The clash between monism and pluralism does exist. It has allowed the emergence of pivotal political theories during the centuries. It has inspired the construction of political models and theories. In our work, we analyzed the term and the concept of monism and pluralism as having an historical dimension, changing over centuries, differently interpreted by the authors and ideologies that we have taken into account. In this sense, we investigated the terms and the concepts of monism and pluralism from the perspective of the history of political thought. That is the reason why we chose to talk about monisms and pluralisms. Through this particular viewpoint we analyzed how over centuries monisms and pluralisms have been used as conceptual frameworks, theories, ideologies to reflect on long-term issues such as the nature of political power, the problem of political legitimacy, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, the meaning of freedom and tolerance, the sense of living together within contexts characterized by diversity. In other terms, we chose to reflect on monism and pluralism not as theoretical entities but as monisms and pluralisms inside history. In doing so, we tried to show how monisms and pluralisms in the history of political thought have posed and continue to pose a series of issues and problems concerning all of us and far from being mere erudition.
Monisms and Pluralisms in the History of Political Thought
Sara Lagi wrote the essay Sir Isaiah Berlin: against Monism (1953-1958) and the Afterword entitled Monisms and Pluralisms in the History of Political Thought: some (not conclusive) remarks. She also edited the essays of Andrea Catanzaro, Iolanda Richichi, Nicoletta Stradaioi, Federica Falchi, Stefano Parodi and Pejman Abdolmohammadi.

Andrea Catanzaro wrote the essay The Achaeans of Homer and those of Hobbes: from a pluralistic monism to absolutism and the Preface entitled Why monisms and pluralisms? Reasons and purposes of a path. He also edited the essays of Sara Lagi, Carlo Morganti, Carlotta Stegagno, Davide Suin, Giuseppe Sciara and the Bibliography.
| CONTENTS |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Preface**      | **Chapter Four** |                  |
| Why monisms and pluralisms? Reasons and purposes of a path **p. 11** | Benjamin Constant the “fox” and the ideal of freedom between politics, history and religion **p. 57** |
| Andrea Catanzaro  | Giuseppe Sciarra  |                  |
| **Chapter One**  | **Chapter Five** |                  |
| The Achaeans of Homer and those of Hobbes: from a pluralistic monism to absolutism **p. 17** | Frances Wright: Liberty as a founding principle of Republican America **p. 69** |
| Andrea Catanzaro  | Federica Falchi   |                  |
| **Chapter Two**  |                  |                  |
| Nicolas Antoine Boulanger’s portrait of “irrational monism” in postdiluvian humanity **p. 29** | 5.1 The Republican spirit **p. 73** |
| Iolanda Richichi  | 5.2 The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution **p. 76** |
| **Chapter Three**| 5.3 The birth of the Constitution **p. 79** |
| Religious pluralism and the International community: Alberico Gentili’s contribution **p. 39** | 5.4 Broad consensus **p. 80** |
| Davide Suin       | 5.5 Conclusion **p. 82** |
| **Chapter Six**  |                  |                  |
| Plurality and Decision. State and Society in Romano Guardini **p. 85** | Carlo Morganti |
CHAPTER SEVEN
Monism and Pluralism: Eric Voegelin’s contribution p. 95
Nicoletta Stradaïoli

7.1 A new science of politics and a new philosophy of history p. 96
7.2 The theory of representation p. 99

CHAPTER EIGHT
Beyond Politics: Organizational Pluralism and Technocratic Monism in the Functionalist Proposal of David Mitrany p. 105
Stefano Parodi

CHAPTER NINE
Polytheism vs. Monotheism: some ideas regarding the pastoral form of power p. 119
Pejman Abdolmohammadi

CHAPTER TEN
Political and religious monism in Michel ‘Aflaq’s political thought p. 127
Carlotta Stegagno

10.1 The foundation of the Ba’th Party p. 127
10.2 The ideology of Michel ‘Aflaq p. 130
10.3 The monist content of Michel ‘Aflaq’s political thought p. 132
10.4 Conclusions p. 136

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Sir Isaiah Berlin: against Monism (1953-1958) p. 139
Sara Lagi

11.1 Introducing the person and his work p. 139
11.2 Berlin and the importance of thinking like a “fox”... p. 142
11.3 Two concepts of Liberty: against monism p. 147

CHAPTER TWELVE
Monisms and Pluralisms in the History of Political Thought: some (not conclusive) remarks p. 155
Sara Lagi

BIBLIOGRAPHY
p. 163

INDEX
p. 185

THE EDITORS
p. 193

THE AUTHORS
p. 195
The essays collected have shown us how nuanced and highly articulated the dichotomy between monism and pluralism can be, especially if analysed and discussed – as we have actually done – through the lens of the History of Political Thought.

In the Preface we commenced by declaring the ratio of our work and more precisely the reasons why several scholars of the History of Political Thought had gathered together to reflect, discuss and write on the meaning of monisms and pluralisms. Far from being moved by a mere attraction for “erudition”, this research group devoted a particular attention to how and to what extent the often oversimplified monism/pluralism dichotomy – interpreted according to a specific methodological approach – could tell us something not only about how specifically several authors and thinkers of the past time considered and defined monisms or pluralisms, but most importantly what, only through these authors and their political reflections, we can “learn” and grasp about relevant political issues. It is relevant to all of us, living in the twenty-first century within a historical and political context, which poses complex challenges.

We think that there are two core, relevant – as we were just saying – thematic directions emerging from the essays collected here: the nature of power and the
nature of the moral and ethical sphere; both intimately interconnected. All the essays seem to share one fundamental basic question: can political unity exist and how? We will seek to show, by following the aforementioned thematic lines, how the essays collected here have tried to reflect on this capital question.

In his *The Achaean of Homer and those of Hobbes: from a Pluralistic Monism to Absolutism*, Andrea Catanzaro proposes a comparison, between the Achaean described in the Homeric text and those of Hobbes’ translation of the Homeric poems, through an in-depth analysis of the linguistic dimension of the text. In doing so, the author is able to emphasize the political and ideological dimension of the Hobbesian translation and most importantly how behind them there is a concrete and tangible will (political) to transform the pluralist monism characterizing the “political structure” of the Achaean army into a true absolutist political vision. If in Homer, Agamemnon holds “a monocratic power”, although not “completely absolute”, in Hobbes’s translation Agamemnon becomes “as similar as possible to the sovereign […] described in the *Leviathan*”. In this sense, Hobbes continues to theorize and profess the monistic and absolutist view of sovereign power by modifying the lines of the Homeric poem which do not fit into his particular idea of sovereignty: “in my opinion – Catanzaro argues – the passage from the Homeric pluralistic monism to a more absolutist vision is one of the most remarkable pieces of evidence that Hobbes really wants to use the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a «continuation of *Leviathan* by other means»

From Catanzaro’s essay, monism and absolutism emerge as the key-terms and the key-concepts to analyze Hobbes’ political thought and his conception of the ultimate nature of political power. In some respects – even though within a different historical, political and cultural context – the French philosopher Nicolas Boulanger, who lived in the early 18th century, analysed by Iolanda Richichi in her *Nicolas Boulanger’s Portrait of “Irrational Monism” in Postdiluvian Humanity*, reflected on the origin and meaning of a specific political model, “theocracy” and more precisely “civil theocracy”. As Richichi stresses, Boulanger rejects theocracy because he sees in religion “the only responsible of all evil”. According to the French Philosopher, the theocratic political model has a profoundly monistic connotation; a monistic connotation he directly relates to a form of “despotism” in the sense that “theocracy was a universal, primitive and absolutely negative model” and Boulanger’s aim “was to demonstrate that the despotic regimes of the East […] were the

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consequence of the existence of a primitive theocracy at the origins of humanity” rather than – as explained by Montesquieu – the consequence of “la volonté momentanée et capricieuse d’un seul”.

Andrea Catanzaro’s and Iolanda Richichi’s essays provide us with examples of figures who seem to be focused on the monistic side of power, although the two thinkers undoubtedly decline this aspect in different ways, living within different historical backgrounds and responding to different political problems. On the one hand we have Hobbesian absolutism as a way to think and justify a stable, unitary, strong kind of political power, on the other hand we have a 18\textsuperscript{th} century French philosopher whose critique of theocracy should be situated within a broader political and philosophical discourse on secularization.

Nonetheless, notably in the case of Hobbes and Boulanger, we are basically dealing with thinkers who reflect on sovereignty, political power and political unity. A substantially identical kind of problem emerges from Alberico Gentili’s and Romano Guardini’s intellectual and scholarly work, respectively analysed in David Suin’s essay Religious Pluralism and International Community: Alberico Gentili’s Contribution and Carlo Morganti’s essay Plurality and Decision. State and Society in Romano Guardini. Yet, as we can observe, both Alberico Gentili’s and Romano Guardini’s reflection on political power seem to entail a series of relevant pluralist elements.

Historically speaking, Gentili and Guardini belong to different periods and are influenced by different political and cultural situations: Alberico Gentili was a sixteenth century jurist and academic lawyer reflecting on the development of a modern international political system based on the emergence of modern states. He comes to terms with a growing pluralist international system whose development runs parallel to the fragmentation of Christianity due to the Reformation. To Gentili, the latter and chiefly the Catholic reaction represent a source of a powerful pluralism, which might – and actually did – lead to struggles and bloody contrasts threatening any form of political unity. As a response to this, Gentili thinks that it is essential to separate politics from religion in order to “preserve State stability and unity” and, at the same time, it is vital to respect “religious pluralism” as a means to support the “community’s political and juridical organization”.

A substantial and continuous tension between monism and pluralism as a hallmark of political power, chiefly in times of crisis and radical changes, characterizes the German philosopher and Catholic theologian Romano Guardini’s political work. His political profile is linked to the Weimar Republic, namely to a time of profound social, ideological and political divisions. We
could be tempted to labeling Guardini’s political thought as monistic because of the central role the state plays in his writings. It is by means of the state that – in his opinion – “a community develops politically and historically”. Guardini’s core idea of the state as “God’s representative in worldly things” might be considered as even more monistic, so far to establish and justify a potentially “authoritarian” political view. But, as Morganti argues, Guardini actually tries to find a balance between monism and pluralism in the search of a more human, peaceful and renewed political order: a democratic order which is monistic (the state) while being based on pluralism of persons with their ideas, interests, peculiarities, who are able to cooperate with one another, far from being mere “atoms”. Re-establishing a just and stable political order means finding a compromise, a balance between the request for unity (political system) and pluralism (society).

The problem of political unity is effectively crucial to the political thinker and political activist Michel ‘Aflaq. The founding father of the Ba’th party, analysed by Carlotta Stegagno in her essay Political and Religious Monism in Michel ‘Aflaq’s Political Thought, promotes a well-defined ideology based on “socialism, nationalism and unity”. Unity – in particular – seems to be “the starting point and the final goal in Michel ‘Aflaq’s nationalism […] For ‘Aflaq – Stegagno writes – nationalism is an all-embracing feeling, it is open to anyone who shared with the Arab peoples their history, language and culture, it is […] centered around the idea of unity”, and more precisely with the idea of “Arab unity”. Stegagno identifies the more pluralist elements characterizing ‘Aflaq’s political theory, whereas she highlights how his political discourse remains essentially monistic. In fact, ‘Aflaq’s monism ends up to coincide and embrace noble values of emancipation, liberation, dignity for the Arab peoples: “Aflaq traced the outline of the Arab mission i.e. the Arab people’s awakening and renewal after decades of political fragmentation, exploitation and moral debasement”.

If unity and monism represent the key-words to describe Michel ‘Aflaq’s political project, pluralism and pluralist – although within certain, specific limits we are going to mention – are central both to Federica Falchi’s contribution on Frances Wright. Liberty as a Founding Principle of Republican America and to Stefano Parodi’s essay on Beyond Politics: Organizational Pluralism and Technocratic Monism in the Functionalist Proposal of David Mitrany.

Falchi introduces us to the figure of the Scottish political thinker Frances Wright whose voyage across the Atlantic Ocean – which took place in 1818, many years before Alexis de Tocqueville – turns into a unique opportunity
to explore and investigate the American republican spirit. Wright tends to emphasize the central role played by liberty in the development and aftermath of the American Republic. Liberty which – as Federica Falchi clearly stresses – is, according to Wright, the source and the consequence of a truly pluralist political and social system: “Frances Wright – Falchi writes – sensed the presence of liberty, the essence of pluralism, not just in a theoretical dimension, as was the case in Great Britain, but on a practical level as well. It was perceptible in all sectors of society, in political and social institutions, to the extent that there was no distinct barriers separating the governed from the governors, nor conditions of oppression and domination, but rather a balance borne of a common consensus”. Moving ideally from the early nineteenth century to the second post war period, we “encounter” another interesting personage coming to terms with the problem of pluralism and its political implications: the Rumanian David Mitrany.

During the 1940s, Mitrany, Economist at the London School of Economics, thinks about how to reform and pacify the post WWII international order by elaborating a “functionalist theory” based on a “total mistrust towards ideologies and politics” and concretely consisting in the establishment of “specific organizations for specific functions”. Behind this project there is the idea that these “functions” have to be carried out by “ad hoc institutions” (“Authorities”), namely a body of international executives who have to work in “selected fields of common life” without any actual political legitimacy. Mitrany seeks to imagine a new pluralist international system which can overstep the traditional bond between sovereignty and territorial divisions, even if, according to Parodi, just this pluralist system potentially entails a monistic side because it seems to be “characterized by a sort of «exclusive thought»: if the political dimension is the «evil», the main cause of wars, the «technical» dimension is the kingdom of the «good»”. Mitrany believes in a solution – the creation of a functionalist international organization – capable of restoring a “total harmony”.

Parodi’s essay ideally creates a kind of “bridge” between the two sections of this work, corresponding – as aforementioned – to two specific thematic lines. In the authors discussed so far – and despite belonging to different historical contexts – the dichotomy monism-pluralism is essentially related to the dimension of political power and to the establishing or re-founding of political order, chiefly in times of crisis and changes. The second section of essays we want to briefly discuss highlights the more moral, ethical and even epistemological aspect of such dichotomy; an aspect which remains profoundly
intertwined with the problem of political power, and more precisely with the problem of how to reach and preserve political unity.

Giuseppe Sciara’s essay on *Benjamin Constant the “Fox” and the Ideal of Freedom between Politics, History and Religion*, defines the Swiss thinker’s liberalism as a political view based upon the idea of the intrinsically limited nature of political power in the name of a supposed “sacred” sphere of individual liberties. After observing that Constant’s idea of liberalism might paradoxically sound univocal, not to speak of monistic, the author seeks instead to prove how profoundly pluralist Constant’s liberalism actually is. By a critical approach to the Enlightenment heritage, to Utilitarian and Kantian views of morality and moral life, the Swiss thinker re-discovers the importance of the individual’s inner life, the complexity of moral life elaborating a reflection (political, moral and philosophical) which is liberal because it is pluralist and it is pluralist because it refuses absolute truths: “For Constant […] an ethics valid for all does not exist, neither does one single system of values, nor does one single lifestyle that everyone has to follow, and happiness cannot have the same meaning for all”.

Although conscious of the particular and historically defined background Constant belonged to, the passage just quoted could be applied in many respects to two prominent twentieth century thinkers: Eric Voegelin and Isaiah Berlin. The Americanized political Scientist and the British philosopher seem to share a basic mistrust towards one single, universally valid political or moral model to be applied. Influenced by the tragedy of totalitarianism, both tried to come to terms with the intellectual and political challenges posed by the post-WWII period. Eric Voegelin, portrayed by Nicoletta Stradaioili in her *Monism and Pluralism: Eric Voegelin’s Contribution*, focuses his attention on the problem of the State and society, whereas Isaiah Berlin, introduced by Sara Lagi in her *Sir Isaiah Berlin: Against Monism (1953-1958)*, is particularly fascinated by the problem of liberty both in political and ethical terms. Yet, both thinkers pose themselves (and all of us) substantially the same kind of problem: the tragedy of the 20th century, marked by totalitarianism, barbarian ideologies, the Holocaust, could be considered in part as the extreme result of a society nurtured – and distorted – by the poisoning “fruits” of a certain type of scientific rationalism and determinism, by the conviction to find a common solution to all problems, to create a perfect, radically new political order. Both Voegelin and Berlin seem to share the idea that totalitarian systems essentially stem from the will to create political unity eradicating any form of pluralism.

If it is true that Voegelin, as Stradaioili argues, identifies in part the roots
of such conviction in the widespread gnosticism of the twentieth century liberal society – whereas this kind of argumentation is absent in Berlin’s work – it is also true that both thinkers speak about “totalitarian monism” which is above all and first of all a philosophical, moral, epistemological vision refusing the complexity and plurality of human and moral existence even before being a concrete and historically determined political system. As Stradaioli writes about Voegelin’s political thought: “monism is intended [by Voegelin] as a model of science desirous to build with mathematical certainty the right political order. A unique and definitive reality that distorts reality itself ends up producing ideological deformations, which find their maximum expression in […] totalitarianism”. It is interesting to observe how a thinker – who is historically and culturally distant from Berlin and Voegelin – a nineteenth century Persian philosopher Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, influenced by Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau and portrayed by Pejman Abdolmahammadi in his *Polytheism vs. Monotheism: some ideas regarding the pastoral form of power*, seems to share just with the British philosopher and the American political scientist the same profound mistrust toward any form of monism. He criticizes the monistic nature of religious faith and more precisely the dangerous “myth of liberation”, according to which: “the need of being guided might be confused with the need of being served or liberated by a heroic figure, who will one day come to save the people from injustice and despotism. In such context [...] the believer might prefer to delegate the individual power to a divine representative who could be a member of one’s church or mosque”. But this kind of “delegation” might lead – in Kermani’s view – to a “despotic rule”. Against a “pastoral” way of thinking, characterized by a monistic connotation, Kermani advocates the critical use of reason.

Although the authors, thoughts, political projects proposed and discussed so far are objectively diversified – in terms of content and in terms of historical, political and cultural backgrounds taken into account – an attempt to critically reflect on all of them allows us to identify some capital aspects. Generally speaking, monism seems to refer to the key problem of sovereignty and political unity; at the same time we can observe that the political and philosophical question of how and to what extent political unity can be established or restored – and therefore the search of a monistic order in the sense of a unitary and stable political system – does not necessarily imply the elimination of any form of pluralism. In this sense, the complex connection between monistic and pluralist elements is declined and interpreted in different ways according to the author and the historical-cultural context considered:
we pass from thinkers such as Hobbes theorizing and justifying absolutism to Boulanger who identifies monism as one of the hallmarks of a regime he rejects, i.e. “civil theocracy”; from Guardini’s monism which seems to be open to pluralist instances to ‘Aflaq’s revolutionary and emancipatory monism aiming at the “awakening” of the Arab people. We pass from Mitrany’s institutional pluralism which is conceptually situated within a theoretical and philosophical framework having a monistic connotation, to Voegelin who re-thinks the foundations of political community in terms of political unity and society’s pluralism, while rejecting single omni-explanatory models and political solutions.

At the same time, the particular perspective characterizing these essays – the perspective of the History of Political Thought – allows to see how concretely the different ways to elaborate and decline monistic or pluralist theories as well as monistic and pluralist theories are basically conditioned and influenced by concrete and historically determined contexts. It is the relationship between political theories, projects and proposal, on the one hand, and historical dimension, on the other hand which show us the impossibility to reduce monism and pluralism to univocal definitions and therefore the importance of recognizing the historical existence of diversified monisms as well as diversified pluralisms.

Moreover, if we tried to ideally “match” all these aspects, we could finally observe that not always and not necessarily the different kinds of monism signify something intrinsically negative or that monisms and pluralisms inevitably and necessarily belong to two totally separate dimensions. This is obviously not a conclusion, as we said, but – we hope – a first path towards a further elaboration on the meaning and the implications of monisms and pluralisms.