

## A Diachronic Investigation of the Great Chain of Being Metaphor in Religious and Political Discourses of Early Modern and Enlightenment Philosophy

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### Abstract

*The great chain of being has shaped and reflected Judeo-Christian world order since the beginnings of institutionalized religion and politics. The purpose of this paper is to uncover the diachronic variations in the great chain that occurred, possibly existing parallel to one and another, in early modern and Enlightenment monarchist (conservative) discourses. The selected corpus (Pascal, Burke, Montesquieu) was analyzed within the methodological framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). By virtue of its disciplinary complexity, CMT can not only provide a detailed structural analysis of the great chain metaphor, but it can also contribute to a more profound and broader understanding of conservative tendencies in general. The results of the analysis suggest that in the period covered the great chain metaphor shows conceptual changes which enable the diversification of conservative discourse related to social and political order.*

**Keywords:** monarchist; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; discourse; great chain

### 1. Introduction

The present article aims at uncovering and explaining the possible variations in the Great Chain model and metaphor in 17-18<sup>th</sup> century political and religious discourse. Andreas Musolff (2010) draws attention to the importance of diachronic metaphor analysis as such method is susceptible to provide a holistic view, integrating the linguistic, philosophical and historical aspects of the research topic. Now, of all the concepts the history of ideas labels as “universal”, the great chain of being model is probably the most influential in shaping humanity’s world view on social and natural order since the beginnings of social, political and scientific thinking (Lovejoy, 1965). Comprising the whole of the created universe, this model has prevailed despite the numerous paradigm shifts that have ensued in the sciences since the dawn of the early modern era. The immanent ubiquity of the great chain justifies an in-depth investigation in order to acquire a more profound insight into the linguistic and ideological changes or variations that have occurred in the model throughout history.

Being simultaneously the engine and the subject of these changes, the study of the great chain retains a disciplinary complexity, requiring a multiperspectival and, so to say, pragmatic approach that views the phenomenon as an active participant of a macro-level process. In an attempt to provide a detailed and thorough description of the subject, the methodological tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) were employed to discourse-level analysis. The conclusions were interpreted within the relevant politico-religious context, supported by previous research done in the history of ideas. By virtue of its interdisciplinary nature, the applied research method is susceptible of mapping the mutual interaction between the linguistic and ideological dimensions of the discourse, keeping in mind that the research is at the same time a historical enquiry. In an effort to preserve historicity, an essential criterion of the corpus should be that the texts selected for investigation show ideological coherence; that is, they are organized along (roughly) the same ideological (political, religious, economic, etc.) mindset. The fulfillment of this requirement would logically ensure both historical continuity and comparability. Nevertheless, the analysis should not consider the social context, as the Cambridge scholar Quentin Skinner (In: Horkay Hörcher 1997: 49) puts it, to be “the determinant” of the evolution of the idea; rather, a more accurate attitude would be to unfold the possible meanings of the idea within the given society, the context functioning as a frame helping the interpretative process. When selecting the corpus, the most important criterion was therefore that of ideological coherence, taking account of any presumed variations.

The time span it covers is the period between 1664 and 1790, the publication of Pascal's *Thoughts (Pensées)*, 1670 and Edmund Burke's first edition of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Besides these two major works, the corpus also included Montesquieu's *(On) The Spirit of Laws (De l'esprit des lois)*, 1748. Although the three texts represent three different genres and authorial intentions, they can be considered ideologically coherent as they all treat the great chain of model similarly, that is, they reinforce an essentially hierarchy-centred, monarchist, in modern terms, "conservative" political mindset. Within this context, the great chain constitutes the core of the discourse on the *state*, which is the target domain of various body and family metaphors. In addition, these metaphors are often explicitly linked to legal definitions of property and inheritance (Kontler 1997: 228-230). The next section briefly presents the basic tenets of CMT, along with its particular applications in literary and discourse studies.

## **2. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT): accounting for the infinite complexity of human cognition<sup>1</sup>**

The emergence of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT, coined by Lakoff and Johnson 1980) opened the way to a method that enables complex interdisciplinary research in the Humanities. Through the synthetization of the latest results drawn from interrelated research fields, CMT contributes to a more holistic and comprehensive interpretation of written discourse. It ceaselessly seeks connection and passage points between disciplines, thereby treating intratextual and extratextual realities together, analyzing cause-effect relations as well as the psychological (conceptual), cultural and ideological foundations that lie beyond the linguistic realizations of a given text.

The principles of CMT, a dynamically developing branch of Cognitive Linguistics, were laid down in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's fundamental work entitled *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). In its essence, Cognitive Linguistics investigates the relationship between cognition, language and culture in the process of meaning creation (Kövecses & Benczes 2010: 13). Being to a great extent empirical, it is built upon a holistic, ever-shaping concept of man. It takes as a starting point the assumption that human thinking – architected in the form of propositions and image representations – is principally figurative or metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson 1989: 6; Kövecses & Benczes 2010: 79-80). The conceptual system of the brain is made up of concrete (physically existent) and abstract concepts; the latter takes longer cognitive processing time due to the fact that abstract concepts, indispensable as they may be, have no palpable physical dimension. In order to fit them into the cognitive system, the brain uses the information of the outside world; that is, it integrates the most salient elements of bodily, visual and social psychological experience into a mental category or scheme: the conceptual metaphor. To take an example, the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY (*we've come a long way together*) or ARGUMENTATION IS WAR (*he defeated his standpoint*) are metaphors that facilitate the understanding of abstract concepts (life and argumentation) through the structure of concrete concepts (journey and war) (Kövecses, 2005: 20-21).

As metaphor is a primarily conceptual phenomenon, its presence is not limited to language. It manifests itself in all other fields of cognition such as in symbols, myths, traditions as well as in historical and political discourse (Lakoff & Johnson 1989: 159; Kövecses 2005: 69). Also, it is important to see that despite what can be called the "universality" of metaphors (i.e. a certain number of metaphors are shared by all or by most cultures and languages examined so far, which suggests similar conceptual schemata across cultures), the underlying structures and linguistic realizations of metaphors are essentially determined by culture, collective and individual, psychological and bodily experience; naturally, this process is not unidirectional as culture, body and metaphor shape one and another (and their relation) in dynamic interaction (Ning Yu [In: Frank, Dirven, Ziemke, Bernádez 2008: 388]). The human body and the environment acting as the most immediate source and filter of cognition, Lakoff introduced the concept of *embodiment* as the principal characteristic of human thinking.

### **2.1. The applications of CMT in discourse analysis**

The primacy of embodiment extends to the whole of cognition, comprising such complex mental processes as the creation and interpretation of written discourse. Cognitive Poetics, coined by Reuven Tsur (1992), assumes that literature is a special form of cognition and experience, a possible way to interpret the world; although it stems

<sup>1</sup>This general introductory part draws on Csenge E. Aradi (2017). Translated into English by the author.

from our general mental processes, it has its specific psychological and social implications (Gavins & Steen 2003:1).

This entails that the reading of any piece of text<sup>2</sup> has to be accompanied by the examination of its psychological, social and cultural realities, and by the uncovering of the constant interactions between these realities as they can provide the key to the genesis and interpretation of the given text. By reason of its interdisciplinary, CMT is well-suited to such a multi-faceted analysis since it is susceptible of grasping the dynamism between text and reality through language. In accordance with its basic tenets, CMT postulates that literary and everyday metaphors differ solely at the level of creativity, their conceptual basis being essentially the same: embodied cognition (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 53; Kövecses 2005: 49). All this suggests that the analysis of the metaphors manifest in a text can give a more detailed and comprehensive insight into the psychological and socio-cultural processes shaping that given piece of written discourse. Moreover, it provides direct access to the conceptual aspects of intra- and intertextual coherence (Kövecses 2010: 285), i.e. it unveils the concepts along with the discourse is organized. Elena Semino and Gerard Steen remark that the function a metaphor fulfills within the given discourse is also determined by genre and authorial intentions (In: Gibbs 2008: 238). Now, in what concerns the CMT perspective on the great chain, Lakoff and Turner (1989: 166-213) provide a detailed linguistic and cultural description of the model, accentuating the social and political consequences of the structure and maintaining that it is primarily a *metaphor* of dominance and subjugation (*Ibid.*, p. 213). This feature is most explicitly brought into prominence in political and religious discourse as these are the domains where the preservation of the fixed hierarchical order is of primary importance. The following sections present the conceptual and cultural analysis of the great chain metaphor in each of the works listed in the corpus above; throughout the analysis, the similarities and differences between them are highlighted in order to support the preliminary conclusion that despite the relative stability of the model in the period, the metaphor itself is subject to flexibility and changes depending on the particular viewpoint represented by the author.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Pascal: the exploitation of the body metaphor in apologetics

The eminent mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was, at the same time, an ardent Jansenist (a religious movement professing Saint Augustine's theology which emerged in the first half of the 1600s, see: Cottret 2016), who consecrated much of his late work to write the apologetics of the Christian faith, published posthumously in 1670 under the title *Thoughts (Pensées)*. Although fragmentary in its composition, *Thoughts* is actually a proof of Pascal's ability to understand and synthesize the most diverse discourses, which attributes an exceptionally logical and strong persuasive force to his own argumentation. Pascal's sole purpose is to convince the reader about God's exclusive supremacy in both earthly and heavenly spheres (see, for example, Descotes 1976: 13-28). The exploitation of metaphors is a major instrument in structuring the argumentation (Le Guern 1969: 240; Parker 2013: 55). In general, it can be observed that Pascal exploits THE ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE HUMAN BODY, more precisely, THE STRUCTURE OF THE ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BODY METAPHOR in his scheme of the spiritual unity between God and his people (see Aradi 2015a; also Aradi 2015b, 2015c; 2017). In fact, the metaphor goes as far as to have its target domain replaced by this latter concept, the final specification being THE UNITY OF GOD AND PEOPLE IS THE HUMAN BODY. This metaphor is most prominent in the section comprising fragments 474-585<sup>3</sup>, where Pascal discusses the role of divine grace in the relationship between God and its people:

To regulate the love which we owe to ourselves, we must imagine a body full of thinking members, for we are members of the whole, and must see how each member should love itself, etc. (fragment 474) If the feet and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting this particular will to the primary will which governs the whole body. Apart from that, they are in disorder and mischief; but in willing only the good of the body, they accomplish their own good. (fragment 475)

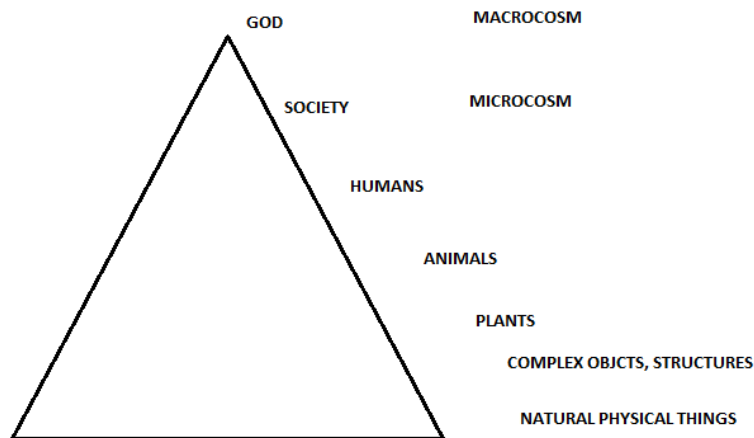
<sup>2</sup>As literature did not clearly separate from political, religious or philosophical writing at that time, it is safest to assume that all texts had some kind of literary function independently of their subject matter.

<sup>3</sup>English source text published by E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1958.

Available: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm>

[...]The separate member, seeing no longer the body to which it belongs, has only a perishing and dying existence. (fragment 483). Aradi (2015a: 41) remarks, based on the above extracts taken from *Thoughts*, that this unity is viewed in the binary terms of the healthy/unhealthy functioning of the body, with the members (people) submitting themselves to the heart (God), the divine grace acting as an intermediary radiating God's will (blood).

A principal metaphorical entailment is that THE APPROPRIATE FUNCTIONING OF THE SYSTEM (God's unity with people) IS HOMEOSTASIS, with the sick parts (people excluded from grace) being separated from the healthy body as explained in fragment 483. The above metaphor can be related to the great chain in two ways. First, it reinforces its structural hierarchy, the peak of which occupied by God, the Creator of all animate and inanimate existence. Here follows a general outline of the great chain metaphor, integrating what Lakoff and Turner call a "basic" and an "extended" model:



The second reason why Pascal's body metaphor fits so well in the great chain model is that it undergoes a conceptual operation first described by Lakoff and Turner (1989: 167). They explain that the levels of the hierarchy, although rigid in their social embeddedness, are mentally permeable, facilitating the understanding of abstract categories. That is, higher-level entities can be viewed in terms of lower-level ones and vice versa. In this specific case, it is the complex structure level that aids the comprehension of the concept of divine unity. As Lakoff and Turner note, the great chain represents a "recurring conceptual complex" (*Ibid.*, 172), a "common sense theory of how things work" (*Ibid.*), a complex metaphor made up of several conceptual and pragmatic properties. Even though Pascal's *Thoughts* was destined to be an essentially theological work, it does relate to the idea of state and political stability given that the era's intense theological disputes had strong political hues:

[...]We must consider the general good; and the propensity to self is the beginning of all disorder, in war, in politics, in economy, and in the particular body of man [...]. If the members of natural and civil communities tend towards the weal of the body, the communities themselves ought to look to another more general body of which they are members. We ought therefore to look to the whole [...]. (fragment 477)

It is essential to note, however, that in his *Deuxième discours sur la condition des grands* (1660), Pascal expresses a certain degree of criticism towards the leading elite, stating that the greatness of nature should not be confused with the greatness of the establishment (Cottret 2016: 117). Being a harsh critic of social hypocrisy, Pascal refused the love and respect of "the gown", those being exclusively reserved to God.

### 3.2. The great chain in British conservative discourse: a historical overview

The concept of rational order in the universe was –and, to some extent, still is – a principal organizational force of society. God having pre-calculated the arrangement and functioning of the universe at the beginning of time – an idea largely accepted in the age of Rationalism and of major scientific discoveries –, the society (the social micro- and macrocosm) had to be, logically, the reflection of this flawless order (Lovejoy 1965: 183).

In practical terms, this meant that all creatures occupied their fixed positions, and staying there guaranteed the smooth and appropriate functioning of the system. Lovejoy (*Ibid.*, 181) defines the great chain along the concepts of infinity, plenitude (i.e. God's infinite goodness in the creation), diversification, continuity and gradation. Of the five, continuity and gradation were the key organizing principles of early modern society, politics, and of the discourses structuring and fixing power relations. This model especially applied to early modern British monarchist politics and, later, to the political philosophy termed conservatism. Historically speaking, the period app. between Henry VIII (†1547) and the voting system reforms in the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of a political discourse submitted to the axiom that social and political status quo has to be maintained to ensure the liberty of man (in the British context liberty primarily means one's rights to possession and dignity). Embedded into a political discourse framed by the Anglican establishment, this principle had a number of ideological considerations which all aimed at reinforcing the existing monarchist structure (Lovejoy 1965: 200-201; Kontler 1997: 38-40). The first and most important of these is the maintenance of the idea that the legitimacy of the Monarch is of Godly origin, or at least it is guaranteed by divine providence. The Monarch's authority is justified by the imperfection of people (Lovejoy 1965: 189; Kontler 1997: 22); being unable to make appropriate political decisions, people must transfer political power to a greater, more competent person or body whose existence is legitimized by the Creator, the sole perfection in the universe. This logic corresponds to the principle of gradation; at the same time, the Monarch has to be supervised by the Parliament and the Church for the preservation of balance. The concept of continuity is maintained by the social consent that the British constitution originates from a period that goes beyond collective memory (see, for example, Pocock 1997). Being a large corpus of laws and principles instead of one single document, governing is based on the careful examination of precedents rather than on theory. As this practice has proved efficient throughout the centuries, there is no reason to break the tradition. An unwanted event of revolution would destabilize the status quo maintained along the principles of continuity and gradation; also, they have been largely unsuccessful apart from some partial success. The conclusion to be drawn is that God structured the hierarchy exactly the way it should be, and the same applies to its social projection. In other words, people are supposed to observe the axiom of status quo and act accordingly, accepting their imperfection and the resulting position they occupy in the hierarchy, in order to maintain the social and economic equilibrium that guaranteed their basic rights, and to contribute to the common good of this consensus-based system (Lovejoy 1965: 200). Propaganda and political thinkers (Filmer, Hale, Hobbes) of the age tended to use, in a similar vein to Pascal, the human body as a source domain to reinforce the instrumentality and rightfulness of the hierarchy.

### 3.2.1. Preserving stability at all cost: Burke on the French Revolution

As it can be concluded from the above, man is the most unstable element of this de facto contractual system. In the conventional great chain model, man occupies a middle but central position. In addition to being the reiteration of the microcosm, man possesses soul, uniting extension and anima, and therefore representing earthly and celestial existence in one (Lovejoy 1965: 103). Nevertheless, from a political point of view, man as the axle of the chain means a potential danger: being a thinking animal conscious of its position, man can revolt against the limited frame of existence to which they are confined. Actually, the participation of a selected population in legislation and the almost total inclusion of the Church in politics and propaganda served to prevent any resistance on the part of the people. Once revolution breaks out, the hierarchy collapses and so does the divine order of things. This concern is met by the ardent conservative Edmund Burke, who, in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)<sup>4</sup>, bursts out against the 1789 French revolution<sup>5</sup>, claiming that all attempts to transfer power into the hands of people and to deprive the Monarch (Louis XVI) and the Church (Catholic) of its power are a hot-bed of anarchy. Employing a powerful, passionate rhetoric, Burke examines all aspects of governing and repeatedly declares that keeping to one's fixed position in the hierarchy is the only way to ensure the equilibrium of the establishment and the rights of people (which does not, by any means, imply social equality in a monarchy, especially when observing the principle of "natural inequality", Kontler 1997: 23).

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<sup>4</sup>Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and Thomas Paine. *The Rights of Man* (1961). Garden City, New York: DolphinBooks, Doubleday & Company, Inc.

<sup>5</sup>For an analysis of Burke's *Reflections* in light of the ancient constitution, see Pocock 1997.

From a conceptual perspective, what Burke does in *Reflections* is compare and contrast the two ideas of state and the two implementations of the rights of men, thus presenting two great chain models: the traditional, fixed hierarchy following a prescribed order, contrasted to a subverted one condemned to demolition according to the philosopher's frame of interpretation. It is necessary to remember, however, that this meaning can be logically inferred only from the political stance Burke represents. When examining the great chain models presented by Burke from a CMT perspective, a number of similarities can be established between the systematic use of conceptual metaphors in *Reflections* and in Pascal's *Thoughts*. Let us consider the following extracts, presented according to the conceptual metaphor on which they are based.

**METAPHOR: THE ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE HUMAN BODY/A HUMAN BEING: THE STATE IS THE HUMAN BODY specification**

[Defending the revolution of 1688] They acted by the ancient organized states in the shape of their old organization, and not by the organic molecule of a disbanded people. (p. 33)

Your legislators, in everything new, are the very first who have founded a commonwealth upon gaming, and infused the spirit into it as its vital breath (p. 209)

[Comparing earlier subversions in France to the revolution] [...] Because, among all their massacres, they had not slain the mind of their country [...] The organs also of the state, however shattered, existed. (p.61)

**METAPHOR: MAN'S POSITION IN THE STATE IS MAN'S POSITION IN THE GREAT CHAIN.**

The rights of men are in a sort of middle, incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned. The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes, between evil and evil.(p.75)

The following passage clearly demonstrates how contemporaneous conservative thinking exploited the great chain metaphor, accentuating its salient elements in a way that they support the virtues of the monarchy (order, authority, obedience):

**METAPHOR: SUBORDINATION (TO AUTHORITY) IS (THE GUARANTEE OF) PEACE**

Good order is the foundation of all good things. To be enabled to acquire, the people, without being servile, must be tractable and obedient. The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not find the principles of natural subordination by art rooted out of their minds. (p.262)

To quote Lakoff, the great chain metaphor “[a]s a chain of dominance, [it] can become a chain of subjugation”(1989: 213). Originally created to establish relations between the entities of the natural and the transcendental world, the great chain came to define everyday thinking to such an extent that it enabled politicians and political philosophers to make explicit reference to it in their line of reasoning; what happens is that basically they use an already fixed set of ideology to increase the persuasive power of their argumentation. The position of man within the political hierarchy adjusts to their place in the great chain, and this position is supposed to stay fixed. Also, the body-metaphor (apart from the fact the human body is, indeed, a most manifest source domain as it is the principal physical channel of experience and is thus easy to understand) suggests that unity and hierarchical orderliness in the political organization is crucial because, similarly to the functioning of the human body, the state works efficiently only if all members and organs are in their place, making up the superior whole. Together with the great chain model, there's another metaphor shaping conservative discourse: THE STATE IS A FAMILY. With the King on top of the earthly chain and God supervising its Creation, they constitute the target-domain projections of the father. George Lakoff, in his blog entry entitled *Why Trump?*<sup>6</sup>, provides an interpretation of contemporary US politics based on the two most typical family models existing in Western European societies. The nurturant parent family, a model that promotes equality within the family but supposes a certain degree of parental authority, is an essential building block of progressive thinking. On the other hand, the strict father family model advocates the quasi complete authority of the father figure, and as such implies an inherently conservative perspective on politics and social order.

<sup>6</sup>Lakoff, G. Why Trump? 2nd March 2016 Access: 9th March 2016  
Available: <https://georgelakoff.com/2016/03/02/why-trump/#more-4935>

### 3.3. Philosophy reshaping the model: Montesquieu on God and human nature

The strict father figure represents authority and as such shapes the mainstream discourse.

The figures of the King, God, and the tradition of attributing divine origin to political power are reflections of the strict father model within this conservative mindset.<sup>7</sup> It is strongly influenced by religion and ensures the Church's stable position in the political scene. However, once God and divine intervention is ruled out of the system, the relations within the the great chain are altered, if not destabilized. Charles Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755), a practicing judge and an eminent political thinker, made an attempt to synthesize his philosophy on law, legislation and society in his milestone work entitled (*On*) *The Spirit of Laws* (1748).

Besides being the first to consider how climatic conditions can shape national attitude and political establishment (referred to as "la théorie des climats", Clément 1969: 23-27), Montesquieu possessed an open and analytical mindset. As a broad definition, Montesquieu was, in modern terms, a conservative thinker: he believed in the honours of monarchy and of moderate governing, but handled it with criticism, having developed an extremely analytical and sophisticated view on the different forms of government (Shklar 1994: 72-74). However, there is an element in Montesquieu's system which makes his philosophy crucially different from mainstream monarchist thinking, at least in terms of the great chain system: he represented deism. That is, he did not deny the existence of God (he did believe in a superior transcendental power), but he considered God the Great Watchmaker (*le Grand Horloger*) who does not interfere with earthly proceedings. Montesquieu goes further and states that divine laws governing physics are not the same as human laws shaping society (*Ibid.*, book I: 54). By doing so, he did not only emphasize the imperfection of the human society, but significantly weakened God's importance in actual state legislation, thereby making ecclesiastic influence in politics unnecessary and undesirable. Consider the following extract:

Man, as a physical being, is, like other bodies, governed by invariable laws. As an intelligent being, he incessantly transgresses the laws established by God, and changes those of his own instituting. He is left to his private direction, though a limited being, and subject, like all finite intelligences, to ignorance and error: even his imperfect knowledge he loseth; and, as a sensible creature, he is hurried away by a thousand impetuous passions. Such a being might every instant forget his Creator; God has therefore reminded him of his duty by the laws of religion. Such a being is liable every moment to forget himself; philosophy has provided against this by the laws of morality. Formed to live in society, he might forget his fellow-creatures; legislators have, therefore, by political and civil laws, confined him to his duty.<sup>8</sup>

He did not completely dismiss religion, though, but considers it a sociological fact rather than the earthly manifestation of a transcendental supreme being. He regarded religious dogmas as an instrument of good and virtuous citizenship provided that people interiorize a moral constructive for the given society (book II: 93-105). Basically, it is the laws of religion that have to adjust to the moral of people, the latter determined and formed by a number of external factors. This upside down view of religion in society can be seen as a logical consequence of Montesquieu's deism and first-hand experience as a judge. From a great chain point of view, what happens is that man's in-between and largely relativized position is much more likely to be shaped by elements of the hierarchy other than God, i.e. abstract systems (climate), geography, lower-level beings (animals and plants) and social constructs (i.e. commerce, establishments). Montesquieu was certainly among the first conservative thinkers trying to comprehend the human being, half-animal, half-divine, in its infinite psychological complexity. By doing so, he inevitably reshaped the conventional great chain model.

### 4. Conclusions

The aim of this diachronic investigation was to trace the possible variations or changes in the great chain metaphor in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century conservative political and religious discourse.

<sup>7</sup> John Locke clearly rejected the idea of a political establishment based on a family model, as he clearly stated in his critique of Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), included in *Two Treatises of Government*. (1689) Filmer, like many of his monarchist contemporaries, justified the King's divine right by arguing that power is derived from the parents' authority, and, Adam being the first King, every monarch is entitled to the same right.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Nugent's translation (1758, second edition). Available: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/montesquieu-complete-works-vol-1-the-spirit-of-laws>

Far from being conclusive, the analysis implies that it is the conceptual structure of the model that is subject to variation, whereas its language-level manifestations remain relatively stable in the corpus. The present research included Pascal, Burke and Montesquieu's works, all three representing a different shade of the conservative spectrum; accordingly, the great chain model is susceptible to alterations that permit its adjustment to the philosophy and purpose of the given text. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive understanding of the great chain model within early modern and Enlightenment discourse requires the expansion of the corpus comprising a larger number of texts both horizontally (from the same period and politico-religious context) and vertically (chronologically advancing). This method of corpus selection would not only ensure the reliability of the results, but would also create, through intersexuality, a coherent view on the subject.

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