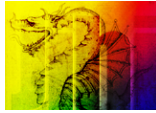


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– Section 1: Articles –

“Dans la même Humanité”: The Concept of  
Universal Solidarity in the Philosophical  
Thought of Pierre Leroux

by

Matteo Cavalleri



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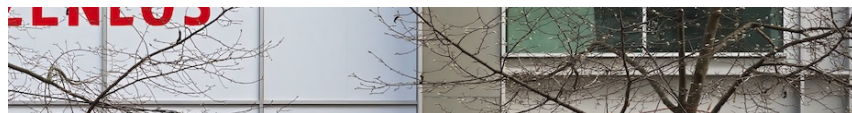
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# “Dans la même Humanité”: The Concept of Universal Solidarity in the Philosophical Thought of Pierre Leroux

Matteo Cavalleri \*

*This essay situates Pierre Leroux’s (1797–1871) philosophical work within the broader conceptual difficulties that modern thought has encountered in defining solidarity. While modern philosophy has often treated solidarity as a vague political slogan or a non-binding ethical disposition, Leroux offers a rigorous and original attempt to re-found solidarity as a fully philosophical concept. Engaging with the tensions between universality and particularity, fact and value, and individual freedom and social obligation, Leroux reinterprets solidarity as the ontological and axiological principle underlying human coexistence. At the core of this rethinking is his critical reinterpretation of the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor, which he reshapes into an objective logic of universal and reciprocal interdependence. Leroux constructs a speculative anthropology in which the individual and humanity are mutually constitutive. Solidarity thus emerges as the modern philosophical response to the need for a symbolic structure that sustains both individuality and sociality. This essay argues that Leroux’s thought—despite its marginalization—provides essential theoretical tools for overcoming the conceptual impasses of modern ethics and politics, and must be recognized as a crucial moment in the genealogy of a philosophical understanding of solidarity.*



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## 1. Introduction

In his insightful notes on the historical and theoretical genesis of the concept of solidarity, which serve as the preface to the volume he edited in 1999, *Solidarity*,<sup>1</sup> German philosopher Kurt Bayertz emphasizes a structural tension within the concept—between its appeal, practical applicability, and inherent vagueness. Indeed, solidarity is a foundational concept in modern philosophical, social, legal, and political thought. The term ‘solidarity’ encompasses a wide range of actions, principles, and *Gesinnungen* (attitudes or dispositions), often situated between “opposing poles of reference”.<sup>2</sup> These include the tension between “fact and value, ideal and obligation, normative principle and political objective, social spontaneity (such as sympathy, as we shall explore, Ed.) and institutional organization, unilateral altruism and mutual aid”,<sup>3</sup> as well as the particularity of a specific social context and the universality of humanity as a whole.

The domains within which his categorical forge has been established are manifold: law, political economy, the ethical-political sphere, and the theological-religious realm. Yet—or rather, precisely because of this—its concept remains ambiguous from a theoretical perspective. Bayertz highlights how the theoretical content of the solidarity concept is often “overshadowed by its appellative function”.<sup>4</sup> And he continues:

Solidarity as a phenomenon lies like an erratic block in the midst of the moral landscape of our Modern Age. It is familiar in an everyday sense, and yet it has remained a foreign body; its dimensions and weight cannot be overlooked, and yet it is bulky. Until now, the geologists familiar with this landscape—Modern Age moral philosophers—have taken it for granted, have circumnavigated it: in any case, they have been incapable of moving it. This has not prevented a ready and frequent use of the term solidarity in everyday politics. Its popularity has maybe even increased as a result of its unexplained theoretical status: the more unclear its prerequisites and implications are, the more freely it is seemingly employed. This has enabled appealing to solidarity—as well as complaining

<sup>1</sup> Kurt Bayertz, Foreword to *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Springer, 1999), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Gerardo Cunico, *L’umanità in comune. Cultura, libertà, solidarietà* (Morcelliana, 2022), 271.

<sup>3</sup> Cunico, *L’umanità in comune*, 271.

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Bayertz, “Four Uses of ‘Solidarity’”, in *Solidarity*, ed. Bayertz, 4.

about its disappearance—to become a ritual linguistic sport, in which hardly anybody would choose to be offside.<sup>1</sup>

Solidarity, therefore, presents a conceptual challenge that is as elusive as it is theoretically difficult to manage, despite its relatively recent emergence in the intellectual landscape. It is a concept that arose during the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly within the French cultural debate.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this contribution is to identify and explore a pivotal moment in the development of the theoretical and philosophical significance of solidarity. This moment marks a time when solidarity was defined—not as a given, but as something to be characterized—in terms of universality and reciprocity. This development took place within the theoretical and political framework of Pierre Leroux (1797-1871)<sup>3</sup>: printer, politician, father of republican socialism,

<sup>1</sup> Bayertz, Foreword, vii.

<sup>2</sup> See Jack Ernest Shalom Hayward, “Solidarity. The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth Century France”, *International Review of Social History* 4, no. 2 (1959): 261-284; Hauke Brunkhorst, “Globale Solidarität. Inklusionsprobleme der modernen Gesellschaft”, in *Die Öffentlichkeit der Vernunft und die Vernunft der Öffentlichkeit*, ed. Lutz Wingert and Klaus Günther (Suhrkamp, 2001), 605-626; Jacqueline Lalouette, “Charité, philanthropie et solidarité en France vers 1848. Pour une histoire des mots et des doctrines”, in *1848. Actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième*, ed. Jean-Luc Mayaud (Créaphis, 2002), 203-231; Thomas Fiegle, *Von der Solidarität zur Solidarität. Ein französisch-deutscher Begriffstransfer* (Lit, 2003); Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe. The History of an Idea* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-92; Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarity. From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community* (MIT Press, 2005), 1-102; Marie-Claude Blais, *La solidarité. Histoire d'une idée* (Gallimard, 2007); Andrea Lanza, “Fraternité e solidarietà intorno al 1848. Tracce di un approccio sociologico”, *Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine* 36, no. 51 (2014): 17-39.

<sup>3</sup> See David Owen Evans, *Le socialisme romantique. Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains* (M. Rivière et Cie, 1947); Miguel Abensour, “Pierre Leroux et l’utopie socialiste”, *Études de marxologie*, n° 15, Économie et sociétés VI/12 (décembre 1972): 2201-2247, now in *Utopiques I: Le Procès des maîtres rêveurs suivi de Pierre Leroux et l’utopie socialiste* (Les éditions de la nuit, 2010); Jack Bakunin, *Pierre Leroux and the Birth of Democratic Socialism 1797-1848* (Revisionist Press, 1976); Jean-Jacques Goblot, *Pierre Leroux et ses premiers écrits, 1824-1830. Aux origines du socialisme français* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1977); Jacques Viard, *Pierre Leroux et les socialistes européens* (Actes Sud, 1983); Leonardo La Puma, *Il socialismo sconfitto. Saggio sul pensiero politico di Pierre Leroux e Giuseppe Mazzini* (Franco Angeli, 1984); Miguel Abensour, “Philosophie politique et socialisme. Pierre Leroux ou du «style barbare» en philosophie, *Le Cahier*, no. 1 (1985): 9-24; Fernando Fiorentino, “Religione e politica nel Leroux della *Revue encyclopédique*”, *Quaderno filosofico*, no. 12-13 (1985): 27-78; Armelle Le Bras-Chopard, *De l'égalité dans la différence. Le socialisme de Pierre Leroux* (Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1986); Bärbel Kühn, *Pierre Leroux. Sozialismus zwischen analytischer Gesellschaftskritik und sozialphilosophischer Synthese. Ein Beitrag zur methodischen Er-*

publisher—playing a key role in the journals *Le Globe* (1824-1832), *Revue encyclopédique* (1831-1833), *La Revue indépendante* (1841-1848), *La Revue sociale, ou Solution pacifique du problème du proletariat* (1845-1848) and in the writing of the *Encyclopédie nouvelle: Dictionnaire philosophique, scientifique, littéraire et industriel, offrant le tableau des connaissances humaines au XIXe siècle* (1833-1842)<sup>1</sup>—and, an aspect of his bibliography of great interest to the present essay, a self-taught philosopher, best known for his important work *De l'humanité*, published in 1840. Leroux was an author who made criticism of the appellative value of solidarity one of the central points of his research. For him, in fact, solidarity is not merely a political slogan but a specific and autonomous philosophical concept,<sup>2</sup> as we can read in *La grève de Samarez, poème philosophique* (1863), one of his last works: “I was the first to borrow the term Solidarity from the jurists, and to introduce it into Philosophy, that is to say, in my opinion, into

*forschung des vormalxistischen Sozialismus* (Peter Lang, 1988); Jérôme Peignot, *Pierre Leroux. Inventeur du socialisme* (Klincksieck, 1988); Armelle Le Bras-Chopard, “Pierre Leroux ou l’invitation à la démocratie”, *Esprit* 68, January (1991): 47-58; Angelo Prontera, *Leroux. Religione e politica* (Milella, 1991); Fernando Fiorentino, *Filosofia religiosa di Leroux ed eclettismo di Cousin* (Milella, 1992); Miguel Abensour, *Le procès des maîtres rêveurs. Suivi de Pierre Leroux et l’utopie* (Éd. Sulliver, 2000); Bruno Viard and Yves Vaillancourt, *Pierre Leroux. Socialiste associatif* (Thierry Quinquetton, 2000); Bruno Viard, *Les trois neveux ou L’altruisme et l’égoïsme réconciliés. Pierre Leroux, 1791-1871, Marcel Mauss, 1872-1950, Paul Diel, 1893-1972* (PUF, 2002); Vincent Peillon, *Pierre Leroux et le socialisme républicain. Une tradition philosophique* (Le Bord de l’eau, 2003); Warren Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key. Pierre Leroux, Romantic Socialism and the Schelling Affair”, *Modern Intellectual History* 2, no. 1 (2005): 61-86; Leonardo La Puma, *Socialismo e libertà. La polemica Leroux-Proudhon* (Lares, 2007); Marisa Forcina, “Pierre Leroux tra individualismo e socialismo”, *Segni e comprensione* 23, no. 67 (2009): 120-125; Bruno Viard, *Pierre Leroux, penseur de l’humanité* (Sulliver, 2009); Lucie Rey, *Les enjeux de l’histoire de la philosophie en France au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Pierre Leroux contre Victor Cousin* (L’Harmattan, 2012); Lucie Rey, “Les Lumières comme enjeu philosophique et politique. Pierre Leroux face à Victor Cousin”, *Société Française d’Étude du Dix-Huitième Siècle* 47, no. 1 (2015): 501-528; Lucie Rey, “«Le Sphinx de la Révolution». Pierre Leroux et la promesse révolutionnaire”, *Archives de Philosophie* 80, no. 1 (2017): 55-74; Annalisa Furia, *Solidarietà, o delle sorti della democrazia. Libertà ed eguaglianza nel pensiero politico di Pierre Leroux (1830-1871)* (Il Mulino, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> For a historical-philosophical contextualisation of the elaboration of the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, see Vincent Bourdeau, “Un encyclopédisme républicain pour le XIXe siècle”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 62, no. 2 (2024): 67-75 and Marisa Forcina, *I diritti dell’esistente. La filosofia della Encyclopédie nouvelle 1833-1847* (Milella, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> See Armelle Le Bras-Chopard, “Metamorphoses d’une notion. La solidarité chez Pierre Leroux”, in *La Solidarité: un sentiment républicain?*, ed. Jacques Chevallier et alii (PUF, 1992), 55-69.

the Religion of the future”.<sup>1</sup> It is not important here to assess the accuracy of the fact that Leroux was actually the first to use the term solidarity outside the legal context, but it is crucial to recognise the fundamental semantic mutation he brought to the concept. Thanks to his philosophical reflection, solidarity becomes an “*ontological axiom*”<sup>2</sup> through which Christian charity is transfigured into mutual and universal solidarity, “a superior interhuman relationship because it is rationally justifiable, progressive, and socially organizable”.<sup>3</sup>

The traces of this mutation are evident not only in his theoretical works but also, as symptoms, in many of his political choices. It is by virtue of his pursuit of a philosophical understanding of solidarity that, for example, Leroux refrains from joining the political movement “Solidarité républicaine” in 1848<sup>4</sup> or signing the “Appel aux républicains” of 1855 (proposed by Mazzini, Kossuth and Ledru-Rollin), which called for “european solidarity”.<sup>5</sup> For Leroux, even framing solidarity as “republican” or “european” is unacceptable, despite its alignment with republican principles. In his view, solidarity must be fundamentally “human”—i.e. universal, without any social, economic, political or cultural characterisation, without anything that cannot directly relate to the ontological dimension of the human as such—or it is not; otherwise, it devolves into a justification for local conflicts and self-interest. As proof of this, he adds that the “european solidarity” evoked by Mazzini, Kossuth and Ledru-Rollin, “limited to the independence of the races recognised as such, is nothing but the wildest individualism” and that it will be necessary for everyone “to come to understand, in the end, this term”, i.e. solidarity, “in its deepest sense”.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Pierre Leroux, *La grève de Samarez* (E. Dentu, 1863), I, 254.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Leroux, *De l'humanité, de son principe et de son avenir, où se trouve exposée la vraie définition de la religion et où l'on explique le sens, la suite et l'enchaînement du mosaïsme et du christianisme* (Perrotin, 1840), vol. 1, XX.

<sup>3</sup> Cunico, *L'umanità in comune. Cultura, libertà, solidarietà*, 275.

<sup>4</sup> See Blais, *La solidarité*, 82.

<sup>5</sup> See “Aux républicains. Appel de Kossuth, Ledru-Rollin et Mazzini”, *L'Homme* 43, 26 Septembre (1855).

<sup>6</sup> Leroux, *La grève de Samarez*, I, 233.

## 2. A New Dogma: “an eternal solidarity that unites all members of Humanity”

Leroux forges the ethical and epistemic framework of his philosophy through a critical examination of the cleavages that innervate his own contemporaneity. A commitment to which he summoned all his contemporary philosophers, as attested by the article “Aux philosophes. De la situation actuelle de l’esprit humain” (1831): “Society is in a thousand pieces because men are deprived of bonds, because no relationship unites them any more, because man has become a stranger to man. And so it will be, until a common faith comes to enlighten consciences and fill hearts”.<sup>1</sup> The shattered society is that of the July monarchy, which awaits—after “the extraordinary days of 27, 28 and 29 July have put a stone over the old order, and inaugurated a new era”,<sup>2</sup> leaving however an ethical vacuum that must be filled—a reactivation of the political order and social organisation: “the political century has begun”<sup>3</sup> as Leroux exhorts from the pages of *Le Globe* on 1 August 1830. Hence, the need to formulate what the philosopher defines as a new dogma, in which to actualise the internal, but never realised, truths present in tradition,<sup>4</sup> in which to revitalise them, through a radical redeclination, in order to be accepted in a world necessarily characterised by Enlightenment principles. A rather difficult project, which brought him the criticism of Proudhon, who branded his positions as mystagogical lucubrations,<sup>5</sup> but the applause of Mazzini and Marx who, in a letter to Feuerbach in 1843, described Leroux as ‘brilliant’.<sup>6</sup> The driving force behind this new dogma is the concept of solidarity, which, through its philosophical re-elaboration, must

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Leroux, “Aux philosophes. De la situation actuelle de l’esprit humain”, *Revue encyclopédique*, 51, Septembre (1831): 501.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Globe*, 15 August (1830).

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Leroux, *Le Globe*, 1 August (1830).

<sup>4</sup> Leroux envisions a moral society emerging from the progression of human history—one that would ensure, through the advancement of the human mind and the evolution of philosophy, that, as he put it, “men would grasp the true meaning of the Christian law of fraternity, redefined as the unity of the human spirit or reciprocal solidarity” (Pierre Leroux, “Éclectisme”, in *Encyclopédie nouvelle* (Charles Gosselin, 1843), IV, 475.

<sup>5</sup> See Blais, *La solidarité*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> See Miguel Abensour, *Dictionnaire des œuvres politiques* (PUF, 2001), 610.

serve as both the catalyst for a renewed *ethos*—that is, a new form of right—and the foundation for a new process of social organisation. This dual practical outcome of a single theoretical act<sup>1</sup> can be identified in a fragment from 1850, which encapsulates the essence of Leroux’s entire philosophical reflection:

But the religious principle, the metaphysical dogma—what is it? Allow me to tell you: it is the dogma of Solidarity; an eternal solidarity that unites all members of Humanity, that creates both rights and duties for them, and that identifies duty with right”.<sup>2</sup>

It is only through this metamorphosis that solidarity can become “the very principle of social organization”,<sup>3</sup> since, as specified in the doctrine of the community-cooperative founded by Leroux himself in Boussac—<sup>4</sup>and expounded in the pages of the *Revue Sociale* by Grégoire Champseix—solidarity becomes the moral sensor capable of identifying both the objective and subjective dimensions of the social bond—by virtue of which the subject, respecting and deepening her/his own individuality, recognises her/himself as a member of the whole of humanity—and the cause of its laceration, namely the presence of evil in a society. Evil, in fact, has no ontological subsistence in itself, but exists solely as the negation of solidarity:

The solidarity of men is eternal: it is, it has been, and it will always be; from which it follows that heaven is on earth, and as a certain and demonstrable consequence, that man is reborn in Humanity. [...] Moral evil has no independent existence; it is not inherent

<sup>1</sup> The relationship between philosophical reflection and practical-political activity is never harmonious in Leroux but is always marked by a tension aimed at fiercely preserving the independence of theoretical thought, precisely to safeguard its fully ethical value, which can never be reduced to immediate utility or instrumentality: “Solidarity is a just, scientific idea, not a motto, not a rallying cry for action. Whenever this idea ends up serving as a banner for supposed unifying purposes and becomes an obstacle to the independence of individual reflection, Leroux is ready to unleash his anathemas. No abuse of the idea of solidarity for electoral purposes, for unions of convenience (...). Action in the realm of ideas must never be confused with a call to action. Unity, yes, but not sacred unity, neither for the Republic nor for universal democracy. Independence, certainly, but not that ‘wild’ and thoughtless ‘individualism’, fanatical about an illusory cult of the self, whether as an individual or as a nation” (Blais, *La solidarité*, 84).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Leroux, “Philosophie et socialisme - III”, *La République*, 3 August (1850): 1

<sup>3</sup> Lanza, “*Fraternité e solidarietà* intorno al 1848. Tracce di un approccio sociologico”, 35.

<sup>4</sup> See Ludovic Frobert, *Quelques lignes d’utopie. Pierre Leroux et la communauté des «imprimeux» (Boussac, 1844-1848)*, (Agone, 2023).

in Humanity as an integral part, constitutive of the essence of Humanity. However, it manifests itself because men do not follow their moral law, Solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

It is by virtue of this eternal conception of solidarity—which is nonetheless fully historical, as it represents the realization of heaven on earth, a revelation that “is historical not only because it takes place in history, but also because it occurs through history, through the action that allows (the subject, Ed.) to understand and improve her/himself”—<sup>2</sup>that Leroux, opposing any reductionist and instrumental invocation of solidarity, proposes a project for a democratic and social Constitution, which he presents on September 21, 1848, and which invokes universal solidarity right from its opening statement: “In the presence and under the invocation of God, both three and one at the same time (...), in the name of solidarity, which unites all men in the same Humanity (*dans la même Humanité*), as if they were the same being, because they are indeed of the same species (...), the National Assembly thus proclaims as follows the dogma of modern republics”.<sup>3</sup>

Modern republics, for Leroux, are characterised by a strenuous faith in progress and technology. Just as strong is his confidence in the impact of industry and typography in the dissemination of ideas. Indeed, technical progress in the field of typography helps to reweave—as a facilitator of the circulation of ideas—social relations that have broken down. Likewise material goods: their pursuit produces the dissemination of the values of freedom and equality. The idea of solidarity—which for Leroux has both a divine and a human nature, springing from the encounter of ideal and material instances—thus arises in constant connection with reflection on religion:<sup>4</sup> a religion that has as its object the god of Voltaire and Rousseau, understood as the universal being, origin and end of ev-

<sup>1</sup> Grégoire Champseix, “Exposé sommaire de la doctrine de l’Humanité (III)”, *Revue Sociale*, no. 5 (1848): 66-73.

<sup>2</sup> Lanza, “*Fraternité e solidarietà* intorno al 1848. Tracce di un approccio sociologico”, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Leroux, *Projet d’une constitution démocratique et sociale, fondée sur la loi même de la vie, et donnant, par une organisation véritable de l’État, la possibilité de détruire à jamais la monarchie, l’aristocratie, l’anarchie, et le moyen infaillible d’organiser le travail national sans blesser la liberté; présenté à l’Assemblée nationale par un de ses membres, le citoyen Pierre Leroux* (Gustave Sandré, 1848), 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830–1852* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

everything. Corollary to this theological perspective, is Leroux's constant sarcasm against both the Catholic Church and Saint-Simonist civil religion (despite the fact that he initially trained at Saint-Simon's theoretical laboratory)<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Origins and Theoretical Limits of the Concept of Solidarity

Before delving into Leroux's work, and thus grasping the central role he played in shaping the evolution of the concept of solidarity toward a characterization of universality and reciprocity, it is necessary to briefly revisit Bayert's reconstruction. According to his analysis, one of the reasons it is so difficult to define the concept of solidarity theoretically lies in its distinctly modern epistemic nature and its connection to the ethical logic underpinning solidarity. The ethics and political philosophy of modernity are characterized by a defensive propensity, which is unable to accept within itself and give normative justification to the "*positive obligations to act*"<sup>2</sup> that are instead inherent to the logic of solidarity. The main ethical and political purposes of modernity aim, in fact, to defend the individual from the risks deriving from conflict and social competition with other individuals, from the danger of the emptying of subjectivity by massification and conformism, and from the crushing of the individual by state institutions and their power: "Justifying individual rights of freedom has become a chief task of ethics; institutionally safeguarding them has become a chief task of politics and law"<sup>3</sup>. Anything that relates to the positivity of acts and volitions, and therefore goes beyond a defensive dimension, raises mistrust from the perspective of normative justification. Ethical and normative obligation always has a protective nature. This attitude culminates, for example, in *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill, where we read:

That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-

<sup>1</sup> See Quentin Schwanck, "Robert Owen's influence on French republicanism in the first half of the nineteenth century: the role of former Saint-Simonians and their networks (Pierre Leroux, Jean Reynaud, and George Sand)", *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 2 (2021): 299-314.

<sup>2</sup> Bayert, "Four Uses of 'Solidarity'", 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Four Uses*, 4.

protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to some one else. The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others.<sup>1</sup>

In such a context, it seems to be permissible to use greater normative power only to justify obligations. It is clear, therefore, that “manifestations of solidarity may be morally commendable but they cannot be made *binding*”.<sup>2</sup>

There is a second difficulty for modern thought in conceiving the concept of solidarity theoretically. This difficulty concerns the definition of the subject to whom an act of solidarity is directed. Indeed, solidarity relations are commonly established within communities and social groups. The subject performing an act of solidarity and the subject to whom the act is directed are often members of the same group. Thus, there is a social differentiation underlying solidarity relations. This clashes violently with the universalistic nature of modern ethics, which is most rigorously expressed in the principle of the universalization of the Kantian categorical imperative. This principle is based on the impossibility of sociologically determining the contexts in which moral maxims should be applied:

when I think of a categorical imperative I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents as necessary. There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative and it is this: *act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Yale University Press, 2003), 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> Bayertz, “Four Uses of ‘Solidarity’”, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.

The “postulate of universalizability”, Bayertz points out, seems therefore to be incompatible with dispositions such as “family obligations, patriotic connections or solidary attachments” and, because of this, “it [...] seems reasonable to comprehend ‘solidarity’ not as an *ethical* term, but merely as a *political* watchword”.<sup>1</sup> In the past, the political traditions that have most drawn on the semantic context opened up by the category of solidarity have been those of non-individualist inspiration, primarily within the broad and multifaceted contexts of Catholic democratic and socialist movements.<sup>2</sup> But it is precisely the assumption of this constitutive tension between the particular and the universal, between differentiation and unity, that suggests referring to the work of Leroux, given his ability to transpose the concept of solidarity from its original context of origin, Roman law, to the philosophical one, through a necessary theological mediation.

The concept of solidarity has a legal origin; in particular, it is rooted in the language of Roman law, specifically in the expression “*appellare in solidum*”, which identifies debtors “in solidum”, meaning those who are called to repay the entire sum, that is, each is responsible for and on behalf of all the others. In its first official formalization, appearing in the *Encyclopédie* of 1765, which reflects the entry *Solidité* found in the *Dictionnaire universel du commerce* (1741), “solidarity, n. f. (*Commerce*) is the quality of an obligation in which multiple debtors commit to repay a borrowed or owed sum; so that the entire debt is owed to each of them, excluding the one for whose benefit the obligation was assumed”.<sup>3</sup> The connection between *solidarité* and *solidité* is thus foundational, and *solidus*, as noted by Gerardo Cunico, could in turn derive from *sollus*, carrying with it a dense polysemy: “compact, solid; geometric body; physical state; firm; whole; legal claim; true, real, concrete; substantial”.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that the Latin root of the word *solidarity* preserves not only the reference to a social group but also the relationship between singularity and totality, between particularity and universality. Solidarity, in fact, defines the responsibility of each individual debtor for the collective debt, but one can also discharge it on behalf

<sup>1</sup> Bayertz, “Four Uses of ‘Solidarity’”, 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe. The History of an Idea*, 93-352.

<sup>3</sup> Louis de Jaucourt, “Solidarité”, in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts e des métiers* (Durand, 1765), 320.

<sup>4</sup> Cunico, *L’umanità in comune. Cultura, libertà, solidarietà*, 273.

of all the others.<sup>1</sup> In an act of solidarity, the relationship between the individual and the collective is centered around the concept of responsibility—a responsibility that is an individual act but carries a global meaning and scope. “Someone who stands for others” follows a logic that is not only theological, but specifically Christological: a God who becomes a person and, alone, pays the universal debt—the debt of sin—of all humanity. This Christological model found its privileged political expression in the context of the French Revolution, influencing both revolutionary and reactionary positions. For counter-revolutionaries, the concept of solidarity was an effective tool for upholding the idea of a divine order within the state, where social cohesion was ensured by the bonds of solidarity.

At the bottom of this conservative thinking lies the idea of an order created and maintained by God. It is a natural order comparable to an organic body suffused by God, and therefore everyone has to obey such an order by subjecting himself or herself to the authority of this claim. The most significant political point is that the theological and metaphysical idea of the order is consequently represented by an authoritative state with the monarch as the supreme sovereign representative of the divine power. Thus solidarity was originally used by conservatives to designate the social cohesion of the citizens of a state whereby the state itself was conceived as a manifestation of the divine order. Solidarity becomes a metaphor of the divine interdependency of human beings.<sup>2</sup>

Through this theological mediation, the concept of solidarity was thus transferred by counter-revolutionary thinkers like de Maistre from a strictly legal context to a political one. As a result of this process of translation, solidarity became a cornerstone of the political theology of the French counter-revolution and a powerful tool for political restoration. Recognizing oneself as a member of a cohesive, *solid*, but non-inclusive solidaristic community—modeled on the image of the divine body of the state and therefore immutable by nature—was a necessary stance to resist the political and social upheavals brought about

<sup>1</sup> See Andreas Wildt, “Solidarität”, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer and Gottfried Gabriel, vol. 9 (Schwabe & Co, 1995), 1004.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hoelzl, “Recognizing the Sacrificial Victim. The Problem of Solidarity for Critical Social Theory”, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6, no. 1 (2004): 51.

by the revolution. In *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (1821), de Maistre defines the sympathy and sense of unity that binds us to our fellow human beings as “that solidarity which exists among men (you will grant me, I hope, this legal term).”<sup>1</sup> What emerges here is the idea of solidarity as a communion in both the fall and the atonement required by original sin, as imposed by the Christian doctrine of reversibility: the righteous must atone in place of the sinner. It is a “co-implication of all human beings in evil, starting from original sin, and their interdependence in the story of the fall and redemption: we are all burdened by a moral debt from which none of us can exempt ourselves, each bearing full responsibility.”<sup>2</sup> De Maistre indeed affirms this, stating: “How could there not be unity among us, given that a single man, with a single act, led us astray?”<sup>3</sup>

Theology thus provides the conceptual framework suited to the purpose of the counter-revolutionary thinker, who employs Augustine’s notion of the two cities—the imperfect earthly city and the perfect heavenly city—to forge two mirrored concepts of solidarity. Only the solidarity relations among the members of a given state body serve as a metaphor for the perfect order of the heavenly city. Here, we see how the theme of universality, inherent in Christological logic—Christ redeems all of humanity—shifts in its political transposition in favor of certain particular communities.

#### 4. Leroux and the Philosophical Concept of Solidarity: How a Fact Can Be a Value

Leroux introduces a radical shift in perspective compared to this approach. Driven by a deep and unwavering faith in progress, he asserts that “solidarity is not what indefinitely binds us to the misfortunes of the past, but what the future has the responsibility to achieve”<sup>4</sup>. No longer should solidarity be overcome through Christian charity—as Pierre-Simon Ballanche suggests in *Palingénésie*

<sup>1</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (Librairie grecque, latine et française, 1821), 236.

<sup>2</sup> Cunico, *L’umanità in comune. Cultura, libertà, solidarietà*, p. 274.

<sup>3</sup> De Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, 232.

<sup>4</sup> Blais, *La solidarité*, 85.

*sociale*<sup>1</sup> (1833)—but rather, charity should be replaced by solidarity. Leroux too, as anticipated, finds in theology the theoretical ground within which to give philosophical form to the concept of solidarity. His theoretical reflection, which flows into the aforementioned important anthropological-philosophical essay *De l'humanité*, aims to refound the philosophical value of solidarity—in a perspective that assumes but emancipates itself from revelation—and to confirm its potential universal scope, i.e. not only addressed to members of one's own group. Leroux writes:

the evil that reigns on earth, I mean the evil that reigns in human society, stems from the fact that the essence of human nature has been violated, because the principle of the unity of the human race, across time and space, and of the mutual solidarity of all men, has not yet been fully understood, nor truly applied.<sup>2</sup>

This new conception of solidarity, still yet to be fully understood, is shaped by Leroux in close historical and theoretical connection with natural sympathy—a connection that serves as a means to transcend sympathy itself. Indeed, Leroux is well aware that one of the key theoretical challenges is the quantum leap that both links and separates solidarity as a fact and as a value—a leap that is obscured by the overwhelming power of faith in the concept of progress. Writing in the 1840s, the writer George Sand, with whom Leroux founded *La Revue Indépendante* in 1841, reflects on this idea:

The most vivid and faithful source of the progress of the human spirit is, to use the words of my time, the notion of solidarity. In the last century, we would have called it sensitivity; before that, charity; fifty years ago, fraternity. (...) It is like an exchange of trust and sympathy, which elevates the thoughts of both the one who speaks and the one who listens. In private life, a natural impulse leads us to humble yet dignified gestures of openness.<sup>3</sup>

There is thus a natural and instinctive sympathy, which functions as the graft of human sociability, and which leads one to regard the other as a fellow human being, an object and subject of care. But Sand fails to clarify why a moral

<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Simon Ballanche, "Palingénésie sociale", in *Œuvres complètes* (Bureau de l'Encyclopédie des connaissances utiles, 1833), t. IV, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Leroux, *De l'humanité*, 179.

<sup>3</sup> George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, (Gallimard, 2004), 47.

theory should be added to this natural inclination, how a spontaneous motion of sympathy can turn into a duty, how a fact can be a value.

Marie-Claude Blais writes, in this regard, that solidarity “conceals the crucial difficulty of the transition from what is—nature—to what must be—duty. The term solidarity cleverly confuses the two senses, positive and normative, of the term law. Nature, defined here as spontaneous sympathy, indicates the direction to be taken, without sophistry, insofar as, however, one relies on providence”.<sup>1</sup> But how do we manage when providence fails? “Renouncing a metaphysical device—the loss of order and unity once guaranteed by revelation and religious tradition—does not, however, mean renouncing a normative instance. Society becomes the means to achieve individuality”.<sup>2</sup>

And this is what is attested by Leroux in his powerful attempt to revisit the tradition. Natural sympathy, as we have seen, is at the origin of all social virtues, as reiterated, for example, by Adam Smith: “The word sympathy, in its most proper and primitive signification, denotes our fellow-feeling with the sufferings”,<sup>3</sup> meaning it allows us, through imagination, to put ourselves in the place of those who suffer and thus understand or be moved by what they feel. This position is also confirmed by Victor Hugo in *Les Contemplations* (1856): “When I speak of myself, I am speaking of you (...). Ah! Foolish is she/he who does not believe that I am you”<sup>4</sup>, and foolish is she/he who seeks only the happiness of one. The poet, in fact, desires universal happiness, and conversely, the misfortunes of humanity make him unhappy. This is not grounded in vague altruism but rather in the ontological structure of an anthropology that anchors the “I” within the “We”. And vice versa. Leroux also sees in the pursuit of happiness, which can only be the happiness of all, the origin of philosophy. Happiness is in fact the subject of the “Introduction” to *De l’Humanité*, his book on solidarity, where he revisits his essay *Du Bonheur*, which appeared in 1834 in *L’Encyclopédie nouvelle*. But to attain happiness, it is necessary to make a shift from sympathy to reflection. Only those who wish to discover, through philosophy, what constitutes the truth of life will understand that “our life is not only within us but

<sup>1</sup> Blais, *La solidarité*, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Beatrice Magni, “Presentazione – Tra ponti e confini: l’idea di solidarietà”, in Marie-Claude Blais, *La solidarietà. Storia di un’idea* (Giuffrè, 2012), xxxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Liberty Fund, 1984), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations* (Le livre de poche, 1965), 12.

also outside of us, in our fellow beings and in humanity”.<sup>1</sup> Only they will know that the happiness of one is a logical contradiction, and not simply a matter of sympathy (or, rather, lack thereof).

The idea of solidarity thus requires philosophical knowledge, philosophical knowledge of life. It is indeed influenced by sympathy, but it cannot be reduced to it. A philosophical knowledge that is both ontological and practical, aiming to establish an axiom—a universal law defining beings and the relationships that connect them. This law, though expressed through actions and volitions, unveils the unseen while bringing to fruition what must inevitably occur: “We are united by a bond, certainly invisible, but more precise and evident than the most solid matter that exists for our eyes.”<sup>2</sup> Solidarity, therefore, not only replaces charity and fraternity,<sup>3</sup> but it also has the vocation to organize human life as a whole, as unity. Through the revelation and unveiling of an invisible reality—namely, the ties that give solidity to humanity as one single humanity—solidarity presents itself as a tension between fact and value: solidarity indeed possesses an “axiological surplus”.<sup>4</sup> That is, it manifests itself as something “already always existing”, but, equally, as “already something that requires a ‘more’ of solidarity”.<sup>5</sup> A tension that is also present in the epistemological status of solidarity: only by integrating religious tradition into modern science (particularly physics, biology, and economics) and “explicitly embracing the metaphysical dimension of the truth implied in it (...) does the idea of solidarity assume its fully modern dimension”.<sup>6</sup>

For Leroux, all those who have sought happiness through philosophical reflection have contributed to the improvement of humanity and the unfolding of its true tradition. However, none of the ancient responses to this fundamental problem can be considered, in his view, satisfactory. The contemporary call for philosophy to fulfill its task must, for him, be rephrased as follows: “Today,

<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Leroux, “Économie politique”, *Revue encyclopédique* 60, Octobre-Décembre (1833): 112.

<sup>3</sup> See Lanza, “*Fraternité e solidarité* intorno al 1848. Tracce di un approccio sociologico”.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Pezzini, “Dimensioni e qualificazioni nel sistema costituzionale di solidarietà”, in *Il dovere di solidarietà*, ed. Barbara Pezzini, Claudio Sacchetto (Giuffrè, 2005), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Delio Salottolo, *Solidarietà e modernità. Saggio sulla “filosofia” di Émile Durkheim* (Meltemi, 2018), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Blais, *La solidarité*, 75.

Philosophy teaches us that the sovereign good consists in religiously loving the world and life. It must teach us how we can religiously love the world and life, how, while remaining within Nature and life, we can elevate ourselves toward our spiritual center”.<sup>1</sup>

In this fragment, writes Tomasz Szymański, all the fundamental elements that animate *De l’Humanité* are condensed: “search for the sovereign good and happiness (Socrates), primacy of love (revealed by Plato and Jesus), which is at the heart of all true religiosity, destruction of illusions about the ‘otherworlds’”, including the fiercely contested Paradise, and “affirmation of nature and life, gravitation around a spiritual center from which humanity originates and which is the driving force of its infinite progress”.<sup>2</sup> The inextricable connection of nature, life and the spiritual dimension constitutes the *Boden* on which to build a new anthropology, i.e. an idea of the human subject capable of moving within tradition without the mediation of “guides” and canons, but in search of the inner truths that constellate it:

Today, the doctrine that rejected Nature and life has been overturned. The truths that gave it existence emerge from the broken shell of the myth, like a chrysalis from the cocoon in which it was wrapped. No more priests: we are now the laity left alone, but laity elevated to the condition of men who must have understood that the essence of man is to love the beautiful and the good, and to nourish his soul with them. Plato’s lesson must have been understood, the lesson that Jesus repeated when he said: *Man does not live by bread alone*.<sup>3</sup>

There is no interest, in Leroux, in the elimination of mythical or religious culture, both of which form the basis of humanity, but in interpreting the messages conveyed by these cultures, because they remain misunderstood and in need of a new modern translation and refinement. This task constitutes an assumption of philosophical commitment and, at the same time, a liberation. The statement “no more priests: we are now the laity left alone”—together with a fully secularised affirmation of human freedom—implies a proportional assumption of responsibility: “returning to the past and its religion no longer means

<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, 120.

<sup>2</sup> Tomasz Szymański, “Pierre Leroux et la religion de l’Humanité: une conception post-séculière au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle?”, *Romanica Wratislaviensia* 66, (2019): 29.

<sup>3</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, 95-96.

mere adherence, but represents an invitation to extract the true ‘essence’.”<sup>1</sup> This implies thinking about a new concept of revelation, with particular reference to its temporal texture:

God, the true God, the incomprehensible and hidden God, though eternally manifested, communicates with us through an eternal and successive Revelation. It is this Revelation that I study in the earlier religions and in positive philosophies; and, if I have proven that a certain supreme law, forming God’s design for humanity, is the foundation of all these philosophies and religions, I will at least have uncovered what is most important and truly divine in these ancient religions and philosophies. I seek to rediscover, beneath ephemeral, transitory, and obsolete forms that have irrevocably fallen today, the spirit of the ancient religions. I show the modern idea in its ancient germ, the Revolution in the Gospel, and the Gospel in Genesis. To rediscover the foundations of the modern doctrine of liberty, equality, and fraternity within the depths of traditions is to give greater authority to this doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

For Leroux, it is not oxymoronic to attempt to investigate philosophy from a religious perspective and, simultaneously, to question religion through a philosophical analysis.<sup>3</sup> The common goal of these two gazes is to find the substance capable of giving concreteness, effectivity, to tradition, of providing it with the authority that it has not yet achieved in its historical evolution. This substance is encapsulated in the concept of universal and reciprocal solidarity, the sole principle capable of revealing “où est vraiment le ciel”,<sup>4</sup>—that is, within historical contingency itself, wherein humanity, guided by progress and the idea of perfectibility, realizes its destiny and constructs its own history, inspired by the enduring continuity of revelation.

In his attempt to forge a concept of solidarity capable of fulfilling this task, Leroux articulates a possible morphology of the complex relationship between philosophy and religion—a morphology whose organizing principle resides in the constant tension between progress and tradition. For Leroux, it is precisely

<sup>1</sup> Szymański, “Pierre Leroux et la religion de l’Humanité: une conception post-séculière au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle?”, 30.

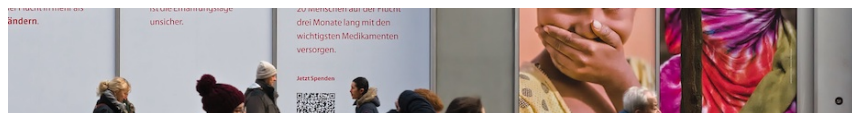
<sup>2</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, VIII.

<sup>3</sup> See Andrea Lanza, *All’abolizione del proletariato! Il discorso socialista fraterno. Parigi 1839-1847* (Franco Angeli, 2010), 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, V.

the conceptual governance of tradition—directed toward its progressive evolution—that constitutes philosophical epistemology and method: a method that consists in “perfectionner la Tradition”, “constater le Progrès dans le passé”, and “déduire l’avenir au moyen de la loi du Progrès continu”, as programmatically stated in the titles of chapters X, XI, and XII of *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*.<sup>1</sup> Leroux appropriates the concept of tradition from counter-revolutionary thought—only to turn it against the very counter-revolutionary project itself—and, in a paradoxical gesture, mobilizes it to subvert the conventional hierarchy between present and past: “It is, on the contrary, through the present constitution of the human mind, through our current morality, that we are able to judge the progress within the past”.<sup>2</sup> As Andrea Lanza aptly observes,

the restitution to the past of a meaning revealed in its being transcended, and to history as a whole of an intrinsic coherence, may serve as a guide in the task of perfecting tradition. By discerning in the past the unity of progress and making it the very precondition for envisioning a just future, tradition itself becomes revolutionary.<sup>3</sup>



The tradition that Leroux’s philosophy seeks to perfect is that embodied by Christianity, whose message must be retrieved in order to be overcome:

the new religion, along with the commitment to disseminate it and thereby build an egalitarian society, stands in faithful continuity with Christianity; the Revolution thus represents the maturation of the ideals preached by Jesus and their translation into social and political terms (...). Christian dogmas are not denied but reinterpreted through a

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité (1833-1835)*, in Pierre Leroux, *(Œuvres (1825-1850))* (Société typographique, 1850), 2, 1-224.

<sup>2</sup> Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 80.

<sup>3</sup> Lanza, *All’abolizione del proletariato!*, 42.

new lens: the mystery of the Incarnation in Christ becomes the image of a more general incarnation of God in Humanity.<sup>1</sup>

The epistemic vector that enables this process of assimilation and overcoming lies in the possibility of discerning within tradition the continuous operation of reason.<sup>2</sup> And it is by virtue of the immanent rationality at work within history that tradition, animated by internal truths, must become the object of a revolutionary hermeneutic labor. This is the task to which Leroux summons philosophy: to unfold what, within tradition—whose privileged site of sedimentation is religion—remains folded in upon itself:

Christianity now appears to me as explained. Its central knot has been untied. And I give thanks to God that I have been able to address this great problem without in any way wounding that which is divine in Christianity—that which shall endure, that which is immortal: its soul, its spirit. I have denied nothing; I have explained. I have not needed to dismiss the Gospels or the Christian tradition, to suppose interpolations, anachronisms, or falsehoods in the venerable and respectable antiquity of Christianity. I have accepted everything—and I have simply explained.<sup>3</sup>

It is in the name of this continuous striving toward perfectibility—of the fact that tradition contains within itself the potential to be more fully unfolded—that the bond between philosophy and religion is forged. This relationship is not exhausted by a mere method; it is animated by an ontological charge: history is driven by a unifying progressivity, insofar as it is the consubstantial union of progress and tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Lanza, *All'abolizione del proletariato!*, 44. On Leroux's reworking of Christianity, see Fiorentino, *La filosofia religiosa di Leroux ed eclettismo di Cousin*, 281-293.

<sup>2</sup> "Philosophers who deny all truth to former religions and regard them merely as the outcome of human credulity, you are, in truth, remarkably credulous yourselves. You reject revelations and miracles, yet fail to see that by grounding modern Deism in reason while dismissing Christianity and all preceding religions as fundamentally opposed to that very reason, you implicitly assume that humanity—after having been for centuries incapable of reasoning on the most essential matters—suddenly became capable of doing so. And that, surely, would be the greatest of revelations and the most extraordinary of miracles!" (Pierre Leroux, "Du christianisme", (1836), in Pierre Leroux, *Discours de Schelling à Berlin. Du cours de philosophie de Schelling. Du christianisme*, ed. Jean-François Courtine (Vrin, 1982), 95).

<sup>3</sup> Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, t. II, 965.

## 5. The True Meaning of the Commandment to Love

Philosophically speaking, therefore, humanity, like tradition—which expresses one of its fundamental determinations—is perfectible. But if humanity is perfectible, so is human beings, whose existence and historicity is unimaginably disconnected from humanity (and vice versa). Milestones in human evolution have been the creation of primary recognition structures, such as family, homeland and property. Outside these structures, the subject loses consistency. But it is by denying the transience and historical contingency of these structures, thus making them absolute, that human beings become slaves to these particular recognition relations and lose their fundamental ontological defining features: the law of the unity of humanity and the universal interdependence of individuals. The ontological co-belonging between human beings and humanity is indeed a conceptual lintel of Leroux’s philosophy:

No man exists independently of humanity, and yet humanity is not a true being; humanity is man, that is, men, that is, particular and individual beings. I begin by saying that no man exists independently of humanity. Indeed, is it possible for you to conceive of the idea of a man without simultaneously having the idea of humanity? On the contrary, do you not begin, when speaking of such a being and wishing to represent it to yourself, by saying that it is a man?<sup>1</sup>

The ethical consequence of this ontological co-belonging— which Leroux does not consider in organicistic or physiological terms, but in terms of differentiation, correspondence and relationship—<sup>2</sup> is undoubtedly embodied in the evangelical commandment, “love your neighbor as yourself”. However, it is precisely Christianity that has failed, despite the preaching of Jesus Christ, to give historical actuality to this form of love and to build an ethical life based on love for one’s neighbor. In particular, Leroux’s critique targets the vertical and horizontal structure of the commandment to love God and neighbour. He blames Christianity for misunderstanding the authentic meaning of the commandment.

<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, 249.

<sup>2</sup> See Pierre Leroux, “De l’individualisme et du socialisme”, in Pierre Leroux, *À la source perdue du socialisme français*, ed. Bruno Viard (Desclée de Brouwer, 1997), 164: “Yes, society is a body, but it is a mystical body (*corps mystique*), and we are not members of it, but rather, we live in it”.

In the Christian tradition, in his view, love of God would have been overemphasised, to the detriment of love between human beings. Moreover, the Christian canon has completely erased the reflexive moment of self-love (thus losing the fundamental pole of individuality). Consequently, Leroux proposes a definition of universal solidarity that, in his view, best expresses the authentic meaning of the commandment to love:

Love God in yourself and in others; which amounts to: Love yourself through God in others; or to: Love others through God in yourself. Do not separate God, yourself, and the other creatures. God does not manifest outside of the world, and your life is not separate from that of other creatures.<sup>1</sup>

Leroux challenges the exclusive dichotomy of vertical and horizontal relationships of love, proposing instead a dynamic triangulation between the self, the other, and God—a God who is no longer purely transcendent but is intrinsically present within the self, the other, and their bond. With God as the objective element, the mediator of two subjectivities, the structure advanced by the French philosopher seems to anticipate the debate on individualism and solidarity that would soon animate sociological reflection (think of Émile Durkheim and the concept of differentiation and organic solidarity)<sup>2</sup>, but also to overcome the externality and one-sidedness of the relationship between God and the subject. Precisely by virtue of this reference to a mediating institution, which, by virtue of its transcendence (God must remain God, he cannot dissolve into pure immanence) offers the relational space, the *ethos*, within which to love the self and the other. Leroux defines this relational space, society, as “milieu”:

Let us simply say that, just as an animal cannot exist without the milieu in which its sensitivity is exercised, so too man, as a rational being, lives in a certain milieu—society—whose more general name is humanity. Morality, politics, sciences, and the arts are the various aspects that this milieu presents to human reason and sensitivity; and it is man himself who, through the successive development of his nature, has created this milieu. (...) It (society) is the new milieu, the true milieu, the only milieu in which

<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, 209.

<sup>2</sup> See Matteo Cavalleri, “L'individualità nel nodo di differenziazione, relazione e istituzione. Echi concettuali tra la solidarietà organica di É. Durkheim e l'eticità hegeliana”, *Filosofia politica*, no. 2 (2024): 307-326.

the existence of this being—who has emerged from the animal condition and is called man—develops.<sup>1</sup>

As Warren Breckman points out, “society is no longer something we relate to, but something that enables relation”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, society turns out to be a “symbolic space”,<sup>3</sup> traversed by ties that, as we have seen, are actual because they are invisible.<sup>4</sup> Only this symbolic gaze allows Leroux to hold together, in a non-fusion relationship, individual and society, particular and universal, relation and difference (fleeing what he defines as absolute socialism and absolute individualism). This results, in Leroux’s perspective, in the transcendental status of society: “society”, in fact, “is not a being in the same sense that we are beings”,<sup>5</sup> while permitting our very existence as relational subjects. A result that Leroux achieves precisely thanks to the theological mediation briefly mentioned here. A mediation that remains effective only when God’s transcendence is preserved:

It seems that Leroux’s wager was that a transcendent God is a key to opening the social space as a milieu for free human social interaction, a milieu that sustains people, enables their interactions, but does not engulf them. Operating as a principle of alterity, the horizon of transcendence breaks the hold of rationalist fatalism and opens human beings to their individual and collective possibilities for free action.<sup>6</sup>

A philosophy, that of Leroux, in which the message of revelation, its content, is radically emancipated from the authority of Christianity and, at the same time, confirms, on the one hand, the immeasurable ontological distance

<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, 116-117.

<sup>2</sup> Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key”, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key”, 72. Miguel Abensour and Georges Navet also emphasize the symbolic nature of society in Leroux’s thought. See Miguel Abensour, “Postface: Comment une philosophie de l’humanité peut-elle être une philosophie politique moderne?” in *Pierre Leroux, Aux philosophes, aux artistes, aux politiques. Trois discours et autres textes*, ed. Jean-Pierre Lacassagne (Payot, 1994), 295–320, and Georges Navet, *Pierre Leroux: Politique, socialisme et philosophie* (Société P.-J. Proudhon, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Hence Leroux’s criticism of 18th-century philosophical positions that considered only individuals to exist and considered universal or collective beings to be mere abstractions: “Those philosophers were in grave error. They did not comprehend anything that was not tangible to the senses; they did not comprehend the invisible” (Leroux, “De l’individualisme et du socialisme”, 164).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Leroux, “Culte”, in Leroux, *A la source perdue du socialisme français*, 225.

<sup>6</sup> Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key”, 84.

between God and the human—despite the constant relationship between the two poles—and, on the other, the infinite possibilities of human interpretation of revelation. He indeed writes: “we admit the Revelation as a divine fact and nonetheless we are not Christians, we reject all idolatry”.<sup>1</sup> Yet, at the same time, he confirms that revelation, while divinely inspired, is always “spoken” through human words within the context of societal relationships. In fact, it is precisely this revelation that invisibly weaves the fabric and order of society:

A specific revelation may come to have authoritative status within a society, indeed it may even provide the ground for the creation of new institutions, but it will always be symbolic, remaining in the tension between the visible and the invisible, the sayable and the un sayable. And in its inexhaustibility, it should be open to a collective hermeneutical process that aims simultaneously at disclosing the divine truth and constituting the human order.<sup>2</sup>



From this dual effort arises the framework proposed by Leroux, which indeed finds its *ratio* in union, but at the same time allows for the delimitation, the safeguarding, of the right of individuality.

Within the triadic structure outlined—God, the self, and the other—universalization (or what could be termed the “third objective” in Hegelian terms) establishes the law of differentiation, distinguishing between the self and the concrete other. Likewise, the universal—love for God—comes into being only through the particular. A topic that is best understood—despite Leroux’s limited familiarity with Hegelian philosophy and his attack on the Hegelian left precisely for its tendency to deny transcendence in a radical immanence<sup>3</sup>—by

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Leroux, “Du cours de philosophie de Schelling: Aperçu de la situation de la philosophie en Allemagne”, in Leroux, *Discours de Schelling à Berlin. Du cours de philosophie de Schelling. Du christianisme*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key”, 82.

<sup>3</sup> See Breckman, “Politics in a Symbolic Key”, 83.

recalling the structure of Hegelian individuality, in which the unity of universal and particular is expressed:

*particularity* reflected *into itself* and thereby restored to universality. It is *individuality* [*Einzelheit*], the *self-determination* of the ‘I’, in that it posits itself as the negative of itself, that is, as *determinate* and *limited*, and at the same time remains with itself [*bei sich*], that is, in its *identity with itself* and universality.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The philosophical recovery of the concept of solidarity allows Leroux to grasp the social nature of human beings and all their activities, avoiding the risks of substantiality and fusion. As Bruno Karsenti has pointed out, “we are individuals, and we are socialized—we are truly both. More precisely, we are individuals insofar as we are socialized. And we are socialized by virtue of our individuality, by the way in which it is constructed and affirmed as a free individuality.”<sup>2</sup>

In Leroux’s theoretical perspective, only a reconsideration of the ontological and axiological status of the world and life—and their history—as the product of human progress, technology, and perfectibility allows for the reestablishment and continuous weaving of the bond between the self and the other, thus reconciling egoism and solidarity in a society founded on freedom.

This brings us back to the issue of the relationship between the individual and humanity, understood in its social concreteness, the only domain in which universal and reciprocal solidarity can be conceived. Bruno Viard writes in this regard:

There is no humanity without individuals, just as there are no individuals without humanity. This is the dialectic: from an ontological perspective, the ability to think of the singular and the plural at the same time; that is, in moral terms, egoism and altruism, and in political terms, freedom and equality.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1991), §7. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Karsenti, “Éticit  e anomia”, *Filosofia politica*, no. 1 (2016): 26.

<sup>3</sup> Viard, *Pierre Leroux, penseur de l’humanit *, 72.

A dialectic grounded in a specific philosophical anthropology: “I will start from the *homme individu* and demonstrate the necessary bond between man and humanity”,<sup>1</sup> writes Leroux in the opening of the First Book of *De l’Humanité*. For him, in opposition to theocratic perspectives, the individual is, in fact, the primary subject: the self and subjectivity are the genesis of everything. But the self (*le moi*), he continues, is defined in relation to what it is not: that is, the non-self (*le non-moi*).<sup>2</sup> And this non-self cannot consist in the objectivity of a transcendent God or nature, but is made up of all the other selves. At the foundation of the self, therefore, lies a self-transcendence of the self, a “detachment from oneself” as Blais writes: “We are subjects only because there exist—before us, with us, and after us—other subjects to whom we are connected”.<sup>3</sup> According to Leroux, it is therefore reasonable to believe that every individual encompasses not only the “you”—the singular other who shapes them—but also humanity as a whole, spanning both space and time. Consequently, society is not the product of a contract but the framework through which individuality is realized. Alongside rationality, what determines the subject is her/him connection with humanity, through which she/he obtain the concrete conditions for individual differentiation. Without this bond, man cannot exist. Solidarity is the vehicle for achieving our humanity. Life, as socially mediated, is understood by Leroux as a “milieu”, i.e., Blais argues, “it is not an individual property, it goes beyond the individual, and encompasses the totality of beings”<sup>4</sup>. As we have already seen, for Leroux, the life of an individual is not only immanent to them, but extends beyond them, into other individuals and into all of humanity. Solidarity—only when understood in its universality and reciprocity—is the principle capable of organizing a society in this world, that is, the concrete form of the manifestation of the relationship between the individual and humanity. Such a society can, on the one hand, create a “sacred” form of egoism, as Leroux points out, one based on reciprocity—that is, on the idea that we will only be subjects if our fellow beings are as well—thereby rejecting the bourgeois form of egoism, which is atomizing. On the other hand, such a society can establish a framework

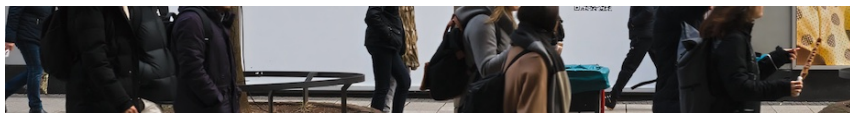
<sup>1</sup> Leroux, *De l’Humanité*, 121.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid*, 158.

<sup>3</sup> Blais, *La solidarité*, 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

designed to promote “the unity of humankind across time and space, along with the mutual solidarity of all human beings: this is the ultimate principle upon which family, city, and property must be organized”<sup>1</sup> and preserved as open and free.



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<sup>1</sup> *Revue sociale*, (March 1846): 111.

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