

the fracture of a kantian antinomy: machiavelli and spinoza

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A genealogy of historical consciousness understood as the absolute knowledge of time should show how the equation reality = history is not empirically self-evident but the effect of a long sequence of events that, towards the end of the eighteenth century, led to thinking about history *tout court*, without any genitive. It should show, in other words, historical consciousness as a contingent phenomena. In his reconstruction of the fundamental themes of the first methodological debate on the practice of historiography in France at the end of the sixteenth century, Fabio Merlini emphasizes the three procedural imperatives that constituted the birth certificate of this discipline which just a half-century before was entirely absent from the university setting: 1) writing the facts of the past in an order irreducible to that of the chronological sequences of chroniclers and medieval annals; 2) subtracting this reconstruction from the prescriptions of dogmatic theology; 3) freeing writing from the stylistic rules of rhetoric. This methodological debate comes to a head with the education of memory as a logical reconstruction of the past; in other words, an historical event can be thought as such only as the product of another historical event. In this way a new order of univocal explanation is inaugurated with respect to the orders of traditional explanation:

The method should offer to memory the possibility of choosing the past in the self-sufficiency of its principles in such a way that historical time comes to be reconstructed on the basis of logically necessary causal links,

capable of leading from the past to the present, and from the present to the future.²

The temporality of the world therefore comes to be understood as a linear concatenation of events that retreat towards the past as consciousness and open towards the future as praxis. The course of human experience is a *fil continu*, according to the expression of Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière,³ which leads from the past to the present according to a logical necessity whose soul reveals it to be in reality the teleological attraction of the present toward the past. This idea of a *fil continu* seems to me to be the fundamental element that allows for the identification of experience and history, such as it is configured (to take the example of the German philosophical tradition) from the Enlightenment to romanticism, up through historicism and hermeneutics. If we wanted to identify the fundamental philosophical figures of this multifaceted tradition, it is easy to think of Leibniz, Lessing, Herder, Hegel, Dilthey, and Gadamer. In its maximum expression in Hegel, spirit is the unbroken thread that gives content to time; historicism and hermeneutics arrive after the fact, and find themselves elaborating a notion of history that has the material path of its provenance behind its back. In opposition to this conception of history we can identify, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, other philosophical figures who, whatever their differences, accentuate the *instant* as an interruption of the continuous series of temporality. Here it is sufficient to cite the exemplary names Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Schmidt.⁴

I would like to propose, then, the following reading of this juxtaposition: contemporary nihilism and antihistoricism can be opposed to historicism according to the schema of the antinomy between necessity and freedom established by Kant in the dialectic of pure reason. This is the third antinomy, which he sets out in these terms:

Thesis. Causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them. *Antithesis.* There is no freedom, but everything happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature.⁵

Against Hegelian historicism and its Marxist offshoots, which hold, with the antithesis, that “a completely coherent experience” is possible only if it is ordered by “the guiding thread of the rules,” Kant’s thesis of “causality through freedom”

(however contrary to Kant's own fundamentally Leibnizian philosophy of history, in which he theorizes the progress and infinite perfectibility of man as a regulative idea of reason) can be used to unhinge the instant from the linear series of worldly events and fill it with a sense that transcends phenomena.

So Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Schmitt (and Jacobi before them) can be read according to this interpretive model: each of them gives a significant difference to the contingent instant, which is freed from the necessary series of events, and from the unbroken thread of tradition. They fill it with sense (namely God), life, purified revolution, decision. But each of them thinks contingency, whether they want to or not, as the effect of a causality through freedom. Of an *eschaton* not prepared by a *telos*, i.e., in the terms of that eschatology without teleology that according to Derrida is Marx's only theoretical legacy (which seems to me to amount to the annulment *tout court* of the specificity of a Marxist theory of history).⁶

In his writings on the freedom of the will, Schopenhauer proposed an extremely lucid analysis of the concept of contingency that is the basis for Kant's causality through freedom. Refusing in fact the definition of necessity as "that of which the contrary is impossible" as too generic, he proposes that it be thought as "that which derives from a given sufficient reason":

Now the contingent is conceived as the opposite of the *necessary*; but the one does not contradict the other. For everything contingent is only *relatively* so. For in the real world, where only the contingent is to be found, every event is necessary in regard to its cause; but in regard to everything else with which it coincides in time and space, it is *contingent*.⁷

The only thinkable contingency for Schopenhauer is therefore a relative contingency, understood as a modal relation between two states belonging to completely heterogeneous causal series. The concept of causality through freedom implies instead an absolute contingency, namely the Kantian idea of an absolute spontaneity of causes—"the power to initiate of itself a series of changes"—that according to Schopenhauer forces us to renounce "the essential form of our whole faculty of cognition," i.e., the principle of sufficient reason.⁸ It is at bottom the same objection that Hegel made regarding Jacobi's *salto mortale*: it is a ultimately *salto mortale* for thought, namely a renunciation of knowledge which, since Aristotle, has been *scire per causas*.

One must therefore attempt to think contingency outside of the alternative the Kantian antinomy imposes on thought: *either* a necessary series (that in Hegelian Marxism culminates in freedom) *or* the insertion of a causality through freedom in the necessary series. And it seems to me that this attempt can be undertaken by using the theoretical instruments of a tradition of thought whose very existence is surprising to many, because it has been erased or misrecognized: the Machiavelli-Spinoza tradition.⁹ The scandalous power of Machiavelli's reflection on history has been erased from the scene of modernity: his thought has been transmitted either in the form of a theory of *raison d'Etat* intended as a bridge linking *kratos* and *ethos* (according Meinecke's celebrated definition¹⁰) or in the form of a radical republicanism, as brought to light recently through the different perspectives of Skinner and Pocock.¹¹

The transmission of Spinoza's thought suffered a similar if opposed fate. The acosmic reading of Spinoza's metaphysics, imposed in Germany through the interpretative line Leibniz-Wolff-Jacobi-Hegel and which through Hegel became dominant in all of Europe, has literally absorbed the Spinozian theory of the finite, thus rendering unthinkable a theory of history by insisting on two premises—the interpretation of the finite as pure vanishing, and the modes as a shadowy reality—which have rendered invisible to the gaze of more than three centuries an extraordinary theory of reading and history, a radical attempt to think reality beyond the metaphor of the book.¹²

I will try to briefly trace the essential contours of the theory of history that Machiavelli and Spinoza contribute through delineating three fundamental points.

THE NECESSITY OF CONTINGENCY

When speaking of the “necessity of contingency,” we must first draw a line of demarcation with respect to the *Notwendigkeit der Zufälligkeit* Hegel speaks of in the chapter of the *Science of Logic* dedicated to “absolute necessity.” Absolute necessity is, in that phase of the discourse, blind and horrified by light,¹³ but soon will find within itself the resources for reaching the clarity of the kingdom of freedom and the concept (that is, of Sense). Affirming the necessity of contingency means affirming the primacy of contingency over necessity, of the encounter over the form to which it gives rise, and of the conjunction over the conjuncture. Contingency produces the necessary encounter of the elements that prior to this encounter are as abstract as the space in which they are immersed. And yet the encounter is exterior to the elements that encounter one another, not in the sense that first there

are terms and then there are relations. Exteriority specifies the quality of the relations, prohibiting the thought of a principle internal to the terms that orders their relations, as in the case of the Leibnizian monad and the theory of pre-established harmony; because in this way, for a rigorous thought, there would be a single term that would include in itself the totality of the real. Exteriority is what guarantees the multiplicity of terms, preventing the whole from being closed up within the interiority of a Subject.

This first condition of the thinkability of reality, then, is represented in Machiavellian thought by the concepts of virtue [*virtù*] and fortune [*fortuna*] and their encounter, which takes the philosophical name “occasion” [*occasione*]:

To come to those that, through their virtue and not through fortune, have become rulers, I say that the most excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and similar.... And examining their actions and lives, it will be seen that they owed nothing to fortune except the *occasion* to shape the material into the form that seemed best to them. If they had lacked the *occasion*, the virtue of their spirit would have been sapped, and if they lacked virtue, the *occasion* would have been wasted.¹⁴

An historical event such as the foundation of a State is not therefore the effect of a mythical first cause or the origin of a linear development of historical time (*ab urbe condita*). It is instead the result of a complex and aleatory encounter between virtue and fortune in the form of the occasion, an encounter that can give birth to a world or bring it to an end. Here we witness the deconstruction of the imaginary first cause¹⁵ which gives way to a relation established between virtue and fortune. Virtue constitutes a part of this complex interweaving and should not be construed as a *pars totalis*, but as an intervention in a conjuncture, i.e., a given field of forces. In the conjuncture, however, the intervention is neither rejected in a fatalistic way nor given into in a teleological way. As Jankélévitch consummately puts it, precisely with regard to the thought of the Florentine secretary, “the occasion is not the instant of a solitary becoming, but the instant complicated by ‘polychronism,’ that is, by the sporadic and plural nature of durations.” And he adds:

If, instead of articulating the measure of different times, the durations were granted among them by an immemorally pre-established harmony, or if, instead of agreeing sometimes, there formed among them an absolutely formless cacophony, there would be no place for the occasion. The miraculous occasion depends on polymetry and polyrhythmy, as well as

on the momentary interference of becomings.¹⁶

In Spinoza's thought, the same condition of thinkability is represented by the concept of immanent causality, provided that this is not understood as the spiritual expression of an essence, but instead as an infinite, acentric, and asystematic productivity that gives rise to always new *connexiones* and conjunctions that sometimes become a conjuncture (that is, conjunctions that last). The radical thought of immanent causality allows Spinoza to take his distance from traditional conceptions of temporality. First, a distance from the double image of time that has dominated the history of the West: Neoplatonism, on the one hand, according to which time becomes identified with the life of a universal soul that precedes movement (which in turn appears only in the successive emanation) and, on the other hand, that of Aristotelianism according to which time is dependent on movement, it being the enumerability according to the before and then the after.¹⁷ The fundamental contrast between the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian models is summarized by Wolfson in these terms: "1) according to Aristotle time is generated from movement, while according to Plotinus time is made manifest by movement; 2) according to Aristotle time is the measure of movement, while according to Plotinus time is measured by movement."¹⁸ Second, Spinoza takes his distance from the double concept of eternity: that which originates with Heraclitus and which speaks of an indefinite duration in time, and that which is first thought by Parmenides as an atemporal present. In the terms rendered canonical by scholasticism, these come to be *sempiternitas* and *tota simul*.

Spinoza's theorization of temporality differentiates itself from both of these conceptions. In articulating time and eternity, Spinoza introduces yet another term, that of duration: far from being subordinated to time as a simple segment of it, duration is in reality the pivot of this new conception of time. Duration has an ontological primacy over time and is the very being of the modes, while time is merely the absolutization in the soul of one predominant rhythm with respect to the others. Time is imaginary, and Augustine's *extensio* and *distensio animi* are merely the mechanism through which the imagination functions. But duration is never the duration of a subject, or the movement of a body displaced within a space, which make possible Aristotelian measurement, Leibniz's harmony among the orders of contemporaneous compossibles, and the Kantian transcendental schematism of succession necessary for applying the category of cause to phenomena. Duration exists only as plurality, as the primacy of movement over the moved subject and over the space in which it is moved. Primacy of movement and the encounter. Space and time understood as Cartesian axes of simultaneity and

succession are in reality not the site of the encounter so much as the effect of the encounter: the Kantian schematism of succession, which translates into transcendental terms Cartesianism's transitive causality of mechanistic ontology (just as the schema of *Zugleichsein* translates the Newtonian universal law of gravitation), reveals itself to be inadequate as the explication of reality. The Spinozian model of immanent causality requires thinking each single spatiotemporal scenario as a singular connection of durations that, in the interweaving of their rhythms, gives rise to a conjunction that lasts (i.e. a conjuncture), but that should never be thought according to the organicist model of the *Zeitgeist*.¹⁹ An interweaving of rhythms that do not follow an eternal arrangement, according to the model of Kepler's cosmology, but that renders possible the score of its factual existence: music, as the twin of mathematics, is not the secret of time, but rather one of its possible effects. If eternity does therefore have an arrangement, it cannot be thought as the eternal logical instant (the *tota simul* of Boethius and the *absolute Zugleich* of Hegel) that contains in itself all of time, the past as well as the future; it cannot be thought as the model according to which time is an image, according to the probable story of the *Timaeus*. If therefore eternity is not *logos*, the steel cage of time, then the interweaving is real and not merely ideal, as it still is in Leibniz's metaphysical panoptic. It is not pre-scribed, and has not always already happened in an eternal essence (Hegel points out the derivation of the substantive *Wesen* from the past participle of the verb to be, *gewesen*) which would cancel the *insecuritas* of contingency and the aleatory. The radical thought of an antihumanistic eternity, one that does not constitute the cage of contingency but only its necessity, allows Spinoza to conceive the temporality of the world as *ordo* and *connexio*, confronting a metaphysical tradition can only think time as a serial order (which the historicist tradition shares with its supposed antagonist).²⁰

The necessity of contingency in both Machiavelli and Spinoza calls for the refusal of a model of serial causality in favor of causality thought as a weave, the warp of being, or, better still, as inextricable tangle (against the idea that there is someone, such as in Gadamer's objective spirit, that spins the weave in view of some finality).

THE LOOMING OF NATURE OVER HISTORY: ALEATORY NECESSITY

In book two, chapter five the *Discourses on Livy*, "That the variation of sects and languages, together with the accident of floods or plague, eliminates the memories of things," Machiavelli presents his conception of history in the form of a reflection on the memories of mankind. Already, chapter fifteen of the *Prince* had

proposed a theory of history as the encounter of virtue and fortune: this theory of history is intended as a history of politico-military relations, while the theory of history proposed in *Discourses* II, 5 has a completely different object. This could appear as a fully-fledged philosophy of the history of humanity if it was not precisely an outright refusal of the totalization of memory.

The opening lines of the chapter are clear, even if seemingly difficult to interpret:

To those philosophers who would have it that the world is eternal, I believe that one could reply that if so much antiquity were true, it would be reasonable that there be memory of more than five thousand years—if it were not seen how the memories of times are eliminated by diverse causes, of which part come from men, part from heaven.²¹

Here Machiavelli affirms, despite a very complex syntactical construction, two very simple philosophical theses:

1. The world is eternal.
2. Some causes exist that cancel the memory of things.

The philosophical power of the first thesis is evident: Machiavelli emphatically takes up again the Averroesian thesis, that starting from the Arabic Enlightenment ran through the late Middle Ages and Christian humanism like an underground river, everywhere resisting the dominant philosophy. It was opposed to both Platonism (the *Timaeus*) and Christianity. The second thesis has the same polemical objectives: it takes aim at both the Platonic theory of memory as anamnesis and the sacred Scriptures as the memory of the history of humanity from its origins (the 5000 years that Machiavelli mentions correspond precisely to the antiquity of the world to which *Genesis* refers).

The combination of these two theses leads to a new conception of historical knowledge; it presents itself not as the conceptual double of the historical totality, but as a fragment spared from the powerful causes of the destruction of human memory. This fragment of human memory is in no way the expression of the totality: no reason (understood as Sense) presides over its survival. This fragment is only what remains from the encounters among the forces of nature and human society and the encounters of different societies amongst themselves. The error of Platonism and Christianity, of which Hegel will accomplish a prodigious synthesis, consists precisely in the projection of the fragment onto totality, an error

that finitizes the world and establishes the powerful alliance between memory and truth, an alliance that in turn founds the grand continent of idealism.

Let's now consider the Machiavellian distribution of the causes of forgetting. Machiavelli begins his exposition of that "which comes from men," that is, social causes:

For when a new sect—that is, a new religion—emerges, its first concern is to extinguish the old to give itself reputation; and when it occurs that the orderers of a new sect are of a different language, they easily eliminate it. This thing is known from considering the modes that the Christian sect took against the Gentile. It suppressed all its orders and all its ceremonies and eliminated every memory of that ancient theology. It is true that they did not succeed in eliminating entirely the knowledge of the things done by its excellent men. This arose from having maintained the Latin language, which they were forced to do since they had to write this new law with it. For if they had been able to write with a new language, considering the other persecutions they made, we would not have any record of things past. Whoever reads of the modes taken by Saint Gregory and by the other heads of the Christian religion will see with how much obstinacy they persecuted all the ancient memories, burning the work of the poets and the historians, ruining images, and spoiling every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity. So if they had added a new language to this persecution, in a very brief time everything would be seen to be forgotten. It is therefore to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile sect, the Gentile sect would have done against that which was prior to it. And because these sects vary two or three times in five or six thousand years, the memory of the things done prior to that time is lost; and if, however, some sign of them remains, it is considered as something fabulous and is not lent faith to—as happened to the history of Diodorus Siculus, which, though it renders an account of forty or fifty thousand years, is nonetheless reputed, as I believe it to be, a mendacious thing.²²

The theses enunciated by Machiavelli are of great philosophical importance. They are:

1. The Christian religion is nothing other than one "sect" among others.

2. Religious sects are temporal apparatuses of power that tend by nature to hegemony, and the logic that regulates the relationships between them on the world stage is that of war.

3. The memory of the spiritual culture of an epoch resides entirely within the materiality of the language that expresses it; language does not have the expressive centrality of a subject and, therefore, cannot be subject to absolute control; consequently, a language can be entirely destroyed, but in the case in which it resists destruction, it escapes the attempts of power to control it. Its materiality is the *de facto* guarantee of its acentricity and its asystematic structure.

The combination of these three philosophical propositions sketches the outline of a theory of history in which memory, far from constituting the instrument of a more powerful knowledge, is what is at stake in the struggles between different sects: the winner attempts to destroy the memory of the vanquished and impose its own story of the world as the only truth (an attempt that can succeed only if the vanquished is destroyed right to its material roots, language).

Let's consider now the passage in which Machiavelli presents "the causes that come from the heavens," that is, the natural causes of the destruction of memory:

As to the causes that come from heaven, they are those that eliminate the human race and reduce the inhabitants of part of the world to a few. This comes about either through plague or through famine or through an inundation of waters. The most important is the last, both because it is more universal and because those who are saved are all mountain men and coarse, who, since they do not have knowledge of antiquity, cannot leave it to posterity. And if among them someone is saved who has knowledge of it, to make a reputation and a name for himself he conceals it and perverts it in his mode so that what he has wished to write alone, and nothing else, remains for his successors.²³

Here are the philosophical theses that can be drawn out of this passage:

1. The history of humankind is profoundly rooted in nature, whose power can brutally make entire civilizations disappear; consequently, the continuity of memorial narrative is nothing other than the continuity of a fragment, of an island that emerges above the flood of oblivion.

2. Memory does not uniformly permeate society: there is a stratification of memory within society that excludes the model of expressive causality and the *pars totalis*.²⁴

3. Memory is much more of an instrument of power and therefore the perversion of truth for a political end than it is the adequate consciousness of the past.

Together these three theses constitute a theoretical position that can be read as an *ante litteram* refutation of the great systems of idealism. However, an unexpected source for this passage can be identified in Plato's *Timaeus*. In effect, there is a passage in Plato's cosmological work that Machiavelli's text seems, in many respects, to be modeled on.

Within the dialogue, a story is told about the existence of a city in ancient Greece whose inhabitants are very similar to those Socrates spoke of in the *Republic*. Plato underlines that what is in question in this story is not an invented myth but a true discourse. The reason why the memory of this city is lost is that the Greeks are all "young in spirit," because in the city there is not "any old opinion of traditional antiquity, no white-haired teacher for the age." And this is the reason, according to the narration given by an old Egyptian priest to Solon:

Many destructions of mankind in many ways have come to be and will be—the greatest of these by fire and water, but different and lesser ones by thousands of other means.... And when in turn the gods purify the earth by flooding it with waters, then those who live in the mountains—herdsmen and shepherds—are saved, while those who live in the cities near you are swept into the sea by the rivers.... And if anything beautiful or great or that also has something distinctive about it has come to pass somewhere, either near you or here or even in another region that we know by hearsay—all such things have been written down from olden times and preserved here in our temples. But it happens that at any given time your lands and those of other people have only just been equipped with writing and all the things that cities need; and after the usual span of years, the heavenly stream comes back again like a plague to sweep your people away, and leaves only the illiterate and uneducated among you, so that all over again from the beginning, you become young, as it were, knowing nothing either of things here or whatever was in your own land in olden times. At any rate, Solon, the genealogies you went through just now about the events

in your land aren't much different from children's stories. First of all, you remember only one flooding of the earth, whereas many have come to pass before this; and furthermore, you don't know that the most beautiful and best race among men was born in the place where you live, from whose little bit of seed that was left over, there exists both you and the entire city that is now yours; but you've forgotten all this because for many generations the survivors met their end without giving voice to themselves in writing.²⁵

The essential point of the Platonic narration figures equally in Machiavelli's text: floods destroy the memory of humanity because the only survivors are illiterate. However, as is frequently the case in the history of philosophy, apparently similar arguments are inscribed in opposed theoretical strategies. The flood functions in Plato as an argument in favor of a lost original wisdom (a conception that Nietzsche would define as "Egypticism"), a thesis of the progressive fall of the ages of the world made paradigmatic by Diodorus Siculus, whose history Machiavelli qualifies as a "mendacious thing."²⁶ For Machiavelli there is no lost originary wisdom, but only memory that has disappeared forever, or the political mystification of memory.

Machiavelli outlines a theory of history which eliminates the metaphysical dyad of Origin and End, while ceaselessly affirming the aleatory necessity of encounters—encounters between virtue and fortune—in the form of multiple material forces: the materiality of the apparatuses of religious power, the materiality of languages, hunger, sicknesses, natural disasters, and the cultural stratification of society. The memory of a civilization is therefore a fragile fragment of matter in the face of the immense power of nature, which has nothing teleological about it. It can survive this immense power for some time and imagine itself to be eternal, projecting itself over the totality of time, but its destiny is, despite everything, oblivion.

When Spinoza examines biblical hermeneutics in chapter 7 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he analyzes the Bible as a crucible of materiality intersecting at different levels, whose sense is in part lost forever due to the voracity of time ("*tempus edax*," Spinoza exclaims at the culmination of the argument). At the base of his entire metaphysical construction, Spinoza resumes and strengthens Machiavelli's proposition [*discorso*], which could hardly find a more efficacious synthesis than in this axiom from the fourth part of the *Ethics*:

In nature there exists no singular thing than that which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.²⁷

History is not legible in the mode of an idealist *Naturphilosophie*, according to a vector that has its origin in nature, but as the *emergence* of a level of complexity different than nature, which has nothing teleological about it with respect to other levels.²⁸ Aleatory necessity is therefore the very necessity of contingency: the latter expresses the absence of the teleology through which regularities are formed (whose invariance compels us to think of them as the effect of a teleonomy), while the former expresses the interference of destructive effects on these regularities. Contingency is thinkable in these terms only under the primacy of this aleatory necessity; otherwise the event might be thought of as the irruption of the divine in nature, that is, as a sign that indicates the existence of a moral order superimposed on the natural order.

THE RUPTURE OF THE ANCIENT ALLIANCE BETWEEN MEMORY AND TRUTH

Analyzing the mythical conceptions of memory in ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant finds that, in a first sense, Mnemosyne, the sister of Kronos, presides over the poetic function:

Memory transports the poet into the midst of ancient events, back into their own time. The organization of time in his account simply reproduces the sequence of events at which he is somehow present, in the order in which they occurred, from the beginning.²⁹

In particular, Hesiod's *Theogony* established the alliance between memory and truth, which allows one to tap into "the primeval reality from which the cosmos arose, and which makes it possible to understand the process of becoming as a whole."³⁰ However, in a second sense, within the doctrine of the reincarnation of souls, memory is no longer that which furnishes mortals with the secret of origins, but the means for reaching the end of time, putting an end to the cycle of generations. The soul, by means of anamnesis, has understood how to connect the end with the beginning and close its cycle, not in order to start over again, but "to escape definitively from it and leave time forever."³¹

Whether therefore memory tells us the secret of time or frees us from it, for myth it is the instrument of truth. Such an alliance between truth and memory, which at the same time constitutes the identity of the subject and the world (as Leibnizian thought demonstrates), implies the possibility of reading the totality of historical development according to a logic of unitary and continuous Sense, which human knowledge traces from its origins through the faculty of memory (anamnesis). This conception constitutes the most powerful affirmation of the theoretical line running through Western philosophy under the name of idealism. It is Plato who inaugurates this powerful form of philosophy with the thought of truth (ἀληθεια) as the absence of forgetting (λήθη)—in other words, remembrance—and it is Hegel that carries it into the very heart of the infinite totality, identifying *Erinnerung* and *absolute Wissen*. “*Omnis scientia nihil aliud est, quam reminiscientia*” (Science is but an image of the truth): breaking the ancient alliance between memory and truth that institutes the originality and primacy of Sense is the challenge accepted by Machiavelli and by Spinoza.

For Machiavelli, as we have seen, memory is not linked to the spiritual transmission of truth, but is traversed by the double materiality of language and power. Spinoza picks up and extends this theory: in the corollary to *Ethics* IIP44S, he searches for the reason why the imagination represents things to itself as contingent. Now, beyond the explanation of the contingency-effect, to which we will return, what is particularly interesting in this passage is the reification of time (that is, the transformation of the measure of a relation among durations to something which sustains itself). Through representation, time becomes one imaginary object among others, which makes it possible to institute a relationship between the abstract instant of perception and its content:

No one doubts that we also imagine time, namely, from the fact that we imagine some bodies to move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with the same speed. Let us suppose, then, a child, who saw Peter for the first time yesterday, in the morning, but saw Paul at noon, and Simon in the evening, and today again saw Peter in the morning. It is clear from IIP18 that as soon as he sees the morning light, he will immediately imagine the sun taking the same course through the sky as he saw on the preceding day, or he will imagine the whole day, and Peter together with the morning, Paul with noon, and Simon with the evening. That is, he will imagine the existence of Paul and of Simon with a relation to future time. On the other hand, if he sees Simon in the evening, he will relate Paul and Peter to the time past, by imagining them together with past time. And he

will do this more uniformly, the more often he has seen them in this same order.³²

Through the reification of time in the form of an imaginary line traced from the path of the sun, and therefore, in a more abstract way, from the line drawn through the three moments of the day (*tempus matutinum*, *tempus meridianum*, and *tempus vespertinum*), the content of successive aleatory encounters is transformed into a normative model for the future and the past: time becomes the arrangement of events according to a serial order, which memory inscribes into habit, and this fortuitous order is transformed into law. While in fact the real durations, in their intertwining, weave a complex order irreducible to the serial succession of events that run along the rails of a temporal substratum, the representation of this order produces an inadequate image of temporality under the form of a succession of empty instants, filled by perceptual content, the effect of a body's encounter with the surrounding environment.

And it is the way the imagination and memory operate that produces the chain-effect, or, to use Spinoza's terminology, the *concatenatio*. Things are in fact interwoven (*ordo et connexio rerum*), but memory arranges them according to a timeline. In this way, the complexity of the relationship between things—their *connexio*, their order—is perceived as a serial order of events according to the body's affections. This *concatenatio* of ideas reproduces the succession of moments of an individual experience in the form of a mnemonic chain. The entire effort of reason and the intellect consists in attempting to break this simple, linear order so as to re-establish, with a new *concatenatio* at the level of ideas, the complexity of the relations between things. For this reason Spinoza never defines the order of the intellect as order by concatenation, instead reserving it, as knowledge of reality starting from God, that is, from the concept of immanent causality, for the definition of order by connection.

The distinction in Spinoza's text between the terms *connexio* and *concatenatio* becomes very important in the interpretation of *Ethics* IIP18S, which has for its object the way in which memory functions:

Memory ... is nothing other than a certain connection of ideas involving the nature of things which are outside the human body—a connection which is in the mind according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body. I say, *first*, that the connection is only of those ideas which involve the nature of things outside the human body, but not

of the ideas which explain the nature of the same things. For they are really (by IIP16) ideas of affections of the human body which involve both its nature and that of external bodies. I say, *second*, that this connection happens according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body in order to distinguish it from the connection of ideas which happens according to the order of the intellect, by which the mind perceives things through their first causes, and which is the same in all men.³³

Memory is nothing other than a certain *concatenatio* of ideas, which involves the nature of things exterior to the human body. This concatenation takes place in the mind according to the order and concatenation of the affections of the body. This means that history as tradition, as the collective memory of a people, derives from a chronology of the affections of the social body. These chronologies are the bearers of ideas that involve the social body and external bodies at the same time, but not of ideas that explain the nature of them. Consequently, history as inadequate knowledge, the product of the concatenations of memory, arises as the simple linear succession of events, while history of the second order of knowledge is precisely the deconstruction, on the basis of the conception of immanent causality, of this simple order. This second order does not grasp things according to the transitive model of causal series, but departs from the model of the *connexio*, or rather, structural causality. The linear conception of historical time results therefore, according to Spinoza, from the way memory functions by proceeding through serial concatenations of the ideas of the body's affections while remaining unaware of the complex connection of causes that subtend and produce this apparent simplicity.



To conclude, let's return to the question of contingency. In the scholium cited above, Spinoza writes that if one day a child "sees Peter in the morning, then Paul at noon, and Simon in the evening," the day after, when encountering Peter in the morning, the child will imagine meeting Paul at noon and Simon in the evening, or, when encountering Simon in the evening, will imagine Peter and Paul by relating them to the past. But, Spinoza writes,

if it should happen at some time that on some other evening he sees James instead of Simon, then on the following morning he will now imagine Simon, now James, together with the evening time, but not both at once... His imagination, therefore, will vacillate and he will imagine now this one,

now that one, with the future evening time, that is, he will regard neither of them as certainly future, but both of them as contingently future.³⁴

Both the necessity and the contingency of these encounters belong to the imaginary order of memory: the reification of time, and the filling of the instant with the quality of the experience of the subject, produce a necessity of the series whose infringement is called contingency. This necessity and this contingency are the categorial effects of a perception of the world in which the time of the Subject is the only unit for measuring events: the empty line on which it places them is filled with the qualities of the world, but does not explain them. It registers the sequential happening and absolutizes it, losing the interweaving rhythms that constitute it.

NOTES

1. Vittorio Morfino, "Temporalità e contingenza: Machiavelli e Spinoza o dell'infrazione dell'antinomia kantiana," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste* (Milan: Mimesis, 2002), 85-100. [TN: I would like to thank Vittorio Morfino and Jason E. Smith for their assistance with this translation.]
2. Fabio Merlini, *Incanti della storia e patologie della memoria. Studi sulla trasformazione 1* (Milan: Guerini, 1997), 28.
3. TN: Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière was a Huguenot writer and historian in sixteenth century France. Among his works are the two volume *Histoire de France depuis l'an 1550 jusqu'à ce temps* (1581) and a general theory of history, *Histoire des Histoires* (1599).
4. According to Taubes, we can see "a trajectory between Kierkegaardian exception and Schmitt's definition of sovereignty." Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 65. Naturally, cf. also Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949).
5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A444/B472.
6. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Marx *sub specie theatri*: La notte e il lampo in Louis Althusser," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 115-124.
7. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, trans. Eric F.J. Payne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.
8. Schopenhauer, *Prize Essay*, 7-8. It is no coincidence, in my view, that Heidegger, when addressing the principle of reason, proposes the alternative Leibniz or Silesius, that is, metaphysics or ecstatic abandonment, carrying out a drastic reduction of the complexity of modern thought. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Spinoza nella storia dell'essere: Il principio di ragione in Spinoza e in Leibniz," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 31-46.
9. TN: Morfino has written a detailed and substantial account of the encounter between Spinoza and Machiavelli. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, *Il tempo e l'occasione: L'incontro Spinoza Machiavelli* (Milan: Il Filarete, 2002).
10. "Raison d'Etat is a principle of conduct of the highest duplicity and duality; it presents one aspect to physical nature and another to reason. And it also has (if one may so express it) a middle aspect, in which what pertains to nature mingles with what pertains to the mind." Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 5. Meinecke traces a linear history of this idea beginning with Machiavelli, passing through jurisnaturalism, and ending with Fichte and Hegel. With respect to this interpretive framework, it is interesting that the work of Senellart tends to show how "under the concept of *raison d'Etat*, we are confronted, from the sixteenth century onwards, with two distinct forms of rationality, one warlike, and the other economic." Michel Senellart, *Machiavélisme et raison d'Etat* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 11.
11. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, eds. Gisela

- Bock, Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
12. On the book as a metaphor of nature and history, cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), but before this, the brilliant observations of Louis Althusser, “From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy,” in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1999), 11-76, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
13. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 487-488. [TN: Di Giovanni translates *Lichtscheue* as “averse to light,” but a more literal rendition would be photophobia, signifying a hypersensitivity of the eyes to light, and a fear. The phobic element of Hegel’s original text is preserved in Arturo Moni’s Italian translation, which Morfino alludes to here.]
14. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, VI. My emphasis. [TN: I have translated from the Italian original, which resulted in a slight modification to the English translation by Russell Price available from Cambridge University Press.]
15. In this regard, it may be noted that the expression *causa prima* in Machiavelli does not refer to an *Ursache*, that is to an origin (*ursprungliche Sache*), but to a relation of forces, or a *Wechselwirkung*, in Hegelian terms (Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* I, 4). For further clarification regarding the concept of *Wechselwirkung*, cf. Vittorio Morfino, “*Causa Sui* or *Wechselwirkung*: Engels between Hegel and Spinoza,” trans. Peter Thomas. *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory Between Spinoza and Althusser* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 18-45.
16. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien 1: La manière et l’occasion*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), 117. I owe Paulo Barone for the retrieval of this splendid passage. [TN: I have utilized Zakiya Hanafi’s translation for part of the present translation of Jankélévitch. Cf Vittorio Morfino, “The Many Times of the Multitude,” *Plural Temporality*, 145.]
17. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* IV.
18. H.A. Wolfson, *The philosophy of Spinoza: unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 335. According to Ricœur, Augustine proposes an alternative position to both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism: “Augustine alone dares to allow that one might speak of a span of time—a day, an hour—without a cosmological reference. The notion of *distensio animi* will serve, precisely, as a substitute for this cosmological basis for the span of time.” Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLoughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 14-15.
19. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, “Sul sincronico: La teoria del tempo storico in Louis Althusser,” *IncurSIONi Spinoziste*, 101-114.
20. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, “L’evoluzione della categoria di causalità in Spinoza: Da *series* a *connexio*,” *IncurSIONi Spinoziste*, 15-21.
21. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5. [TN: For all quotes from the *Discourses*, I have used Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov’s translation, available from The University of Chicago Press.]
22. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
23. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
24. Balibar defines this principle as “the social homoeomery” (*l’homéométrie sociale*): this consists in thinking that “within every social (or political, or cultural) whole, the ‘parts’ or ‘cells’ are necessarily similar to the whole itself.” Étienne Balibar, “Foucault and Marx: The question of nominalism,” *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 44.
25. Plato, *Timaeus*, 22d-23c. [TN: I have used Peter Kalkavage’s translation. See Peter Kalkavage, *Plato’s Timaeus* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2001).]

26. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
27. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVP1. [TN: For all Spinoza quotations, I have used Edwin Curley's translation, available in various editions from Princeton University Press.]
28. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Ordine delle idee et ordine delle cose in Spinoza e in Hegel," *IncurSIONi Spinoziste*, 47-56.
29. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Mythic Aspects of Memory," *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 117.
30. Vernant, "Mythic Aspects of Memory," 120.
31. Vernant, "Mythical Aspects of Memory," 132.
32. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP44S.
33. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP18S.
34. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP44S.