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Between State-Managed Reforms and Private Utopia: The Entrepreneurial Projects of Pablo de Olavide

Abstract If we look for prefigurations of modern capitalist entrepreneurship in 18th-century Spain, Pablo Antonio José de Olavide y Jáuregui (1725–1803) would perhaps appear to be one of its most emblematic, and probably best-known incarnations outside of Spain. However, in order to determine Olavide’s new enlightened economic habitus and the particular nature of his “atopian” entrepreneurship, which has not yet found its “place” in the Spanish society of the time, as I will argue, this paper concentrates primarily on the transformations and continuities of the texts that prepared and accompanied his famous reform project of the colonization of the Sierra Morena (1766–1767), the *Fuero de Población* (1767), and the *Informe sobre la ley agraria* (1768), as well as the utopian parts of his widely read Christian treatise *El Evangelio en triunfo o historia de un filósofo desengañado* (1797–1798), which he composed shortly before his death.

Keywords: Olavide, entrepreneurship, agrarian reform, inner colonization, self-interest, biopolitics, Christian utopia

1. The atopia of the entrepreneur in 18th-century Spain

Whereas historical figures such as the Basque businessman, erudite humanist and politician Juan de Goyeneche y Gastón (1656–1735), one of the representatives of the early Spanish reformism of the 18th century, are not so well known to a wider audience today,¹ Pablo Antonio José de Olavide y Jáuregui, or Pablo de Olavide for short, to whom this contribution is devoted, is in contrast one of the most emblematic and best-known Spanish reformers of the Age of Enlightenment, probably even outside Spain.

Choosing a figure as famous as Olavide for the purpose of characterizing him as a Spanish “protagonist of production,” however, involves certain advantages and disadvantages. To be sure, one of the biggest advantages is that the work and endeavors of Olavide seem to coincide with the scope and the limits of the Spanish Reform movement itself, as has already been stated, for instance, about Benito Jerónimo Feijoo for the first half of the 18th century.² The disadvantage

1 On Goyeneche cf. Witthaus in this volume.

2 Cf. Stiffoni 1986, 61–62.

probably is that focusing once more on this particularly brilliant, talented, energetic, entrepreneurial and dazzling figure diverts the attention from other reformers of the second or third rank, such as perhaps Juan de Goyeneche, and might continue thus to contribute to an antiquated and stereotyped idea of the Spanish Enlightenment.

So what makes Olavide such an outstanding figure?³ At least five things need to be mentioned here. First, his origin. Olavide was a so-called “indiano,” a remigrant from the Latin American colonies. He was born in 1725 in Lima, the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, and came to Spain in 1752 at the age of 27, impelled by juridical prosecution. In Spain, his American provenance proved to be significant in two ways: for quickly being considered an expert in questions of colonization and, according to historians, for the freshness, the impartiality and the “virginal sentido de lo nuevo” (“virginal sense of the new.” My trans.)⁴ with which he set about the Herculean reform task he was later asked to perform by the Spanish government against the resistance of the ruling elites.⁵

Second, his projects. Over a span of ten years, between 1766 and 1776, Olavide held several public offices, first in Madrid and then in Sevilla, that served to establish his reputation as an effective and resolute reformer in Spain and abroad. In this period he carried out reforms in fields as diverse as the municipal treasury, infrastructure, welfare assistance, the theater, the educational system and, above all, the foundation of forty new settlements in the deserted and fallow areas of Andalusia and the Sierra Morena, where he succeeded in placing 6,000 settlers from Germany and other countries.⁶ In Olavide’s own words, these “Nuevas Poblaciones” (“New Settlements”) were conceived as a model for the rest of Spain “no sólo para la buena agricultura, sino también para la industria,

3 On Olavide’s life and work, cf. mainly the monographs by Defourneaux 1959; Aguilar Piñal 1966; Capel 1970; Perdices Blas 1993 and Marchena Fernández 2001 as well as the articles by Dufour 1966 and Perdices Blas 2003.

4 Núñez 1987, XI. Cf. also Aguilar Piñal 1969, 23 and Capel 1970, 5.

5 I address the question of the extent to which Olavide’s acting in metropolitan Spain was influenced by his colonial experience in more detail in Tschilschke 2017. For Olavide’s status as “criollo” and “indiano” cf. Neal 2017, 13–15.

6 On Olavide’s reform projects beyond the monographs already mentioned, cf. Aguilar 1974; Alcázar Molina 1927, 1930; Avilés Fernández / Sena Medina 1988, 1991; Bernaldo de Quiros 1986; Caro Baroja 1952; Chiareno 1986; Merchán 1996; Oliveras Samitier 1998; Palacio Atard 1962, 1989, 2006, 103–122; Pérez Fernández 2018; Pérez Fernández / Hamer Flores 2020; Reese 2022; Vázquez Lesmes 1979; Vicens Vives 1972, 446–447.

actividad y trabajo de sus naturales” (“not only for good agriculture, but also for the industry, activity and labor of its people.” My trans.).⁷

Third, the fact that he was persecuted and convicted by the Inquisition. Olavide’s ambitious colonization project and his activities as superintendent of the New Settlements came to a sudden end when he was arrested in Madrid and accused of heresy by the Holy Inquisition in 1776. Two years later, he was sentenced to lifelong seclusion in a monastery in a spectacular public propaganda trial. To any observer, it was clear that the Inquisition wished to make an example of him. In the 18th century, Olavide was therefore considered throughout Europe as “la víctima por antonomasia de la Inquisición” (“the victim of the Inquisition par excellence”).⁸

Fourth, his international reputation. The huge echo that Olavide’s punishment evoked in the whole of Europe has mainly to do with his previous trips to France: Since 1757 he had become acquainted with many major figures of the Enlightenment, like Voltaire, Diderot and D’Alembert. It was his first biographer, Denis Diderot, who in 1779 laid the basis for the myth of Olavide as a scapegoat of the church and a great reformer, a myth that already surrounded him during his lifetime and created his posthumous fame.⁹ What’s more, the New Settlements in Andalusia rapidly turned into an attraction for international travelers from England, France, Germany and Italy, including Giacomo Casanova, who reports on his visit there in 1768, in his posthumous *Histoire de ma vie* (“*History of My Life*”).¹⁰

Fifth, Olavide’s so-called “conversion.” After two years of detention in Spain, Olavide managed to escape to France. Under the impression of the excesses of the French Revolution he began to write a monumental apology of Christianity

7 Letter to Miguel de Múzquiz, September 5, 1774, quoted from Perdices Blas 2003, 17.

8 Dufour 1988, 5.

9 Cf. Denis Diderot “Don Pablo Olavidès. Précis historique, rédigé sur des mémoires fournis par un espagnol” (about 1779; “Don Pablo Olavidès. Historical précis, written according to memories provided by a Spaniard.” My trans.). For the fabrication of the later myth of Olavide, cf. Núñez 1987, XXVII–XXXIV and Marchena Fernández 2001, 86–92, in which, however, no mention is made of the historical novel *Goya oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* (1951; “*This is the Hour*,” 1956) by the German writer Lion Feuchtwanger (1884–1958) who, in the third chapter of the second part, devotes some very suggestive pages to Olavide and the proceedings that were attempted against him.

10 The numerous literary and travelers’ testimonies, both Spanish and foreign, about the “Nuevas Poblaciones” are studied, among others, in Alcázar Molina 1930, 99–103; Capel 1970, 113–134 and Chiareno 1986.

in four volumes, *El Evangelio en triunfo o historia de un filósofo desengañado* (“*The Gospel of Triumph, or the story of a disenchanted philosopher*”), which would become his most successful work. Anonymously published in Valencia in 1797, it was soon translated into English, German, Italian, Portuguese and Russian, and turned out to be one of the greatest bestsellers of the 19th century. To Olavide “la más singular apologia de la religión católica que nunca haya sido escrita” (“the most original apology of the Catholic religion ever written.” My trans.)¹¹ allowed him to return to Spain, where he died in 1803.

Despite this short outline of Olavide’s life and work, I am not specifically interested in his biography here, even though it might be “la más altamente novelesca de todo el XVIII español” (“one of the most novelesque of all the Spanish 18th century.” My trans.).¹² I would prefer to concentrate on the particular nature of the entrepreneurship which is so obviously at work in his reforming practices and writings. For this purpose, I will compare the continuities and transformations between the texts related to the colonization of the Sierra Morena and the utopian parts that, quite surprisingly, constitute the fourth volume of his Christian treatise. In doing so, we have to keep in mind that the relationship between reform and utopia is dialectic in the sense that reforms are always inspired by an ideal of better practice, and utopia is often conceived with the intent to inspire reforms.

So, if we consider first the pragmatic texts of the 1760s and then the extensive apology he composed shortly before his death, it very quickly becomes obvious that his reforming ideas and measures astonishingly did not change significantly over the years, whereas their pragmatic and conceptual framings indeed did alter: from reform to utopia, and from the state as an agent to the individual as the center of action. But between these two positions one place remains empty: the place of the modern private entrepreneur. We might call this the “atopia”, the placelessness of the entrepreneur in Olavide. Even if many traits of modern entrepreneurship, understood emphatically as an act of “creative destruction”¹³ that recombines natural, human, and financial resources in an innovative way, always willing to take risks, are already present in Olavide’s thinking and acting, this new habitus still lacks a proper place in the Spanish society of the 18th century.

11 Dufour 1988, 5. On the successful commercialization of the book, cf. Dufour 2003.

12 Aguilar Piñal 1969, 20.

13 The term was coined by Werner Sombart (“schöpferische Zerstörung”) and popularized by Joseph A. Schumpeter. Cf. Schumpeter 1942, 80–86.

2. Olavide's commitment to state-managed reforms

Olavide's personal support of state-managed reforms is nowhere more evident than in the colonization of the Sierra Morena and the southern parts of Andalusia. This prototypical Enlightenment project, managed by Olavide by order of King Charles III in June of 1767, came along with a series of instructive documents: a report written by Olavide about a project to establish settlements in Southern America, critical for choosing Andalusia; the *Informe sobre el proyecto de colonización de Puerto Rico y América del Sur* (1766, "Report on the Colonization Project of Puerto Rico and South America." My trans.); a legislative code of 79 paragraphs designed to regulate the social and economic life of the settlers to the smallest detail, the *Fuero de Población* (1767, "Population Charter." My trans.); the correspondence between Olavide and his supervisor, the Minister of Finance Miguel de Múzquiz y Goyeneche; and, most notably, a report about planned reforms in the agricultural sector, elaborated by Olavide and a team of experts, presented in 1768: the *Informe sobre la ley agraria* ("Agrarian Law Report." My trans.).

As a new agricultural policy was considered decisive for growth, prosperity, and the happiness of the nation, the report relied mainly on the physiocratic ideas shared by most supporters of the Bourbon reform policies of the era, like Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes (1732–1802) and Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744–1811). This did not mean that the industrial and commercial sectors were to be neglected.¹⁴ However, they were to remain subordinate to agriculture as the principal source of wealth for the state. Before becoming a politician, Olavide had already been a successful businessman who defended domestic free trade and the concept of competition.¹⁵ In his writings about the colonization project, these ideas reappear adapted to the rural sector. According to Olavide, agricultural production was to be complemented by factories and by what Olavide's friend Campomanes, in his widely read essay *Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular* ("Treatise on the Promotion of Popular Industry." My trans.), published in 1774, classified as "industria popular" ("popular industry." My trans.), that is home-based textile production.

Discussing Olavide's approach to reforming the rural sector, one should not forget that he always acted as a loyal agent of the absolute monarchy and never challenged the estate-based society of his epoch. At the same time, he propagated

14 Perdices Blas therefore considers the designation "agrарista" ("agrарistic." My trans.) more appropriate than "physiocratic" (Perdices Blas 2000, 275).

15 Cf. Perdices Blas 2003, 15–17.

and promoted a fundamental shift in mindset towards capitalist principles. By subordinating all aspects of human life to the economic imperatives of rationalization and the maximization of productivity – for the benefit of the state and the nation – he must inevitably have come into conflict with religious traditions and the Church's claim to power, as his indictment by the Inquisition shows.

Instead of elaborating on the technical, economic, and administrative details of Olavide's reform endeavor, in the following I would prefer to focus on three aspects that seem characteristic of this mentality shift: the plea for private property and self-interest, the defense of biopolitical measures, and the approval of female labor.

The very basis of Olavide's reform project, as he develops it in his *Informe sobre la ley agraria*, is the distribution of equally large parcels of uncultivated land to families of settlers and the intention to provide them with the material, equipment, and skills to cultivate this land independently. Of course, the principal purpose of this measure was to combat one of the severest problems of the Spanish economy: the neglect of large estates by the Church and other great landowners. It was planned to give the new settlers the opportunity to sell their goods on the market and to reinvest the gains in their properties. The free "flujo de compras y ventas" ("flow of purchases and sales")¹⁶ seemed vital to Olavide to keep the land in good condition. For him, as for other Spanish Enlightenment thinkers, the motor of all action was self-interest, the basic idea of economic liberalism. In his report the word "interés" ("interest") appears sixteen times, the collocation "propio interés" ("self-interest") seven times, and "estímulo" ("incentive") four times. According to Olavide, "el interés del propietario, del colono y del Estado es que la tierra produzca todo lo posible" ("the interest of the landowner, the colonist and the State is that the land produces a maximum." All my trans.).¹⁷

Olavide's second obsession is biopolitics. It is not in the least surprising that the Spanish historian Francisco Vázquez García dedicated a whole chapter of his study about the emergence of biopolitics in Spain, *La invención del racismo. Nacimiento de la biopolítica en España, 1600–1940* (2009; "The Invention of Racism. Birth of Biopolitics in Spain, 1600–1940." My trans.) to the case of the New Settlements in the Sierra Morena, whose general objectives and disciplinary mechanisms he analyzes in detail. In his eyes, they constitute "un verdadero paradigma de normalización disciplinaria en el gobierno de una población" ("a

16 Olavide 1987, 525.

17 Olavide 1987, 486.

real paradigm of the disciplinary normalization in the governing of a population.” My trans.).¹⁸ If we follow Michel Foucault, biopolitics always obey the economic logic of capitalism. In fact, Olavide views the settlers as a raw material and intends to get the maximum benefit out of them. The specific biopolitical dimension of the project becomes apparent in a variety of aspects, beginning with the spatial division and distribution of the population in places “sanos, bien ventilados, sin aguas estancadas que ocasionen intemperies” (“healthy, well ventilated, without stagnant water that causes bad climate.” My trans.) and situated near the fields where they work, so that they do not lose time, as required by Articles V and VII of the *Fuero de Población*.¹⁹

Further aspects include the characteristics by which colonists were selected. In fact, this was done according to three criteria, as summarized by Luis Perdices Blas: “El primero fue el religioso, pues todos debían ser católicos. El segundo, el económico: solo se admitía a agricultores y artesanos que ejercieran oficios útiles. El tercero, y último, el biológico: se regulaban las edades de los admitidos” (“The first was religious, since everyone had to be Catholic. The second was economic: only farmers and artisans who exercised useful trades were allowed. The third, and last, was biological: the ages of those admitted were regulated”).²⁰ In addition to German, Swiss, Savoyard and Flemish foreigners, Spaniards were also admitted on the condition that they did not come from neighboring regions. The real reason for this requirement was surely the intention to create a “new man,” cut off from the determining roots of his territory and mentality, “partiendo de cero” (“starting from scratch”)²¹ in order to have “un personal libre de las ideas tradicionales en España en la sociedad rural, y por tanto, fácil de modelar conforme a los preceptos ideales que inspiraban tan ambicioso proyecto, cuyas experiencias servirían en su caso para ser trasplantadas a las demás regiones de la Península” (“a personnel free of the traditional ideas in Spain in rural society, and therefore, easy to mold according to the ideal precepts

18 Vázquez García 2009, 44.

19 The Royal Decree was signed on June 25, 1767 and published on July 5, 1767. A facsimile of the text can be found on the website of the Ministry of Culture (URL: www.mcu.es/archivos/lhe/servlets/VisorServlet.jsp?cod=003295) or the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (URL: https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/pragmatiques/pragmatiques_273.pdf). All further citations refer to this source. All translations are mine. Its author was Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, assisted by Pablo de Olavide (cf. Perdices Blas 1995, 181). For an annotated summary cf. Capel 1970, 83–99.

20 Perdices Blas 1995, 191.

21 Vázquez García 2009, 44.

that inspired such an ambitious project, whose experiences would serve in their case to be transplanted to the other regions of the Peninsula”).²²

In accordance with article XXVIII of the *Fuero*, in which the superintendent was allowed to “promover casamientos de los nuevos Pobladores con Españoles de ambos sexos respectivamente; para incorporarles más fácilmente en el cuerpo de la Nación” (“promote marriages of the new settlers with Spaniards of both sexes respectively; to incorporate them more easily into the body of the Nation”), Olavide defended an active marriage policy of unions between foreigners and Spaniards in order to create a homogeneous national body. As can be deduced from the accusations made against Olavide before the Holy Office in Cordoba, he apparently attributed a higher value to procreation and population increase than to the dogmas of the Catholic Church. This explains the reproaches made against him by the German Capuchin friar Fray Romualdo de Friburgo in 1775, who denounced him before the Inquisition, among others, for not giving due importance to the sixth commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”), for openly criticizing the celibacy of the ecclesiastics and for organizing public dances and masked balls.²³

The state assistance offered to the population covers all aspects of collective and individual life: health and hygiene (hospitals and apothecaries are created), education (schools and public libraries are opened), the organization of leisure time (public dances are held on holidays in the main square), and even food (people are guaranteed sufficient food and do not drink too much alcohol). Although in article LXXIV it is decreed that “todos los niños han de ir à las Escuelas de primeras letras” (“all the children must go to the elementary schools”), in the following article they are denied all access to higher education: “No habrá Estudios de Gramatica en todas estas nuevas *Poblaciones*; y mucho menos de otras Facultades mayores, en observancia de lo dispuesto en la *Ley del Reyno*, que con razón les prohíbe en Lugares de esta naturaleza; cuyos moradores deben estar destinados à la labranza, cría de ganados, y à las artes mecánicas, como nervio de la fuerza de un Estado” (“There will be no Studies of Grammar in all these new *Populations*; and much less of other major Faculties, in observance of the provisions of the *Law of the Kingdom*, which rightly prohibits them in Places of this nature; whose inhabitants must be destined to farming, cattle breeding, and the mechanical arts, as the nerve of the strength of a State”). All settlers who do

22 Lohmann Villena 1964, 82.

23 For more details see Defourneaux 1959, 327–329; 352–353 and Perdices Blas 1995, 347–361; 383–391.

not abide by the regulations imposed on them by the Charter are subject to harsh disciplinary sanctions, as specified in article LIV: “En el termino de dos años, si no se puede lograr antes, debe tener cada Vecino corriente su suerte y habitacion; y no haciendolo, ò notandose abandono en su conducta, se le reputará en la clase de vago, y quedará en el arbitrio del Superintendente de las Poblaciones, segun las circunstancias, aplicarle al servicio Militar, à la Marina, ò otro conveniente, ò prorrogar el termino, si mediare justa y no afectada causa.” (“In the term of two years, if it cannot be achieved before, each Neighbor must have his own current lot and habitation; and not doing so, or showing abandonment in his conduct, he will be considered in the class of vagrant, and it will be at the discretion of the Superintendent of the Populations, according to the circumstances, to remand him to Military, the Navy, or other convenient service, or to extend the term, if there is just and unaffected cause.” My trans.).²⁴

Another issue that attracted Olavide’s attention was female labor. In line with the views of other reformers such as Jovellanos and Campomanes, Olavide was displeased with a situation where the majority of the population – in fact he refers to women and boys – is idle and unproductive. Therefore, he insisted that women should work in factories or make handicrafts at home, always appropriate to their sex like spinning, stitching or weaving – the already mentioned “industria popular.”²⁵ In a letter to Miguel de Múzquiz he writes in October 1773: “Nada me ha parecido tan importante como excitar los colonos y colonas a la aplicación. Gimo con dolor de ver que la ociosidad es la ruina de estas Andalucías, y me repugna la destructora costumbre que observo en ellas de que por razón de Estado, no han de trabajar las mujeres, teniendo las ideas tan corrompidas en esta parte que tiene por oprobio la honesta aplicación y por decoro de su sexo la ociosidad.” (“Nothing seemed so important to me as to encourage the settlers to be industrious. I groan with pain when I see that idleness is the ruin of these Andalusians, and I am disgusted by the destructive habit I observe there, that for reasons of state women are not permitted to work, their ideas being so corrupted in this area that honest application is a disgrace and idleness is the decorum of their sex.” My trans.).²⁶

24 Cf. also Lera García 1988, 53–54.

25 As to Jovellanos’s opinion of women’s inclusion into the workforce, cf. Gies in this volume.

26 Cf. URL: <https://frasaji3.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/3c2aa-parte.pdf>. Accessed February 20, 2022. Regarding Olavide’s attention to the situation of women see also Perdices Blas 1995, 102–105.

3. Olavide's private utopia

Twenty years after the failure of the project to colonize Andalusia – or at least, its partial failure, because some of the settlements still exist today – Olavide returned once again to his earlier ideas, though on fundamentally other terms and conditions. While the reform project had soon proven to be utopian in the trivial sense of the word as “desirable but impracticable,” the 1700-page Christian treatise *El Evangelio en triunfo o historia de un filósofo desengañado*, written for the most part at the Château de Cheverny during his stay in France and published in 1797–1798, which he based on the model of the epistolary novel, was a utopia in a more specific way, especially the fourth volume.²⁷

In the last six letters of this volume, the “apología racional del cristianismo” (“rational apology of Christianity,” My trans.),²⁸ the exemplary story of the conversion to Christianity by the disenchanted philosopher protagonist, who resembles Olavide himself, is replaced by the correspondence between two other persons, Mariano, a close collaborator of the philosopher, and his friend Antonio, who is traveling abroad. In the letters which Mariano addresses to Antonio, corresponding to letters XXXVI–XLI (and last) of *El Evangelio en triunfo*, the same ideas about education, public assistance and agriculture reappear, barely modified, but now fictionalized, that Olavide had first developed during his time as intendant of Sevilla and superintendent of the New Settlements.²⁹

Looking only at the parts about agriculture, we actually find his old concepts: private property, the stimulating effects of self-interest, biopolitical questions from the proper distribution of the population to questions of nutrition, as well as the need for women and young people to do useful work. Thus, Mariano, as the mouthpiece of his friend the philosopher, insists: “La tierra está dividida en pequeñas propiedades, cada propietario o cada arrendador tiene la suya” (“The land is divided into small properties, each owner or lessor has his own”).³⁰ “Premios y ventajas” (“rewards and

27 On the influence of Olavide's experiences in France on *El Evangelio en triunfo* cf. Carrasco Monsalve 2007; on the utopian character of the fourth volume cf. Dufour 1985, 1990; and on its novelistic features cf. Dufour 1995. On the entire book, cf. Gómez Urdáñez 2004 and Rodrigo Mancho / Pérez Pachco 2017.

28 Aguilar Piñal 1969, 42.

29 Gérard Dufour speaks in this regard of “una total fidelidad a sus ideas de antaño” (“a total fidelity to his former ideas.” My trans. Dufour 1988, 19). A more detailed comparison between the socio-economic reform projects and *El Evangelio en triunfo* can be found in Almanza-Gálvez 2015.

30 Olavide 2004, 269.

benefits”)³¹ should encourage the implementation of reforms. The field workers were supposed to live as close as possible to their fields, so as not to lose time on the way to work and to escape the temptation to idleness that would await the father of the family in the village: “La distancia le quita la facilidad y la tentacion de ir a la taberna” (“The distance takes away the ease and temptation to go to the tavern”).³² The desirable participation of women and children in field work is also easier to achieve in this way, so that in the end “[t]oda la familia toma el gusto y la inteligencia de los trabajos del campo” (“the whole family takes the taste and the understanding of the works of the field.” All my trans.)³³ – to name just a few examples.

But moving from reality to fiction and from reformism to utopianism is not the only change in Olavide’s program. There is also a stronger influence of Christian morality. This becomes particularly clear when Mariano / the philosopher points out that the redistribution of land should not only increase productivity, but also support and protect the poor laborers against the rich stock farmers, of whom he says: “son como los vampiros, que se chupan la substancia pública” (“they are like vampires that suck up the public substance”).³⁴ For himself he denies any interest in generating business profits. Nevertheless, he is well aware of the fact that charity in the long run brings a return for himself and the community. The utilitarian aspect of charity is evident, among other things, in the fact that he deliberately keeps the levies he collects from the settlers low in order to reward them for their efforts: “mi ánimo no es hacer el negocio de un traficante, que quiero imprimir a esta operación el carácter de beneficencia, y que es menester ahora alentar a los colonos en un negocio en que no conocen todavía sus grandes ventajas” (“my intention is not to do the business of a dealer, that I want to give this operation the character of charity and that it is now necessary to encourage the settlers in a business in which they do not yet know the great advantages.” My trans.)³⁵

The most important difference, though, is, that the whole project is now individualized. It seems as if the reformer Olavide, after his disappointing experiences in Spain and with the French Revolution, had finally lost confidence, as Perdices Blas points out, “en que el Estado comience a realizar las reformas y

31 Olavide 2004, 269.

32 Olavide 2004, 275.

33 Olavide 2004, 275.

34 Olavide 2004, 269.

35 Olavide 2004, 277.

dé ejemplo” (“in the faculty of the state to initiate reforms and to set an example.” My trans.).³⁶ He now places all his hopes on private initiative and individual commitment. The perfect incarnation of all this is the figure of the disenchanted philosopher. The way he transforms his own village should serve as a best practice for a future society.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the practical initiatives and theoretical writings of Pablo de Olavide are characterized by the coexistence and sometimes surprising combination of traditional and innovative features. This is true for the period of his life in which he acted as a state reformer in Madrid, Sevilla and Andalusia, as well as the period when he created his private utopia in French exile by the means of literature. On the one hand, he believes in the power of the state and the absolute monarchy, in the healing truth of (Catholic) Christianity and Plato’s paternalistic concept of the philosopher as a leader, and on the other hand he stands for the performance of the individual, the stimulating power of self-interest, rational, future-oriented planning and engaging in risky activities. So, what we can observe in the example of Olavide is that even though some essential features of the modern capitalist entrepreneur are already there, in Spain in the second half of the 18th century they have obviously not yet merged into a social figure of its own. This may be one of the specific limitations of the epoch in Spain mentioned at the beginning.

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36 Perdices Blas 1995, 474. Perdices Blas also brings up the idea that Olavide possibly read Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) but admits that there is no clear evidence for that (cf. Perdices Blas 1995, 477–478).

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