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Meritocracy and the *rational* Exclusion of the Other in Enlightenment's emancipative Discourses: The case of 18th Century Freemasonry

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In this paper I attempt at providing some arguments for the thesis that every appeal for (radical) egalitarianism and universal inclusion *necessarily* leads to postulating mechanisms of social differentiation and exclusion based on meritocratic criteria. These criteria are usually related to traditional conservative or right discourses, since they serve as justification for the inevitability, of social and economic inequity —these discourses pretend to see— and to criticise (compulsory) solidarity¹. So, egalitarian emancipative discourses end up supporting economic, social and political practices they tend to contest. According to this thesis, which provides the conceptual horizon of the present paper, the fact that such discourses, no matter how universalist their pretension might be, can be used for justifying the exclusion of individuals from society is not, as one would suppose, due to a wrong application of the respective ideas, but, on the contrary, results from having consistently inferred from the respective egalitarian principles. Consequently, there is no qualitative difference between egalitarian emancipative discourses and discourses attempting at justifying the exclusion of some groups or individuals from a particular society (or from the world society) such as the ones articulated by conservative, racist, nationalist and fundamentalist religious thinkers, movements and institutions. Both groups possess a similar excluding potential, since both consider merit as the only criterion that can guarantee real equality. The question in each case, though, is what kind of individuals is considered not to be worth of being part of the whole and what kind of arguments is used to justify the exclusion. In other words: The difference is to be found in what for each of both positions is meritorious. Being aware of this will let us consider current social excluding mechanisms in Europe and the reactions against them from a new perspective, as I will try to show in the third and last part of the present paper.

¹ See i.a. R. Nozick, *Property, Justice and the Minimal State*. Cambridge, 1991.

The thesis about the particular connexion between egalitarianism and meritocracy will be illustrated by both an analysis of and a critical reflection on the meaning central ideas in modern political thought –such as ‘man’, ‘society’ and ‘state’, ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘brotherhood’– receive in the foundational text of Enlightenment Freemasonry: the *Old Charges* (1723)². Accordingly I will attempt to show i) that the egalitarian discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry represents a clear example of the development during the European Enlightenment of an at that time new way of justifying the exclusion of individuals from the benefits of society; ii) that the novelty of this justification consists in its being based on “objective”/“rational” arguments, contrary to other forms of argumentations mainly based on religious or racial differences; iii) that Freemasonry justification for the “enlightened” excluding device is based on the premises of the egalitarian discourse of Freemasonry, which belongs to a new form of conceiving equality, namely, as based on rational arguments, opposed to other modern egalitarian discourses based on dogmatic, arbitrary or merely subjective arguments such as authority, belief or superstition (e.g. B. de las Casas’ discourse for the recognition of the humanity of Amerindians and M. Astell’s discourse for the recognition of equality between men and women); iv) and, finally, that the power of persuasion of the rationality (objectivity, impartiality) that is at work in the arguments for inclusion or exclusion, not only made possible that this (at the time) new egalitarian discourse prevailed upon the discourse of pre-Enlightenment or conservative/moderate Enlightenment ideologies, but is also still effective in our present, since it constitutes the conceptual basis of current exclusion mechanisms.

This at that time new exclusion mechanism is what I want to call “*rational exclusion*”, the origin of which can certainly be situated in modern political thought. According to the presuppositions of the present paper, an analysis of the case of 18th Century Freemasonry should clearly show the logical dynamic of this mechanism of exclusion. Therefore, it is not my intention to examine the rituals as such of Freemasonry nor focus on its esoteric, mystic or metaphysical message³. I will strictly focus on the set of ideas articulated in Freemasonry discourse, which let imagine a certain (democratic, egalitarian, emancipative) interaction between individuals. This imagined scenario and its realization in the lodges can be seen as one of the several manifestations of the emergence of the *public sphere* in the Enlightenment. In this sense by “Enlightenment Freemasonry” I mean a social institution of Europe’s 18th Century consisting in imaging, praising, promoting and

² J. Anderson, “The Charges of a Free-Mason”, in: *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*. London 1723, S. 49-56.

³ About esoteric elements in Enlightenment Freemasonry vide M. Neugebauer-Wölk, “Zur Konzipierung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Freimaurerei und Esoterik”, in: J. Berger & K.-J. Grün (eds.): *Geheime Gesellschaft. Weimar und die deutsche Freimaurerei*. München/Wien 2002, pp. 80-89.

realising a form of interaction between individuals out of the scope of the state that makes the *experience* of equality among individuals possible. So, the object of analysis is “the case of Freemasonry” considered as an attempt at creating a public space for free discussion and free interaction between individuals based on the idea that all human beings are *per naturam* equals.

The analysis will therefore concentrate on the *egalitarian* discourse articulated in Freemasonry foundational writing. The above-mentioned ideas will be examined in the light of the question about how universality, individual subjectivity and criteria for differentiation or introduction of differences among individuals are constructed in this discourse. This analysis is guided by the presupposition that the main topics of Freemasonry egalitarian discourse and, first of all, its distinction between *fair* (rational) and *unfair* (dogmatic) exclusion of individuals are, as already said, still present in the way we think of the social and the political. Therefore an analysis of this event in the history of European political and philosophical thinking will contribute to an analysis of some problems in the social and political situation of contemporary Europe.

The present paper is divided in three parts: (1) I will begin with an explanation of why the discourse of Freemasonry can be considered both a democratic and a revolutionary or radical one, why egalitarianism represents the ideological core of Freemasonry discourse and what its egalitarianism basically consists in. Then (2) I will analyse how ideas such as ‘man’, ‘society’ and ‘state’; ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘brotherhood’ are conceived in Freemasonry egalitarian discourse by focussing on two points: how universality, (radical) egalitarianism, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are conceived; and how the mechanism of exclusion is developed in this discourse. The results of this analysis will lead to (3) a critical consideration of the conceptual legacy of this egalitarian discourse in the light of some of the principal problems of the current political crisis in Europe.

1 Freemasonry Democratic Discourse: the Central Question on (radical) Equality

By ‘democratic discourse’ I mean, following E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe, a set of ideas, articulated in a discourse, that let resignify inter-subjective relationships that were regarded until then as normal or acceptable, by unmasking their oppressive nature, unjust character and/or incompatibility with the dignity of the human being. Characteristic of democratic discourses is that the displacement of meaning they exert, opens up the

possibility for a *real* change in the mentioned relation by means of emancipative practices.⁴

Without any doubt Enlightenment Freemasonry has contributed to change the perception people had at that time of the social order, which was hierarchically structured according to dogmatic principles. Enlightenment Freemasonry could achieve this not only by articulating an emancipative egalitarian discourse –although some of its ideas can sound a little bit conservative or reactionary to our postmodern ears–, but also by giving individuals the possibility of experiencing the equality they could not find in the *real* world. Although the *Old Charges*, as we will see in part (2), reserves the right to become a mason exclusively to certain male individuals; it is also true that the historical development of Freemasonry during the European Enlightenment and in the next centuries shows an increasing tendency, supported on Freemasonry principles, to include social groups initially marginalized from Freemasonry (in the case of the women by creating, for example, the *Lodges of Adoption* in the 18th century in France or mixed orders such as *Les Droits Humains* at the end of the 19th century). Furthermore, it has to be said that as a result of the egalitarian message of Freemasonry many people throughout Europe during the Enlightenment tried to be part of this institution or to apply its principles and practices in the real world⁵. So, the initial discrimination of some male individuals and all women we find in the *Old Charges* can be considered a *wrong inference* from the principles postulated in this writing maybe due to cultural and historical conditions.

Although Enlightenment democratic discourses are conceptually based on the ideals of *freedom*, *equality* and *brotherhood*, they differ from each other in giving predominance to one of the three ideals and so establishing a certain dependence of the other two to the chosen one. In the case of Freemasonry democratic discourse, as we will see, equality constitutes the conceptual basis from which on freedom and brotherhood must be conceived. Freemasonry social and political message is, thus, principally a plea for equality, which is understood as condition of possibility for brotherhood and freedom. Precisely its insistence on the recognition that all human beings as such are equals and on the benefits resulting from a praxis according to this reality is what constitutes the core of Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse and its (at that time) revolutionary character. This can be seen not only in the Masonic writings in which the principles of this institution are presented, but also in the 18th Century anti-Masonic literature. Indeed, the majority of this

⁴ Cf. E. Laclau & Ch. Mouffe, *Hegemonía y estrategia socialista. Hacia una radicalización de la democracia*. Madrid 1987, p. 173.

⁵ About the historical development of Freemasonry and its contribution during the Enlightenment to the propagation of egalitarianism I emphatically recommend the reader to see: M. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, London & Boston 1981; and *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*, Oxford 1991.

last group of writings concentrate their criticisms on the idea of equality Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse and practices were based on. In this criticism we can see that the discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry was not principally considered as a wrong explanation of reality or a fantastic plot without any philosophical basis, but first of all as a way of thinking and interacting that was very dangerous for the established social order. The threat to the established hierarchical social order is seen in the egalitarianism both proposed in the *Old Charges* and other doctrinal writings and pamphlets, and praised in an infinity of songs, composed in the 18th century, about what it means to be a Mason.

As an example of the reactions against Freemasonry message of egalitarianism we can find in the anti-Masonic literature the anonymous pamphlet: *Masonry, the Way to Hell*⁶. In this book, Freemasonry is certainly criticized from a moral and theological point of view. The author adverts the reader about “the impiety and absurdity of its [sc. of Freemasonry] mysteries and the wickedness of those who profess them”⁷. In a rhetorical way the author depicts the end of religion and morality as a result of the influence of Freemasonry on individuals: “Adieu religion! Adieu morality! Farewell, ye deceitful phantoms!”⁸. Nevertheless, at the end of both quoted passages the real point clearly comes to light: for the author of the pamphlet the central problem is not the absurdity and impiety of the mysteries as such, but actually “the malignant influence of this institution [sc. Freemasonry] on society”⁹ exerted by its message and practices that let vanish “all distinction of right and wrong”¹⁰.

So, it is all about the social and political consequences of Freemasonry egalitarian message, which as such tends to the abolition of all differences. The author certainly criticizes Freemasons’ laxity concerning drinking habits and women. There is also a religious criticism: “we suppress brothels, we prohibit by penal laws the religious conventions of heretics, while in reality there are no places where impiety and enthusiasm are so effectually propagated, as in the holy lodge of St. John”¹¹. But again the problem is not impiety as such nor that Freemasons profess a different religion or a kind of ecumenism, but that they propose a religion *without authority*, namely, without a religious institution conceived as *indispensable medium* between God and men. Hence, the central point is the issue of authority, which is intimately related to the issue of equality: “they [sc. the Freemasons] profess at their meeting to acknowledge no distinction of character”¹²,

⁶ Anonymous, *Masonry, the Way to Hell. A Sermon wherein is clearly proved, both from Reason and Scripture, that all who profess the Mysteries are in a state of Damnation*. London 1768.

⁷ *Ib.* p. 8.

⁸ *Ib.* p. 16.

⁹ *Ib.* p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ib.* p. 16.

¹¹ *Ib.* p. 21.

¹² *Ib.* p. 27.

“the prince and the porter, the lord and the lackey, are all upon equality: all are united by a friendly grip”¹³.

This can more clearly be seen in another anti-Masonic writing: the *Compendio della vita, e della gesta di Conte Cagliostro*¹⁴, on which Freemasonry ecumenical message that “the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Calvinist and the Jew [are] equally good, in as far as they all believe on the existence of God and the immortality of the soul”¹⁵, is seen as an attack against the Catholic Church as one of the guarantors of social order. In the *Compendio* it is also said that Freemasonry attack on religion is not essentially a theological matter, but a strategy aimed at destroying the Catholic Religion and Monarchy. Accordingly, Freemasonry pursues a “goal contrary to [the goal of] the state and to public tranquility”¹⁶. Indeed, in the *Compendio* it is affirmed that this kind of religious egalitarianism, which consists in a sort of *indifference* toward the doctrinal particularities of institutionalized religions, necessarily leads to sedition and riot (*sedizione e tumulto*) and that Freemasonry discourse on humanity, equity, purged morals and religion (*religione e morale depurata*) pursues exclusively one goal: the destruction of the rights of property and of the ranks of orders or classes [*graduazioni di Ordini*], “which are the strongest bond of society”¹⁷.

Freemasonry message of egalitarianism permitted forms of associations between individuals that were impossible in real life. When the author of the first quoted writing, *Masonry, a Way to Hell*, tells the reader not to believe in the promise of Freemasons that, if he enters the lodge, he will receive help from his *brethren*, when he needs it¹⁸; he is actually trying to influence against the creation of ties between social groups or classes that in real life would have never met, because the system did not allow it.

Freemasonry egalitarian practices in the Enlightenment allows some people to enjoy the feeling of being equal. This was certainly an experience that did not correspond to daily life. Nevertheless, for the unknown author of *Masonry, A Way to Hell* the real problem is not the experience of a fictional or parallel reality based on equality, but the consequences of such an experience, namely that this kind of lived experiences, on the one hand, leads to a change in the perception of the social order (the real) by contrasting it with a possible and fairer reality (the ideal), and so, on the other, encourages imagination to seek ways to establish a fairer (egalitarian) social order. Precisely this dialectic view of hierarchical social order fostered by Freemasonry egalitarianism and consisting in seeing

¹³ *Ib.* p. 28.

¹⁴ G. Barberi, *Compendio della vita, e delle gesta di Giuseppe Balsamo, denominato il conte Cagliostro che si è estratto dal processo contro di lui formato in Roma l'anno 1790. E che può servire di scorta per conoscere l'indole della setta de' Liberi muratori*. Roma 1791.

¹⁵ *Ib.* p. 151, my translation.

¹⁶ *Ib.* p. 82, my translation.

¹⁷ *Ib.* p. 4, my translation.

¹⁸ Cf. *Masonry, the Way to Hell*, p. 29 f.

hierarchical social order as something fortuitous or to be abolished, is what the author of the pamphlet is observing, when he accuses Freemasonry of nurturing the “pernicious and delusive ambition”¹⁹ in the low classes of being treated as equals. So, there is without any doubt an at that time radical/revolutionary component in Freemasonry discourse: *its conception of a possible world absolutely based on equality.*

The radical character of Freemasonry equality consists basically in its *indifference* to all distinction among individuals *as such*, namely to the particularities that constitute the individualities of each subjectivity. According to the examined writings, Freemasonry considers each individual merely as human being bracketing the social and economic situation and the religion of the individual. Equality is then essentially a result of negating precisely that which distinguishes individuals from each other, more clearly: of abstracting from the *singularity* of each human being. Equality is thus the result of a negative process, something that can only be reached by removing from reality some elements that do not let individuals recognise that all human beings as such are equals. This abstract or negative equality is based on a particular notion of human being that implies a conception of the whole of social and political life. The different components related to equality will be analysed in the following part of this paper.

2 Constructing Universality: The Egalitarian Discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry

Enlightenment egalitarian discourses have to be understood in the context of the struggle against political and metaphysical dogmatism for recognition and equality during the European modern era. In order to understand the particularity of these discourses and, specifically, of Freemasonry egalitarianism, we first have to briefly refer to modern egalitarian discourses that are not fully based on objective or impartial principles. In its conceptual diversity, the Enlightenment offers a lot of examples of such discourses. I will refer to one related to the Feminist struggle for recognition in the Enlightenment.

Previous to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*²⁰ —a plea for equality among men and women based on rational (objective) arguments— namely, during the so-called *Querelle des Dames*, the arguments either for or against the recognition of the humanity and rights of women were based in principles derived from the Catholic Dogma, theology, Christian philosophy and a particular interpretation of Aristotle. At the end of this debate, actually initiated by *male* theologians and philosophers, we find one of the

¹⁹ *Ib.* p. 27.

²⁰ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London 1792.

most representative female voices joining this discussion: Mary Astell. Her arguments for equality between man and woman were deduced in general from the Catholic beliefs and fundamentally from the following two dogmas: i) that God does nothing without reason and ii) that both man and woman were created in God's own image.

One of M. Astell's arguments is: "if God had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason, He wou'd not have given them any, for He does nothing in vain"²¹. Another of her most important arguments reads as follows: "If all men are born free [since man and women are created in God's own image, and God is free], how is it that all women are born slaves?"²² In doing this, Astell was saying: if what you say and what you believe in, is true, then you have to recognize that we are all equals.

The idea of human being in Astell's emancipative discourse, however, still falls short of universality, since her plea for equality is based on a religious conception of reality that does not criticise the dogmatic pillars of monarchy. Indeed her discourse for equality still distinguishes at least two kinds of individuals: the monarch and his or her subjects. She was a Tory and accordingly believed in the necessity of the subject's absolute obedience to the monarch. Indeed, this subjectivity (Mary Astell) introduced itself neither as a mere rational being nor as a mere woman, but as a *Daughter of the Church of England*. Her struggle for the recognition of women is based on the same principles of the social order that excludes women from the benefits of society. Therefore, her discourse is an attempt at radicalizing the moral values as well as the interpretation of reality of the English social, political and religious order of her time.

This strategy certainly gives to her argument a very strong force of persuasion, because it is presupposed that she is not doing nothing but correctly applying the principles recognized by both sides in the dispute. But because it is based on the beliefs of a particular religion with a particular history and relationship to political power, her discourse at the same time doesn't necessarily contradict the form of government upheld by her oppressors. Furthermore, she reproduces the exclusion mechanisms of the group that excluded her and all women. Hence, her plea for equality consists in increasing the extension of the set of the subjects of law by means of the demonstration of the current misapplication of the concept to reality –namely that a right application implies the inclusion of women in the community of subjects of law–, but without criticizing the intension of the concept. Nevertheless, M. Astell's discourse is articulated by her conviction of representing the whole of the humankind. Therefore, she identified "member of the Church of England" with "human being". If we do not understand this discursive

²¹ M. Astell, *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England*. London, 1705. Section 5.

²² M. Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage. With Additions*. London (4th ed.) 1730, "Appendix", p. 150.

strategy and the undesired consequences it implies, then we will not understand why she is a monarchist, although she seems to be arguing for radical egalitarianism, and we will think of having found contradictions in her thinking.²³

Concerning M. Astell's emancipative discourse, we could say from the point of view of European Enlightenment common sense that the problem lies precisely in the fact that "reason", understood as an impartial tribunal, is not undertaking the determining role in both the conception of "human being" and the construction of universality. Then this is the reason why the pretended universality of Astell's democratic discourse neglects political rights to some individuals or groups that did not share determined qualities. Instead of a *consistent* universal concept of human being, Astell's concept has certain predicates that do not actually belong to all human beings, but to a particular social group (the Church of England). So, considered from the point of view of European Enlightenment common sense, a solution to this problem should consist of removing from the concept of human being, on which equality is to be based, all predicates or differences that do not belong to all human beings. This kind of operation of thought is *abstraction*. It is therefore all about the construction of an *abstract* concept of human being that as such must not be "contaminated" by the particularities of the individuals, so this concept can really encompass the totality of humankind and allows for the construction of a consistent universality.

In the Enlightenment, this idea of human being resulted from reconsidering the human being from the perspective of reason understood as a pure, universal, objective and, therefore, impartial instance of judgement. This attempt has to be seen as a reaction against every form of argumentation that is dogmatically based on authority and beliefs. Enlightenment's maxim can be formulated as follows: *only what reason recognizes as true, fair, convenient and good, is objectively and universally true, fair, convenient and good, and should therefore be accepted and recognized as such.*

2.1 The individual

In establishing a definition of human being, Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse follows the aforementioned maxim. The idea of human being postulated in the *Old Charges* appears under the figure of the *mason*. The mason has to be understood as the representative of the idea of human being. This universal notion of human being is forged by Freemasonry by means of abstraction from all particularities in human individualities.

²³ This is the case for example of R. Perry's reading of M. Astell's thinking: "All the contradictions of the period we call "The Enlightenment" were embodied in the life and writings of Mary Astell, a feminist intellectual who lived from 1666 to 1731. She argued for the rights of women yet she upheld absolute monarchy in the state." R. Perry, "Mary Astell's Response to the Enlightenment", in: *Women and the Enlightenment*. New York 1984, pp. 13-40, here 13.

So, the universality of “human being” is based on its indeterminacy: the less predicates the concept possesses, the more extension the concept has. The mason is therefore the incarnation of an abstract notion of human being.

At the beginning of the first chapter, “Concerning God and Religion”, of the *Constitutional Part of the Old Charges* a definition of mason is given. In order to achieve universality some particularities of the existing singularity have to be removed. So, to become a worthy representative of humanity, individuals have to leave “their particular Opinions to themselves”²⁴; individuals must be considered only in the light of the *moral law*, which can be understood as a kind of moral instinct in terms of modern moral consciousness. This law is the criterion for judging an individual. In the lodge it is only important whether the individual “is a good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish’d”²⁵. Particular opinions, denominations and convictions have to be left outside of the consideration of the individual, because they are not necessary predicates of the notion of “human being” and, therefore, of each individual understood as mere human being. Furthermore, the social, cultural, national and historical character of each personality as well as feelings like envy²⁶ are an obstacle for the establishment of a free and equal interaction among individuals.

Particular (institutionalized) religions also have to be set aside. For the human being has no concrete religion, but only the one “in which all Men agree”²⁷. And, as I already mentioned, individuals have *essentially* no concrete customs or morals as well. They, considered exclusively as human beings, only have “to obey the moral Law”²⁸.

As it can be seen, Freemasonry emancipative discourse postulates a praxis of *purification* of the self as condition for acceptance in the lodge. One has to purify his or her “self” in order to become a worthy representative of the ideal of human being. The resulting individuality is universal by grace of its abstract character. Because of this purification, equality and free interaction occur on the soil of a reciprocal identification of the individuals as manifestations of the *same*, namely as instances of the same concept. They recognize each other merely as human beings in terms of a rational being without any particular determination, but not as historical singularities.

The abstracting procedure for the establishment of Freemasonry idea of human being is rational in the sense that the only criterion is pure reason, which guarantees the impartiality of the resulting concept. The concept is therefore not contaminated by particularities of the subjectivity who has conceived it. This procedure shows that in the

²⁴ J. Anderson, op. cit. p. 50.

²⁵ *Ib.*

²⁶ *Ib.* p. 53: “None shall discover Envy at the Prosperity of a Brother”.

²⁷ *Ib.* p. 51.

²⁸ *Ib.* p. 50.

light of pure reason, individuals appear only as pure human beings. The idea of human being expresses that which reason recognizes as essential in human beings and therefore, since individuals must act in a rational way, that which each individual must recognize in the others.

2.2 Society

Freemasonry equality is based on the concept of human being described above. The universality of this concept becomes concrete in the lodge understood as the space where equality becomes real in the form of free interaction and discussion among individuals. The lodge can be considered as a place situated between the public and the private spheres of human life, where free interaction between individuals *outside of the scope of the state* is possible. Freemasonry appears as a place where freedom, equality and brotherhood can become reality, although it is a special kind of reality, *namely a secret²⁹ and closed one*. So, in order to fulfil these ideals of human emancipation, individuals have created a closed place situated outside the scope of the establish authority as well as outside of the real public life. It may sound somewhat contradictory, but it is precisely this apparent contradiction that makes it an interesting subject, among other reasons because it will let us more easily see the construction of equality and universality (totality) in the Enlightenment and today.

Enlightenment Freemasonry's point of departure for the construction of a space for free interaction is the acknowledgment that the real world (real society and the state guarantying order in society) is not structured in a way that can make such an interaction possible. The elements that do not let free interaction arise (social and economic differences, hierarchy, and political and religious differences) are products of the real society. This is the reason why it is necessary to create an alternative place inside reality, which can guarantee the envisioned free interaction.

For Enlightenment Freemasonry mentality, this was actually not a diagnosis of a particular situation, but a necessary consequence of the idea that real society necessarily

²⁹ The importance of secrecy for guaranteeing freedom of speech and thought should not be interpreted as something originally coming from Freemasonry ideology or a symptomatic manifestation of a kind of paranoia in Freemasonry thinking. For the common sense of the Enlightenment, it was obvious that it was very dangerous for the professional carrier of an individual in public life (if not for his or her life) to freely express his or her thoughts. Some words of a young E. Burke confessing to a friend in 1744, when he was student at Trinity College, can serve as example of this: "We live in a world where everyone is on the catch, and the only way to be safe is to be silent –silent in any affair of consequence; and I think it would not be a bad rule for every man to keep within what he thinks of others, of himself, and of his own affairs" (quoted from B. J. Spruyt, "Een omstreden erfenis: Edmund Burke in Nederland", in: E. Burke, *Het wezen van het conservatisme. Een bloemlezing uit Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Kampen/Kapellen 2002, p. 11.). About the fundamental role of secrecy for Freemasonry see R. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. Cambridge, Mass. 1988, p. 83 f.

sets men apart. This is an idea shared by many Enlightenment thinkers and which is always related to Rousseau's conviction that society pervades individuals. The first goal of Freemasonry or the first reason for the creation of Lodges is to bring together what the world has set apart. Accordingly, masonry is defined in the *Old Charges* as "the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remained at a perpetual Distance"³⁰.

From the very beginning a barrier is set between the real world and the lodge. The barrier divides reality in two domains: the profane world and the sacred one, i.e. the temple (lodge). Nevertheless, in doing so, Freemasonry does not explicitly or consciously attempt to subvert the social order. On the contrary, the conception of the lodge as a parallel world is based on the presupposition that society and its exclusion mechanisms are impossible to overcome. The barrier between temple and profane world is constitutive for the lodge. If real society would not have set men apart, then the lodge as such would be unnecessary.

The lodge must be considered as the place where individual differences are bracketed. Accordingly, the lodge constitutes a moment of suspension of the validity of the real world. The lodge is a space, where recognition and equality are at work and the possibility for free interaction is given to everyone. Freedom is, however, not primarily positive freedom, but freedom *from* the profane world. A free place *for* free interaction of free individuals results therefore *from* excluding all conflicts, ideologies, differences, etc. So, the establishment of the lodge is essentially a negative move. Freemasonry does not solve the differences that have set men apart, but shows that they are not essential, namely that they do not have to play any role in human interaction. A rational being (here: a mason) must recognize this and consistently act, namely he or she must treat the others as mere (pure) human being without considering the historical background of the others. The negative fundamental character of the lodge understood as the social (inter-subjective) moment of the pure human being is repeated in the relation between the lodge and the state.

2.3 The State

The mason as the manifestation of the pure human being, it has been said, has no nationality. Nationality is one of the particularities that have to be left outside of the lodge in order to achieve the purification required to enter the community of equals. Nationality not only contradicts the universality of "the human being" and produces conflicts that are superficial or artificial, since they are not directly related to the essence of the individuals,

³⁰ *Ib.* p. 50.

but it is also a dogmatic difference, namely a difference that the individual has not made freely.

The rejection of nationality brings Freemasonry subjectivity nearer to the figure of Enlightenment cosmopolitan subject. Cosmopolitans certainly are, as M. Jacob says, “stranger nowhere in the world”³¹, but not because they *accept* all nations and they feel citizen of all nations, but because they *neglect* them and consequently the authority of every particular state. They are citizens of the world in terms of members of a community liberated from the coercive power of every political authority. For Freemasonry common sense as well as for Enlightenment mentality, above the rules of the state are the moral values and the objective knowledge (truth), which can be recognized as such exclusively by a consistent use of reason. For Freemasonry as well as for many Enlightenment thinkers in the line of Rousseau, the state usually follows other principles than the ones given by reason, so its principles are neither impartial nor objective. The state does not correspond, therefore, with the purity of the human being. The state is impure, insofar as it is a necessary consequence of the immorality this kind of thinking pretended to see all over the *real* world.

The subjectivity postulated by Freemasonry discourse neglects the authority of the state opposing to all political powers the primacy of morals and truth. The ideal human being is therefore an *apolitical being*. The state is, as Thomas Paine said, nothing but a necessary evil:

“Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best is but a necessary evil.”³²

The tension between society and state and the definitions of the elements of the opposition Paine is trying to advance, is the same as the tension the *Old Charges* notes between the lodge and the state. Freemasonry’s denial of state power can be found in its very specific rules to solve conflicts between Brethren without going to public trials and in its compromise to protect the political persecuted³³. So, Freemasonry makes possible social life outside of the coercive power of the state. This kind of inter-subjective life is

³¹ M. Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World. The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe*. Philadelphia, 2006.

³² Th. Paine, *Common Sense*, in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, M;D. Conway (ed.), New York & London 1804. Vol. I., p. 69.

³³ See J. Anderson, op. cit. p. 50 and 54.

actually the dreamed situation of consistent classical liberalism and radical democracy movements and discourses in the line of A. Negri's and M. Hardt's trilogy on the emancipation of the multitude from the claws of the Empire. Common to all these ideologies is the conviction that politics should have to obey the dictates of morals and that politics is something bad and impure that could be avoided if we interact consistently according to what our (universal) moral consciousness dictates.

2.4 Rational exclusion and merit

The universality envisaged in Freemasonry conception of the human being implies that everyone can be a member of the community of equals, i.e. that everyone can demand to be recognized by the others as equal in rights and duties. The only requirement consists in the mentioned process of purification of the self, which is essentially an act of freedom. The relation between individuals as equals is comprehended in the idea of Fraternity or Brotherhood as the ideal of Humanity. All individuals must consider each other brothers, i.e. members of the same *family*. But Freemasonry egalitarian discourse builds this including universality on a mechanism of exclusion: "The Persons admitted Members of a Lodge must be good and true Men, free-born, and of mature and discreet Age, no Bondmen, no Women, no immoral or scandalous Men, but of good Report."³⁴ And if there have to be differences among the brothers, they have to be according to the Merit of each individual: "All preferment among Masons is grounded upon real Worth and personal Merit only"³⁵.

Aside from the exclusion of women and bondmen, actually a dogmatic form of exclusion that as such contradicts the principles of the *Old Charges* and has therefore been abandoned in the further historical development of Freemasonry (although there are up to this day fraternities trying to rationally argue for the exclusion of women from Freemasonry), there is another kind of exclusion that can be deduced from the principles of the *Old Charges* and generally from the principles of Enlightenment common sense: the exclusion of individuals based on merit or moral values.

Contrary to dogmatic discrimination based on religious, cultural, racist, national and political differences, the exclusion based on merit and moral values corresponds with Enlightenment conviction that only differentiations based on objective or universal moral values can be tolerated in a community of rational and free beings. We see here one example of Enlightenment tension between authority and merit, dogma and (moral or objective) truth in the struggle between political and ecclesiastical power and civil society. For the Enlightenment subjectivity, merit is a difference made by freedom within a scope

³⁴ *Ib.* p. 51.

³⁵ *Ib.*

of action regulated by objective rules and based on equality. Therefore differences based on merit are, for the Enlightenment mentality, *fair* differences. On the contrary, differences based on superstition or tradition are unfair and arbitrary. As such they could not resist an impartial (scientific) examination of the arguments supporting them. Hence, the fact that there is no place in the lodge, namely in Humanity, for individuals who have not achieved success in life or who act or think contrary to the moral common sense of the community, is not unjust. For contrary to dogmatic exclusion, the rational exclusion based on distinction according to merit presupposes that the individual has had the possibility to act in a different manner, namely that he or she has been free in all decisions he or she has made in order to become what he or she now is. The exclusion in this case is not unfair; on the contrary, the individual deserves to be excluded. Hence, meritocracy is consistent deduced from the postulate that everyone as mere human being is free and can rationally conduct his or her life. As criterion for differentiation merit comes to replace arbitrary criteria of differentiation and exclusion, it also replaces the differences made by the state, for example nationality or citizenship.

As soon as a scope of action where equality is universally recognised and based on an abstract concept of human being, is established, the only possible criterion for differentiation among individuals is what they freely do and the results of their actions. Inclusion and exclusion do not depend on an external authority, but on the individuals themselves. Everyone is free to enter in the lodge and once he or she has entered it, only his or her acts will determine his or her position, duties and rights in the dynamic of the lodge.

3 Conclusion: Merit and Rational exclusion, then and today

Freemasonry concept of human being and “fair” inter-subjectivity possesses universality based on rational arguments. This was not an original idea of Freemasonry, but of the Enlightenment, I have considered Freemasonry only as an example of the former. The rationality operating in this conceptual construction consisted in identifying in the individuals only what is universal. The result is the concept of a *pure* human being, whose purity implies the denial of differences such as social status, nationality, individual conflicts, political opinions and beliefs. So, universality is achieved by means of abstraction/refusal of every particularity.

This conceptual construction reflects a particular tension between purity and impurity, between scientific or moral truth and authority and superstition, between freedom and oppression. The democratic discourse that results from Enlightenment construction of Universality, promotes the emancipation of individuals of all impurity, which implies not only the refusal of religious discourses, nationalism, racism and

ideology, but also the replacement of politics through technocracy in terms of a replacement of opinions by truth or objective criteria for judgements.

The inter-subjective relation according to equality in Freemasonry discourse proposes a particular form of tolerance consisting in being indifferent to the particularities of each individual existence. The effects these particularities could have in the relation among individuals are neutralized and with them the conflicts they could generate. Conflicts of inequality, discrimination or intolerance are solved by means of a transformation (purification) of the individuals involved in the respective conflicts. With their “purification” their conflicts lose their relevance: they are neglected as such. The rationality governing this scope of action makes the state (its laws and the necessity of its intervention) irrelevant as well.

We can see in our times that this way of thinking is still present. I think firstly on contemporary debates on multicultural societies and on recognition of the differences, where the most important attempts are conceived according to the same logic. The theories of consensus first propose an ideal of society and or individual and then require everyone to adapt her or himself to this model as a condition to take part in public discussion. Conflicts that do not allow for dialogue are neglected or ignored by classifying them as irrational, fundamentalist, contaminated with ideology, etc. The only way a conflictive discourse can take part in the public discussion (universality) is by “purifying” itself from its own “irrationality”, so it becomes a *rational* discourse. Through this operation of purification (abstraction) the real conflict or the real discourse is left outside of the framework for the discussion, i.e. is excluded, of course in an impartial way. Conflicts are therefore not really solved, but necessarily neglected, because their negation is condition of possibility for the establishment of a rational dialogue. Individuals are therefore only recognized in their identity with the ideal of rationality and humanity of those who propose the dialogue. Recognition happens under the idea of a pure human being that is actually *mutatis mutandis* the subject of today’s human rights.

Last but not least the demonstrations in Madrid and other similar movements such as the “occupy X-actions”, show the still effective potential of the idea of the pure human being. The *indignados* understand themselves essentially as apolitical beings and the “purity” of their individualities allows them to distinguish them from the impurity of the oppressive political and economical power. In all these cases individuals as well as groups or organizations do not recognize political authority and present themselves as apolitical (and that means pure) subjects that only recognizes a higher principal than authority, which usually has moral and sometimes scientific bases.

It is very interesting to see that even the economic power criticized by the above-mentioned movements follows the same logic. The discourse representing the interests of the economic world power and articulated by the majority of the politicians and of the experts in economics in Europe presents itself as a rational one meant to bring true

solutions to a problem originated by the irrationality or negligence of politicians (see the case of Greece). There is the conviction that the purity of knowledge necessarily brings solutions, among other reasons because it establishes impartiality and rationality in human relations.

Nowadays merit is still considered as the fairest form of making differences, which also means, of excluding people from a certain sphere of interaction. The same concept appears in the conformation of our liberal democracies and in their defence against arbitrary discrimination. Merit has been used to conform our *open* societies, where, like in a closed society such as a Lodge, people are not excluded because of religion, blood, race, and other arbitrary criteria. The only kind of exclusion we can still tolerate is, like in the Lodge and in the Enlightenment, one based on merit, the rationality and impartiality that nobody seems to cast into doubt. According to merit the only group that can be excluded from our open societies are the *losers*, namely, the ones whose actions do not deliver anything productive for the whole of (world) society, the ones whose actions society does not need, the ones who have never learned what a “free” society is all about, the ones who have not play this game well enough.

Meritocracy and the *rational* Exclusion of the Other in Enlightenment's emancipative Discourses: The case of 18th Century Freemasonry

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In this paper I attempt at providing some arguments for the thesis that every appeal for (radical) egalitarianism and universal inclusion *necessarily* leads to postulating mechanisms of social differentiation and exclusion based on meritocratic criteria. These criteria are usually related to traditional conservative or right discourses, since they serve as justification for the inevitability, of social and economic inequity —these discourses pretend to see— and to criticise (compulsory) solidarity¹. So, egalitarian emancipative discourses end up supporting economic, social and political practices they tend to contest. According to this thesis, which provides the conceptual horizon of the present paper, the fact that such discourses, no matter how universalist their pretension might be, can be used for justifying the exclusion of individuals from society is not, as one would suppose, due to a wrong application of the respective ideas, but, on the contrary, results from having consistently inferred from the respective egalitarian principles. Consequently, there is no qualitative difference between egalitarian emancipative discourses and discourses attempting at justifying the exclusion of some groups or individuals from a particular society (or from the world society) such as the ones articulated by conservative, racist, nationalist and fundamentalist religious thinkers, movements and institutions. Both groups possess a similar excluding potential, since both consider merit as the only criterion that can guarantee real equality. The question in each case, though, is what kind of individuals is considered not to be worth of being part of the whole and what kind of arguments is used to justify the exclusion. In other words: The difference is to be found in what for each of both positions is meritorious. Being aware of this will let us consider current social excluding mechanisms in Europe and the reactions against them from a new perspective, as I will try to show in the third and last part of the present paper.

¹ See i.a. R. Nozick, *Property, Justice and the Minimal State*. Cambridge, 1991.

The thesis about the particular connexion between egalitarianism and meritocracy will be illustrated by both an analysis of and a critical reflection on the meaning central ideas in modern political thought –such as ‘man’, ‘society’ and ‘state’, ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘brotherhood’– receive in the foundational text of Enlightenment Freemasonry: the *Old Charges* (1723)². Accordingly I will attempt to show i) that the egalitarian discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry represents a clear example of the development during the European Enlightenment of an at that time new way of justifying the exclusion of individuals from the benefits of society; ii) that the novelty of this justification consists in its being based on “objective”/“rational” arguments, contrary to other forms of argumentations mainly based on religious or racial differences; iii) that Freemasonry justification for the “enlightened” excluding device is based on the premises of the egalitarian discourse of Freemasonry, which belongs to a new form of conceiving equality, namely, as based on rational arguments, opposed to other modern egalitarian discourses based on dogmatic, arbitrary or merely subjective arguments such as authority, belief or superstition (e.g. B. de las Casas’ discourse for the recognition of the humanity of Amerindians and M. Astell’s discourse for the recognition of equality between men and women); iv) and, finally, that the power of persuasion of the rationality (objectivity, impartiality) that is at work in the arguments for inclusion or exclusion, not only made possible that this (at the time) new egalitarian discourse prevailed upon the discourse of pre-Enlightenment or conservative/moderate Enlightenment ideologies, but is also still effective in our present, since it constitutes the conceptual basis of current exclusion mechanisms.

This at that time new exclusion mechanism is what I want to call “*rational exclusion*”, the origin of which can certainly be situated in modern political thought. According to the presuppositions of the present paper, an analysis of the case of 18th Century Freemasonry should clearly show the logical dynamic of this mechanism of exclusion. Therefore, it is not my intention to examine the rituals as such of Freemasonry nor focus on its esoteric, mystic or metaphysical message³. I will strictly focus on the set of ideas articulated in Freemasonry discourse, which let imagine a certain (democratic, egalitarian, emancipative) interaction between individuals. This imagined scenario and its realization in the lodges can be seen as one of the several manifestations of the emergence of the *public sphere* in the Enlightenment. In this sense by “Enlightenment Freemasonry” I mean a social institution of Europe’s 18th Century consisting in imaging, praising, promoting and

² J. Anderson, “The Charges of a Free-Mason”, in: *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*. London 1723, S. 49-56.

³ About esoteric elements in Enlightenment Freemasonry vide M. Neugebauer-Wölk, “Zur Konzipierung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Freimaurerei und Esoterik”, in: J. Berger & K.-J. Grün (eds.): *Geheime Gesellschaft. Weimar und die deutsche Freimaurerei*. München/Wien 2002, pp. 80-89.

realising a form of interaction between individuals out of the scope of the state that makes the *experience* of equality among individuals possible. So, the object of analysis is “the case of Freemasonry” considered as an attempt at creating a public space for free discussion and free interaction between individuals based on the idea that all human beings are *per naturam* equals.

The analysis will therefore concentrate on the *egalitarian* discourse articulated in Freemasonry foundational writing. The above-mentioned ideas will be examined in the light of the question about how universality, individual subjectivity and criteria for differentiation or introduction of differences among individuals are constructed in this discourse. This analysis is guided by the presupposition that the main topics of Freemasonry egalitarian discourse and, first of all, its distinction between *fair* (rational) and *unfair* (dogmatic) exclusion of individuals are, as already said, still present in the way we think of the social and the political. Therefore an analysis of this event in the history of European political and philosophical thinking will contribute to an analysis of some problems in the social and political situation of contemporary Europe.

The present paper is divided in three parts: (1) I will begin with an explanation of why the discourse of Freemasonry can be considered both a democratic and a revolutionary or radical one, why egalitarianism represents the ideological core of Freemasonry discourse and what its egalitarianism basically consists in. Then (2) I will analyse how ideas such as ‘man’, ‘society’ and ‘state’; ‘freedom’, ‘equality’ and ‘brotherhood’ are conceived in Freemasonry egalitarian discourse by focussing on two points: how universality, (radical) egalitarianism, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are conceived; and how the mechanism of exclusion is developed in this discourse. The results of this analysis will lead to (3) a critical consideration of the conceptual legacy of this egalitarian discourse in the light of some of the principal problems of the current political crisis in Europe.

1 Freemasonry Democratic Discourse: the Central Question on (radical) Equality

By ‘democratic discourse’ I mean, following E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe, a set of ideas, articulated in a discourse, that let resignify inter-subjective relationships that were regarded until then as normal or acceptable, by unmasking their oppressive nature, unjust character and/or incompatibility with the dignity of the human being. Characteristic of democratic discourses is that the displacement of meaning they exert, opens up the

possibility for a *real* change in the mentioned relation by means of emancipative practices.⁴

Without any doubt Enlightenment Freemasonry has contributed to change the perception people had at that time of the social order, which was hierarchically structured according to dogmatic principles. Enlightenment Freemasonry could achieve this not only by articulating an emancipative egalitarian discourse –although some of its ideas can sound a little bit conservative or reactionary to our postmodern ears–, but also by giving individuals the possibility of experiencing the equality they could not find in the *real* world. Although the *Old Charges*, as we will see in part (2), reserves the right to become a mason exclusively to certain male individuals; it is also true that the historical development of Freemasonry during the European Enlightenment and in the next centuries shows an increasing tendency, supported on Freemasonry principles, to include social groups initially marginalized from Freemasonry (in the case of the women by creating, for example, the *Lodges of Adoption* in the 18th century in France or mixed orders such as *Les Droits Humains* at the end of the 19th century). Furthermore, it has to be said that as a result of the egalitarian message of Freemasonry many people throughout Europe during the Enlightenment tried to be part of this institution or to apply its principles and practices in the real world⁵. So, the initial discrimination of some male individuals and all women we find in the *Old Charges* can be considered a *wrong inference* from the principles postulated in this writing maybe due to cultural and historical conditions.

Although Enlightenment democratic discourses are conceptually based on the ideals of *freedom*, *equality* and *brotherhood*, they differ from each other in giving predominance to one of the three ideals and so establishing a certain dependence of the other two to the chosen one. In the case of Freemasonry democratic discourse, as we will see, equality constitutes the conceptual basis from which on freedom and brotherhood must be conceived. Freemasonry social and political message is, thus, principally a plea for equality, which is understood as condition of possibility for brotherhood and freedom. Precisely its insistence on the recognition that all human beings as such are equals and on the benefits resulting from a praxis according to this reality is what constitutes the core of Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse and its (at that time) revolutionary character. This can be seen not only in the Masonic writings in which the principles of this institution are presented, but also in the 18th Century anti-Masonic literature. Indeed, the majority of this

⁴ Cf. E. Laclau & Ch. Mouffe, *Hegemonía y estrategia socialista. Hacia una radicalización de la democracia*. Madrid 1987, p. 173.

⁵ About the historical development of Freemasonry and its contribution during the Enlightenment to the propagation of egalitarianism I emphatically recommend the reader to see: M. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, London & Boston 1981; and *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth Century Europe*, Oxford 1991.

last group of writings concentrate their criticisms on the idea of equality Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse and practices were based on. In this criticism we can see that the discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry was not principally considered as a wrong explanation of reality or a fantastic plot without any philosophical basis, but first of all as a way of thinking and interacting that was very dangerous for the established social order. The threat to the established hierarchical social order is seen in the egalitarianism both proposed in the *Old Charges* and other doctrinal writings and pamphlets, and praised in an infinity of songs, composed in the 18th century, about what it means to be a Mason.

As an example of the reactions against Freemasonry message of egalitarianism we can find in the anti-Masonic literature the anonymous pamphlet: *Masonry, the Way to Hell*⁶. In this book, Freemasonry is certainly criticized from a moral and theological point of view. The author adverts the reader about “the impiety and absurdity of its [sc. of Freemasonry] mysteries and the wickedness of those who profess them”⁷. In a rhetorical way the author depicts the end of religion and morality as a result of the influence of Freemasonry on individuals: “Adieu religion! Adieu morality! Farewell, ye deceitful phantoms!”⁸. Nevertheless, at the end of both quoted passages the real point clearly comes to light: for the author of the pamphlet the central problem is not the absurdity and impiety of the mysteries as such, but actually “the malignant influence of this institution [sc. Freemasonry] on society”⁹ exerted by its message and practices that let vanish “all distinction of right and wrong”¹⁰.

So, it is all about the social and political consequences of Freemasonry egalitarian message, which as such tends to the abolition of all differences. The author certainly criticizes Freemasons’ laxity concerning drinking habits and women. There is also a religious criticism: “we suppress brothels, we prohibit by penal laws the religious conventions of heretics, while in reality there are no places where impiety and enthusiasm are so effectually propagated, as in the holy lodge of St. John”¹¹. But again the problem is not impiety as such nor that Freemasons profess a different religion or a kind of ecumenism, but that they propose a religion *without authority*, namely, without a religious institution conceived as *indispensable medium* between God and men. Hence, the central point is the issue of authority, which is intimately related to the issue of equality: “they [sc. the Freemasons] profess at their meeting to acknowledge no distinction of character”¹²,

⁶ Anonymous, *Masonry, the Way to Hell. A Sermon wherein is clearly proved, both from Reason and Scripture, that all who profess the Mysteries are in a state of Damnation*. London 1768.

⁷ *Ib.* p. 8.

⁸ *Ib.* p. 16.

⁹ *Ib.* p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ib.* p. 16.

¹¹ *Ib.* p. 21.

¹² *Ib.* p. 27.

“the prince and the porter, the lord and the lackey, are all upon equality: all are united by a friendly grip”¹³.

This can more clearly be seen in another anti-Masonic writing: the *Compendio della vita, e della gesta di Conte Cagliostro*¹⁴, on which Freemasonry ecumenical message that “the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Calvinist and the Jew [are] equally good, in as far as they all believe on the existence of God and the immortality of the soul”¹⁵, is seen as an attack against the Catholic Church as one of the guarantors of social order. In the *Compendio* it is also said that Freemasonry attack on religion is not essentially a theological matter, but a strategy aimed at destroying the Catholic Religion and Monarchy. Accordingly, Freemasonry pursues a “goal contrary to [the goal of] the state and to public tranquility”¹⁶. Indeed, in the *Compendio* it is affirmed that this kind of religious egalitarianism, which consists in a sort of *indifference* toward the doctrinal particularities of institutionalized religions, necessarily leads to sedition and riot (*sedizione e tumulto*) and that Freemasonry discourse on humanity, equity, purged morals and religion (*religione e morale depurata*) pursues exclusively one goal: the destruction of the rights of property and of the ranks of orders or classes [*graduazioni di Ordini*], “which are the strongest bond of society”¹⁷.

Freemasonry message of egalitarianism permitted forms of associations between individuals that were impossible in real life. When the author of the first quoted writing, *Masonry, a Way to Hell*, tells the reader not to believe in the promise of Freemasons that, if he enters the lodge, he will receive help from his *brethren*, when he needs it¹⁸; he is actually trying to influence against the creation of ties between social groups or classes that in real life would have never met, because the system did not allow it.

Freemasonry egalitarian practices in the Enlightenment allows some people to enjoy the feeling of being equal. This was certainly an experience that did not correspond to daily life. Nevertheless, for the unknown author of *Masonry, A Way to Hell* the real problem is not the experience of a fictional or parallel reality based on equality, but the consequences of such an experience, namely that this kind of lived experiences, on the one hand, leads to a change in the perception of the social order (the real) by contrasting it with a possible and fairer reality (the ideal), and so, on the other, encourages imagination to seek ways to establish a fairer (egalitarian) social order. Precisely this dialectic view of hierarchical social order fostered by Freemasonry egalitarianism and consisting in seeing

¹³ *Ib.* p. 28.

¹⁴ G. Barberi, *Compendio della vita, e delle gesta di Giuseppe Balsamo, denominato il conte Cagliostro che si è estratto dal processo contro di lui formato in Roma l'anno 1790. E che può servire di scorta per conoscere l'indole della setta de' Liberi muratori*. Roma 1791.

¹⁵ *Ib.* p. 151, my translation.

¹⁶ *Ib.* p. 82, my translation.

¹⁷ *Ib.* p. 4, my translation.

¹⁸ Cf. *Masonry, the Way to Hell*, p. 29 f.

hierarchical social order as something fortuitous or to be abolished, is what the author of the pamphlet is observing, when he accuses Freemasonry of nurturing the “pernicious and delusive ambition”¹⁹ in the low classes of being treated as equals. So, there is without any doubt an at that time radical/revolutionary component in Freemasonry discourse: *its conception of a possible world absolutely based on equality.*

The radical character of Freemasonry equality consists basically in its *indifference* to all distinction among individuals *as such*, namely to the particularities that constitute the individualities of each subjectivity. According to the examined writings, Freemasonry considers each individual merely as human being bracketing the social and economic situation and the religion of the individual. Equality is then essentially a result of negating precisely that which distinguishes individuals from each other, more clearly: of abstracting from the *singularity* of each human being. Equality is thus the result of a negative process, something that can only be reached by removing from reality some elements that do not let individuals recognise that all human beings as such are equals. This abstract or negative equality is based on a particular notion of human being that implies a conception of the whole of social and political life. The different components related to equality will be analysed in the following part of this paper.

2 Constructing Universality: The Egalitarian Discourse of Enlightenment Freemasonry

Enlightenment egalitarian discourses have to be understood in the context of the struggle against political and metaphysical dogmatism for recognition and equality during the European modern era. In order to understand the particularity of these discourses and, specifically, of Freemasonry egalitarianism, we first have to briefly refer to modern egalitarian discourses that are not fully based on objective or impartial principles. In its conceptual diversity, the Enlightenment offers a lot of examples of such discourses. I will refer to one related to the Feminist struggle for recognition in the Enlightenment.

Previous to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*²⁰ —a plea for equality among men and women based on rational (objective) arguments— namely, during the so-called *Querelle des Dames*, the arguments either for or against the recognition of the humanity and rights of women were based in principles derived from the Catholic Dogma, theology, Christian philosophy and a particular interpretation of Aristotle. At the end of this debate, actually initiated by *male* theologians and philosophers, we find one of the

¹⁹ *Ib.* p. 27.

²⁰ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London 1792.

most representative female voices joining this discussion: Mary Astell. Her arguments for equality between man and woman were deduced in general from the Catholic beliefs and fundamentally from the following two dogmas: i) that God does nothing without reason and ii) that both man and woman were created in God's own image.

One of M. Astell's arguments is: "if God had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason, He wou'd not have given them any, for He does nothing in vain"²¹. Another of her most important arguments reads as follows: "If all men are born free [since man and women are created in God's own image, and God is free], how is it that all women are born slaves?"²² In doing this, Astell was saying: if what you say and what you believe in, is true, then you have to recognize that we are all equals.

The idea of human being in Astell's emancipative discourse, however, still falls short of universality, since her plea for equality is based on a religious conception of reality that does not criticise the dogmatic pillars of monarchy. Indeed her discourse for equality still distinguishes at least two kinds of individuals: the monarch and his or her subjects. She was a Tory and accordingly believed in the necessity of the subject's absolute obedience to the monarch. Indeed, this subjectivity (Mary Astell) introduced itself neither as a mere rational being nor as a mere woman, but as a *Daughter of the Church of England*. Her struggle for the recognition of women is based on the same principles of the social order that excludes women from the benefits of society. Therefore, her discourse is an attempt at radicalizing the moral values as well as the interpretation of reality of the English social, political and religious order of her time.

This strategy certainly gives to her argument a very strong force of persuasion, because it is presupposed that she is not doing nothing but correctly applying the principles recognized by both sides in the dispute. But because it is based on the beliefs of a particular religion with a particular history and relationship to political power, her discourse at the same time doesn't necessarily contradict the form of government upheld by her oppressors. Furthermore, she reproduces the exclusion mechanisms of the group that excluded her and all women. Hence, her plea for equality consists in increasing the extension of the set of the subjects of law by means of the demonstration of the current misapplication of the concept to reality –namely that a right application implies the inclusion of women in the community of subjects of law–, but without criticizing the intension of the concept. Nevertheless, M. Astell's discourse is articulated by her conviction of representing the whole of the humankind. Therefore, she identified "member of the Church of England" with "human being". If we do not understand this discursive

²¹ M. Astell, *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England*. London, 1705. Section 5.

²² M. Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage. With Additions*. London (4th ed.) 1730, "Appendix", p. 150.

strategy and the undesired consequences it implies, then we will not understand why she is a monarchist, although she seems to be arguing for radical egalitarianism, and we will think of having found contradictions in her thinking.²³

Concerning M. Astell's emancipative discourse, we could say from the point of view of European Enlightenment common sense that the problem lies precisely in the fact that "reason", understood as an impartial tribunal, is not undertaking the determining role in both the conception of "human being" and the construction of universality. Then this is the reason why the pretended universality of Astell's democratic discourse neglects political rights to some individuals or groups that did not share determined qualities. Instead of a *consistent* universal concept of human being, Astell's concept has certain predicates that do not actually belong to all human beings, but to a particular social group (the Church of England). So, considered from the point of view of European Enlightenment common sense, a solution to this problem should consist of removing from the concept of human being, on which equality is to be based, all predicates or differences that do not belong to all human beings. This kind of operation of thought is *abstraction*. It is therefore all about the construction of an *abstract* concept of human being that as such must not be "contaminated" by the particularities of the individuals, so this concept can really encompass the totality of humankind and allows for the construction of a consistent universality.

In the Enlightenment, this idea of human being resulted from reconsidering the human being from the perspective of reason understood as a pure, universal, objective and, therefore, impartial instance of judgement. This attempt has to be seen as a reaction against every form of argumentation that is dogmatically based on authority and beliefs. Enlightenment's maxim can be formulated as follows: *only what reason recognizes as true, fair, convenient and good, is objectively and universally true, fair, convenient and good, and should therefore be accepted and recognized as such.*

2.1 The individual

In establishing a definition of human being, Enlightenment Freemasonry discourse follows the aforementioned maxim. The idea of human being postulated in the *Old Charges* appears under the figure of the *mason*. The mason has to be understood as the representative of the idea of human being. This universal notion of human being is forged by Freemasonry by means of abstraction from all particularities in human individualities.

²³ This is the case for example of R. Perry's reading of M. Astell's thinking: "All the contradictions of the period we call "The Enlightenment" were embodied in the life and writings of Mary Astell, a feminist intellectual who lived from 1666 to 1731. She argued for the rights of women yet she upheld absolute monarchy in the state." R. Perry, "Mary Astell's Response to the Enlightenment", in: *Women and the Enlightenment*. New York 1984, pp. 13-40, here 13.

So, the universality of “human being” is based on its indeterminacy: the less predicates the concept possesses, the more extension the concept has. The mason is therefore the incarnation of an abstract notion of human being.

At the beginning of the first chapter, “Concerning God and Religion”, of the *Constitutional Part of the Old Charges* a definition of mason is given. In order to achieve universality some particularities of the existing singularity have to be removed. So, to become a worthy representative of humanity, individuals have to leave “their particular Opinions to themselves”²⁴; individuals must be considered only in the light of the *moral law*, which can be understood as a kind of moral instinct in terms of modern moral consciousness. This law is the criterion for judging an individual. In the lodge it is only important whether the individual “is a good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish’d”²⁵. Particular opinions, denominations and convictions have to be left outside of the consideration of the individual, because they are not necessary predicates of the notion of “human being” and, therefore, of each individual understood as mere human being. Furthermore, the social, cultural, national and historical character of each personality as well as feelings like envy²⁶ are an obstacle for the establishment of a free and equal interaction among individuals.

Particular (institutionalized) religions also have to be set aside. For the human being has no concrete religion, but only the one “in which all Men agree”²⁷. And, as I already mentioned, individuals have *essentially* no concrete customs or morals as well. They, considered exclusively as human beings, only have “to obey the moral Law”²⁸.

As it can be seen, Freemasonry emancipative discourse postulates a praxis of *purification* of the self as condition for acceptance in the lodge. One has to purify his or her “self” in order to become a worthy representative of the ideal of human being. The resulting individuality is universal by grace of its abstract character. Because of this purification, equality and free interaction occur on the soil of a reciprocal identification of the individuals as manifestations of the *same*, namely as instances of the same concept. They recognize each other merely as human beings in terms of a rational being without any particular determination, but not as historical singularities.

The abstracting procedure for the establishment of Freemasonry idea of human being is rational in the sense that the only criterion is pure reason, which guarantees the impartiality of the resulting concept. The concept is therefore not contaminated by particularities of the subjectivity who has conceived it. This procedure shows that in the

²⁴ J. Anderson, op. cit. p. 50.

²⁵ *Ib.*

²⁶ *Ib.* p. 53: “None shall discover Envy at the Prosperity of a Brother”.

²⁷ *Ib.* p. 51.

²⁸ *Ib.* p. 50.

light of pure reason, individuals appear only as pure human beings. The idea of human being expresses that which reason recognizes as essential in human beings and therefore, since individuals must act in a rational way, that which each individual must recognize in the others.

2.2 Society

Freemasonry equality is based on the concept of human being described above. The universality of this concept becomes concrete in the lodge understood as the space where equality becomes real in the form of free interaction and discussion among individuals. The lodge can be considered as a place situated between the public and the private spheres of human life, where free interaction between individuals *outside of the scope of the state* is possible. Freemasonry appears as a place where freedom, equality and brotherhood can become reality, although it is a special kind of reality, *namely a secret²⁹ and closed one*. So, in order to fulfil these ideals of human emancipation, individuals have created a closed place situated outside the scope of the establish authority as well as outside of the real public life. It may sound somewhat contradictory, but it is precisely this apparent contradiction that makes it an interesting subject, among other reasons because it will let us more easily see the construction of equality and universality (totality) in the Enlightenment and today.

Enlightenment Freemasonry's point of departure for the construction of a space for free interaction is the acknowledgment that the real world (real society and the state guarantying order in society) is not structured in a way that can make such an interaction possible. The elements that do not let free interaction arise (social and economic differences, hierarchy, and political and religious differences) are products of the real society. This is the reason why it is necessary to create an alternative place inside reality, which can guarantee the envisioned free interaction.

For Enlightenment Freemasonry mentality, this was actually not a diagnosis of a particular situation, but a necessary consequence of the idea that real society necessarily

²⁹ The importance of secrecy for guaranteeing freedom of speech and thought should not be interpreted as something originally coming from Freemasonry ideology or a symptomatic manifestation of a kind of paranoia in Freemasonry thinking. For the common sense of the Enlightenment, it was obvious that it was very dangerous for the professional carrier of an individual in public life (if not for his or her life) to freely express his or her thoughts. Some words of a young E. Burke confessing to a friend in 1744, when he was student at Trinity College, can serve as example of this: "We live in a world where everyone is on the catch, and the only way to be safe is to be silent –silent in any affair of consequence; and I think it would not be a bad rule for every man to keep within what he thinks of others, of himself, and of his own affairs" (quoted from B. J. Spruyt, "Een omstreden erfenis: Edmund Burke in Nederland", in: E. Burke, *Het wezen van het conservatisme. Een bloemlezing uit Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Kampen/Kapellen 2002, p. 11.). About the fundamental role of secrecy for Freemasonry see R. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. Cambridge, Mass. 1988, p. 83 f.

sets men apart. This is an idea shared by many Enlightenment thinkers and which is always related to Rousseau's conviction that society pervades individuals. The first goal of Freemasonry or the first reason for the creation of Lodges is to bring together what the world has set apart. Accordingly, masonry is defined in the *Old Charges* as "the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remained at a perpetual Distance"³⁰.

From the very beginning a barrier is set between the real world and the lodge. The barrier divides reality in two domains: the profane world and the sacred one, i.e. the temple (lodge). Nevertheless, in doing so, Freemasonry does not explicitly or consciously attempt to subvert the social order. On the contrary, the conception of the lodge as a parallel world is based on the presupposition that society and its exclusion mechanisms are impossible to overcome. The barrier between temple and profane world is constitutive for the lodge. If real society would not have set men apart, then the lodge as such would be unnecessary.

The lodge must be considered as the place where individual differences are bracketed. Accordingly, the lodge constitutes a moment of suspension of the validity of the real world. The lodge is a space, where recognition and equality are at work and the possibility for free interaction is given to everyone. Freedom is, however, not primarily positive freedom, but freedom *from* the profane world. A free place *for* free interaction of free individuals results therefore *from* excluding all conflicts, ideologies, differences, etc. So, the establishment of the lodge is essentially a negative move. Freemasonry does not solve the differences that have set men apart, but shows that they are not essential, namely that they do not have to play any role in human interaction. A rational being (here: a mason) must recognize this and consistently act, namely he or she must treat the others as mere (pure) human being without considering the historical background of the others. The negative fundamental character of the lodge understood as the social (inter-subjective) moment of the pure human being is repeated in the relation between the lodge and the state.

2.3 The State

The mason as the manifestation of the pure human being, it has been said, has no nationality. Nationality is one of the particularities that have to be left outside of the lodge in order to achieve the purification required to enter the community of equals. Nationality not only contradicts the universality of "the human being" and produces conflicts that are superficial or artificial, since they are not directly related to the essence of the individuals,

³⁰ *Ib.* p. 50.

but it is also a dogmatic difference, namely a difference that the individual has not made freely.

The rejection of nationality brings Freemasonry subjectivity nearer to the figure of Enlightenment cosmopolitan subject. Cosmopolitans certainly are, as M. Jacob says, “stranger nowhere in the world”³¹, but not because they *accept* all nations and they feel citizen of all nations, but because they *neglect* them and consequently the authority of every particular state. They are citizens of the world in terms of members of a community liberated from the coercive power of every political authority. For Freemasonry common sense as well as for Enlightenment mentality, above the rules of the state are the moral values and the objective knowledge (truth), which can be recognized as such exclusively by a consistent use of reason. For Freemasonry as well as for many Enlightenment thinkers in the line of Rousseau, the state usually follows other principles than the ones given by reason, so its principles are neither impartial nor objective. The state does not correspond, therefore, with the purity of the human being. The state is impure, insofar as it is a necessary consequence of the immorality this kind of thinking pretended to see all over the *real* world.

The subjectivity postulated by Freemasonry discourse neglects the authority of the state opposing to all political powers the primacy of morals and truth. The ideal human being is therefore an *apolitical being*. The state is, as Thomas Paine said, nothing but a necessary evil:

“Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best is but a necessary evil.”³²

The tension between society and state and the definitions of the elements of the opposition Paine is trying to advance, is the same as the tension the *Old Charges* notes between the lodge and the state. Freemasonry’s denial of state power can be found in its very specific rules to solve conflicts between Brethren without going to public trials and in its compromise to protect the political persecuted³³. So, Freemasonry makes possible social life outside of the coercive power of the state. This kind of inter-subjective life is

³¹ M. Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World. The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe*. Philadelphia, 2006.

³² Th. Paine, *Common Sense*, in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, M;D. Conway (ed.), New York & London 1804. Vol. I., p. 69.

³³ See J. Anderson, op. cit. p. 50 and 54.

actually the dreamed situation of consistent classical liberalism and radical democracy movements and discourses in the line of A. Negri's and M. Hardt's trilogy on the emancipation of the multitude from the claws of the Empire. Common to all these ideologies is the conviction that politics should have to obey the dictates of morals and that politics is something bad and impure that could be avoided if we interact consistently according to what our (universal) moral consciousness dictates.

2.4 Rational exclusion and merit

The universality envisaged in Freemasonry conception of the human being implies that everyone can be a member of the community of equals, i.e. that everyone can demand to be recognized by the others as equal in rights and duties. The only requirement consists in the mentioned process of purification of the self, which is essentially an act of freedom. The relation between individuals as equals is comprehended in the idea of Fraternity or Brotherhood as the ideal of Humanity. All individuals must consider each other brothers, i.e. members of the same *family*. But Freemasonry egalitarian discourse builds this including universality on a mechanism of exclusion: "The Persons admitted Members of a Lodge must be good and true Men, free-born, and of mature and discreet Age, no Bondmen, no Women, no immoral or scandalous Men, but of good Report."³⁴ And if there have to be differences among the brothers, they have to be according to the Merit of each individual: "All preferment among Masons is grounded upon real Worth and personal Merit only"³⁵.

Aside from the exclusion of women and bondmen, actually a dogmatic form of exclusion that as such contradicts the principles of the *Old Charges* and has therefore been abandoned in the further historical development of Freemasonry (although there are up to this day fraternities trying to rationally argue for the exclusion of women from Freemasonry), there is another kind of exclusion that can be deduced from the principles of the *Old Charges* and generally from the principles of Enlightenment common sense: the exclusion of individuals based on merit or moral values.

Contrary to dogmatic discrimination based on religious, cultural, racist, national and political differences, the exclusion based on merit and moral values corresponds with Enlightenment conviction that only differentiations based on objective or universal moral values can be tolerated in a community of rational and free beings. We see here one example of Enlightenment tension between authority and merit, dogma and (moral or objective) truth in the struggle between political and ecclesiastical power and civil society. For the Enlightenment subjectivity, merit is a difference made by freedom within a scope

³⁴ *Ib.* p. 51.

³⁵ *Ib.*

of action regulated by objective rules and based on equality. Therefore differences based on merit are, for the Enlightenment mentality, *fair* differences. On the contrary, differences based on superstition or tradition are unfair and arbitrary. As such they could not resist an impartial (scientific) examination of the arguments supporting them. Hence, the fact that there is no place in the lodge, namely in Humanity, for individuals who have not achieved success in life or who act or think contrary to the moral common sense of the community, is not unjust. For contrary to dogmatic exclusion, the rational exclusion based on distinction according to merit presupposes that the individual has had the possibility to act in a different manner, namely that he or she has been free in all decisions he or she has made in order to become what he or she now is. The exclusion in this case is not unfair; on the contrary, the individual deserves to be excluded. Hence, meritocracy is consistent deduced from the postulate that everyone as mere human being is free and can rationally conduct his or her life. As criterion for differentiation merit comes to replace arbitrary criteria of differentiation and exclusion, it also replaces the differences made by the state, for example nationality or citizenship.

As soon as a scope of action where equality is universally recognised and based on an abstract concept of human being, is established, the only possible criterion for differentiation among individuals is what they freely do and the results of their actions. Inclusion and exclusion do not depend on an external authority, but on the individuals themselves. Everyone is free to enter in the lodge and once he or she has entered it, only his or her acts will determine his or her position, duties and rights in the dynamic of the lodge.

3 Conclusion: Merit and Rational exclusion, then and today

Freemasonry concept of human being and “fair” inter-subjectivity possesses universality based on rational arguments. This was not an original idea of Freemasonry, but of the Enlightenment, I have considered Freemasonry only as an example of the former. The rationality operating in this conceptual construction consisted in identifying in the individuals only what is universal. The result is the concept of a *pure* human being, whose purity implies the denial of differences such as social status, nationality, individual conflicts, political opinions and beliefs. So, universality is achieved by means of abstraction/refusal of every particularity.

This conceptual construction reflects a particular tension between purity and impurity, between scientific or moral truth and authority and superstition, between freedom and oppression. The democratic discourse that results from Enlightenment construction of Universality, promotes the emancipation of individuals of all impurity, which implies not only the refusal of religious discourses, nationalism, racism and

ideology, but also the replacement of politics through technocracy in terms of a replacement of opinions by truth or objective criteria for judgements.

The inter-subjective relation according to equality in Freemasonry discourse proposes a particular form of tolerance consisting in being indifferent to the particularities of each individual existence. The effects these particularities could have in the relation among individuals are neutralized and with them the conflicts they could generate. Conflicts of inequality, discrimination or intolerance are solved by means of a transformation (purification) of the individuals involved in the respective conflicts. With their “purification” their conflicts lose their relevance: they are neglected as such. The rationality governing this scope of action makes the state (its laws and the necessity of its intervention) irrelevant as well.

We can see in our times that this way of thinking is still present. I think firstly on contemporary debates on multicultural societies and on recognition of the differences, where the most important attempts are conceived according to the same logic. The theories of consensus first propose an ideal of society and or individual and then require everyone to adapt her or himself to this model as a condition to take part in public discussion. Conflicts that do not allow for dialogue are neglected or ignored by classifying them as irrational, fundamentalist, contaminated with ideology, etc. The only way a conflictive discourse can take part in the public discussion (universality) is by “purifying” itself from its own “irrationality”, so it becomes a *rational* discourse. Through this operation of purification (abstraction) the real conflict or the real discourse is left outside of the framework for the discussion, i.e. is excluded, of course in an impartial way. Conflicts are therefore not really solved, but necessarily neglected, because their negation is condition of possibility for the establishment of a rational dialogue. Individuals are therefore only recognized in their identity with the ideal of rationality and humanity of those who propose the dialogue. Recognition happens under the idea of a pure human being that is actually *mutatis mutandis* the subject of today’s human rights.

Last but not least the demonstrations in Madrid and other similar movements such as the “occupy X-actions”, show the still effective potential of the idea of the pure human being. The *indignados* understand themselves essentially as apolitical beings and the “purity” of their individualities allows them to distinguish them from the impurity of the oppressive political and economical power. In all these cases individuals as well as groups or organizations do not recognize political authority and present themselves as apolitical (and that means pure) subjects that only recognizes a higher principal than authority, which usually has moral and sometimes scientific bases.

It is very interesting to see that even the economic power criticized by the above-mentioned movements follows the same logic. The discourse representing the interests of the economic world power and articulated by the majority of the politicians and of the experts in economics in Europe presents itself as a rational one meant to bring true

solutions to a problem originated by the irrationality or negligence of politicians (see the case of Greece). There is the conviction that the purity of knowledge necessarily brings solutions, among other reasons because it establishes impartiality and rationality in human relations.

Nowadays merit is still considered as the fairest form of making differences, which also means, of excluding people from a certain sphere of interaction. The same concept appears in the conformation of our liberal democracies and in their defence against arbitrary discrimination. Merit has been used to conform our *open* societies, where, like in a closed society such as a Lodge, people are not excluded because of religion, blood, race, and other arbitrary criteria. The only kind of exclusion we can still tolerate is, like in the Lodge and in the Enlightenment, one based on merit, the rationality and impartiality that nobody seems to cast into doubt. According to merit the only group that can be excluded from our open societies are the *losers*, namely, the ones whose actions do not deliver anything productive for the whole of (world) society, the ones whose actions society does not need, the ones who have never learned what a “free” society is all about, the ones who have not play this game well enough.