state, with the counterpoint of enlightened public opinion, seemed to reach the height of its ascendancy during the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), reality was very soon to show the weakness and precariousness of this triumph. In effect, in the following twenty or thirty years, Spain was in a state of permanent crisis, which provided with rather fragile foundations for building the liberal state of the nineteenth and twentieth.

At the turn of the century, the prolonged crisis of the state was due to factors apparently only fortuitously connected. The counterproductive effects of the foreign policy of Charles III were revealed gradually, but the fiscal crisis of the state worsened abruptly. It was heightened as a consequence of the foreign policy which had led to war, first against France, and then, in alliance with France, against England. Added to this was the discontent generated by an economic crisis, the confusion caused by the news of revolutionary events in France (and by the imposition of a *cordon sanitaire* and censorship in order to try and control diffusion of that news), and the disrepute brought on the royal family by the intense father-son hatred between Charles IV and his heir (the future Ferdinand VII), which culminated in a coup d'etat by the latter. For a time, part of the irritation felt by the people was channelled towards a scapegoat, Minister Manuel Godoy. But then the French Armies invaded Spain, supposedly present on Spanish soil as allies. This was like the litmus test of the consolidation of the Bourbon state, and it collapsed like a pack of cards, together with the top echellons of the privileged orders. The royal family, father and son, already united by the common trait of reciprocal hatred, were now further united in a show of submission to the French invader. They both abdicated in his favor. No other state agency assumed any responsibility whatsoever in this situation: neither royal counsellors, nor regional courts, viceroys, captains general, nor intendants. The royal army did not present battle to the invader; the highest members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were silent or submitted; and the high nobility did the same (Artola 1959).

In these circumstances, lacking a state and ruling elites, a miscellaneous of social groupings and individuals took up arms, rather spontaneously, on its own behalf, and, while doing so, (some of them first, then, many) discovered they had a strong attachment to a common identity they named *pueblo*, *patria*, *país* or *nación española*, that is, Spanish people, fatherland, country or nation. This reaction was set in motion by the most diverse protagonists: local authorities, the commanders and officials of some small bodies of the army and, above all, the guerrilla forces made up of peasants, carriers, artesans, shepherds, priests and seminarists, encouraged and supported by the corporate villages. Significantly, it was the mayor of a small village, Móstoles, Andrés Torrejón, who was the first to make a formal

declaration of war on Napoleon. The villages based their resistance on organizational resources built up from long experience of control of local power and regulation of the local economy; from their habituation and easy access to short arms and firearms; and from a collective memory of feats of war which nourished an almost knightly ethos of honor. Once under way, they invented their own form of warfare, guerrilla warfare, and their own forms of inter-local or provincial coordination. On the basis of this collective experience, a somewhat precarious organizational structure was erected, presided by a *Junta Central* (whose President was the *ilustrado* Gaspar de Jovellanos) subordinate to the *Cortes de Cádiz*. In this way, society embarked upon a long period of intermittent local warfare which combined with a dizzying succession of political regimes: liberal (1812-1814), absolutist (1814-1820), liberal (1820-1823), absolutist (1823-1833), and finally open civil war between a liberal government and absolutist Carlist enclaves which were located mostly in the Basque country and Catalonia (between 1833 and 1840). In this dramatic context, an approximation took place between this collective experience of 'organized anarchy' and the invention of a new, liberal tradition (which was influenced by the currents of intellectual thought from the end of the previous century). This was to be decisive at the initiation of a completely different stage in the evolution of the Spanish state and society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in her public sphere.

We may give a final thought to a peculiar group of intellectuals, heirs to the *ilustrados*, whom the events of the era overwhelmed and placed in an uncomfortably ambiguous position. This group was called (in the broadest sense) the *afrancesados* (French sympathizers), who were destined to remain on the fringes or coexist with the invader (in mistrust or collaboration), and later to emigrate to France and return one day, or not, as the case might be. They were people with mixed feelings, and not easy to place, such as the writer Leandro Fernández de Moratín, or Juan Antonio Llorente, who wrote a classic book on (and against) the Inquisition on the orders of the Chief Inquisitor, Manuel Abad de la Sierra, or another Chief Inquisitor, Ramón José de Arce, temporizing and compliant, who went into exile and lived the rest of his life in Paris (Caro Baroja 1968: 45-60).

Francisco de Goya, who was to die in Bordeaux in 1825, also belonged to this milieu, and lived observing his world in a way equidistant

between the perspective of the court painter of portraits of kings for whom he apparently had limited esteem, and that of the painter of scenes of battle and strife, whose collection of gravures entitled 'disasters of war' portrayed common people of patriotic and authentic but also blind and terrible passions. Goya is witness to a time of confusion, in which, as in another of his etchings, "the dreams of reason beget monsters". By contrast, Jovellanos was an egregious *ilustrado* who ended not as a French sympathizer but as the figurehead of the fight against the French. Yet, significantly, there seems to be echoes of the same sentiment, of both fascination with and estrangement from their own people and society, in the last words of Jovellanos on his deathbed: "*¡nación sin cabeza!, ¡desgraciado de mí!*", as if he were feeling lost in the midst of a country without a head, or a brain, and lamented his fate. Pronounced by a man in the edge between lucidity and darkness, those words can be easily dismissed. But they can also be understood as summing up the long trajectory of a prudent reformer; or as a foresight of how difficult would be for the civil institutions to take root on the Spanish soil in the years to come.

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