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On the specificity of the catholic model of the modern state*

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It would be pointless to discuss in abstract terms the contrast between microhistory and macrohistory. Rather, it makes more sense to investigate microanalysis or microhistory as an historiographical practice. By microhistory, we mean an analysis of historical facts which magnifies the scale of observation - similar to looking through a microscope in order to see if anything was overlooked when observing with the naked eye. In defining microhistory, one should emphasize the methodological and practical aspects as well as the perspectival ones. Another preliminary consideration should be added here as well: microhistory is necessary for analysis of historical reality where

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macrohistory has failed to identify the problems raised by the real dynamics of social systems or has fallen into tautologies and preestablished models of reference. The relationship between macrohistory and microhistory, in other words, is not an abstract problem about the possibility of constructing models and making comparisons. Because reality is, by definition, more complex than any systems devised to describe it, the question arises as to what the legitimate level of simplification is. This legitimate level of simplification can only be measured in terms of description, interpretation and prediction.

The origins of the modern state, I think, provide a particularly apt example not only of how macrohistory has standardized the definitions and the characteristics of its general model of reference, but, above all, of how this kind of analysis has failed to explain the specific situation of a case such as Italy. Italy has become one of the leading industrial nations, despite the fact that its state does not correspond with Weberian or Marxist models. Thus, the risk arises of falling back onto tautologies such as ascribing differences in development to a delay in adaptation caused by vague cultural attributes - the character and mentality of the Italian people is a perfect non-explanation of this kind. Another example of this would be ascribing the delayed development of the Italian state to socio-economic conditions such as "feudal remnants". This kind of explanation, which was the core of Gramsci's interpretation of the *risorgimento* as a failed agrarian revolution, has had a significant and negative influence on the history of left-wing politics in Italy.

The main problem with this kind of analysis is the static structure of the models it proposes, in which an improbable coherence and linearity are ascribed to ongoing historical developments according to typical functionalist rules.

Microanalysis, on the contrary, scrutinizes the development of events through a framework of constantly changing forms, without however, dispensing with efforts to formalize and generalize. These generalizations of relevant mechanisms, however, do not deny the disorder of reality, nor do they construct a model of development which assumes that any departure from the standard process is irrelevant to the topic. What we could use here is Fredrik Barth's

suggested imperative to conceptualize disorder¹.

We can find criticism of macro-procedures in other fields of social science, which in itself suggests that historiography is belated in its criticism of macrohistory. I mention here only the critique of neoclassical economics made by economists of transactions, a critique which has radically shifted interest from static models to dynamic forms and from tautological generalizations to the identification of rules which take into account the importance of locality and specificity. The economics of transactions has placed great importance on a radical critique of neoclassical concepts such as an ostensibly unlimited rationality, the standardization of information, the nonspecialization of market transactions, the standardization of maximizing behavior taken in absence of opportunism (to use Williamson's concept), and the non-specificity of resources. Instead, it has focussed attention on the dynamics *ex ante* and *ex post* of contractual processes and on the transformation of institutions within these transactional processes, and on an economic system dominated not by predetermined procedures but by long-term processes of negotiation².

I believe that historians are gradually becoming aware of these problems. Changes have developed slowly, in part because history is not a predictive social science, but rather works according to causal analyses in which the result is known from the beginning. This is probably the reason why general models are so prevalent and so difficult to abandon in our field.

2. In the following pages, I will discuss the modern state. I will argue that a microhistorical perspective is necessary in order to examine the problems of modern state development. Recent political events have led to a re-introduction of the mistaken notion that long-term historical developments can, in spite of interruptions and abrupt changes, be interpreted as a continuous and unchanging evolutionary progression which is, for the most part, homogeneous. Capitalism and the market have emerged victorious out of the crisis of the bipolar

¹ Fredrik Barth, *Balinese Worlds*, Chicago and London 1993, pp. 3-8.

² Oliver E. Williamson, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism. Firms, Markets, Relational Contracting*, New York 1986, pp. 69-87.

system, and this has revived the widespread and dangerous hypothesis that, in Europe over the past six centuries, there has been a progressive process of centralization along with the development of impersonal bureaucratic and administrative structures which have reinforced the central monopoly of power, the legitimate use of violence and the creation of norms.

The prospect of creating a single European currency and the debate about the Maastricht treaty have contributed significantly to the general belief that such an evolutionary development is inevitable. At the height of its splendor, the nation-state seems to be heading towards its dissolution into a larger confederation; at the same time, 'Europe' is being proposed as a model, in particular, for the Eastern European states which have recently emerged from the dissolution of so-called 'real Socialism.' Although this prospect has been used by many historians to demonstrate that the idea of the modern state cannot be understood in absolutist terms because states continue to evolve into larger and more complex organizational forms, it has also led to a réintroduction of the same ideology of destiny and uniformity.

The process of European unification is indisputably positive. I believe, however, that ideology which has permeated the historiography of the origins of the nationstate is parallel to the ideological pressure which is leading to a single European currency: differences and specific qualities are suppressed in the name of an uncertain future, at the cost of exploring the possible alternatives, the real consequences and the choices which must be made. Like 'Europe,' the modern state is depicted as a natural necessity: there is only one path of development, which has both positive and negative sides. The current globalization appears increasingly as the diffusion of a unique model of political and social relations. In all vital questions, decisional mechanisms remain hidden, as well as any kind of democratic representation.

I believe that microhistory can contribute greatly towards rectifying this distorted interpretation. Microhistory is not solely concerned with the composite nature of the monarchy in the *ancien régime*, nor with the fragility of centralization and the plurality and overlapping of the centers of power or the forms of negotiation and compromise between the center and the periphery.

Nor is it simply a matter of identifying all the leading figures, coalitions or social issues. If historical developments are taken to be inevitable, particular differences are seen as part of a general condition of irrelevance, distortion, delay, residue and resistance. It is interesting to note here that the extensive research on the modern state undertaken by the European Science Foundation is organized in precisely this manner: the general project as well as the introductions and titles of every volume confirm this idea of inevitability, while the essays themselves demonstrate all the different variations, distances and delays in regard to these apparently inexorable developments³ In this way, the modern state becomes akin to a god - whether good or evil, its historical status remains unquestioned and unquestionable:

The modern state is certainly a bitter poison. It has produced the most horrendous wars which have devastated the world, conquering and subjecting entire nations and peoples to merciless slavery; it has favoured and sustained the pitiless exploitation of peasant communities, and then the labouring classes. Nevertheless, it is in the end the modern state which has permitted the emergence and the recognition of human rights and which has given society the chance to settle political conflicts by diverse but ultimately democratic means, i.e., with the participation of all or most people through universal suffrage. Historians must make people aware of this and of the fact that the state is not an

³ The project itself was presented in Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.), *L'Etat moderne: Genèse. Bilans et perspectives*, Paris 1990. The completed project will consist of seven volumes, three of which have already been published; four volumes are collections of papers from various conferences. While some of the essays are extremely interesting, the general organization of the project and the special emphasis paid to particular nations rather than others betrays underlying preconceived hypotheses about the modern state. The titles of the individual volumes themselves illustrate the unilinear perspective of the project as a whole. For example, the volume Janet Coleman (ed.), *The Individual in Political Theory and Practice*, Oxford 1996, contrasts public and private space in an attempt to show that the increases in the strength of the state are proportional to the increases in individual freedom. Another volume, Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (to be printed), does emphasize resistance, but only as the useless efforts of the periphery in the face of the inevitable affirmation of the center. Finally, in a recent article, Genet - one of the people responsible for the project as a whole - rejects definitively the possibility of alternative interpretations. See Jean Philippe Genet, "La genèse de l'Etat moderne. Les enjeux d'un programme de recherche", in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 118, 1997, pp. 3-18.

end in itself either for a people or for a region, and that the state is so dangerous and has caused so much destruction that we may perhaps have to accept the fact that it should be abolished. Yet historians must remember and they must let it be known that certain values could neither have emerged nor have been asserted without the state⁴.

Microhistory, on the contrary, has proposed a different perspective, one which shifts the focus of observation from the center to the periphery, thereby demonstrating that “the framework for formal authority is constructed discontinuously and not necessarily cumulatively, through social interaction at all levels of the center/periphery relationship. This analytical path contrasts the study of a unilinear, unidirectional, and monocausal process defined by given cultural dichotomies with the study of an open process laden with conflicts and negotiations⁵.”

Simply recognizing this, however, is not sufficient, for one risks replacing an overly restrictive unique model with an alternative of endless possibilities and contexts, which only concrete research can identify and describe. Every region, village, family and individual certainly has its own political understanding and interpretation of facts, its own way of negotiating and adapting to power. We run the risk of reintroducing a scale of 1:1, of examining each individual case as the only possible approach. I believe, however, that microhistory has the potential for a more complex morphological description which permits the identification of developments which have been emphasized by microanalysis in the first place. Legitimate generalizations can be identified between an infinity of different cases and the unique model, generalizations which are useful in understanding the vast range of both past and present possibilities. These generalizations are not, of course, a complete typology, but rather hypotheses which, in turn, are essential in directing research by modifying the perspective and scale of observation, thereby bringing to light objects which might otherwise be overlooked.

⁴ J.-Ph. Genet, “La genèse”, p. 18.

⁵ Osvaldo Raggio, “Visto dalla periferia. Formazioni politiche di antico regime et Stato moderno”, in Perry Anderson (ed.), *Storia d'Europa*, vol. 4 ed. Maurice Aymard, Torino 1995, p. 522.

In this paper, I shall attempt to shed some light on several problems which have been the object of a microhistorical approach and which are related to two tightly interwoven aspects in the analysis of the political development of European society: on the one hand, the ability to organize autonomous associations and the different forms of solidarity which are expressed in society; on the other hand, those ideological forms very often of theological origin - which have lent meaning, legitimacy and strength (or weakness) to the various institutions which organize the state.

During the discussion of this paper in Gottingen, I was criticized for straying from microhistory and for making inaccurate generalizations, simplistic models and bird's-eye view affirmations. I can only say in my defence that without microhistory, I would not have been able to understand the importance of the differences in state development throughout Europe nor the specific characteristics which have defined Italy and the Italian state as the product of numerous different factors, determined by a complex ideology which is at the same time ambiguous, contradictory and profound and which has generated the salient character of the Catholic political model.

I do not have space here to go into the details of the studies on which I base my conclusions. Paradoxically enough, the impressions which I offer can only be grounded on general rather than microanalytical references. Nevertheless, what I refer to in the following pages is the fruit of a fundamental turning point in the historiography of the modern state in Catholic countries, a turning point brought about by the works of Accati, Clavero, Grendi, Hespanha, Prodi, Raggio and Torre, to name but a few. It is a matter here of the belated identification of a specific model for Catholic countries, developed from the work of various groups of microanalytical researchers focusing on the specific nature of relations in a society dominated by the political presence of the Church, the familial structures situated between state power and moral ecclesiastical models, the relation to civil and religious symbols, and the village communities and local political realities in relation to centralized power and patronage. These different elements, which can only be observed through microscope, have progressively taken a tortuous but coherent path, showing the specificity of a so-

cial organization which is itself deeply rooted in economic development and which does not stand in contrast to, but is rather a specific form of modernity.

I will now review some of the debates about the modern state over the past thirty years.

3. Until the 1970's, understandings about the historical formation of national states in Western Europe were based on the idea that it was both possible and useful - even from a political perspective - to reach some kind of generalization about large-scale political changes, in particular those related to the processes of centralization evident, for example, in the organization of the armed forces, in taxation, in the police force, in the control of food supplies and in the training of technical personnel. Thus, the presumption was that both common properties and variations existed. However, these variations were understood as superficial in the sense that they assumed that the results would be largely homogeneous: over the last hundred years, all Western European governments emerged with relatively highly developed states characterized by durability, a well-defined territory, permanent and impersonal institutions, ultimate authority and loyalty⁶, even if these developments involved processes with factors, points of origins and chronologies which were based upon different patterns of mobilization of the populations subject to each state, and even though the individual states had developed to different degrees and their populations differed in the political rights enjoyed.

In 1975, Charles Tilly classified the different theories of state formation into three categories: developmental, functional, and historical. All of these theories worked on a macrohistorical level, as did the studies of synthesis that he proposed, presupposing an ineluctable invisible hand working towards the uniform development of the state:

Our study of the European experience suggests that most of the transformations European states accomplished until late in their histories were by-products of the consolidation of central control; that the forms of government them-

⁶ Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton 1970; German translation: *Die mittelalterlichen Grundlagen des modernen Staates*, Köln 1975.

selves résultée largely from the way the coercion and extraction were carried on; that most members of the populations over which the managers of states were trying to extend their control resisted the state-making efforts and that the major forms of political participation which westerners now complacently refer to as 'modern' are for the most part unintended outcomes of the efforts of European statemakers to build their armies, keep taxes coming in, form effective coalitions against their rivals, hold their nominal subordinates and allies in line, and fend off: the threat of rebellion on the part of ordinary people⁷.

Although Tilly is, in the more recent volume *Coercion, Capital and European States*, in part critical of his earlier analysis, he retains this macro-outline: "In fact, we implicitly substituted a new unilinear story - one running from war to extraction and repression to state formation - for the old one. We continued, more or less unthinkingly, to assume that European states followed one main path, the one marked by Britain, France, and Brandenburg-Prussia, and that the experiences of other states constituted attenuated or failed versions of the same processes. That was wrong. "The question has now changed and the variations of the past are given greater emphasis than those in the present: "What accounts for the great variation over time and space in the kinds of states that have prevailed in Europe since AD 990, and why did European states eventually converge on different variants of the national state? Why were the directions of change so similar and the paths so different?"⁸ This is the same 'renewed' perspective adopted by the European Science Foundation. Here again, the multiplication of diversity alone does not alter the view of an inevitable uniformity. We need to introduce as well at least as a hypothesis and as an analytic procedure - the various possible paths of development and the important social and cultural differences in the various countries which have produced the diverse behavior and characteristics relevant to contemporary politics. Over-emphasizing appa-

⁷ Charles Tilly, "Western State-Making and Theories of Political Transformation", in id. (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton 1975, pp. 601-638, the quotation is from p. 633.

⁸ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States. AD 990-1990*, Cambridge/Mass. and Oxford 1992, pp. 12, 5.

rent uniformity can create optical illusions and lead to errors in interpretation, particularly when this uniformity is more formal than substantial.

In all likelihood, this belief in the progressive development of the state and the over-simplified hypothesis generalizing the state system for the entire world was linked to the political climate of the Cold war during those years in which bipolarism guaranteed a substantial balance in the dominant world system of states. This perspective, however, had the effect of blinding historians to relevant questions and of introducing some misapprehensions. I shall mention three here.

A first mistake was to presume, from a teleological perspective, that there was a conscious centralizing strategy on the part of central powers. This led to the corollary that every failure to centralize was due to a weakness or inability on the part of the dominant elite. One has only to remember William Beik's or Alain Cottureau's⁹ rejection of this view as regards France, a country which could best fit this kind of model. Another example would be the common historical wisdom on the Venetian Republic as unable to complete the process of state centralism.

A second mistake was to understand every rebellious movement as a form of resistance to the ineluctable development of the modern state. A classic example of this was the study of peasant revolts and urban uprisings, which were regarded merely as the resistance of the social or geographical periphery to the center or, at best, as the expression of a defence of a traditional moral economy against the capitalistic market. As a result, it was extremely difficult to identify an alternative political perspective which could present a different conception of modernity.

A third mistake was the elimination of national and local differences, based upon the presumption that, faced with the standard model of the modern bu-

⁹ See William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France. State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc*, Cambridge 1985, and Alain Cottureau, "'Esprit public' et capacité de juger. La stabilisation d'un espace public en France aux lendemains de la Révolution", in id. and Paul Ladrière (eds.), *Pouvoir et légitimité. Figures de l'espace public*, Raisons Pratiques 3, Paris 1992, pp. 239-272.

reaucratic and impersonal state, such differences were largely irrelevant, merely delays or hindrances in an ineluctable process.

4. By the 1980's, changes emerged within historiography as the result of internal debate as well as the transformation of the global political structures. The system of the two Super-Powers began to disintegrate in the face of what could be described as the rise of numerous sub-imperialistic forces. The certainties based upon the system which had dominated world politics and the corresponding ideological forms began to appear fragile. Shortly thereafter, the so-called 'end of ideologies' commenced, creating space for the critique of the structures, codified tools and concepts of the social sciences. The optimism of the older general explanations was soon replaced by an uncertainty in all areas. A substantial relativism emerged together with a general self-critique of the authority of social scientists and their ability to understand the 'other-ness' of different historical eras or of different cultures.

It was at this time that microhistory was born. There was a growing call for complexity and for criticism of the heuristic instruments used by historians. This had nothing to do with relativism. It aimed at a new form of generalization, one directed against the simplification to be found in macrohistorical explanations. "Pourquoi faire simple si on peut faire compliqué?"¹⁰ Historians sought to understand reality better by constructing more complex descriptions which were closer to reality. Thus, attention was shifted from general answers to general questions in order to understand the differences which lie beneath the apparent similarities of two distinct situations. Again, the formation of modern states provided a good place for confrontation and verification: for verifying the differences rather than the uniformities and thus contributing to the construction of alternatives to the models of the bipolar system which had led us to believe that it was the only system possible.

During the 1980's, microhistorical research flourished and focussed on a different schema of reference in studying modern European states, and sug-

¹⁰ Jacques Revel, "L'histoire au ras du sol", introduction to Giovanni Levi, *Le pouvoir au village. Histoire d'un exorciste dans le Piémont du XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1989, pp. I-XXXIII, the quotation is from p. XXIV.

gested a different general picture which was characterized by an important new perspective: the uniformity among states is not so important as their differences¹¹, differences which are politically significant as well.

Several microhistorians, for example Ago, Grendi and Raggio¹², have demonstrated the importance of the perspective 'from the periphery to the center'. They have shown that the central power of a state does not wish to impose uniformity on the periphery nor to abolish privileges specific to it. Centralism, in other words, is not a government program in those societies which consider themselves to be unequal, corporative and based on privileges and distributive justice. Local functions and powers are organized into forms that develop kinship and client networks, specific social hierarchies as well as negotiations with the center. The strategies, institutions and forms of solidarity differ from place to place. In the Catholic reason of State, politics remains the amoral field for man's free initiative, although, of course, always under ecclesiastical control.

At the same time, however, the Church consolidates its moral and all-pervasive political role through detailed practices which increase its ideological control over individual conscience. Here too, the microperspective (Accati, Torre)¹³ has supplied some fundamental indications that there is, in daily life, a specific framework of relationships between men and women, parents and children, priests and parishioners, monarchs and subjects. Through a manipulation of symbols (the cult of the Virgin Mary, the undermining of the father figure and of political authority, the politics of pardoning sins) and through intense pressure on individuals - exerted through daily local religious practices - a form of power and legitimacy was developed separate from political institutions and

¹¹ I use the term 'difference' instead of Variation', since 'variation' seems to assume a single model from which individual cases deviate.

¹² Renata Ago, *Un feudo esemplare. Immobilità padronale et ash-zia contadina nel Lazio del '700*, Roma 1988; Edoardo Grendi, *Il Cervo e la repubblica. Il modello ligure di antico regime*, Torino 1993; Osvaldo Raggio, *Faide e parentele. Lo stato genovese visto della Fontanabuona*, Torino 1990.

¹³ Luisa Accati, *Il mostro e la bella. Padre e madre nell'educazione cattolica dei sentimenti 1480-1850*, Milano 1998; Angelo Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni. Religione e comunità nelle campagne dell' 'Ancien Régime*, Venezia 1995.

which has created shared behavior and attitudes. A complex process of cultural formation has thus produced the political behavior of Italians, and more generally, of Catholic peoples, taking root and producing a set of ideologies and values which are still very much alive today.

I shall now consider this problem more closely.

5. Three theories of sovereignty existed in 16th and 17th century Europe. The first is characterized by unity and absolute monarchy. The second attributes ultimate political authority to the people monarchs are subject to the people and can thus be deposed by them. The third, Catholic theory, denies any kind of supernatural origin of political power and asserts the moral supremacy of the Church.

Absolutist theories of the state were based on the presumption of an essentially sinful human nature which required governing. Catholic doctrine was based on the Thomistic theory of a universe governed by a hierarchical system of laws in which divine law (*lex aeterna*) determined natural law (*lex naturalis*), which God had inspired in man. Positive law (*lex humana*), which emanates from man so that he can govern the society which he has created, is, in turn, subject to natural law. If it is not to be devoid of its juridical aspect, human law, according to de Soto, should be derived from natural law, which is, in turn, intrinsically just and expresses the will of God.

There is a fundamental difference between the Catholic doctrines of 16th century Scholastics and the Reformed theories of the state. The Scholastics' emphasis on man's innate ability to understand natural law was at odds with the Protestant assertion that the foundation of political society was ordained directly by God. According to Catholic doctrine, secular states had been established by their own citizens as a means to purely secular ends. The role of the Catholic Church was to exercise control and to bring monarchs back to moral values.

Before examining the political consequences of this theory, let us consider the Jesuit doctrine. This doctrine weakened state institutions greatly by denying them their supernatural character and, at the same time, stressing the rational capacity of man, whose being was said to be analogous to that of God.

There was, in other words, a difference in quantity and proportion between the two beings, but the quality was the same. The Dominican tradition, which opposed this analogy, was defeated at the Council of Trent. According to Cajetan, there is no analogy between God's being and that of man. The consequence of this was clear: Suarez thought that man was potentially sovereign, whereas Cajetan denied this. For both of them, the Church - as the real manifestation of divinity on earth - assumed the role of controlling and defending secular political institutions. However, they each understood the nature of this control and defence very differently.

6.1 do not know whether, after these brief reflections, the reader has grasped the immense political consequences which these concepts have had. The three different theories of sovereignty found in the 16th- and 17th-century were based on fundamentally different ideas. In the first case, sovereignty was entrusted to the monarch definitively. In the second case, God had given sovereignty to the people, who entrusted it to the monarch but who could also repeal it. In the third case, sovereignty was represented neither entirely by the people nor by the monarch, but by a direct representative of God on earth who preserves the moral control of divine law and safeguards the conformity of natural and positive law with divine law.

Quentin Skinner, who has written one of the best books on the subject¹⁴, has explained thoroughly and clearly the roots of Catholic theory underlying the political actions of the state. These roots are closely related to Machiavelli, but are constructed with a continuously negative reference to the original model, underlining the nonmetaphysical dimension at the origins of political society. One might think, for example, of Botero's extremely cold reason of State. As happens often with historians of the modern state when they search for the roots of the secular and impersonal state, Skinner underestimates the illiberal dimension behind the apparent anarchy of Thomistic theory as it was interpreted by the Jesuits. The recent work of several legal historians is of great importance in emphasizing the specificity of the Catholic model, e.g. Bartolomé

¹⁴ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols., Cambridge 1978.

Clavero on Spain, Antonio Hespanha on Portugal, and Paolo Prodi on the Papal stated¹⁵.

These three models of sovereignty contributed greatly to the development of European political societies and their differences. While institutions have indeed progressively adopted relatively similar models, this has been a largely formal similarity. This formal similarity has, in turn, obstructed the historian's ability to see the causes of more permanent substantive differences not in the political forms, but in behavior, in relations between state and society and, in Catholic countries, in relations between church and state.

7. It may be useful at this point to propose four European models, each derived from different concrete evolutions of the state and nation and each of which has its origins, to a greater or lesser degree, in the 16th and 17th century. I shall use here the broad term 'civil society, which is particularly common in the political language of those European countries strongly influenced by Marxism. 'Civil society' refers to the sphere of relations among individuals, groups and social classes which are located outside of state institutions. Civil society, in other words, is a domain of economic, ideological, social and religious conflicts, which the state then must settle through mediation or suppression. Civil society is seen as a base from which questions arise which the state has to answer, and from which various social forms are organized in order to move towards the conquest of political power. Using the well-known Weberian distinction between real and legitimate power, one could say that relations of real power occur in civil society, whereas relations of legitimate power occur in the state¹⁶. Thus there is a continuous dialectic between the state and civil society, as well as a difference in progress and conflictual relations.

¹⁵ Bartolomé Clavero, *Razón de estado, razón de individuo, razón de historia*, Madrid 1991; Antonio M. Hespanha, *Visperas del Leviatán. Instituciones y poder político*. Portugal, siglo XVII, Madrid 1989; Paolo Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, Bologna 1982, English translation: *The Papal Prince: One Body and Two Souls*, Cambridge 1987.

¹⁶ See N. Bobbio, "Società civile", in Norberto Bobbio, Nicola Matteucci, Gianfranco Pasquino (eds.), *Dizionario di politica*, Torino 1983, pp. 1061-1065.

In this definition, it is extremely important to take into account the ways in which society is organized differently than the state. The existence of an organized power of supernatural origins which is charged with maintaining moral control over the state is fundamental in determining the strength, or more importantly, the weakness of the state, indeed the very legitimacy of state power. The existence of such an organized power can also influence the behavior of citizens in regard to the state as well as in regard to their civil and political responsibilities and their respect for political institutions.

I now propose four European models:

a. Nations in which the state is weak and civil society is strong, i.e., in which civil society, endowed with a variety of religious and secular forms which exclude the prevalence of one main religious orthodoxy, has taken control of the state (England);

b. Nations in which the state is strong and civil society is strong, i.e., in which civil society has a variety (if rather uniform) of organized forms and religious organizations, which have been subordinated to absolute state power (France);

c. Nations in which the state is strong and civil society is weak. Germany is perhaps the most studied case in point¹⁷. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, there were discussions in Germany about the science of administration which emphasized the necessity of the state not only solving the problems expressed in civil society but also identifying and expressing the needs of civil society, which it was thought to be too fragmentary and weak to express them itself.

d. Nations in which the state is weak and civil society is weak. This is typical of Italy, where governmental institutions have always been weakened by a widespread, if unconscious, Catholic ideology and by the existence of a highly political force such as the Church. The church considers itself, and is consid-

¹⁷ See Pierangelo Schiera, *Il laboratorio borghese. Scienza e politico nella Germania dell'Ottocento*, Bologna 1987; German translation: *Laboratorium der bürgerlichen Welt. Deutsche Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt/Main 1992.

ered by others, to be morally superior, capable of justifying, protecting and pardoning but also capable of expressing a strong political model, so-called social Catholicism based upon corporatism, social hierarchy and distributive justice. Calling a state weak does not mean that it is absent or nonexistent. As in the case of Italy, there is certainly no lack of rules, regulations and laws as well as a solid centralized government and administration. But herein lies the weakness of Italy's state, which, together with a deep mistrust of institutions on the part of citizens, has led to a meaningless proliferation of laws.

Concentrating on Catholic societies of the Mediterranean region, there are two aspects of great importance: the idea of solidarity and equity, and the idea of distributive justice, i.e. the image of a hierarchical, non-conflictual society in which one receives according to one's rank or station. Indeed, it is this ideal of a just, rather than egalitarian society which dominates Catholic thought and which pervades Catholic society with corporative models of a just but hierarchical redistribution. Hardly a day goes by without a proposal along the lines of this model, for example in the appeals for solidarity and justice by Pope John Paul II. Nor is it difficult to find expressions of this model throughout the past fifty years of Italian history, or even beneath the explicit images evoked in the speeches of Franco, Salazar, Menem or Tudjman. One can, of course, also find it in much of the trade union and left-wing discourse of these countries. The ambiguity of such discourse, together with its protective dimension against the disasters of a rampant capitalism or an impossible egalitarianism, provide it with more strength than is usually realized and help to explain the difficulties which arise in bringing together the various lobbies and associations which represent similar or homogeneous interests. The desire of politicians and political parties to express the needs of society as a whole explains why there is a continuous convergence towards the center and why it is so difficult to construct the two-party system and the alternation of power found in other democratic societies, in which opposing interests clearly present political, economic and social alternatives and different institutional models.

8.1 hope that my discussion of Italy has not wandered too far from the main subject of our discussion. The Italian model is only one example of an infinite

number of possible alternatives. Yet at the same time, I do want to emphasize the degree to which those elements which are evident in the Italian model have been underestimated in both Historiographic and political debate in which more attention has been paid to consequences than to causes. In discussions with me, students and colleagues have claimed that I overestimate the role of the church and the Catholic political project, but I believe that they have been blinded by the fact that they see Catholicism as an institution, i.e. the church, or as an individual religion rather than as general widest attitude forming the basis of a culture which appears to be linked only weakly to Catholic liturgical practices and the moral behavior prescribed by the church. There is the risk of confusing the causes attributed to a complex past history with lasting psychological characteristics of the nation. However, I have also proposed these considerations with a more general aim in mind, that is, not only to conduct research the models and origins of the modern European state, but to suggest the need to work on a more complex comparative level when investigating those countries in which the so-called modern state has become the dominant political institution. Microhistorical studies have shown the importance of conceptual models, often of a religious origin, which have influenced the development and the political differences in various countries over a long period of time. However, at the same time, microhistory has demonstrated that none of the positive religions have developed a unique model of the state and that in each situation, the different societies followed different paths with different results.

Living in Italy, I often wonder how outsiders judge us: a great capitalist nation which is relatively rich but, at the same time, one which appears to be wrought with political disorder, institutional weakness, corruption and illegality. Thus, I thought it would be interesting for an audience in a different country to listen to these considerations about the relations between political and religious culture as well as to some of the interpretations which political scientists and historians have offered for them. In particular, I wanted to emphasize a new interpretation which is emerging in historiography, even if it is still hotly debated and not yet underpinned by a broad range of studies: that Italy should not be seen as a pathology or aberration from the existing models of the modern

state, but rather as a specific and complex form of political, social and cultural developments, composed of both negative and positive elements. This model, which I would call (perhaps too schematically) 'corporativism moreover one which is far from being outmoded, but rather, to the contrary, has become increasingly important in the political practices in capitalist countries which are not Catholic. Yet, as a historian, I would argue that difficult to identify the cultural origins of political practices which stem from different historical eras and which are so closely related to theological debates, and it is equally difficult to identify the mentality which pervades Italian politics and that of other Catholic countries far from the Mediterranean. Thus, I propose the use of less formalistic historical models when investigating the ways in which the modern state has developed.

This highly general discourse is the fruit of microhistorical research. Where macrohistory, by assuming a unique model of the modern state, makes it impossible to understand the real development of Italy and other countries, only microanalysis can really help. The weak role of men within the family, the role of the church in subordinating and determining the position of women in society, the weakness of collective forms as a result of unresolved conflicts between the normative state systems and the moral and political church systems, the consequent difficulty in bringing together different interests and in making decisions as well as the inability of the political system to identify two political poles and two alternative political programs are all evident in Italy: they are the result of two morally hierarchical sources of authority. Thus, it is neither the formal dimension of institutions nor the definition of formal rules which explains the Italian system. Rather, the Italian system is best explained by the continuous modification of the political forms which occur through changes in relations and through developments of transactions, the logic of which is often incomplete and contradictory. The relative freedom in Italy, its atmosphere of disorder and anarchy derives from the continuous modification of individual behavior within a network of contradictory norms which emerges simultaneously from two different sources, both of which are politically important: the state and the church. If historians and social scientists who study Italy attempt

to formalize this disorder and the continuous flow of transactions and relations through macroanalysis, the result will only be paradox and tautology - the strong economic development of a state which has not yet reached the prescribed level of modernity.

I think that other Catholic countries, even though they differ from Italy, partly confirm these observations. Yet as a more general rule, we must identify the political consequences of the specific characteristics in every country. Microhistory corrects the tendency of macrohistory to classify at the risk of producing tautologies. Microhistory suggests that in order to understand the complexity of reality, one must identify restrict the acceptable level of simplification. A conceptual microscope is often necessary in order to formulate such questions and answers.

Macrohistory needs to be used with great caution.