



Third-Way Perspectives on Order in Interwar France: Personalism and the Political Economy of François Perroux

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The French context of the 1930s is particularly representative of the intricacy of the interwar period. The effects of the economic crisis that

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hit that country in particular from 1932 on were some one of the main ingredients that motivated the search for alternatives between liberal capitalism and communism, giving form to a wide range of third-way sources for discourse and movements, some with particular sensitivity to the international question.

It is exactly among these third-way movements, challenging the political and economic order of the period, that the influence of a personalist perspective spread, aiming to find a third “communitarian” alternative and offering multiple connections and philosophical bases to different movements, such as federalist groups.

The influence of communitarian personalism in the French debates of the 1930s is the guiding thread here, connecting personalism with federalist ideas and also with corporatist perspectives. The chapter will therefore focus on “personalism,” “federalism” and “corporatism,” with attention to the framework of influences that Catholic philosophy and a Catholic-based social and political ideas offer to that debate. Nevertheless, it is necessary to have in mind that these three concepts operate in very different levels and fields, personalism more at the philosophical level, federalism more as a proposal for political organization, and corporatism more as an economic-social doctrine. But it is precisely because of these differences that the points of contact and articulations between these perspectives in the French debate of the 1930s are of particular interest. Based on an original reflection on the relationship between individuals and communities, both personalist perspectives become part of the (conceptual) content of federalist propositions, as well as federalist ideas become an element present in certain personalist platforms. Additionally, several individuals were involved in both debates at the same time, including some of the most preeminent names for both debates, as is the case of Alexandre Marc (for the federalism) and Emmanuel Mounier (for the personalism). Young nonconformist intellectuals in the period also connected these perspectives with a third-way criticism that chooses corporatism as a central issue, being the work of François Perroux in the interwar period the key illustration of these overlays. These concepts, therefore, even operating at different levels, were directly linked to corporatism through a communitarian angle and incorporated in the third-way perspectives defended by Perroux in the period.

As will be explained below, personalism promotes a vision of the human person that goes beyond the idea of the individual in liberalism and highlights person’s multiple simultaneous links with different communities. At the same time anti-liberal and non-nationalist, the

emphasis on the idea of community given by personalism was a key to different perspectives on the economic and political order in the period, which can be explored both at the international level (at the level of the community of nations) as well as at the sub-national level, in terms of the different communities within nations. This influence of communitarian personalism on these visions of order will be explored here on two fronts, first in the criticism of the abstract internationalism represented by the League of Nations and of the international disorder that takes shape in the federalist discourse, and then in highlighting the importance of intermediate groups (as the family, communities or professional groups), rejecting both individualism and statism, which is the basis of Perroux's third-way conception of corporatism.

This chapter starts defining personalism and locating it among the so-called nonconformist groups within this map of various third-way discourses in the French debate of the 1930s, and then, in the second section, explores particular points of criticism from these groups on the international order. Finally, in the third section, these different questions converge into the analysis of François Perroux's ideas, reflecting interesting dimensions of the connections between communitarian personalism (as well as integral federalism) and corporatism in France third-way interwar debates. Perroux's case offers, thus, a very interesting illustration of how personalist philosophy penetrated the political economy of corporatism.

I PERSONALISM AND NONCONFORMIST THIRD-WAY DISCOURSES

Personalism is not a simple word. It is not the purpose here to make a broad recovery of the origin of the term and all its philosophical inflections in different parts of the European continent, since the goal here is the development of this current from the specific context of the French debates in the 1930s. However, we can start by qualifying that this is, naturally, a concept created from a reframing of the term "person" with the explicit intention of preserving the idea of the "individual" but opposing the idea of "individualism." It is important to highlight right from the start that the concept of personalism as analyzed here has no direct relation to the idea of personalist regimes proper to authoritarian governments, or to processes of the personalization of the leadership. This idea of "person," or more precisely of "human person," thus

makes reference to a collective being, focusing precisely on the broader “organic” relationships that connect the individual with collective instances such as the family, “*commune*,” and groups of professional activity.

Based on the perspective that humans are not atomic individuals but communitarian creatures, each with an absolute individual value, personalist philosophy is dedicated to promoting an integral vision of human individuals in society. Personalism also includes a kind of pedagogy of community life, and it offers a political thought about the relationship between the individual and society within Catholic philosophy (but not exclusively restricted to it). Even if we exclusively consider the French debate of the period, it would be more accurate, as Dries Deweer (2013, 109) insists, to speak of “personalisms,” since, despite the common project, the movement assumes several stages, including, for example, the line of Jacques Maritain’s “neo-thomist personalism” or the more “existentialist personalism” of Emmanuel Mounier, combining a certain phenomenological mark with the spiritualism of Henri Bergson. Mounier’s perspective is undoubtedly the one that would be most influential in terms of third-way discourses in France at the time.

The interest in the influence of debates in the field of Catholic philosophy for third-way discourses in the period goes beyond the specific question of personalism and includes a whole set of themes linked to Catholic-based social and political ideas and, broadly, to “spiritual humanism.” The connection of these ideas with the promotion of corporatism, for example, which is another important source of third-way discourses in the interwar period, is also an important topic here and will be highlighted below in the analysis of the ideas of François Perroux.

Catholicism (via the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, and *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931) was, in fact, one of the fundamental sources in promoting a third-way discourse associated with corporatism, and it is not surprising that doctrinal transformations in social Catholicism have also shaped an important part of these debates in the midst of wars. Actually, some of the main protagonists of this interwar third-way debate were exactly a group of young Christians, Catholics in particular, who did not fight in World War I and who began to engage in political debate in the late 1920s.¹

¹Debates in the field of corporatism would be basically banned in the postwar period, given their easy association with fascist regimes, but it is possible to speak of a certain

Communitarian personalism, as developed, for example, in the work of Mounier, presents a dual opposition to both individualism and collectivism and seeks to promote the idea of the “human person,” full of articulations with different community bodies. It is, therefore, an original source of the third-way discourse since it reflects an attempt to escape both the monological conception of the individual in liberalism and the tendencies to reject human autonomy in communitarianism. It took shape in the debates of the 1930s in France and can be directly associated (albeit not exclusively) with young, Catholic intellectuals from nonconformist groups and ended up providing important elements of the third-way discourse that influenced, though with new colors, the concrete actions that would shape the integration process years later.

The sources of third-way discourse in interwar France are, nevertheless, complex and polysemic and include not only personalist discourse within nonconformist movements but also other groups, such as neo-socialists, former revolutionary syndicalists, and (neo)corporatists in broader terms (Bastow 2001, 173). Even though there were some connections between several of these third-way anti-liberal sources,² the emphasis here is on nonconformism, since it can be directly associated with a set of particularly interesting perspectives on international order in the period and visions about the future of Europe. This includes some ideas that would be promoted in the European integration process from the immediate postwar period, connecting, for example, planning, corporatism and communitarian personalism. It is also important to include here the direct connections between the nonconformist movement and the activism on Franco-German rapprochement from young intellectuals organized, for

level of the recombination of elements coinciding in the plan of this “spiritual humanism.” In a sense, it is possible to understand that the third-way aspirations of a personalistic basis are grounded in a much broader Europeanist discourse of a philosophical nature. The ties to phenomenology and existentialism are clear in personalism; however, as a diffused and eclectic movement, without a clear universal reference point, the personalist perspective acquires different configurations in the work of different philosophers. The configuration of the personalist movement within the French debate of the period has, in this sense, correlations, for example, with ideas previously developed by other names in different parts of the continent, such as Rudolf Hermann Lotze, Rudolf Eucken (father of the central name of Ordoliberalism, Walter Eucken), and Charles Renouvier or, more particularly, Max Scheler, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Heinrich Pesch (Pasture 2018, 31).

²On anti-liberal discourse in interwar Europe, see Gosewinkel (2015).

example, in the *Circle du Sobberg* or in the *Club du Moulin Vert* (Cohen 2006, 131; Hellman 2002, 31). Since the rapprochement between France and Germany was one of the central problems of the interwar period and, at the same time, a key dimension in the promotion of European integration in the postwar period, it is particularly interesting to notice its connection in the early 1930s with the third-way perspectives of personalist and federalist groups.

To understand the nature of the 1930s debate in France, and in particular the position of the nonconformists, some basic issues must be addressed. The combination of the economic crisis that began in the United States in 1929 and touched Europe in the early 1930s, with the political problems that were increasing and contributing to the growth of anti-parliamentary currents and dissatisfaction with the political and economic directions both in the domestic and international spheres, contributed to a general climate of growing uneasiness about the destiny of Western civilization itself and of disillusionment with the adopted trajectories. It is in this intersection that one notices an intellectual effervescence, which includes the arrival of young people (who did not fight in World War I) in the political debate, mixing pessimism and the will of transformation at the same time. The nonconformists, specifically, as highlighted by Ory and Sirinelli (2004, 140), were born mostly in the first decade of the twentieth century, and are part of that partially orphan generation, quickly propelled into public debate with the premature death of many of their intellectual fathers.³

A key issue that qualifies the importance of the nonconformist movement and “the spirit of the 1930s” in French thought is that it was gradually becoming clear that political views prior to the First World War were no longer sufficient to think about a world in crisis (Ory and Sirinelli 2004, 139). Thus, even though the ideas produced by these groups did

³This component of disillusionment and pessimism ran throughout the whole interwar period, but it gained strength essentially in the 1930s. To a large extent this pessimism can be read as the opposite reaction to the euphoric attitude of living the moment intensely, typical of the 1920s (“*les années folles*”). This same combination of disillusionment and pessimism was present in different parts of Europe, translating an important aspect of the spirit of the time when expressing criticisms and questions about the cultural development of modern civilization. This critical attitude guided much of the creative energy of an entire generation that came into public debate in the 1930s. The answers offered were the most diverse, nevertheless the unrest and uneasiness about the course of the civilization was largely coincidental.

not have an immediate impact, the repertoire of themes and perspectives raised, whose central values were anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism and anti-nationalism, ended up guiding important developments in the debate of political ideas.

The historiography of political ideas in France, particularly along the lines pointed out by Jean Touchard (1960), would insist that the 1930s offer, in spite of the substantial diversity of intellectual origins of those involved, a convergence of perspectives and dreams of these young intellectuals who, using a common language and vocabulary, aspired to overcome traditional forces and renew French politics. It is in this line of interpretation that the influential work of Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle (1969) is inserted, seeking to discern within the multiplicity of groups that professed “non-conformist” perspectives after the end of the 1920s in France three main groups that could be highlighted as marked by the philosophical influence of personalism: *Jeune Droite*, *Ordre Nouveau*, and *Esprit*. The first one, and least original of the three, corresponded essentially to the young, Catholic intellectuals somehow close but not aligned with the *Action Française*⁴; the second group (easily associated with the name of Alexandre Marc) originally professed their perspectives in the “*Manifeste pour un ordre nouveau*” from 1930 and was crucial in the development of a federalist/personalist critique on the international order; and finally the third group, which ended up being the best known of the three, gathered around journal *Esprit*, founded and directed by Emmanuel Mounier (Loubet del Bayle 1998, 21–4).

In response to what was read as a crisis of civilization, the third-way discourse of these nonconformist groups was guided by a search for alternatives between liberal capitalism and communism, as well as, at the level of the political-institutional arrangement, for a solution between the supposed softness/weakness of democracies (particularly stimulated by the criticism of the French Third Republic) and the totalitarian

⁴ *Action Française*'s reactionary nationalism, under the leadership of Charles Maurras, exerted a great attraction on the French Catholic elite early twentieth century. Maurras actively sought to come close to Catholicism after the First World War, with the aim of achieving a nationalist and monarchist alliance, both of believers and non-believers. However, a Vatican doctrinal condemnation of Maurras and the *Action Française* in 1926 had a major impact among French Catholic intellectuals, most of whom sympathized with *Action Française*. This opened space for several re-elaborations of perspectives and worked as an important component of the development of French personalism in the 1930s (Deweert 2013, 109).

mechanism of emerging dictatorships (Ory and Sirinelli 2004, 139). An inevitable dimension of this discourse, which permeated several of the groups involved, was that it was not a matter of looking for an intermediate point between liberalism and communism as a kind of reconciliation between different perspectives or a moderate mediation.⁵ On the contrary, the third-way discourse in France in the 1930s was markedly radical; it was about the search for a new way, for a rupture. It was not without reason that the term “revolution” was insistently used by these groups in various resignifications.

Of the three nonconformist groups influenced by personalism that Bayle (1969) analyzed, those who pointed out original perspectives of criticism of this crisis of civilization—which would somehow last throughout the debate, even if it had little influence on the political debate at that time—were the group centered on the *Esprit* review, who most directly identified with personalism and whose main leader was Emmanuel Mounier, and those centered on the *Ordre Nouveau* review, founded by Arnaud Dandieu and Robert Aron, who most identified with federalism. Both groups, however, professed coincident perspectives, and there was also some overlap between their members, the most important example being Alexandre Marc, who was directly interested in unifying sympathetic movements to the federalist cause. Even with their different trends, it is possible to read these two groups, at least in the early 1930s, as part of the same personalist/federalist movement. What particularly unified them at that time, despite their different emphases, was a defense of a decentralized federalist political system and a coincident rejection of both capitalism and the liberal democratic nation-state, as well as the state of communist regimes (Loughlin 1989, 192). The fundamental connection between these groups in the beginning, even though they later moved more or less distinctly within the political spectrum, was nevertheless anchored in personalism. It was precisely the belief that the center of all political, economic and social structures was, in the human person, understood as the spiritual individual rooted in a rich, concrete reality

⁵The third-way perspective of the French interwar debate, therefore, is not related to an intermediate point of bargaining and compromise, as in the perspective analyzed by Aurelian Craiutu (2017) in *Faces of Moderation*, discussing the importance of virtue of moderation in the success of representative governments and its institutions in contemporary democratic regimes.

that formed the basis of the political philosophy of French federalism (Loughlin 1989, 195).

By emphasizing the concept of community as a bridge between the individual and society and rejecting nationalism as well as statism, an important trait of the identity that personalism would assume in the French context would be precisely its articulation with the federalist perspectives. This would have a clear expression in Alexandre Marc's ideas. A federalism that was seen as a process that brought together both decentralization (from the state to levels such as the region or community) and a bottom-up approach in which the lower instances were delegated competences of a higher level in the spatial hierarchy. By withdrawing importance from the state and privileging the links that articulate the shared belonging of the individual to multiple communities to start the family, the personalist discourse favors a non-nationalist vision and is attentive to a renewed perception of the European space. This is one of the important points of articulation between personalist ideas and federalist perspectives in the work of Alexandre Marc. There is also, broadly speaking, a strong perception of the potential role to be played by religion in the federalist discourse about European cooperation, with a conception of Europe marked by the idea of a Christian project⁶ in which different denominational ideas would serve as the basis for establishing a lasting peace (Pasture 2018, 31).

The Christian Democratic perspective, in a broad sense, had a substantive impact on the debate on international order and, in particular, on the European integration process in the postwar period, which is widely recognized in the historiography. The same is true in terms of the repercussions on the formation of some of the founding fathers of the European Union, including Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, and, specifically in the French context, Robert Schuman or Jean Monnet (Pasture 2018, 25). In particular, the echoes of the communitarian personalism of the 1930s in the Christian democratic perspective of

⁶The idea of a Christian Europe was equally important in one of the most famous movements of the interwar period, the Pan European Union proposed by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. Nevertheless, the idea of Europe as a Christian project were equally part of other author's perspectives in the past and an emblematic example is the fragment "Christendom or Europe" ("*Die Christenheit oder Europa*") written in 1799 by Novalis [Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg], calling for a universal Christian church to restore a Europe whose unity had been destroyed by the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

some of these key individuals linked to the postwar European integration process were substantive, further increasing the interest in properly understanding the main articulations of ideas promoted in the mix of political currents in the interwar period.

A common attitude of these personalist/federalist groups is the reaction to what *Esprit* called a “rupture with established disorder,” a disorder that was expressed on several levels and that possessed a clear component of criticism of the international order, which was diagnosed as part of a more general and profound crisis than the economic and political crisis and which concerned a “crisis of civilization” that was perceived with a privileged focus on the human condition and the perception that this established a reductionism in social relations that was marked by a kind of ideology of material progress and an inner and spiritual crisis that hit modern humans. The motto of the *Ordre Nouveau* group translated this spiritualist perspective well: “The spiritual first, then economics, politics at their service.”

The marked attitude of these three nonconformist groups, defined at the beginning of the decade, thus translated into a series of denials and negative positions: anti-parliamentarism, anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism, anti-rationalism, and anti-materialism, among others. In this way, these groups end up anticipating a general feeling of the deterioration of the economic and political climate that would worsen over the course of the decade (Loubet del Bayle 1998, 25–6). In the proper terms of the 1931 manifesto drawn up by Alexander Marc and Gabriel Marcel for an *Ordre Nouveau*: “Traditionalists, yet not conservative, realists, yet not opportunists, revolutionaries, yet not rebels, constructive, not destructive, neither war-mongers nor pacifists, patriots, yet not nationalists, socialists, yet not materialists, personalists, yet not anarchists, human, yet not humanitarian” (apud Hellman 2002, 31).

The primary focus of these young intellectuals’ criticisms of the “established disorder” at the international level is the type of internationalism represented by the League of Nations, understood as artificial, ineffective, and decorative. It was precisely a reaction to the kind of internationalist militancy of the 1920s that was concerned with ensuring peace in Europe but equally committed to an ideal of maximum respect for national sovereignties that was translated into a deliberately moderate discourse. Heinrich Mann spoke of Europe as a “supreme state,” demanding a supra-nationalist allegiance, Emile Borel of the “United States of Europe,” and Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi of “Pan-Europe”; there was

a certain convergence toward a kind of ideal or hope that it would be possible to promote peace through the law so that different European nations, united in a common legal perspective, would be able to build an order that would respect national specificities and guarantee peace. The most direct expression of this, which promoted the mobilizing myth of a European federation while promising not to touch the sovereignty of nations, was undoubtedly the project of the European Union that was launched by Aristide Briand in the League of Nations in 1929 (Guiou 2010, 3).

As advocated René Dupuis and Alexandre Marc in *Jeune Europe* (1933, 150–75), the aim was to find a middle ground between imperialist nationalism and abstract internationalism, exactly where the fundamental critique of these nonconformist young people lay with the internationalism of the 1920s. For them, the European community should not be a cosmopolitan and international result (which was the weakness of other proposals, such as Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi’s Pan-Europe) but rather a supranational and decentralized entity (Pasture 2018, 31–2).

2 PERSONALIST AND FEDERALIST VIEWS ON THE “INTERNATIONAL (DIS)ORDER”

It is not necessary to fully subscribe to Zeev Sternhell’s (1984) influential, but also controversial, argumentative line to recognize that in these nonconformist personalist/federalist groups of the early 1930s, there are elements closer to a fascist perspective in terms of its anti-parliamentarism and anti-liberal democracy discourse. We can also easily agree with Sternhell in arguing that the works of Touchard (1960) and Bayle (1969), and much of the historiography inspired by these works, tended to analyze the “spirit of the 1930s” in France with an almost exclusive focus on the first half of the decade. Few works have been concerned with the second half of the decade, particularly with the relationship of these groups and individuals with the Vichy regime. Even though it is not our objective here to offer an answer to this line of historiographical questions, it seems to us important to insist that it was only gradually that the debate of ideas throughout the 1930s incorporated a binary opposition between fascism and anti-fascism, and this was definitely not a fundamental cut in the French debate in the early 1930s, which allows us to see just how different perspectives were intermingled at that time (dangerously intermingled, it is possible to add).

It is not productive to reread this period of French thought with eyes set on the immediate postwar period, when there was room only for the absolute denial of fascism and when several characters with openly favorable or at least ambiguous attitudes toward the Vichy regime eagerly sought to redefine or reframe their trajectories (as François Perroux, for example, quickly and skillfully did). What seem most interesting to us are precisely the persistence of an ambiguous attitude toward fascism in the third-way discourse in France in the 1930s and of the elements of this communitarian and personalist nonconformism that took shape in the early 1930s and had a persistent duration throughout the 1930s and even during the Vichy period, until became part of the federalist discourse of some key personalities in the European integration process in the postwar period.

The reflection on the international disorder on the part of these personalist and federalist groups started from a criticism of the disorder established at the domestic level, specifically in relation to the growing incredulity of the French Third Republic. The attack on liberal democracy, particularly on the parliamentary representation system, is thus a recurring point in French third-way discourses in the 1930s as part of a broad criticism of the Third Republic that was then in the process of progressive erosion. The effects of the economic crisis that were felt directly in metropolitan France in particular since 1932 in combination with a succession of political and financial scandals strongly shook the regime. Disbelief in political elites on both the right and the left favored radicalization. On the left, the French communist party lived through its most sectarian period, refusing to work with other left-wing parties and preparing for insurrection; on the right, the fascist leagues were spreading, forming militias and preparing for armed conflict (Loughlin 1989, 181; Bernard and Dubief 1985). This context, in which the economic crisis made room for a political crisis, was the fundamental stage for another radicalization space that was equally anti-parliamentary and based on the position of these young nonconformist groups and their third-way movements.

In 1932, Alexandre Marc qualified this radical criticism of the established order:

The ascertainment of the liberal failure, of the current sterile and inhuman disorder, of the instinctive disgust that parliamentary and pseudo-democratic illusions are now arousing in every well-born soul. — The

refusal of all conformism, by the very individuals who cover themselves with revolutionary garb, whose bravado and provocation are now an integral part of the established regime. The intransigent will of breaking with a world where everything conspires against the dignity of man and the revolutionary audacity in the search for truly new solutions. — The taste for construction and order that creates an abyss between us and those who come to the Revolution due to an ambiguous desire for ‘upheaval’ and bloody adventures. (Marc 1932, 332)

Undoubtedly, the ferment for all this critical movement was fundamentally given by the internal context of the country, but the alignments at the level of the international order are equally important for the understanding of the process. In this sense, another component that aggravated the crisis at that time and in that context was the disagreement of France with the positions of the USA and United Kingdom in relation to the topic of war reparations and in the criticism of the League of Nations’ inability to offer answers to a context of the progressive radicalization of nationalisms, which would be one of the privileged focuses of personalist and federalist criticism.

Following some of Bayle’s (1969, 185–91) conclusions on the nonconformist groups’ views on international disorder, we can highlight the critical attitude of these groups toward the Versailles settlement that was breaking down and, in particular, toward the League of Nations and the specific perspectives on internationalism that it represented at that time. That critical attitude, even if possessing different degrees of radicalism, was professed by different nonconformist groups. The *Ordre Nouveau* group in 1933 even applauded Hitler for breaking with the League of Nations:

Allow us, Mr. Chancellor, to congratulate you. The gesture you have just made, by administering a resounding blow to the hypocritical cheek of the League, is salutary. The monster of Geneva, born of a coupling between the democratic phraseology, puritanical hypocrisy and pacifist stupidity, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the interests of the gigantic trusts, international banks and economic statism, is a challenge to the most basic intelligence and honesty. By withdrawing from these learned assemblies, which are all the more harmful because they are more stupid and useless, you have accomplished an act of public health; you have served the truth. (Ordre Nouveau 1933, 23)

A compliment to Hitler's attitude, even if in 1933, was definitely significant, but it may not be the main point to be underlined here. In fact, it is noteworthy the open hostility to the League of Nations by the *Ordre Nouveau* group as well as how the inclusion of that reference to the collusion of interests between states and international financial capital can be clearly associated to the anti-capitalist and anti-liberal elements in the group's discourse (Bayle 1969, 187).

One year before the publication of the above quoted excerpt, the same criticism of the League of Nations by two of the main names of the *Ordre Nouveau* group was published in the *Esprit* review, including however an expression of disapproval on the connection between the maintenance of modern nation-states and the authoritarian government model:

The League of Nations has not only failed for contingent reasons. Their very principle is struck with absolute sterility because modern nation-states are only maintained by the insidious police dictatorship; serve, under high pretexts, only basely material interests; and cannot come into contact with each other only to oppose, fight and destroy themselves. (Marc and Dupuis 1932, 317)

In fact, *Esprit's* criticisms of the League of Nations were not so explicit and did not so openly show their hostility, particularly because *Esprit* agreed with the supranational perspective of the institution (and also so as not to run the risk of approaching the kind of nationalistic prejudice that *Esprit* condemned and that was closer to *Jeune Droite's* positions). Nevertheless, *Esprit* clearly criticized the League for not being able to overcome the simple administration of the Treaty of Versailles, remaining exclusively concerned with safeguarding the arrangement reached in the treaty. *Jeune Droite's* position about the League of Nations was, in fact, not far from *Action française's* orthodoxy on the subject, which reinforced nationalistic tendencies in this regard. *Esprit*, on the other hand, even with the coincident hostility of the *Jeune Droite* members (in particular Thierry Maulnier) toward the Treaty of Versailles, was more concerned with matters of justice (Bayle 1969, 188).

The diagnosis of the failure of postwar Europe was, nevertheless, a common point for these different groups and reinforced the perspective presented by Robert Francis, Thierry Maulnier and Jean-Pierre Maxence in *Demain la France* (1934): "Europe divided, Europe constituted by exacerbated nationalisms, by a helpless bureaucracy of Geneva, by a

France considered by the leaders themselves as a secondary nation”—in short, “the Europe of Geneva has failed. The Treaty of Versailles is no more than a convention repeatedly violated, solicited, adulterated” (Francis et al. 1934, 72–86; Bayle 1969, 188–89).

France’s foreign policy (based on the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations since 1918) was a convergent target of criticism from these nonconformist groups. Raymond Poincaré and Aristide Briand, even if located in very different fields, were the central representatives of this policy and were equally responsible for insisting on attitudes detrimental to France and international peace. The criticism was applicable both to the Poincaré nationalist positions and to Briand, with what they understood as a non-effective international pacifism, but Briand was the most frequent target of the critics. It was again the *Ordre Nouveau* that offered the harshest criticism (in the same “*Lettre à Hitler*” 1933, mentioned above), highlighting both the bankruptcy of the diplomatic paths followed (which, while followed in the name of peace, could easily result in war) and their collusion of interests with international finance. The letter talks of a “sleepy and tearful” France that “would be able, in the name of peace, to make war on you [Hitler]” (Ordre Nouveau 1933, 25–26; Bayle 1969, 189–90).

Mounier was also eloquent on this point some years after in his *Manifeste au service du personnalisme* from 1936, insisting that pacifism can work against peace: this “cosmopolitan and juridical pacifism is the international doctrine of bourgeois idealism as nationalism is the one of an aggressive individualism. Both are two complementary products of the liberal disorder, grafted on two different phases of its decomposition. These are two ways to degrade and oppress the person” (Mounier 1936 [2003], 129).⁷

⁷ It is interesting to note how the personalist perspective is capable of promoting certain interesting convergence spaces, even among very different groups in the political spectrum. An interesting example of this is the proximity in certain aspects of Mounier’s discourse in his *Manifeste au service du personnalisme* (1936), in particular in the session that opens the Chapter 6, titled “*Le nationalisme contre la nation*,” and the ideas of the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, at that time one of the most prominent intellectuals of the French Communist Party, in his 1937 book, *Le nationalisme contre les nations*. Although Lefebvre’s book makes no mention of Mounier, there are several personalist references in the text. In the February 1938 edition of *Esprit*, the book would be praised in a review by Roger Labrousse, who insisted precisely on the point that it was not possible to ignore in this book “a series of references, even loans, to personalism,” and that these references would serve to facilitate *Esprit*’s readers’ agreement

Esprit and *Ordre Nouveau*, as well as *Jeune Droite*, were, above all, preoccupied with denouncing the errors of nationalism and pacifist internationalism and reflecting on the basis on which a new European political order could be developed, which should necessarily include a critical reflection on the principles that led Europe on the verge of chaos.

Broadly speaking, we can also emphasize the importance of the communitarian perspective in the visions of the future about Europe that were being processed by these nonconformist groups. For Mounier, this question should be understood in terms of an actual revolution, a communitarian revolution, that was taking shape at that very moment. In an article published in January 1935, Mounier wrote about this as a broad process of a spiritual nature, permeating different political systems and pointing in the direction of a profound transformation:

Finally, today, a new revolt, in reaction against the consequences of the first. Fascism and Communism converge from this point of view. They are the first jolts of the immense communitarian wave, which begins to sweep over Europe. Let there be no mistaking that this second Renaissance is as profound as it may be, perhaps even more far-reaching than the first. Individualism, certainly, is not at its last jolt: do we not know feudalities still surviving in the twentieth century? But history has given a little help. A great commotion begins. Men, weary of their psychological complications and their vain solitude, will try the most desperate, perhaps the craziest, outings to find their way back to the community. All their efforts will be spiritual to some degree. (Mounier 1935, 548)

What must be highlighted here and what seems to us to be the core of the personalist perspective in relation to his vision of the future of Europe is precisely the progressive weight given to the communitarian question. Even if immersed in a discourse of a strongly spiritualistic nature, it seems to us that the theme, progressively decanted, would end up being a fundamental legacy of the group that, in different ways, would have repercussions on French thought about the international order of the period and would ultimately influence the debates on integration in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

Nevertheless, between the 1930s and the post-World War II era, there was the Vichy period, and it was precisely through a new reflection, in

with Lefebvre's background arguments, even if not necessarily "about the tactic" proposed by him (Labrousse 1938, 789).

communitarian terms and connected to the idea of national revolution, that personalist perspectives remained important in the discourse of the period, with François Perroux being a central character in this process.

3 CORPORATISM, COMMUNITY AND THE SCIENCE OF MAN IN FRANÇOIS PERROUX'S WORKS

The work of François Perroux represents not only a point of convergence from different perspectives highlighted here but also a source of original developments on these issues that help to perceive some specific colors of the third-way ideas in the period, as well as the growing ambiguities of some of these characters in the dark years of Vichy France.

In order just to offer a very short overview of Perroux's trajectory, we can begin by saying that he was one of the most creative and prominent French economists of the twentieth century. Working with a broad set of themes along his trajectory, he progressively sought to move toward a new theoretical scope for the treatment of asymmetric relations between agents and economic units, which became the basis of his theory of domination and his ambition to renew the "theory of general interdependence and to make of it something quite other than a new kind of equilibrium," as noted by Bernis (2000, 498). With contributions ranging from the 1930s to his death in the 1980s, Perroux produced studies throughout his life in very different subjects, such as corporatism, national accounts, planning, the dynamics of the disparities and inequalities among nations (with important implications for the field of international political economy), and several other developments of his theory of the dominant economy, particularly in the field of spatial economics. One of his important contributions is related to the definition of a structuralist approach to the studies in the field of economic development, marked by his characteristic humanistic perspective of the Catholic base. However, Perroux became internationally known and is still remembered in the economic literature, almost exclusively with regard to his contributions to the growth and development poles approach, with significant implications for industrial planning in different parts of the world between the 1950s and the 1970s (see Higgins and Savoie 1988; Meardon 2000).

This extensive intellectual trajectory also combines a path that includes prestigious positions in the French academic system and the organization of large and very specialized work teams, particularly in the 1940s and the 1950s, that would project his influence onto different fields of economic

and political action. Nevertheless, his trajectory is also marked by many ambiguities (see Chavagneux 2003), particularly associated with his institutional involvement and influence in the Vichy regime. Moreover, his diverse connections with the regime offered an important platform for the projection of his name and the dissemination of his ideas about the community to a large audience.

The question of the community is, to some extent, a point of arrival for Perroux's reflections in the interwar period. It was effectively under the sign of corporatism that Perroux developed his main ideas throughout the 1930s. He expressively exemplified the multiplicity of perspectives that overlapped in the economic debate in the interwar period, and his name stands out as an interesting and complex case of the analysis of economic and political ideas in the period precisely because he tried to combine many of these varied sources in his work. This included, among other sources, his Catholic-based thinking, his connection with personalist debates, his reflections about the individual nuanced by first-hand contact hand with Austrian marginalism (during his sojourn in Vienna in 1934), and a reflection on the functioning of the economy that highlighted the role of structures and took shape in his comparative studies about corporatism on the European continent.

Corporatism was an important, albeit diffuse, focus for the third-way discourse in France in the 1930s, and undoubtedly, Perroux's ideas represented one of the most consistent and influential sources for this debate, particularly after the publication of his book, *Capitalisme et Communauté de Travail*, in 1938. Even though Perroux himself described the work on corporatism in France as "extremely fragmentary, with too inhomogeneous tendencies to speak of a French corporatist movement" (Perroux 1938, 160), it is necessary to re-emphasize the progressive importance of corporatism⁸ in the French interwar period as a topic of anti-liberal criticism and third-way discourses.

⁸Variations on the theme of corporatism were frequently evoked in nonconformist debates, in particular in the early 1930s, as an important element for the third-way proposals. Marc and Dupuis, for example, connected the topic to the regional issue in 1932, insisting that: "it is the region which also exercises the property right over all the riches which serve as means of production. Only the regional organization of production makes it possible to break with capitalism; because, at the same time as the system of private capitalism, it excludes, by a corporative organization, all forms of state capitalism" (Marc and Dupuis 1932, 322).

One of the authors highlighted by Perroux in the academic reflection on these ideas and in the analysis reactions of French public opinion about corporatism was Gaëtan Pirou, who, for example, in one of his books sought to recover from René de La Tour du Pin in the nineteenth century to the 1930s the main lines of corporatist ideas in the French context, insisting that until around the 1920s, the debate was still very incipient and that it did not include an effective perception of the economic question involved in all its implications. Even if it served to qualify economic dimensions, the interest of the corporatist perspective of, for example, the *Action française* or defenders of social Catholicism, returned essentially to the question of the search for a way to restore order in modern society (Pirou 1938, 7–15).

Nonetheless, this trend was progressively reversed, making corporatism an important source for third-way discourse. The same Pirou celebrated the proliferation of interest in corporatist themes in the 1930s, showing that this interest permeated different ideological tendencies, particularly highlighting the contribution of Henri de Man (also discussed by Perroux in some works; see Perroux [1936] and [1938]), and included the interests of young people, with particular reference to the group *Ordre Nouveau*:

A growing number of minds are turning to the corporatist idea and wondering if it is not alone able to solve the current difficulties and put an end to economic and social chaos. (...) the word and the idea of a corporation now find an audience in circles that formerly had disdainfully dismissed them. Thus, the great Belgian socialist Henri de Man (in two articles published in *Le Peuple de Bruxelles* and appropriately reproduced by the *Homme nouveau*) has engaged in a curious rehabilitation of corporatism, and he maintains that he ‘does not excommunicate but exorcise it’ and means to integrate it into the socialist doctrine... There is more: whereas formerly the seductions of corporatism seemed to try only men of experience and stale meaning, it is today the young people who most willingly let themselves be won by them. The *Ordre Nouveau* devoted to him, on April 15, 1934, a very sympathetic number. (Pirou 1938, 16–17)

This helps us to understand how it was possible for aspects of the discourse of communitarian personalism in relation to the international order to have participated in this relative convergence of perspectives between neo-liberalism, neo-corporatism and neo-syndicalism. Combined and recombined in this period, communitarian personalism offered

important elements that, in the immediate postwar period, would be part of the vocabulary and logic through which the integration process would take shape. In the line proposed by Olivier Dard, we can identify among the projects of transformation of the state and societies that marked this context of the 1930s two distinct groups: that of the “realists,” who pointed to the modernization of the economy, the reform of the state and the perspectives of European integration, and the “spiritualists,” whose beliefs can be directly associated to the personalist movement represented by the *Ordre Nouveau* or *Esprit*, which, in turn, criticized the empire of technique and pointed in the direction of a quest for a renewed humanism founded on spiritual primacy (Dard 2002, 20, 285; Guiéu 2010, 6). There were undoubtedly overlaps and variations between these groups, and it is also possible to treat these two perspectives as expressions of the same sum of pessimism with the will for transformation mentioned above, favoring both realistic and spiritualistic perspectives of action at the same time.

Perroux’s first studies on corporatism date from the early 1930s (see, for example, Perroux 1933), and they soon expanded as part of his studies on the historical evolution and national structure of contemporary capitalism in Germany, Austria and Italy under the auspices of a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation that allowed him to take study and research visits to these countries in 1934 and 1935 (see Brisset and Fèvre 2019) that provided, among other things, the working material for some of the central parts of *Capitalisme et Communauté de Travail* (1938) years later.

Perroux’s first trips to Portugal date from that same period and arose in the same way as those in the Austrian case, that is, from an interest in corporatist experiences in Catholic countries. In Portugal, where he gave lectures in Coimbra and Lisbon in 1935 and 1937, Perroux had direct contact with the Portuguese corporatist experience, which, to a large extent, influenced his ideas about the development that corporatism should follow in France.

Perroux published some analyses of the international situation from his personal experience in these different European countries in *Affaires Étrangères*, a monthly Parisian review published between 1931 and 1939. In the November 1935 issue, Perroux published an article on Portugal and referred in the following terms to the head of government, António de Oliveira Salazar (who, until 1928 was the holder of the chair of political

economy at the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra, the one that Perroux temporarily held between January and May 1935⁹):

Salazar, a scientist, head of government and great spiritualist, recognized and vigorously affirmed that to accept the national ‘vocation’ consists of adjusting contradictory interests within a group, of subordinating the diverse opinions to a minimum of values on which everyone can agree, and thus places the human persons who form the nation in an environment favorable to their highest material yield and their most intense spiritual development. This doctrine, which transfers to the account of the person the sacrifices that it imposes on the individual, respects the differences in functions, the diversity of opinions and aspiration, but within moral frameworks considered intangible, and in which an increasing unification of the nation can take place. (Perroux 1935, 524)

The praise for Salazar highlights in particular the importance attributed by Perroux to the connection of the personalist perspective with the concrete experience of corporatism in Portugal. The excerpt, to a large extent, says more about Perroux’s own perspectives, however, than about the Portuguese experience itself and helps us to begin to differentiate important aspects in his understanding of the human person as an element that both translates communitarian affiliations and results in a growing unification of the nation. Later in the article, he also insists on the connection between the prerogatives of this legal person who expresses him or herself through different intermediary groups and the revitalization of the State:

The political reconstruction is attempted according to a formula that is developed on a completely different plan than that of pure individualism or statism and emphasizes the destinies and prerogatives of the person, of intermediate groups (family, ‘*commune*’, professional activity groups). Such a formula invigorates the state, but without deifying it. (Perroux 1935, 528)

The Portuguese experience, marked by a “personalist and communitarian philosophy equally distant from democratic liberalism and collectivist socialism, and even from state socialism” (Perroux 1935, 532), concentrated fundamental aspects of the third-way response to corporatism that Perroux was interested in disseminating in France. In concrete terms,

⁹See Ribeiro (1993, 251).

the Portuguese experience in fact served as a model for different aspects of Vichy's corporatist economic system, enjoying the direct attention of Marshal Pétain himself (Le Crom 1995, 121–22).

Overcoming the problems of the capitalist economy in terms of a third-way perspective was a central theoretical question for Perroux, and his propositions in the field of corporatism, more specifically from the idea of a community of labor (*communauté de travail*), constituted his answer to this problem until the early 1940s. Only when it became clear that France's liberation from Nazi occupation only was a matter of time did Perroux undertake an effort to reorient his prospects, with a view to neutralizing, as much as possible, his involvement with Vichy. He sought a redefinition of his third-way discourse, moving away from corporatism and shaping an idea of "liberal interventionism" (Cohen 2006; see also Cohen 2012). It is important to note, however, that several points of connection remained, particularly in terms of the idea of the "organized market economy," an expression that, at times, recalled his reflection in terms of corporatism (Cunha 2020).

In his works, Perroux highlighted that corporatism was, first and foremost, a product of the Depression and that this context was, above all, what created the opportunity for forms of conservative interventionism. Nevertheless, his original idea of the community of labor differed from both other theoretical perspectives of corporatism and the concrete experiences then lived in Europe, even if it bore similarities to these perspectives and experiences. From his perspective, and taking into account that the crisis that was then occurring should be understood as a crisis of the capitalist system itself, the idea of a community of labor worked as a representation of a possible "regime" in the transformation/metamorphosis of capitalism, along with the partial socialization of state capitalism. In Perroux's exercise of anticipation, the half-century following his period of focus (the 1930s), i.e., the lifetime of the generation that was then 20 or 30 years old, would be marked in the great nations of Western Europe by an "organized market-economy regime" (Perroux 1938, 194–95).

One of the distinctive features of Perroux's vision under corporatism was indeed his attention to the development of the human being as a person and the non-obliteration of the issue of freedom. This would manifest itself, for example, in the very question of the organization of the community of labor, which should be distinguished from simple corporations because of the element of freedom of participation in the organisms of effective worker representation and therefore does not serve as a mere

mechanism to enforce the authority and tutelage of the state (Cardoso 2012, 110).¹⁰

Freedom was a repeated theme in these discussions, albeit fundamentally as an idea of collective freedoms (freedom of persons) and not as an individual freedom. Reflecting on this issue in an article published in *Esprit* in 1936, Perroux asserted that “freedom, as the right to do what pleases, does not lead to anything positive,” thus reinforcing the importance of the idea of collective freedoms and connecting the topic to labor law, which, for him, was not simply linked to historical liberalism but could represent an “instrument of a greater sum of effective freedoms, freedoms of persons” (Perroux 1936, 869–70).

In the evolution of Perroux’s ideas about corporatism, which would assume their main form in the 1938 *Capitalisme et Communauté de Travail*, there were undoubtedly a series of articulations on the personalist discourse. However, it is also important to note Perroux’s deliberate effort to demarcate some differences and distances from Mounier’s conceptions, which, to a large extent differed in relation to the “coordinates of the nation in a personalist system” (Perroux 1938, 286). Nonetheless, Perroux also highlighted converging concerns: “Mounier, who heads the group ‘*Esprit*’, denounces the ‘duplicates of corporatism’ and does not hesitate to proclaim that any liberal or authoritarian corporatism which does not break decisively with the spirit and techniques of capitalism is a deception” (Perroux 1938, 161).

At that time, Perroux embraced the idea of the “person” but not without questioning the usefulness of creating a new terminology. He seemed to resist giving up the idea of the individual (not the one of individualism, but the one in which the multiple spiritual determinations could also be recognized). This movement led him to progressively use the term “man” (instead of person), which would eventually become the basis of one of his most influential formulations, the idea of the

¹⁰This “humanistic” perspective of corporatism would be present, for example, in a new wave in Portuguese corporatism in the 1950s with strong inspiration from the tradition of social Catholicism and, in particular, the work of Perroux. These authors would have no problem referencing Perroux’s works from the 1930s with new works related to economic development that would appear in the 1950s and 1960s (Cardoso 2012, 109–10).

economy of the whole man and of all men (“*de tout l’homme et de tous les hommes*”).¹¹ For him:

An outdated conception of man (*l’homme*) ruins the state of yesterday and deviates the state of today. A renewed conception of man will bring up the state of tomorrow. Those who cannot be satisfied as citizens of the liberal state, of the proletarian state, or of the totalitarian state will seek to find out how the state must be completely overhauled to meet the material and spiritual demands of the time. (Perroux 1938, 254)

Perroux insisted that the liberal state, authoritarian state, totalitarian state, and proletarian state would all be unable to accurately contemplate the idea of the collective human person that underlies the idea of the community of labor and would ignore it in its “full and irreducible meaning” (Perroux 1938, 255). He finally insisted on the necessity of the affirmation of the rights of the group, of the “human person and not only of the citizen, of the producer [or] of the proletarian” (Perroux 1938, 267).

Nevertheless, the last part of his 1938 book (titled “French Revolution”) ends with ideas for a process of profound transformation, of revolution, that Perroux foresaw for France that had the nation (as a collective of intermediate groups of persons) in the center. This emphasis on the nation marked important differences in relation to Mounier’s personalist revolution. For Perroux, this “French revolution” would take place on the basis of a communitarian economy, in which the community of labor “is the tool and the means of a communitarian spirit, of a community of persons” (Perroux 1938, 330). In 1938, Perroux already resorted to what, years later, would become Vichy’s official slogan: the idea of the “national revolution,” but not as a “revolution that closes and locks a nation in on itself. (...) The very particular historical conditions of the fascist and Hitlerian revolution do not allow us to dispute this obvious truth that a nation, to open up to international collaboration, (...) must first benefit from a minimum of security and order” (Perroux 1938, 287).

¹¹This formula of the economy of “*tout l’homme et de tous les hommes*” was widely used by Perroux in his studies of economic development from the 1950s onwards and exerted considerable influence on the social Catholicism discourse. Perroux was one of the founders, in Vichy times, of the movement “*Economie et Humanisme*” and close associate of the Dominican priest Louis-Joseph Lebret, which is why these ideas took part in the text of the 1967 encyclical “*Populorum Progressio*” of Pope Paul VI. On the movement “*Economie et Humanisme*,” see Pelletier (1996).

In what would be Perroux's editorial project with probably the most impact and diffusion during the occupation, the *Cahiers d'études communautaires*, which was directed by Perroux and Jacques Madaule between 1941 and 1942, the central message was the national revolution as a communitarian work. Its first issue ("Communauté et Société") presented texts by Perroux and Rémy Prieur, a pseudonym of Perroux's beloved pupil, Pierre Uri (behind which Uri disguised his Jewish origins). The final part of Prieur/Uri's article is devoted to a section on "Communauté et personne," in which he discusses in particular the limits of the question of collective personality and problems relating to the unity of the group (Prieur 1941, 46). At that time, Uri actively participated in Perroux's reflections on communitarian topics. This is evidenced, for example, by another text ("Communauté et Communisme"), this one prepared by Uri for an intervention in a study and discussion session with Perroux and others in July 1941.¹² Uri would become Perroux's most important collaborator in the immediate postwar period, just before moved on (causing great resentment on the part of Perroux) to Jean Monnet's entourage at the *Commissariat Général au Plan* (CGP), where he would be one of Monnet's main collaborators in the definitions of the Schuman Plan and in the design of the Economic Community of Coal and Steel (ECCS), which rehabilitated the idea of community in the projects for postwar European integration.

It is important to emphasize, however, the question of how this path of a "National Revolution" was already inscribed in Perroux's work in 1938. This helps us to better understand the circumstances of Perroux's engagement in the Vichy government. We fully agree here with Julian Jackson's line of reasoning that "the fact that someone of Perroux's intellectual distinction could commit himself so totally to Vichy suggests that we take Vichy's National Revolution seriously as an intellectual project, and not see it as merely the rearguard action of a handful of irreducible reactionaries" (Jackson 2005, 157). Although deep, complex, opportunistic to a great extent and certainly not valuable for his future curriculum, there is undoubtedly a component of true conviction in Perroux's connections with the Vichy regime and a belief in a path of renewal for France that was already inscribed in the perspectives he defended throughout the 1930s.

¹² Historical Archives of the European Union at Florence, Italy: Fund "Pierre Uri"—PU-3 ("Réunion du samedi 1 5 juillet 1941" in "Études d'économie avec le professeur F. Perroux").

Perroux had different institutional insertions during the Vichy period, having been part of the constitutional commission of the *Conseil National* created in 1941 and contributed directly to the writing of the Labour Charter (“*Charte du travail*”), a central document for the French corporatist experience in the period that ended up having no effective application (see Dard 2017, 230–32; Cointet 1989, 154–56). His main position, however, starting in 1942, was that of secretary-general of the influential Carrel Foundation (*Fondation française pour l’étude des problèmes humains*), where he also directed the Department of Biosociology (Drouard 1992, 207–69).

His activism as a disseminator of communitarian ideas advanced in parallel with intense academic management activity at the Carrel Foundation in those years. Perroux took advantage of his privileged institutional position to further his research interests, in particular through the team he gathered at the Department of Biosociology and the wide range of contacts he established with prominent social scientists and intellectuals. In an article published in late 1943, Perroux produced a reflection on the possibilities of integrating the “sciences of man” with economic sciences. The extensive discussions and praiseworthy references to the works of Alexis Carrel led Perroux to not even wait for the printing of the book to retract himself, including an erratum in the publication in which he attributed his lack of training in the biological disciplines to his mistake in relation to ideas de Carrel, also saying that “I must therefore, to my great regret, warn the public against an error of which I was, for a time, the victim, and no longer intend to be the propagandist” (Perroux 1943, *erratum*). In addition to the endorsement of Carrel’s ideas, other elements of the text were also potentially problematic to Perroux in that moment of personal search for redefinition. In themselves, the analyses follow a coincident line with his other publications in the period, but some statements are much more intense than those in his other works. He wrote about the trends and shape lines of an economy of tomorrow that he defined as “communitarian and authoritarian.” For him, “the economy of tomorrow will be communitarian” and “this economy will develop under the sign of authority” (Perroux 1943, 32–34).

The integration of the sciences of man with the economic sciences allowed Perroux to speak of an economy of the complete man, “in contrast to the ideologies of parliamentary democracies and social democracies.” He insisted that:

Biology is breaking into the politics of several large states. (...) The public authorities take care of the child, the mother, the blood, the race, and to achieve this protection for the masses, by mass means. (...) All this is in contrast to the ideologies of parliamentary democracies and social democracies. This conversion takes place at the same time or roughly [the same time] in enemy states. Such a statement by Lenin or Stalin on the construction of solid men with steel nerves echoes those of Hitler or Mussolini. Rome, like Berlin, like Moscow, is finding the meaning of a full life, vigorously animal to be effective and with a tendency for the improvement of man. (Perroux 1943, 29)

In the same way, Perroux sought to bring this idea of a “complete man” (*l’homme complet*), informed by this articulation with the biology that the article extols (and which he worked on at the Department of Biosociology), together with his motto of the economy of the whole man and of all men. His work talks of “an economy of the whole man, of all man, who performs all of his essential functions as a robust and balanced animal, and who also participates in the ascent of the spirit” (Perroux 1943, 30).

This 1943 academic article mobilized a large amount of theoretical content but was still articulated with Perroux’s texts and intended for dissemination in the period. These intense activities for disseminating the communitarian perspectives in the period, which included the creation of different groups and publications, culminated in the creation, together with Yves Urvoy, of the so-called *Renâitre* group in 1942, which, to some extent, radicalized the discourse of the National Revolution and insisted on the idea of doctrinal work and mobilization of the elite that would lead France to this revolution. The objective of the *Renâitre* group was the same as that advocated by Perroux and repeated multiple times in those years: a national communitarian revolution. The tone, however, was more intense and urgent: “Our action has a very limited meaning: Revolution, we specify: National Community Revolution. We find ourselves in the stream of confused aspirations and groping thoughts which for years has prepared the present revolutionary task, and which is the soul of all the important events of our time” (Perroux and Urvoy 1943, i).

The path to the deepening of the national revolution also included, for Perroux, a specific vision on the future of Europe, clearly announced by *Renâitre* by attributing a prominent role in this process to the French nation. This idea is in line with other perspectives vehemently supported by Perroux during those years, including ideas such as the idea of a

complete man, a new man, a healthy society and, in particular, an unmeasured importance attributed to the nation. For him, the nation is the locus for a synthesis of the different communities that are part of the country, though this does not necessarily unfold within a nationalist discourse. The perspective that the *Renaitre* group seemed to sustain, on the contrary, was still associated with the perspective of the 1930s federalist and personalist nonconformist groups that preserved the idea of the nation as a space of belonging and moving away from sectarian perspectives of nationalism. That is, the idea was one of an “integral federalism,” built on the basis of the recognition of diverse collective persons, diverse communities, forming multiples and organic bonds among individuals at the local and national levels as well as, by the same reasoning, the international level.¹³

And if Europe is divided, it is because of these global and confused aspirations, where some focus on one side, others on the other. You have to note that you have to take and keep both, but in a higher order, which will be the European civilization of tomorrow. (...) The first problem, the capital problem, is to remake the unit in the man, to remake the man. (...) The second problem, which is just another side of the first, is to rebuild a healthy society. By remaking a new man, he makes a new society, both a result and a cause, a manifestation and a setting, of a new man. The new man will understand that it is through other men, in common life, that he finds the normal framework for his development and not in sterile isolation. ‘Community’ is the guiding word for the constructive task. It is complemented by another: ‘hierarchical pluralism.’ It is by reintegrating man into numerous human communities organically linked within the Nation that

¹³The idea of “integral federalism” (as opposed to the “integral nationalism”) was in line with several sources of discourse that understood the nation as a kind of community of communities. It is noteworthy how this type of discourse in the mid-1930s could be appropriated by very different figures in the political spectrum. Here again, the reference to Henri Lefebvre and his 1937 book, *Le nationalisme contre les nations* is of particular interest (see Lefebvre 1988 [1937]). Lefebvre speaks positively of “integralism” and “total man” in his search to find, qualify or requalify terms capable of separating nationalism in its forces that pointed to totalitarianism, of aspects of the term that he understood as positive and that could be associated with the idea of homeland and community. There were undoubtedly many terms in dispute at that time, not only for Perroux or Lefebvre. What seemed to matter was most of all a redefinition of the discourse. Even if polarized on one side or the other of the political spectrum, there is a very broad interest, shared by a whole generation in 1930s France, in redefining the terms of the political discourse at a time when the responses presented seemed insufficient to deal with the various dimensions of a persistent crisis.

we will give him the possibility of solving the great political, technical and human problems of the hour, of solving them himself, supported fraternally by his companions of destiny. (Perroux and Urvoy 1943, 84–85)

This understanding of Europe as diverse echoed the ideas that Perroux had already insisted on in the mid-1930s that were broadly in consonance, for example, with the federalist perspectives inspired by personalism asserted by Marc, who insisted at that time on topics such as multi-belonging to different communities at different levels. Analyzing the imperial ambitions of Nazi Germany in 1934, Perroux commented that “the pan-German solution is unacceptable because it destroys Europe. Europe is diversity, originality of autonomous elements on a common civilization background. A continuous German band, stretched between Hamburg and Constantinople, irreparably breaks European unity” (Perroux 1934, 530).

A coincident perspective was also present in his arguments in the postwar period. We can thus insist once again on the elements of continuity in Perroux’s reflection in the interwar period, in the Vichy years and in the immediate postwar period (even if accompanied by a discourse on which the terms of analysis ended up being redefined or remade). In Perroux’s analysis of the postwar period, the perspective of an effective understanding of “cultural pluralism” is a key element for the success of the integration process or, in its own terms, of overtaking the nation (*dépassement de la nation*). Perroux was precisely interested in the criticism of “partial federalism” (as opposed, therefore, to “integral federalism”), which merely proposed the retreat of national borders in the direction of larger territorial units and would simply produce an “expanded nationalism.” For Perroux, the answer, on the contrary, was a process of the progressive “devaluation of borders” for the construction of what he called “Europe unbounded by the sea” (*Europe sans rivages*) (Perroux 1954, 295–96).

4 FINAL REMARKS

It is interesting to note how Perroux, in the pages of the *Renaitre*, repeatedly used variations of the term “confusion.” Perroux, Mounier, Marc and other authors analyzed here tried to understand those confusing aspirations and confusing times and came closer to the coincident perception that not only was action necessary, but also an exercise in interpreting

reality, in order to understand which course of action should be taken. It is from this greater unrest that the search for an answer by nonconformist groups in the 1930s in France was born, and third-way perspectives in personalist and federalist discourses were fundamental dimensions of this. Perroux, Mounier, Marc, Dandieu, Aron, Maulnier and others understood that their efforts, always with a view to revolutionary action, included, above all, a “doctrinal stage.”¹⁴ Not only did this preliminary step serve to educate and convince a wider audience to engage in the intended revolutionary action but also, and perhaps primarily, that stage was the space to affirm (tentative) responses to a confused and unstable reality. It is not surprising that the answers themselves were also sometimes confusing and unstable. The combination of philosophical, spiritualist, political, economic, and social discourses also contributed to this confusion, which tended to very easily create internal dissonances and sometimes conflicts within these groups.

The present attempt to articulate some of these elements with a particular focus on the personalist sources of the third-way discourse, in different of their appropriations (an in particular in Perroux’s political economy of corporatism), leads us finally to a particular conclusion: the enormous plasticity of the personalist argument (which, to some extent, helped to generate confusion in the historiography of this period). The idea of personalism as developed in the French context of the 1930s lends itself easily to both the call for freedom and the call for order. Both the praise of the difference, which is a reaction against the uniformity of the nation, and, on the contrary, the concern with perceiving bonds and elements of belonging shape the collective person and the community. In the end, it was exactly this plasticity that allowed the concepts created in the 1930s context to be used by different groups, with reinforcement from one or the other of its facets, during that decade, throughout the Vichy period, and in the postwar period.

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¹⁴See for example: Marc (1932, 333) or Aron (1935, 282).

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