

THE DEEP ROOTS OF MERITOCRACY

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«La sventura è di per sé inarticolata.
Gli sventurati supplicano in silenzio
che vengano fornite parole per esprimersi.
Vi sono epoche in cui non sono esauditi»
S. WEIL, La persona e il sacro

Abstract Meritocracy, whose teachings are the blaming of the poor and the ethical justification of inequality, is becoming the new religion of our age. Thanks to meritocracy, the natural inequality of the capitalist market, which is artificially mitigated in society by political and social means because it is considered morally and socially undesirable, has become a moral property. Academic merit leads to widely differing privileges and positions, which have sustained and continue to sustain the fabric and inequalities of our society. If we want to break the spiral of inequality and exclusion, we must put in place anti-meritocracy education policies, in the same way that during the twentieth century Europe was able to introduce free, universal and compulsory schooling.

Keywords Meritocracy, Talent, Merit, Inequality, Gratuity.

Meritocracy, whose dogmas are the blaming of the poor and praise for inequality, is becoming the new religion of our time. Its origin in fact is rooted in the story of religions and the worship of idols. The religion most intertwined with economics is that of the Bible. Consider the centrality of the covenant of the people of Israel with YHWH. The Bible took it from the commercial and political treaties of the time, which were based on the principle of “do-ut-des”. In the biblical covenant the initiative comes from God, appearing in some traditions as something one way, without explicit reciprocity: the mere fact, however, that the people had to 'accept' it made the covenant a relationship of reciprocity (as gifts are).

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The chief way in which economics entered the bible is in the theology of retribution. The goods and evils we receive in life are a payment for our faults or merits, or those of our parents. And so the rich were rich twice over: in their daily lives and in their religion.

In the Old Testament we find this expressed mainly in the Pentateuch and in the book of Job (which reacts against that vision). It is a very pervasive and deep-rooted idea in the Bible, up until the New Testament, and passing beyond it right to our day.

This view did widespread and serious damage to the social, spiritual and ethical evaluation of the poor. The poor were the beggars, but so too were the lepers, the blind, the dumb, the lame, all lumped together as the dregs of society.

To defend their idea of a just God, those ancient 'economic religions' condemned the poor, who were discarded by life and by God. The discarded were guilty, even if their faults were not always visible to the naked eye and only to the theological eye. Thus God, in the face of the world's spectacle of apparent injustice, could be considered just because in reality each person received only what he or she had deserved (either themselves or their forebears)

Wealth, health and longevity were doubly blessed, while poverty, sickness and early death were doubly cursed. Until quite recently, many parents segregated their severely disabled children at home or in institutions, because the religious and social curse on their family implied by those diverse children was felt too strongly.

It took millennia for human civilisations (and not all of them yet) to finally be able to say that disability is not a curse and that material and psycho-physical destitution is not a moral stigma. It is a question and a cry, and the civil and moral quality of a society depends on how it responds.

The ancient idea of poverty-curse has never been defeated; it has changed forms (unemployment, inefficiency, immigration...), and has disguised and camouflaged itself (meritocracy). It has become stronger, convincing us that the deserved poverty of others bears no relation to our own deserved wealth: blaming the victims is the oldest and simplest strategy for freeing us from any responsibility. Cain tried to evade responsibility for his brother, not answering God's question ("Where is your brother?") and denying any guardianship for him.

Christianity continued to develop the relationship between economics and faith. From the earliest days of the Church, Paul and later the Church Fathers borrowed the Greek category of *oikonomia* to try to describe and explain the most innovative truths of Christianity (the incarnation and the Trinity: the economy of salvation, the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity).

Talents, drachmas, coins, merchants, administrators, populate the parables and many Gospel images, which are steeped more in economics than in any other area of human life. There is thus much economics in the language and symbolic code of biblical humanism and Christianity, and therefore of the West.

We cannot deny that even in the Gospels there is much economics - although the Greek word *oikonomia/oikonomos* only appears in Luke's parable of the dishonest steward. The interpretation of the parable of the talents, which is a message about the logic of the Kingdom of heaven became, over the centuries, a praise of the logic of business and capitalism and even of meritocracy. It is one of the 'misunderstandings' which come from the use of the language of economics to express realities of faith. The view of the world and social relations typical of economics, *homo oeconomicus*, is therefore much older than economic science. If in modernity *homo oeconomicus* has been able to establish itself as a universal ideology, it is because its logic was ancient and very much rooted in human experience.

It was in fact religion, well before economic science, that invented *homo oeconomicus*. We do not have enough historical evidence to say which came first in this marriage between economics and religion. It is very likely that they co-evolved, because both are primitive in the experience of human communities. The exchange of goods and services based on a golden rule of reciprocity was the first language with which humans learned to relate to one another.

It also provided the first language in which to speak to their idols and gods. It's an economic language that has not helped us in understanding God, or human beings. We have eliminated the biblical God, but we have not freed ourselves from the economic categories of faith that became capitalism. It is very difficult to free ourselves from the economic idea of faith when we are increasingly surrounded by economics and its teachings. We would need a serious theological analysis of capitalism to understand it, and perhaps try to change it.

The Bible (above all the prophets and Job) and Christianity have attempted a real anti-meritocratic revolution, albeit with little success (the parable of the last-hour worker and its anti-meritocratic wage policy; the 'elder brother' in the Prodigal Son story, who rebukes the merciful father for not following the merit scale).

Meritocratic societies are ruthless. Despite this, the ancient meritocratic theology has continued to influence the West. Today, meritocracy is the ethical legitimisation of inequality.

In Europe in the 20th century we fought inequality as an evil; in the 21st century, all it took was to change its name (meritocracy) to transform inequality from a vice into a public virtue. A bizarre outcome, considering that meritocracy was and is presented as a struggle to overcome inequality.

Hence the strange fact that meritocracy fanatics are people who in good faith would like a better and fairer society.

A key word in the present economic and political moment, meritocracy is among the few words capable of acquiring the consensus of (almost) everyone, and whoever dares to question it, distinguishing between meritocracy and meritability (preferring democracy to meritocracy), is immediately pointed out as a supporter of demerit, perhaps to justify his or her own. And the accusation would indeed be justified if those who question meritocracy do so in order to support the cause of the incompetent, the privileged, the recommended, or the protected. Simply to contrast merit with demerit, praising the former and blaming the latter is banal, and therefore not useful.

The argument becomes relevant when we explore it further. The subject of merit is ancient and complex, and has generated endless discussions, even theological ones.

Regarding meritocracy, the words of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin from a hundred years ago ring true: 'Christianity in the age of the Reformation turned into capitalism'.

Indeed meritocracy, before becoming an economic dogma, was a religious and theological category. 'Earning merit', 'earning heaven' and are expressions (among others) and themes that have been central to Christian piety for centuries and continue to accompany the lives of Catholics today.

A certain idea of merit was already present in the Bible, but it was the encounter with Greek and Roman ethics that transformed part of Christianity into an ethics of merit and virtues, to the point of thinking that for a Christian to be declared a saint it had to be shown that he or she practised heroic virtues.

Biblical and evangelical ethics, on the other hand, were different; excellence was not in the virtues but in agape, which is not part of either the Stoic or Aristotelian virtues.

For some years now, meritocracy has left the debates of the theology classrooms, forgotten the doctrinal disputes of Paul, Augustine, Pelagius, and Luther, and entered the more elegant and modern classrooms of *business schools*, where these issues are addressed without theological expertise.

The new name of inequality

Inequality is the natural condition of human beings (and many animals), because the talents that each person receives at birth are different from those of others. The great Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, at the end of the 19th century, demonstrated that income inequalities respond to similar

distributive laws in all societies because they are linked to unequal levels of intelligence, and, being natural, we simply have to accept them as a given of nature.

Christianity, on the other hand, because of the message of radical universal fraternity that animates it, has tried to fight against this datum of nature, attempting to unravel the inequalities underlying the sacred-hierarchical structures of ancient societies. Periods of equality, however, have always been brief and limited to small communities, while the principal narrative of Christian Europe has continued to be, apart from a few outstanding exceptions, a story of inequalities and castes. The law of motion in Western history has generated a few islands of equality and fraternity, in oceans of inequality. Modernity and the Enlightenments, at the culmination of a long and (perhaps too) slow process of cultural and religious maturation, did launch a pitched battle against inequality, and gave rise to an era of scientific, philosophical, spiritual, civil and economic achievements that were unimaginable, extraordinary and immense.

These miracles of the modern West were the fruits of the battle against natural inequalities which were not considered unchangeable, and which were above all a social construction. Without more egalitarian societies (not just more democratic: not all democracies are egalitarian) hundreds of millions of men and women who went on to innovate, invent, and change the world would not have been included in politics and the economy. The brighter moments of medieval Europe in the civic, spiritual and economic sense were associated with more egalitarian periods in the cities and the convents.

This struggle accelerated during the 20th century. The period produced its monsters, but its deepest soul gave birth to the welfare state, it allowed women to be able to study and work, permitted children to stop working so they could go to school, and the elderly to be able to stop working and have a pension to live the last part of their lives with dignity.

It invested a large share of its wealth in creating these wonderful common goods and thus reduce inequalities. For many European countries, the second half of the 20th century was a golden age of an economy and a society where inclusion, equality, rights, quality of work and freedoms grew, and where servants, the poor, castes, and privileges declined.

But while many, almost all of us, were enjoying the fruits of this happy historical conjuncture, in the backrooms of economics, finance and politics an anti-egalitarian counter-revolution was beginning, created and planned by large multinational corporations and international *business* schools. Not something radically new, this could be explained by the ebbs and flows of ideas, reactions and counter-reactions.

What we have, however, is a radical and totally underestimated novelty: in order for capitalism to establish itself as a universal cult, and thus be able to obtain everything from its adherents and fuel a train hurtling along at breakneck speed, it has an absolute need for a moral, possibly spiritual, legitimisation of the axioms on which it is founded. And it has performed this miracle: the natural inequality typical of the capitalist market, which civilisations had artificially mitigated through politics and the churches because it was considered morally and socially undesirable, at one point became a moral property: meritocracy.

Meritocracy is not simply a more attractive name for the former exaltation of inequality, but a perfect mechanism for amplifying and intensifying it. It gives it a content of justice, by considering natural talents as merit rather than gift. Thanks to meritocracy, natural inequalities are no longer opposed but praised and rewarded. The time has come for us to at least begin to become aware of this.

Merit is the great paradox of the economic cult of our time. The first spirit of capitalism was engendered by Luther's radical critique of merit theology, but today that 'rejected stone' has become the 'cornerstone' of the new capitalist religion, springing up in the heart of countries built on precisely that ancient Protestant anti-meritocratic ethic.

Salvation by grace alone and not by our own merits was placed at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was also a revival, after a millennium, of Augustine's polemic against Pelagius (Luther had been an Augustinian monk). The anti-Pelagian critique was essentially a shattering of the ancient idea that salvation of the soul, God's blessing, paradise, could be earned, bought, and merited by our actions. Merit theology also tried to imprison God within meritocratic logic, forcing him to punish and reward on the basis of criteria that the theologians attributed to him.

The fight against Pelagianism was anything but marginal. It was decisive for the Church of the early centuries (a struggle that in reality, as we can see, was never won). If, in fact, Pelagian theology had prevailed, Christianity would have been added to the many apocalyptic and gnostic Middle Eastern sects, or transformed into an ethic similar to Stoicism. It would have lost the *charis* (grace, gratuitousness), which was its specific mark, and which clearly distinguished it from the dominant religious doctrines and meritocratic idolatries.

Neo-Pelagian ideas continued to inform Christian doctrine and above all Christian praxis, right up until the real disease of the "indulgence market", something only understood within a retributive-meritocratic deformation of the Christian message. And as always happens in matters of religion, the consequences of these theological ideas were (and are) immediately social, economic and political. Those who were considered demerited were (and are) condemned and marginalised even

by their fellow human beings, while the deserving, before earning paradise in the next life also achieved it on this earth, where their merits were associated with many privileges, money and power.

Meritocracy and education

The word 'meritocracy' has a relatively short history¹, but for the past few years it has been gathering ever more transversal, choral, consensus. Anyone wishing to denounce corruption and inefficiency need only utter the phrase 'we need more meritocracy here' to gain widespread support, and to convince themselves that they are finally on the right track.

Merit (from *mereor*) is in fact becoming the new global ideology of our time, which by presenting itself as a technique, confusing merit with competence and responsibility, does not easily reveal its ideological nature.

An interesting paradox emerges from the historical excursus just given: the first spirit of Protestant capitalism was generated by Luther's radical critique of the theology of merit. Salvation by *sola gratia* and not by our merits was placed at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. It was also a revival, after a millennium, of Augustine's polemic against Pelagius (Luther had been an Augustinian monk). The anti-Pelagian critique was precisely an overcoming of the ancient idea that salvation of the soul, God's blessing, paradise, could be earned, bought, merited by our actions.

The history of Christian Europe has been a slow process of breaking free from this archaic view of faith, alternating between more Augustinian and more Pelagian historical phases. But until recent times, it had never been possible to build a society that was entirely, or even predominantly, meritocratic. Army, sport, science, school, were areas that tended to be built on merit, but other important spheres of life were governed by different and sometimes opposing logic. In the family, in care, in civil society, the basic criterion was not merit but need, a word now forgotten and replaced by consumer tastes. School, for example, is a place where few if any questioned whether the meritocratic system should be the prevailing one (although not the only one) in the education and evaluation of children and young people.

Academic merit has determined widely differing privileges and dignities, which have governed and continue to govern the structure and inequalities of our societies. Doctors, lawyers and university

¹ M. YOUNG, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. London, Thames and Hudson, 1958. In this satirical essay of fanta-sociology, the author imagines he is in the year 2033, Meritocracy (a term he coined) is in power; some reforms based on equality of opportunity are enacted, particularly in the field of education, but the result produced is not a democratic system, but a new caste society in which the great majority is even more subtly humiliated; hence the uprising.

professors have therefore had much better salaries and social conditions than workers and peasants, while the workers who day and night keep the streets and sewers clean, the nurses and health workers whose work has come powerfully to the fore in the time of our present health emergency, today receive salaries hundreds of times lower than those of the managers of the companies in which they work.

Schools at all levels should not be based on merit. If we look at it from afar on the surface we see successes, a few failures, and we think that school resembles business: grades like salaries, academic achievement like career advancement. But this is too distant and therefore a wrong view of school (and business).

The meritocratic ideology that is also trying, with success, to occupy schools is based on the dogma that talents are merits and therefore those with more talent should be rewarded more. But we all know that this dogma is a deception or at least an illusion for society, and even more so for schools. Talents are gifts, and our performance in life depends on the talents-gifts we receive, and very little on merit (because even my capacity for commitment is a gift). What merit is there in being born intelligent, rich, even good? That is why schools must be inspired by values that are not only different from meritocracy but opposite.

If we want to break the spiral of inequality and exclusion, we will have to initiate anti-meritocratic educational policies, something we were able to do in Europe during the last century with the introduction of universal, compulsory and, free schooling. Article 34 of the Italian Constitution states: 'The able and deserving, even if deprived of means, have the right to attain the highest levels of education'. In the light of what has been said, this formulation could be partly revised. Those who ought to be put in a position to reach the highest levels of studies are not so much or only the able, but the less able, because being more or less able is not a question of merit, but of social, family and environmental conditions, largely inherited, which are neither fault nor merit.

Education open to all and for all was conceived, and sought, to reduce the social and natural inequalities that meritocracy, i.e. the ideology of merit, actually increases. All boys and girls go and must go to school, not just the deserving. Everyone must be enabled to flourish and achieve excellence, not just the deserving. Everyone is entitled to care, esteem, recognition, admiration, dignity even if they do not have much merit or if they have less than others. Moreover, the school is a wonderful garden where many talents flower: "Precossi, I give you the medal. No one is more worthy than you to wear it. I don't just give it to your intelligence and your good will, I give it to your heart, your courage, your character as a brave and good son. Isn't it true," he added, turning towards the class, "that he also deserves it for that? Yes, yes, they all replied in one voice." Precossi was the son of a blacksmith who drank and occasionally beat him. But he too got his medal.

This was not Derossi's medal, who was the top of the class. It was the medal of a different schooling. After De Amicis² came Maria Montessori who eliminated grades, and then Don Lorenzo Milani and the school of Barbiana. Democracy has seen a multiplication of Precossi medals, which today are called school inclusion and support teachers. We have learnt that there is more to children's lives than merit. The day someone convinces us that schools must also be founded on meritocracy we will start giving medals all the same and always to the same pupils, we will make special classes and schools for those with few merits, inequalities will explode and democracy will have finally given way to meritocracy.

We cannot fully understand the rise of inequality in our time if we do not look very seriously at its root: the sharp rise of the meritocratic theology of capitalism. And we cannot understand the increasing blaming of the poor, who are regarded more and more not as wretched but as those with few merits, if we do not consider the unabated advance of meritocratic logic. If, in fact, I interpret the talents received (from life or from parents) as merit, the step of considering those who do not have those talents as undeserving and guilty becomes very, very short.

The effects of meritocracy

Meritocracy, therefore, has very ancient and profound roots. Deep down in human civilizations, there has always been the thought that an order should exist that rewards each person according to the merits he or she has acquired and punishes him or her for the faults committed and accumulated. Generally, this order was conceived as supernatural and postponed to a future life, since it was all too evident that on earth such an order did not exist and had never existed.

At a certain point, however, within the evolution of Western civilisation, an entirely new and unexpected idea appeared, the idea that a meritocratic society was possible in the here and now (Santambrogio 2021). This was because such a society in reality already existed, it was the *business community*, of which large companies and banks were the best examples. There, merits were quantifiable, measurable, could be sorted on a scale, so that everyone got what was due to them, no more and no less. What was “theirs” in merits and, clearly, in demerits. A reward system that convinced much and convinced many, because it presented itself and still presents itself as a higher form of justice (compared to ordinary and common justice).

² DE AMICIS, E. (2018) *Cuore*, ET Classici Einaudi, Torino. The book *Cuore* (Heart), is a very popular Italian children's novel, written in Turin by Edmondo De Amicis, structured in separate episodes and first published by the Milanese publisher Treves in 1886. The book takes the form of a fictitious diary of a third-grade boy who recounts the unfolding of his school year 1881-82: each chapter bears the date of the day and a title referring to the subject. See the recent article <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/la-medaglia-di-un-altro-merito> Luigino Bruni, Avvenire, 22 ottobre 2022.

In the space of just a few years, meritocracy has thus migrated from the business community to the whole of civil society, from politics to schools, from the left to the right, from healthcare to the non-profit sector, and it is also undermining the ecclesial communities. It is a major ideological project, one of the biggest of our time, based on the ethical and anthropological deception that is as obvious as it is unspoken: that our merits and demerits are obvious and easy to see and can be sorted, measured, and then rewarded.

The discourse on merit was also at the centre of a treatise by the economist Melchiorre Gioia, who in 1818 began *Del merito e delle ricompense (On Merit and Rewards)* as follows: "The ideas that in the minds of men correspond to the word merit, are, as everyone knows, infinitely diverse". In reality, today "not everyone knows", and too many have forgotten this old and profound truth. Those who invoke meritocracy think that merit is something one-dimensional, and quite easy to identify, weigh up and use as a criterion for good choices. There are certainly fields in which merit is immediate, those where very specific and rare technical skills are sought, like scientific research or Japanese cuisine. In the economy and in organisations, however, merit is something complex and not at all easy to identify. Let us imagine a small or medium-sized (industrial, let's say) company that has three candidates for a single management position in the personnel area.

The first, Andrea, would like to return to Italy after eight years working abroad as personnel manager in a large company. Among the candidates, he has the best technical curriculum, topped off by a master's degree in 'human resources' from a prestigious university in London. The second one, Bruno, does not have a master's degree, is younger than Andrea, but he does have a first-class degree in economics and has worked for five years as a manager in a social cooperative, obtaining excellent references for his relational talents and teamwork coordination.

Finally there's Catia, who is Bruno's age, is married, has three children, and graduated with honours in the psychology of work, although two years late because she finished her studies when her first child was on the way. She has a brief experience of cooperation work in a large organisation, where she coordinated complex projects, and therefore knows English very well (more than Andrea and Bruno).

Which of the three is more deserving of being hired? Or at least to make it to the second stage of the selection process? This comparative exercise is very common in large organisations, or when small to medium-sized companies outsource personnel selection to external agencies. A first common-sense look at these three curricula should first of all tell us that we are dealing with three people who are all deserving, but deserving for different reasons.

In modern business culture, it's Andrea's merits that are seen and rewarded, more than Bruno's and Catia's. No intelligent recruiter can deny that the merits are many, but in the dominant culture

of the business world, they are weighed and sorted, deeming some more relevant than others (Thomas Piketty). The reason is that technical merits and qualifications can be easily translated into quantity, and so appear objective and thus fair.

On the other hand, relational and qualitative merits are difficult to order objectively, and they have often been used and are still used as excuses to disguise the hiring of friends and relatives. They are merits that lend themselves more to abuse, but they are no less important, even in terms of turnover and company development.

We thus make the serious mistake of forgetting that while a master's degree, techniques, know-how, can be acquired on the market, relational and qualitative talents, the *know-why*, are tied to our stories, and are the result of choices and long and costly investments which no market can provide. Today, companies are not only suffering and closing due to a lack of turnover and financial capital, but also due to a shortage of relational and spiritual capital. Relational and emotional illiteracy leads to an inability to say words like 'excuse me' or 'forgive me', words that, when they are missing, block companies as much as or more than a credit squeeze. This so-called 'human capital' is the primary resource of every enterprise, but it is a plural capital, made up of many dimensions and skills.

Many women especially mothers develop, by nature and by necessity, capacities to manage complexity (children, family, parents, relatives, work, social relations...), capacities that also have a great organisational and economic value, if they are seen and valued in the right way. Scientific research has highlighted the economic damage caused by discrimination against women in decision-making roles. The economic crisis is the result not only of demerit, but also, and above all, of the choices made by too many managers hired solely on the basis of merits measured by master's degrees and PhDs, but who then turned out to be deficient in relationships, ethics, and humanity.

Therefore, the company and the market are not meritocratic environments, because while results depend to a large extent on unforeseen and often unpredictable *ex-post* events, choices are made on the basis of *ex-ante* information. Among successful entrepreneurs there are many undeserving people rewarded simply by chance, while among those who fail there are many deserving ones who simply found the wind against them. The main vehicle of meritocracy is *business* itself.

It is another paradox, even more surprising, of a business meritocracy mainly produced by the Anglo-Saxon world whose humanism was born out of Luther and Calvin's radical polemic against 'salvation by merit'. The novelty of capitalism today is the extension of meritocracy to every sphere of civil life, whose first and most relevant consequence is the ethical legitimisation of inequality, which from being an evil to fight against is becoming a value to be defended and promoted.

The steps are three: 1) we start by considering talent a merit; 2) we continue, reducing people's many merits to the simplest and most useful ones (who today sees the merits of compassion, meekness, humility?); 3) and finally, we remunerate talent-merits in different measure, widening the distances between people and radically forgetting the decisive role that chance and providence play in our talents.

Thus, if I am the child of educated, rich and intelligent parents, if I am born and grow up in a country with many public assets and a good health and education system, if my genetic makeup has been particularly fortunate, it follows that I will attend better schools, I will accrue more scholastic merit than my peers born in more unfavourable natural and social conditions, and I will in all likelihood find a better paid occupation in the labour market under the meritocratic system. And so, by the time I retire, the distance from my fellow citizens who came into the world with fewer talents will have multiplied over my lifetime by a factor of 10, 20, 100.

There is therefore a need for a new public discussion of what merit and its plural nature are. Otherwise, we will continue to have too many deserving people staying outside the walls of the city of work. Some remain there because undeserving protected and recommended candidates pass in front of them; and many others remain because they have merits that our economy and society cannot see and recognise. Two injustices, one more important than the other, and the second is more serious because it is not even perceived as such.

The talents of humility, meekness, compassion, mercy, diverse authentic human and relational capital are systematically denied. They are not valued and are often ridiculed and identified in those considered losers. These different virtues are chained up, as in the myth where Kratos is ordered to chain Prometheus, who is the friend of men and enemy of the powerful and their ideology.

How long will a business community with too many 'easy' merits and a mass destruction of 'difficult' merits last? And what will happen when the famine of merits other than business merits strikes schools, associations and churches? Where will the undeserving multitudes created by meritocracy go?

If we had imagined another kind of capitalism less anchored to the religion of retribution, we would almost certainly have had a less sick planet and healthier social relations. Today we must at least prevent its logic from becoming the culture of all social life.

We have seen that yesterday and today meritocracies have only one great enemy: gratuitousness, which they fear more than anything else because it breaks down hierarchies and frees people from the slavery of merits and demerits. A revolution of gratuitousness - shouted, desired, lived, given –

is the only way to free us from this new flood of Pelagianism, and if, in this time of slavery and forced labour in the service of Pharaoh, we keep dreaming together of a promised land free from all slavery, including the gentle slavery of merit.

We are greater than our merits, we are better than our demerits.

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