Journal of Italian Philosophy

Contents

Editorial

At its beginning, a journal is little more than a space in which something might or might not happen. The arena opened up by a journal is a clearing in which truths may become public. They may then be developed or subjected to critique. Our intention with this journal, in particular, is to increase the space available in today's academy and the extramural world for a discussion of Italian philosophy: its nature, its history, and the thinkers and writers who constitute it and continue to elaborate its potential.

A large part of a publication's task is, therefore, *exposure*, and by these means we hope to foster an already burgeoning interest in the philosophy of Italy, and so to increase the likelihood of further studies, publications, and projects in the same area. Publishers, after all, tend to have economic matters uppermost in their minds, often of necessity, and without the promise of a 'market', they are sometimes unwilling to venture the translation of 'unknowns' or the publication of works concerning those who remain obscure. Similarly, in the university, one hears of doctoral students being discouraged from studying 'obscure' figures for the risk of failing to fit into any pre-existing 'niche' within the academic 'job market'.

We regret the subordination of both publishing and academia to the market, but if we cannot yet destroy it, we may nevertheless intervene within it and help to create a new kind of 'demand', which the market should then feel it may not be entirely without profit to 'supply'. We can, in other words, create new niches, and indeed use a journal such as this, in concert with other initiatives, to broaden them together with those that already exist, so as to make room for productive work in the pursuit of truth. As we began by saying, a journal in its ideal form is a space in which one writes so as to attempt, however slowly and partially, to allow truth to emerge, and purported truths to be contested by other writers and readers. It provides a — more or less public — space for thought.

In particular, we feel that Italian philosophy is today perhaps more worthy than any other of this kind of intervention, as Italian soil is proving to be an extraordinarily fertile ground for new concepts and innovative engagements between philosophy and those disciplines with which it proves itself capable of communicating, from law to theology, from linguistics to anthropology, politics, and beyond. It is even tempting to think that, if there were to be one single geographical and linguistic location for philosophy that would prolong the history that some have considered to run from Ancient Greece to Modern Germany, and finally to the France of the 1960's, then it might be contemporary Italy.

An awareness of this possibility has already begun to dawn, and as testimony to this one need cite only the ever-increasing and in some cases long-standing prominence of such exceptional thinkers as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri, and Gianni Vattimo, as well as certain figures who have perhaps in the last ten years gained increasing notice in Anglophone circles, such as Paolo Virno, Christian Marazzi, and Maurizio Lazzarato. This has been thanks to the noble efforts of publishers, editors, and, above all, translators.

And the number of these ventures is growing, for in addition to an already established series of books devoted to Italian thought by SUNY Press and Seagull Books, as well as notable work carried out for a long time now by Stanford University Press and Semiotext(e), we find forthcoming series proposed by both MIT Press and Bloomsbury. A Society of Italian Philosophy has also been established.

We wish to foster the expansion of all these initiatives, without any unnecessary limits. With so much happening, there is plenty to discuss. This ambition of limitlessness is assisted by the online status of the journal. We are not subject to any serious constraints of space, or any particular censorship; we make no binding promises of calendrical regularity which would demand a certain number of issues per year — no more, but also no less. One of our interventions in the marketplace of publication in particular, in which we are thankfully by no means alone, is to resist all of those features which make the experience of publishing in academic journals so increasingly frustrating and often unjust: the cost of accessing many journals, for libraries but much more so for individuals, particularly those outside of the academy; the quite irrational and needless demand for standardisation, often to an excruciating degree (formatting, punctuation, referencing....) even *before* the article has been accepted for publication in that particular journal; the properly staggering response times, partly consequent upon the immense pressure to publish in certain journals which have been elevated at least temporarily to the status of the 'prestigious'; the constraints of a certain length, style, and easily identifiable genre of text, among many other things.

Being published online, in an 'open-access' form, we see no need automatically or in advance to impose these templates which function perhaps deliberately to discourage 'speculative' contributors, of whom there are — for certain journals — always 'too many', or simply as the expressions of a superficial desire for a veneer of 'professionalism' or an easily identifiable 'brand'.

Of course, it would be unwise to imagine that we can free ourselves from these desires and necessities altogether, but we can try to minimise as far as possible the limitations they tend to impose, in terms of wasted time in particular, and the deleterious effects of such wastage upon authors and the quality and freedom of the work they produce. In other words, we should like to allow others to devote as much of their attention as we have the power to influence exclusively to *philosophy*.

This issue of our journal contains the first English translation of a work by Giorgio Agamben, originally published in 1968 in Italian, and now extremely difficult to obtain. We must thank the author for granting his permission to reprint the original here in a revised and corrected form, which may be considered final, and the translator, Connal Parsley, for his supreme efforts in bringing this remarkable text to a new audience.

'The Tree of Language' (*L'albero del linguaggio*) is an attempt to construct nothing less than a genealogy of contemporary linguistics. Kevin Attell has devoted a number of important pages to this work, and we thought it a matter of urgency that it be made available to Anglophone readers. The text is astonishing in its prescience, constituting Agamben's very first engagement with a topic that would preoccupy the final chapter of his book, *Stanzas,* which deploys a certain reading of Saussure against Derrida, who is, as so often with Agamben, invoked without being named here, save subliminally.

In the present work, we find a similar critique of the interpretation of language as a system of *signs* (the 'semiological' conception) given in a year that cannot but be significant for readers of Derrida: 1968, just one year after the great opening trilogy of 1967. It is as if Agamben saw from the very beginning how necessary it would be to distance his own project from such an immensely powerful use of so many of the thinkers dear to him, by another whose work at first glance might appear uncannily similar to his own — perhaps even to warn readers against a certain seduction here.

Rather remarkably, the text also contains a reference to quantum physics, in the form of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, to which Agamben would return almost half a century later, in a short text on probability, entitled *What is Real?*

The text thus reveals how quickly it was that Agamben came to find his own voice; while in the 1960's it was closer to Heidegger's than it would later become, it is already by no means that of a mere disciple. Such an early work allows us to marvel once again at the remarkable constancy in the concerns and references which have characterised Agamben's work right up to the present day and from close to the very beginning.

This continuity in Agamben's thought is noted by Lorenzo Chiesa in the first of two texts devoted to Agamben's work that follow this translation. These articles, by Chiesa and Stephen Howard, respectively, both address questions to Agamben's corpus as a whole, with Chiesa drawing out the project of Homo Sacer by tugging on a certain discreet thread within *The Use of Bodies*, which concludes the series. This strand is bound around Sophocles' phrase regarding the 'superpolitical apolitical'. Given the continuity of Agamben's thought, the entire edifice of Homo Sacer — and as we have seen, even earlier and beyond this series — may be at risk if a certain element here fails to hold.

Howard then exposes Agamben's project in a different light, by considering its overall method, and in doing so pursues a question the posing of which is long overdue: does Agamben distinguish between 'genealogy' and 'archaeology'? The precise provenance of these terms is carefully determined, along with the trajectory that carries them from Nietzsche and Foucault to Agamben.

The next section of the journal includes a penetrating engagement with the work of Simona Forti by Lars Cornelissen, which traces an alternative genealogy of the contemporary figure of 'evil' by reconsidering what Forti calls the 'Dostoevsky paradigm'.

Then, Andrea Bellocci engages with the question of truth in the context of hermeneutic philosophy, and with a hermeneutics of a particularly Italian kind, stemming as it does from the work of Luigi Pareyson. Bellocci allows us to become thoroughly acquainted with the latter's work, whilst maintaining a certain distance at once both respectful and critical. One of the central questions raised here, and to which the author offers a novel response, is that of the status of the claim that truth is infinitely interpretable: does the principle exclude itself from the very realm which it governs? And one might note in passing that Bellocci's text contains a discussion of evil which may be placed in communication with that of Cornelissen in the essay that precedes it.

Following these articles is an eclectic selection of review-essays, longer and more philosophically satisfying perhaps than a standard book-review, which vouchsafe us a series of snapshots of recent works in and around Italian thought.

Let us note in passing that in a number of cases, we have somewhat artificially appended to these reviews bibliographies as complete as we could manage. We hope gradually to expand these bibliographies and include more of them, both in the journal and on our website, where they may be corrected and kept up to date collectively.

Lucio Privitello provides us with a vibrant extended essay on Claudio Paolucci's recent book, yet to be translated into English, on a student of Luigi Pareyson, and perhaps one of Italy's most underrated thinkers — in academic philosophical circles, at least — Umberto Eco.

Sevgi Doğan presents a recent text by Roberto Esposito, *Da Fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa* (very recently published in an English translation by Zakiya Hanafi under the title of *A Philosophy for Europe: From the Outside*), a timely discussion of the meaning and future of Europe when the integrity of the union has come to seem more fragile than ever. At stake here is something like a *philosophical* understanding of the crisis within Europe, and that involves Esposito in an engagement with the nature and development of *European* philosophy and its curious relation with distinct *national* philosophies, including what he has termed 'Italian Thought'.

Finally, my own text presents a reading of Paolo Virno's *Essay on Negation*, at the time of writing (May 2018) due to appear in an English rendition

by Lorenzo Chiesa. I attempt to clarify the place of this work and its problematic within the context of Virno's work as a whole and to demonstrate how it might be employed so as to resolve certain questions raised by a systematic reconstruction of Virno's philosophical gesture. This means engaging with his conception of the relation between the transcendental and the empirical, their historical collapse, and the way in which 'human nature' is conceived in light of this.

Finally, I must, on behalf of the entire editorial board, thank our authors and translators for allowing their work to appear in a forum entirely untried and untested, to expend such time and effort on a venture with no guarantee of any lasting or even fleeting success. If the undertaking does indeed succeed to any significant degree, it will be thanks to their willingness to take such a risk — and in an academic culture where certainty and long-established prestige seem to be the order of the day.

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Michael Lewis
Newcastle upon Tyne
Spring 2018

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{Editorial Note: This text, 'L'albero del linguaggio' by Giorgio Agamben, was first published in the journal, *Ulisse* (*Ulysses* or *Odysseus*) (now defunct), Anno XXI, Volume IX (September 1968), in a special edition entitled *Lingua e linguaggi* (Language and Languages).

The contents of this issue of the journal, along with their order and the place of Agamben's work within it, are not perhaps irrelevant to an understanding of the essay, and indeed on at least one occasion within the article, Agamben himself refers to them.

The full contents of the journal are as follows:

Bruno Migliorini, *Cento anni di lingua italiana*
Alfredo Schiaffini, *Le origini dell'italiano letterario e la soluzione manzoniana del problema della lingua dopo G. I. Ascoli*
Ignazio Baldelli, *Aspetti della lingua della prosa letteraria contemporanea*
Maurizio Dardano, *La sintassi dell'italiano contemporaneo*
Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Civiltà tecnologica e lingua nazionale*
Paolo Monelli, *Dialetti e neologismi*
Nunzio Cossu, *Sopravvivenze del dialetto in Sardegna*
Antonino Pagliaro, *Le funzioni del linguaggio*
Giorgio Agamben, *L'albero del linguaggio*
Giacomo Devoto, *Linguistica generale?*
Guido Favati, *La semantica*
Paolo Caruso, *Lo strutturalismo*
Aldo Rossi, *Metodo strutturale e critica letteraria*
Cesare Cavalleri, *Strutturalismo e critica letteraria*
Rudolf Engler, *Saussure e la scuola di Ginevra*
Emilio Garroni, *Jakobson e la scuola di Praga: problemi del linguaggio poetico*
Nicola Perrotti, *Linguaggio e psicoanalisi*
Amleto Bassi, *La psicologia del linguaggio e la psicolinguistica*
Silvio Ceccato, *La traduzione meccanica (linguistica e cibernetica)*
Alberto Bevilacqua, *Il linguaggio cinematografico*
Camilla Cederna, *I misteri del linguaggio mondano*
Corrado Grassi, *Linguaggio pubblicitario e storia della lingua italiana*
Gianfranco Folena, *Analisi linguistica di contesti pubblicitari*
Glossario

The original pagination of the article is given in square brackets interpolated within the text.

All footnotes are the author's own.

Responsibility for the transcription of the text lies with the editors, Michael Lewis and Marco Piasentier, with thanks to Connal Parsley, Kevin Attell, and Cornell University library, for obtaining a scanned copy of the original, and to Giorgio Agamben for allowing us to re-publish it here in a form which differs from the original only in a number of typographical corrections and very minor alterations made by the author. It may thus be said to constitute a version which represents the author's final intentions.}

L'albero del linguaggio
Giorgio Agamben
Scrittore

[104] Il sentiero che i saggi qui raccolti ci invitano a percorrere si propone di indicare il luogo a partire dal quale il lettore possa abbracciare una prospettiva il più possibile ampia sui problemi della linguistica contemporanea. La linguistica sembra infatti oggi avviata a occupare un posto privilegiato fra le scienze, come se le ricerche linguistiche offrissero in qualche modo il modello metodologico di ogni altro tipo di ricerca, dall'etnologia alla critica letteraria. Accingendosi a seguire questo sentiero, è perciò inevitabile che il lettore sia condotto a porsi innanzi tutto la domanda: che cos'è la linguistica? Che cos'è — per servirsi delle parole con cui si apre un corso di linguistica che, a torto o a ragione, ha goduto a lungo di un prestigio particolare — "la scienza che si è costituita intorno ai fatti della lingua"?[1]

Che la linguistica sia, infatti, la scienza del linguaggio è una costatazione di per sé evidente, sulla quale non sembra in alcun modo necessario soffermarsi col pensiero. Secondo l'opinione corrente, ciò significa semplicemente che — in quanto scienza — la linguistica ha "per unico e vero oggetto la lingua considerata in se stessa e per se stessa",[2] dove "in se stessa e per se stessa" allude al carattere obiettivo del moderno metodo scientifico così come si è venuto costituendo dal secolo XVI ad oggi.

Ma una considerazione scientifica dei fatti del linguaggio è poi veramente possibile? Noi sappiamo che nel 1927 il fisico tedesco Heisenberg, per spiegare l'impossibilità di conoscere simultaneamente con precisione la posizione e il movimento di un corpuscolo, fu costretto a introdurre il cosiddetto *principio di indeterminazione,* secondo il quale ogni volta che uno scienziato osserva o misura un determinato sistema fisico, si produce un'interazione fra l'osservatore e il sistema stesso che si risolve in una deformazione del fenomeno da osservare. Se consideriamo il meccanismo che ha reso possibile la nascita della linguistica come scienza, saremmo tentati di chiederci se un fenomeno di questo genere non si trovi anche a fondamento dello studio del linguaggio, e se, di conseguenza, l'idea di una lingua considerata "in se stessa e per se stessa", nella sua integrità, non sia che un mito fra i tanti che hanno accompagnato il sorgere della scienza ottocentesca.

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[1] SAUSSURE, *Cours de linguistique générale,* cap. I, Introd.
[2] Sono le parole che chiudono il citato corso di Saussure.

[105] Saussure, che, come Marx per il socialismo, riteneva di essere stato il primo a far passare la linguistica dall'utopia alla scienza, ci informa che "se per la prima volta noi abbiamo potuto assegnare alla linguistica un posto fra le scienze, ciò è perché l'abbiamo ricondotta alla semiologia".[3] La linguistica si è potuta, cioè, costituire come scienza soltanto quando ha determinato il suo oggetto come un sistema di segni, cioè come un insieme coerente di entità caratterizzate dall'unione inscindibile di due costituenti, il *significante* e il *significato (signans* e *signatum).* In altre parole, la nascita della linguistica come scienza coincide con l'entrata definitiva e senza residui del linguaggio in un orizzonte semiologico. La "deformazione" che si è prodotta nell'interazione fra lo studioso e il fenomeno in oggetto è — in questo caso — la riduzione del linguaggio a un sistema di segni, inteso nel modo che si è detto. La deformazione è — a dire il vero — impercettibile, perché — secondo una definizione che sbarra da quasi duemila anni l'accesso a una meditazione più essenziale dei problemi del linguaggio, ma che soltanto nel nostro tempo ha acquistato un valore normativo — la lingua è *fônê sêmantiké,* un'emissione sonora che significa qualcosa. Questa definizione del linguaggio, contrariamente a quanto si è creduto per un certo tempo, non è in alcun modo una scoperta di Saussure: essa era già implicita in un passo del *De interpretatione* di Aristotele ed era stata già completamente elaborata dai pensatori della Stoa, che consideravano appunto il *sêmeion* come un'entità costituita da una relazione inscindibile fra il *sêmainon* sensibile e il *sêmainomenon* intelligibile. Saussure non fece che rendere questa definizione normativa e, facendo tacere ogni diversa caratterizzazione del linguaggio che pure risuonava da un capo all'altro del pensiero greco, si pose a considerare le leggi del linguaggio tanto da un punto di vista *sincronico* (considerando, cioè, al di fuori del tempo, lo stato della lingua in un momento determinato) che *diacronico* (cioè, rispetto alla sua evoluzione nel tempo). Agendo in questo modo, egli conservò l'illusione di star considerando scientificamente la lingua "in se stessa e per se stessa", dimenticando che "la langue envisagée en elle même et pour elle même" è qualcosa di molto simile a un fantasma e che 1'investigazione linguistica non si innesta sul puro fatto della lingua, ma su un dato già preorganizzato dalla riflessione filosofica e, cioè, sulla lingua considerata o, se si vuole, pre-giudicata come sistema di segni.

Dopo Saussure, questa caratterizzazione del linguaggio come segno costituisce il fondamento di tutte le ricerche dei linguisti, ed è stata accettata come un dogma indiscusso anche da coloro che, rispetto a Saussure, si ponevano in una posizione decisamente critica (cfr. Jakobson: "II moderno pensiero strutturalista l'ha stabilito con certezza: il linguaggio è un sistema [106] di segni, e la linguistica è parte integrante della scienza dei segni, la Semiotica [la *sémiologie*

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[3] SAUSSURE, *op. cit.,* cap. III, Introd.

di Saussure]. La definizione medievale del segno: *aliquid stat pro aliquo,* che è stata risuscitata dal nostro tempo, si è dimostrata sempre val ida e feconda".[4]

Se, alla domanda che ci eravamo posti inizialmente, possiamo ora rispondere — senza che la nostra risposta appaia più tanto ovvia — che la linguistica è la scienza che studia il linguaggio considerato come un sistema di segni, sorge ora spontanea la domanda su quali siano gli scopi concreti che questa scienza si prefigge. Anche qui la risposta è apparentemente semplice: la linguistica — si dice — cerca le leggi (sincroniche e diacroniche, nel senso che si è visto) del linguaggio. Ma che vuol dire cercare le leggi di un fenomeno o di un sistema? Noi siamo talmente abituati a rappresentarci il reale come un sistema governato da leggi (a rappresentarcelo cioè, come si dice, "razionalmente") che non ci chiediamo neppure che cosa possa significare un'espressione come: "cercare le leggi del linguaggio". La parola "razionalmente", che abbiamo usato poco fa, ci aiuta a trovare una risposta.

L'investigazione scientifica e, in generale, tutto il nostro modo di pensare da uomini moderni (così come la possibilità che qualcosa come una legge esista), si fonda su un principio che fu enunciato chiaramente soltanto nel secolo XVII, col nome di *principium rationis,* principio di ragione. Leibniz, che menava gran vanto di averlo scoperto, lo enuncia in questo modo: *nihil est sine ratione,* nulla è senza ragione. Esso significa che nulla esiste nell'universo di cui non si possa dare la ragione, o, come si diceva allora, di cui non si possa *reddere rationem.* Ragionare significa appunto: cercare e rendere la ragione, chiamare il reale a rendere la sua ragione. La linguistica — in quanto scienza — cerca dunque la ragione del linguaggio, convoca il linguaggio *ad rationem reddendam. Ratio,* ragione, si dice, in greco, *logos.* Ma *logos* è anche il nome che i greci davano al linguaggio. La celeberrima definizione aristotelica dell'uomo come *zôon logon echon* significa tanto che l'uomo è "l'animale che ragiona" quanto che egli è "l'animale che parla".

Hamann, un pensatore che Hegel e Goethe tenevano in gran conto e che fu tra i primi a porre in maniera radicalmente nuova i problemi del linguaggio, scrisse in una lettera a Herder: "Anche se io fossi eloquente come Demostene, la sola frase che avrei bisogno di ripetere tre volte è questa: Ragione è Linguaggio, λόγος. Io rosicchio quest'osso e lo rosicchierò [107] fino alla morte. Per me vi è sempre oscurità su questa voragine, e sto sempre in attesa di un angelo apocalittico che porti la chiave di questo abisso". Se questo è vero, se *logos* è linguaggio, se ragione e linguaggio sono la stessa cosa, come è possibile rendere la ragione del linguaggio? Se nulla è senza ragione, la ragione stessa si tiene tuttavia fuori del suo principio. Ciò che fonda è necessariamente senza fondo. Proprio in quanto ragione, linguaggio finisce così col metterci di fronte a un abisso e ci obbliga a girare eternamente in circolo; come la rosa di cui parla Angelo Silesio,

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[4] In *Essais de linguistique générale,* Paris 1963, p. 162.

esso "è senza perché; fiorisce d'essere in fiore/ di se stesso dimentico, e non vuole esser visto".

Così la domanda su che cosa sia la linguistica come scienza, ci conduce proprio a revocare in dubbio la possibilità stessa della linguistica, in quanto scienza che cerca la ragione del linguaggio e vuole obbligare il linguaggio a rendere la sua ragione. Ma, se è vero che l'interrogazione è la pietà del pensiero, se la nostra domanda ci avrà, cioè, condotti a chiederci in modo più originale: che cos'è il linguaggio?, allora essa ci avrà anche condotto in una zona in cui potremo ascoltare nella loro sonorità propria i saggi qui raccolti e porci ancora una volta nel suo senso più pieno la domanda: che cos'è la linguistica? Che cos'è la scienza che si è costruita intorno ai fatti della lingua?

Resta ora da chiedersi a che cosa si debba il posto privilegiato che la linguistica occupa oggi fra le altre scienze. Per rispondere a questa domanda, vorremmo invitare il lettore a tornare col pensiero al mito biblico dell'origine del linguaggio. Nel racconto della Genesi, l'origine del linguaggio è presentata in questo modo: "L'eterno Iddio, avendo formato dalla terra tutti gli animali dei campi e tutti gli uccelli dei cieli, li menò all'uomo per vedere come li chiamerebbe, e perché ogni essere vivente portasse il nome che l'uomo gli darebbe. E l'uomo dette dei nomi a tutto il bestiame, agli uccelli dei cieli e ad ogni animale dei campi".[5] Del linguaggio originale dell'umanità, la lingua adamitica, non sappiamo altro; ma possiamo arguire dalle parole della Genesi che essa era una sorta di nomenclatura il cui scopo era di assicurare all'uomo quel "dominio sui pesci del mare, sugli uccelli del cielo e sul bestiame" che Dio gli aveva promesso al momento della creazione.

Quando Adamo fu cacciato dall'Eden e diede inizio sulla terra alla sua discendenza, l'umanità conservò tuttavia il linguaggio originale. Il potere [108] di questa nomenclatura adamitica doveva essere davvero notevole se Dio, secondo quanto racconta la stessa Genesi, dovette confonderla a Babele per impedire che gli uomini edificassero la torre "che giungeva fino al cielo": "E l'Eterno disse: ecco, essi sono un solo popolo e hanno il medesimo linguaggio; e questo è il principio del loro lavoro; ora nulla li impedirà di condurre a termine ciò che disegnano di fare. Orsù, scendiamo e confondiamo quivi il loro linguaggio, sicché l'uno non capisca il parlare dell'altro".[6]

Verso la seconda metà del secolo XVII, filosofi e linguisti — spinti dalla nostalgia del mitico potere del linguaggio di Adamo — si posero il problema di quale dovesse essere la lingua dell'umanità prima della confusione delle lingue a Babele. Proprio nel momento in cui si stavano ponendo le basi della scienza moderna, essi avevano compreso che il problema della conoscenza era

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[5] Genesi, 2, 19.
[6] Genesi, 11, 6.

indissolubilmente congiunto a quello del linguaggio, e pensavano che, se l'uomo avesse ritrovato la lingua di Babele, nessun ostacolo si sarebbe più opposto alla marcia della scienza verso l'acquisizione piena della verità.

Un matematico gesuita, Athanasius Kircher, e, indipendentemente da lui, Wilkins e Dalgarno, si resero conto che, se era impossibile risalire alla lingua adamitica attraverso un esame analitico dei linguaggi naturali conosciuti, era tuttavia possibile costruire un linguaggio artificiale che avesse le stesse caratteristiche di quello originale: fosse, cioè, universale — nel senso che potesse essere compreso e parlato da tutto il genere umano — e, proprio per questo, *razionale,* nel senso che una volta trovati i suoi caratteri o segni primi e irriducibili (la sua "grammatica filosofica"), l'intero universo logico-linguistico scaturisse automaticamente dai segni stessi, attraverso un sistema di regole di trasformazione implicite, press'a poco come avviene nella serie dei numeri naturali, per i quali noi sappiamo senza bisogno di pensare che $2 + 1 = 3$. Cartesio, ponendosi, in una lettera a Mersenne del 20 novembre 1629, il problema se una tale lingua "filosofica" fosse possibile, aveva compreso che la possibilità della sua invenzione dipendeva *"de la vraye philosophie"*, perché presupponeva che si potesse stabilire un alfabeto di tutte le idee semplici del cervello umano, dalle quali derivare tutti i possibili ragionamenti.

Messosi per questa via, attraverso un metodo da lui definito analitico-sintetico, Kircher giunse a disegnare un vero e proprio albero della Ragione, che, partendo da una base e svolgendosi lungo un tronco verticale e delle diramazioni orizzontali, compendia in sé l'intero universo logico e fornisce la struttura elementare di ogni possibile conoscenza. A questo punto, è sufficiente assegnare a ciascuno di questi elementi primi un segno appropriato, perché l'albero della Ragione si trasformi in un albero del Linguaggio, [109] e l'uomo entri in possesso di un perfetto equivalente della lingua di Babele. Venuto a conoscenza delle ricerche di Kircher, Wilkins e Dalgarno, Leibniz si rese conto che il problema da risolvere per poter trasformare l'albero della Ragione in albero del Linguaggio e costruire così la lingua universale, che avrebbe spalancato all'uomo le porte della conoscenza confuse a Babele, era quello di trovare il nesso razionale che legava il segno alla cosa rappresentata (il significante al significato, diremmo oggi), perché, secondo le sue parole, "è necessario che vi sia una ragione per la quale certe voci vengono assegnate a certe cose" *(causas subesse oportet, cur certae voces certis rebus sint assignatae).*[7] Per questo Leibniz cercò per tutta la vita di costruire una scienza, la "Caratteristica" o "Speciosa universale", che anticipa di più di due secoli il progetto saussuriano di una scienza generale dei segni e avrebbe rivelato agli uomini la "ragione" che legava il segno alle cose: *"puisque c'est elle* [la Caratteristica] *qui donne les paroles aux langues, les lettres aux paroles, les chiffres à l'Arithmetique, les notes à la musique; c'est elle qui nous apprend le secret de fixer le raisonnement et de l'obliger à laisser*

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[7] LEIBNIZ, *Opuscules et fragments inédits,* ed. Couturat, p. 151.

comme des traces visibles sur le papier en petit volume, pour estre examiné à loisir; c'est elle enfin qui nous fait raisonner à peu de frais, en mettant des caractères à la place des choses".[8]

Nel 1702, quando ha ormai sessant'anni, Leibniz copia e annota il *Lexicon Grammatico-philosophicum* di Dalgarno, il cui titolo vale la pena — per le ragioni che si vedranno — di trascrivere qui per intero: "LESSICO GRAMMATICO-FILOSOFICO, ovvero Tavole di tutte le Cose o Nozioni semplici e generali, sia naturali che artificiali, comprendenti in sé le Cause e i Rapporti comuni, metodicamente ordinate; ai quali significati vengono assegnati dei nomi, non in modo arbitrario, ma con arte e intelligenza, conservando la corrispondenza analogica fra la Cosa e il Segno. Dalle quali Cose e Nozioni si formano poi, attraverso regole generali e certe, e secondo un'analogia logico-grammaticale, tutti gli altri nomi più complessi, o per deduzione, o per combinazione in una o più voci".

Se ci siamo soffermati sulle ricerche di Kircher e di Leibniz e abbiamo trascritto per intero il titolo del trattato di Dalgarno, è perché in essi si trovano implicitamente o esplicitamente annunciati i motivi fondamentali della linguistica attuale. Anche il lettore profano saprà che, con la pubbli[110]cazione nel 1957 del libretto di Noam Chomsky: *Syntactic Structures,* la linguistica contemporanea attraversa una vera e propria tempesta, dopa la quale, com'è stato detto, tutto ciò che i linguisti avevano tenuto per articolo di fede si trovò ad essere nuovamente messo in questione. Qual è il punto di partenza delle ricerche della nuova scuola linguistica? Chomsky stesso dichiara il suo debito verso le correnti di pensiero razionalistiche dei secoli XVII e XVIII, e, se anche sembra ignorare le ricerche di Kircher e di Dalgarno e gli scritti di Leibniz sulla lingua razionale, cita però più volte Cartesio e gli altri scritti di Leibniz, e si richiama esplicitamente alle ricerche dei filosofi di Port-Royal sulla grammatica universale. Secondo Chomsky, ogni soggetto parlante si comporta come se possedesse, innato nella propria sostanza pensante, una sorta di codice generatore capace di stabilire dei collegamenti fra semantemi e fonemi in un numero indefinito di combinazioni possibili. Tutto avviene, cioè, come se ogni lingua possedesse una "grammatica generatrice" *(generative grammar)* che può rendere conto — partendo da una base di strutture minime e attraverso un sistema definito di regole di trasformazione — di qualsiasi frase possibile, tanto per quel che concerne il contenuto semantico della frase che la sua struttura fonologica.

Una "grammatica generatrice", intesa in questo senso, si può paragonare al gioco del Piccolo Ingegnere, che ogni bambino conosce; vi è, in primo luogo, un nucleo di elementi primitivi, materiali-base a partire dai quali verranno fabbricati i nuovi oggetti (A); le istruzioni che indicano le operazioni che bisogna compiere

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[8] LEIBNIZ, op. cit., pag. 98-99.

per costruire i nuovi oggetti a partire dai primi (B); gli schemi strutturali degli oggetti da costruire (C). L'analogia che l'idea di "grammatica generatrice" presenta con l'albero filosofico del linguaggio elaborato da Kircher e col *Lessico grammatico-filosofico* di Dalgarno (che erano, appunto, dei sistemi linguistici generatori) è sorprendente.

E l'analogia diventa ancora più spiccata, se si tiene conto che Chomsky e gli altri teorici della nuova scuola linguistica sono poi condotti a rinunciare a dedurre, per via di analisi, le grammatiche generatrici delle lingue naturali esistenti, e finiscono col costruire (attraverso un procedimento definito "analisi per sintesi", che ricorda così perfino nel nome il metodo analitico-sintetico di Kircher) delle grammatiche generatrici puramente astratte, delle specie di "macchine logiche", che forniscono la descrizione strutturale di lingue teoriche e virtuali, com'era appunto la lingua filosofica dei razionalisti seicenteschi.

Quanto all'altro aspetto delle ricerche di Leibniz e di Dalgarno, e, cioè, quello del rapporto necessario che deve esistere fra il segno e la cosa (fra significante e significato), anch'esso trova un esatto corrispondente nell'altra grande corrente della linguistica strutturale contemporanea, cioè nella critica di Jakobson al teorema saussuriano dell'arbitrarietà del segno.

[111] Senza entrare nei particolari di questa critica, che risulterebbero poco comprensibili al lettore inesperto di studi linguistici, ricorderemo che già nel *Cratilo* di Platone, Socrate discute con Ermogene il problema se, nel linguaggio, la forma debba considerarsi congiunta al contenuto "per natura" *(physei)* o "per convenzione" *(thesei)*. Nel dialogo platonico, Socrate propende per la prima soluzione, mentre Ermogene sostiene la seconda.

Nella linguistica moderna, la tesi di Ermogene aveva finito col prevalere, e Saussure —sia pure con qualche esitazione — era arrivato a stabilire un vero e proprio teorema dell'*arbitraire du signe*. Jakobson — riprendendo dei motivi già accennati da Otto Jespersen e dall'americano Peirce — rimette invece in onore la tesi di Socrate e ne fa il fondamento di una serie di brillanti analisi in cui l'accento, nell'esame dei fenomeni linguistici, si sposta dall'aspetto lessicale a quello strutturale.

In questo modo, il secondo tema fondamentale della linguistica contemporanea — accanto alla teoria delle grammatiche generatrici — è, se ben si guarda, proprio la costruzione della "Caratteristica" cercata da Leibniz, cioè della scienza che permette di stabilire la connessione razionale fra i1 segno e la cosa.

Nel 1677, all'età di 31 anni, Leibniz scrisse un dialogo "sulla lingua razionale", cioè sul metodo che avrebbe permesso di calcolare, in modo completo e per tutto ciò che esiste, il rapporto fra la parola, il segno e la cosa. In questo scritto, Leibniz, com'è stato osservato,[9] pose le basi logiche di ciò che noi conosciamo oggi come cervelli elettronici e macchine cibernetiche. In una nota in margine al testo, si legge questa frase, di pugno di Leibniz: *"Cum deus calculat, fit*

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[9] HEIDEGGER, *Der Satz vom Grund,* Pfullingen 1957, cap. 12.

mundus", mentre Dio calcola, il mondo si fa. Il "calcolo" divino è la ragione segreta scritta nell'universo e nel linguaggio dell'uomo di realizzare qualsiasi progetto e di prendere su di sé il dominio della terra.

Se la linguistica occupa oggi un posto privilegiato fra le altre scienze, è appunto perché essa, cercando la ragione del linguaggio, rende in realtà possibile la costruzione di un metodo universale della scienza paragonabile alla *lingua razionale* di Leibniz, e la cui elaborazione definitiva è compito della cibernetica e della teoria dell'informazione. Nella linguistica contemporanea, in altre parole, la frase: "il linguaggio è ragione" viene intesa nel senso che "il linguaggio è calcolo", una macchina logica che trasforma secondo regole matematiche un aspetto dell'informazione in un altro; e la linguistica studia appunto il meccanismo di questo calcolo che fornisce la struttura razionale di ogni possibile conoscenza.

Se questo è vero, la linguistica non sarebbe allora semplicemente la [112] scienza che ha per oggetto i fatti della lingua, ma un appello rivolto al linguaggio perché si conformi all'istanza ovunque dominante della ragione calcolante e si disponga in conformità del calcolo universale. In questa prospettiva, la convergenza sempre più ampia delle ricerche linguistiche con quelle della teoria dell'informazione e della cibernetica assumerebbe un significato tutto particolare. L'albero del linguaggio non sarebbe allora altro che un ramo di quella "scienza matematica dell'anima" (o *Psicologia matematica)* che già si annuncia come la scienza centrale dei prossimi anni e nel cui calcolo universale linguistica, teoria dell'informazione e cibernetica non costituiscono che i gradini di accesso.

Abbiamo visto che, nella sua ricerca della ragione del linguaggio, la linguistica è stata condotta a rinunciare a molti dei postulati stabiliti da Saussure, e a elaborare un metodo semimatematico che — se ricorda quello di Kircher e di Leibniz — non sembra però aver più molto in comune con quello della linguistica tradizionale. La crescente importanza assunta dalla teoria astratta delle grammatiche generatrici e l'introduzione dei modelli linguistici ha indotto molte università americane a istituire degli speciali corsi di matematica come propedeutica necessaria agli studi sul linguaggio. La linguistica algebrica — alla quale le teorie di Chomsky hanno dato un notevole impulso — è in crescente sviluppo.

E tuttavia, da un capo all'altro della storia della linguistica, un postulato è rimasto indiscusso: ed è la definizione del linguaggio come sistema di segni, unità indissolubili di significato e di significante. Benché non siano mancate critiche radicali da parte dei filosofi e si sia perfino arrivati a parlare recentemente di una "chiusura storica dell'età del segno",[10] il dogma del segno è rimasto intatto. In questo senso, si può dire che la linguistica contemporanea resti fedele fino in fondo al progetto semiologico saussuriano. Il linguaggio resta — per essa — *fônê*

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[10] JACQUES DERRIDA, *De la grammatologie,* Paris 1968, pag 25.

sêmantiké, un'emissione sonora che significa qualcosa. La struttura di questo sistema di segni viene intesa come razionale, nel senso che sia, cioè, possibile renderne la ragione e disegnarne un modello formale analogo a una teoria formale matematica. Di pari passo alla matematizzazione degli studi linguistici, noi assistiamo a una convergenza sempre più accentuata della linguistica (divenuta, come si è visto, un ramo di una più ampia teoria matematica dell'anima) con la cibernetica e la teoria dell'informazione (il lettore non dovrà perciò meravigliarsi di trovare in un volume [113] come questo, dedicato alla linguistica, il contributo di uno studioso di cibernetica come Ceccato). Lo studio del linguaggio come "macchina logica", riproducendo su un nuovo piano il problema tradizionale del rapporto fra la lingua e il pensiero, porta un utile contributo alla soluzione del problema fondamentale della cibernetica, e cioè quello della modulazione del pensiero umano nella macchina calcolatrice universale.[11]

Per questa via, la linguistica sembra avviata a realizzare i sogni dei filosofi razionalisti e a costruire un albero razionale del linguaggio che, come l'*Arbor philosophica universae cognitionis typus* disegnato da Kircher alla fine della sua *Arte magna del sapere,* il cui tronco si elevava dall'abisso del nulla fino alle regioni celesti, fornisca la ragione strutturale dell'intero universo logico.

Ma, accanto a questa possibilità, un'altra se ne presenta, che, annunciatasi all'aurora del pensiero greco, è rimasta, per così dire, in riserva nella storia della meditazione occidentale sul linguaggio. Secondo la strada che questa possibilità apre al pensiero, il linguaggio è *logos,* ma *logos* non significa semplicemente "ragione, calcolo", ma designa invece, secondo la sua etimologia, l'atto di raccogliere, di mantenere e portare qualcosa davanti allo sguardo perché esso appaia per quello che è. Il linguaggio, in questa senso, è ciò che fa sì che ogni cosa si tenga raccolta in se stessa davanti a noi nella luce della presenza. Per questo i greci dicevano: *to autò estin einai te kai logos,* "una sola cosa sono l'essere e il linguaggio", e avevano interpretato per tempo la natura di segno, propria del linguaggio, nella luce di questa sua originale appartenenza all'essere.

Un frammento di Eraclito esprime magnificamente questa dimensione ontologica del segno: "Il Signore, di cui a Delfi è l'oracolo, non svela né nasconde, ma significa *(sêmainei)*". Nell'unità indissolubile del segno linguistico, i greci scorgevano, cioè, il mistero dell'essere che, apparendo nel significante sensibile, si nasconde, e, nascondendosi, appare, e questa duplice natura dell'essere avevano voluto esprimere nella determinazione negativa che essi davano della verità: *alêtheia,* non-occultazione, svelamento, coappartenenza dell'apparire e dell'essere celato.

L'essenza del linguaggio non si esaurirebbe, allora, nel suo essere un mezzo

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[11] Cfr. SAUMJAN, *La Cybernétique et la langue,* Diogène 1965, n. 51.

di comunicazione e di espressione, un suono significante, ma il suo carattere semiologico non sarebbe a sua volta che un indizio dell'originale [114] appartenenza del linguaggio all'essere. La prospettiva semiologica che la linguistica apre sul linguaggio sarebbe perciò esatta soltanto nella misura in cui essa si apre in una più ampia dimensione ontologica, perché è nel linguaggio che l'uomo — questo animale provvisto di parola — si avvicina di più al problema del proprio essere al mondo, e ritrova ogni volta la sua stazione fondamentale di fronte all'essere.

L'albero del linguaggio è l'unità dell'albero della vita e dell'albero della scienza, che Adamo aveva posseduto nell'Eden e che la confusione delle lingue a Babele tolse all'umanità. In questo senso, l'uomo è sempre in cammino verso il linguaggio, e la linguistica — questa "scienza che si è costituita intorno ai fatti della lingua" — servirebbe allora al suo scopo se, orientando l'uomo nel suo cammino verso il linguaggio, lo obbligasse a prestare ascolto alla parola e alla ragione (vorremmo poter dire: alla *parola-ragione*) del linguaggio*.*

D. – Oggi ci troviamo di fronte a diverse linguistiche (applicate alle macchine in genere, operativa, strutturalistiche varie, glossematica a uso di grammatiche generative, ecc.); lei da quale punto di vista affronta l'oggetto "linguaggio"?

R. – Dal punto di vista dei suoi rapporti possibili con la matematica. Penso che, facendo analisi perimatematiche, si possano portare alla luce alcuni caratteri propri dello stile, e così del fare letterario in genere. Sto lavorando in questa direzione, ma non ho ancora raggiunto qualcosa da chiamare "risultato", e quindi non ho ancora pubblicato niente. Specialmente, mi sto dedicando ad alcuni problemi relativi all'ambiguità linguistica, che — credo — l'analisi quantitativa, meglio di altri metodi, riesce a mettere in evidenza.

Da un'intervista concessa da QUENEAU a *Paese Libri,* 1968

The Tree of Language
Giorgio Agamben

Translated by Connal Parsley[1]

The path traced by the essays collected here leads us to the widest possible vantage over the problems of contemporary linguistics.[2] Linguistics, today, has begun to occupy a privileged place amongst the disciplines; seeming to promise a methodological model for every kind of inquiry, from ethnology to literary criticism. Setting out along this path, therefore, the reader must inevitably consider the question: what *is* linguistics? To borrow the opening words of the *Course in General Linguistics* that, for better or for worse, has long enjoyed an unusual level of prestige: what is 'the science that has been developed around the facts of language'?[3]

That linguistics really is the *science* of language is taken as self-evident; something that need not detain our thinking. According to current opinion, this just means that as a science, linguistics takes 'language studied in and for itself' as its 'true and unique object';[4] where the phrase 'in and for itself' reflects the objective character of modern scientific method as it has been constructed from the sixteenth century to today. But is such a scientific contemplation of the 'facts of language' really possible? We know that in 1927, when he needed to explain the impossibility of knowing with precision both the position and the momentum of a quantum particle, the German physicist Werner Heisenberg had to introduce what he called the *Uncertainty Principle*. According to this notion, every time a scientist observes or measures a given physical system, an interaction is produced between observer and system that results in the distortion of the phenomenon being observed. If we consider the mechanism that has made the birth of linguistics as a science possible, we may be tempted to ask whether a similar phenomenon also lies at the foundation of the study of language, and whether, as a result, the idea of language as a whole considered 'in and for itself' isn't merely one more myth amongst the many that accompanied the birth of nineteenth century science.

Saussure — who thought himself the first to transport linguistics from the utopian realm into the realm of science (just as Marx did with socialism) — informs

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[2] For a full list of the contents of the journal in which this article originally appeared, please consult the Italian version of the text that immediately precedes the translation. — Ed.

[3] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

[4] Ibid., 232.

us that if he has, for the first time, 'succeeded in assigning linguistics a place among the sciences' it is because he has 'related it to semiology'.[5] Linguistics could be cast as a science, that is, only by defining its object as a system of signs — a coherent whole made up of entities, each characterised by the indivisible union of two elements, the *signifier* and the *signified* (*signans* and *signatum*). In other words, the birth of linguistics as a science coincides with the definitive entry of language into a semiological sphere, without remainder. The 'distortion' that is produced by the interaction between the scholar and the object-phenomenon in question is, in this case, the reduction of language to a system of signs. In truth, this distortion is imperceptible. This is so because, according to a definition that has barred our access to a more essential reflection on linguistic problems for almost two thousand years (but which has only now, in our time, acquired a normative significance), language is *phônê sêmantiké*, a sonic emission that signifies. Contrary to a mistaken belief that endured for some time, this definition of language was in no way Saussure's discovery. Already implicit in Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, it was comprehensively elaborated by the Stoic philosophers, who regarded the *sêmeion* as an entity comprised of the inseparable connection between a sensible *sêmainon* and an intelligible *sêmainomenon*. Saussure merely made this relation normative, and thus silencing any other characterisation of language that might have been equally prevalent in Greek thought, arrived at a consideration of the laws of language from both a *synchronic* perspective (the state of a language at a determinate moment) and a *diachronic* one (from the point of view of its evolution in time). In this way, he preserved the illusion of analysing language scientifically 'in and for itself', forgetting that *'la langue envisagée en elle même et pour elle même'* is something very much like a phantasm. Any inquiry into language must take root not in the pure fact of language, but in an object that is already itself the product of philosophical reflection: in this case, language considered or indeed pre-judged to be a system of signs.

Since Saussure, this characterisation of language-as-sign has become the foundation of all linguistic inquiry, and is accepted as incontestable dogma even by those who take an avowedly critical stance towards his work. As Jakobson wrote, 'modern structuralist thought has clearly established [that] language is a system of signs, and linguistics is part of the science of signs, or SEMIOTIC (Saussure's *sémiologie*). The ancient definition of the sign — *'aliquid stat pro aliquot'* — has been resurrected and proposed as still valid and productive'.[6]

If we now reply, to the question we posed at the outset, that linguistics is the science that studies language considered as a system of signs — an answer that no longer seems quite so obvious — then a question immediately arises concerning the

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[5] Ibid., 16.
[6] Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings Volume II, Word and Language* (Mouton de Gruyter, 1971), 103.

concrete aims assumed by any such science. Here, too, the answer is apparently straightforward: linguistics, it is said, seeks the laws of language, both synchronic and diachronic, in the sense we have described. But what does it mean to search for the laws of a given phenomenon, or of a system? We are so used to representing reality as a system governed by laws (that is, representing it 'rationally') that we no longer even ask what this expression might mean, to 'seek the laws of language'.

The word 'rationally', in fact, helps us to find an answer. Scientific investigation (but also our modern way of thinking generally and indeed the very possibility of the existence of something like 'laws') is based on a principle that was not clearly articulated until the eighteenth century, with the expression *principium rationis*. Leibniz, who was extremely proud of his discovery, formulated it thus: *nihil est sine ratione*. Nothing is without reason: this means that nothing in the universe exists whose reason cannot be given, or as the expression of the time had it, nothing exists for which we cannot *reddere rationem*. To reason means, in fact, to search for and to provide reasons — to name the real by giving to it its reason. Linguistics, as a science, therefore seeks the reason of language, summoning language *ad rationem reddendam*. In Greek, *ratio*, or reason, is *logos*. But *logos* is also the name that the Greeks gave to language itself. As such, Aristotle's most celebrated definition of man as *zôon logon ekhon* means both that man is 'the animal who has reason' and 'the animal who has language'.

Among the first thinkers to pose language's problems in a radically new way was Johann Georg Hamann, whom Hegel and Goethe both held in very high regard. As he wrote in a letter to Johann Gottfried Herder: 'Even if I were as eloquent as Demosthenes, I should not have to do more than thrice repeat a single phrase: Reason is language, *logos*. This is the bone I gnaw at, and shall gnaw myself to death over. Yet these depths are still obscure to me; I still await an apocalyptic angel with a key to this abyss'.[7] If this is true — if *logos* is language, if reason and language are the same thing — then how would it be possible to discover the reason of language? If nothing is without reason, then reason maintains itself beyond the reach of its own principle in any case: that which founds is necessarily without foundation. Understood as reason, language thus ends up revealing an abyss that it forces us to circle for eternity. Like Angelus Silesius' rose, language is 'without why, it / blooms because it blooms, / It pays no attention to itself, / asks not whether it is seen'.

In this way, to enquire after the nature of linguistic science leads us to call into question the very possibility of linguistics itself, insofar as it is a science that seeks the reason of language and hopes to oblige language to justify itself rationally. Yet if it is true that questioning is the piety of thought — if our question leads us, that is, to ask 'what is language?' in a more originary sense — then we will also have been led to a place where we can hear the specific resonance of the essays gathered here.

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[7] Ronald Gregor Smith, *J. G. Hamann (1730–1788) A Study in Christian Existentialism: With Selections from His Writings* (Harper and Brothers, 1960), 246.

We can then pose the question once more, in its fullest sense: what is linguistics? What is the science that has been developed around the facts of language?

To what does linguistics owe its privileged place among the sciences? To answer this question we must return to the biblical myth of the origin of language. In the story of Genesis, language's origin is presented thus: 'Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name'.[8] We know nothing more of this original language of humanity, Adamic language. But we can deduce, from the words of Genesis, that it was a kind of nomenclature whose aim was to guarantee man's dominion 'over the fish in the sea and birds in the sky and over ever living creature that moves on the ground' that God promised him at the moment of creation.

When Adam was banished from the garden of Eden and his descendants began to people the earth, humanity retained this original language. The power of Adamic naming must have been truly remarkable if, according to Genesis, God had to confound it in order to prevent humans from erecting the tower at Babel that reached 'to the heavens': 'The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other"'.[9]

Towards the second half of the eighteenth century, driven by nostalgia for the mythical power of Adamic language, philosophers and linguists posed themselves the problem of the nature of human language before the confusion of languages at Babel. Even whilst they were arranging the very foundations of modern science, these thinkers understood that the problem of knowledge was inextricably linked to that of language, and they thought that if man could rediscover the language of Babel then no further obstacle could be placed in the way of science's march toward the acquisition of truth.

The Jesuit mathematician Athanasius Kircher — and also, independently, John Wilkins and George Dalgarno — realised that although it is impossible to return to Adamic language via an analytic examination of known natural languages, it is nonetheless possible to construct an artificial language that possesses the same characteristics. Such a language would be universal, in the sense that it could be understood and spoken by all humankind. It would also, for that reason, be *rational*, in the sense that once its primary or irreducible characters or signs are discovered (its 'philosophical grammar'), then the entire logical-linguistic universe would emerge from these signs through a system of implicit rules of transformation

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[8] Genesis 2,19 (New International Version).
[9] Genesis 2, 4-6.

— more or less like that of natural numbers, thanks to which we know without even thinking that 2 + 1 = 3. In a letter to Marin Mersenne of 20th November 1629, asking himself whether such a 'philosophical' language is possible, Descartes realised that the possibility of its creation depended on *'la vraye philosophie'*, because it presupposed the possibility of establishing an alphabet made up of all the basic ideas of the human mind, from which all the possibilities of reasoning could be derived.

Pursuing this path via a method he termed 'analytic-synthetic', Kircher came to construct a true and proper tree of Reason. Proceeding from its base up a vertical trunk and along its horizontal branches, this tree condensed within itself the entire universe of logic, supplying the elemental structure of every possible knowledge. At that point, it remained only to assign each of these primary elements an appropriate sign, so that the tree of Reason would be transformed into a tree of Language and man would come into possession of a perfect equivalent of the language of Babel. Encountering the research conducted by Kircher, Wilkins and Dalgarno, it dawned on Leibniz that a certain problem must be resolved in order to make this transition from the tree of Reason to the tree of Language — and thus to construct the universal language that would throw open the portals to knowledge that were closed at Babel. What was to be discovered was the rational nexus that binds the sign to the thing it represents (that binds the signifier to the signified, we would say today). In his words: 'there ought to be a reason why certain words are assigned certain things' (*causas subesse oportet, cur certae voces certis rebus sint assignate*).[10] This is why Leibniz strove his entire life to develop a science (the *'characteristica universalis'* or *'spécieuse générale'*), which — more than two centuries before Saussure's general science of signs — would have revealed to man the 'reason' that binds sign and thing: '[s]ince it is this *Characteristic* which gives words to languages, letters to words, numbers to Arithmetic, notes to Music. It teaches us how to fix our reasoning, and to require it to leave, as it were, visible traces on the paper of a notebook for inspection at leisure. Finally, it enables us to reason with economy, by substituting characters in the place of things'.[11]

In 1702, at seventy years of age, Leibniz transcribed and annotated Dalgarno's *Lexicon Grammatico-philosophicum*, the title of which, for evident reasons, is worth transcribing here in full: 'Grammatical-Philosophical Lexicon, or Methodically organised Table of all simple and general Things and Notions, both natural and artificial, including their Causes and Common relations; whose meanings are assigned names, not arbitrarily but with art and intelligence, preserving the analogical relation between Thing and Sign. From these Things and Notions are then formed, by general and clear rules and according to logical-

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[10] Marcelo Dascal, *Leibniz. Language, Signs, and Thought: A Collection of Essays* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987), 189.

[11] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Leibniz: Selections* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 4.

grammatical analogy, all other, more complex names, either by deduction or by combination in one or more entries'.[12]

The reason we have given careful attention to Kircher and Leibniz's research, and to the full title of Dalgarno's treatise, is the fact that they announce — either explicitly or implicitly — the fundamental themes of present-day linguistics. Even the lay reader will be aware that with the publication of Noam Chomsky's 1957 *Syntactic Structures*, contemporary linguistics enters a true and proper upheaval, suddenly throwing into question every article of faith held by linguists. What was the point of departure for the enquiry made by this new school of linguistics? Chomsky himself declares his debt to the rationalist current of thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although he seems to neglect Kircher and Dalgarno, as well as Leibniz's writing on rational language, he often cites Descartes and other works by Leibniz, and refers explicitly to the Port-Royal philosophers' universal grammar. According to Chomsky, every speaking subject acts as if, inherent in their *res cogitans*, there were a kind of generative code capable of establishing connections between semantemes and phonemes in an indefinite number of possible combinations. Everything happens as if, in other words, every language had a *generative grammar* that could account for any possible phrase, by reference to a base of minimal structures and a defined system of rules for their transformation — encompassing a phrase's semantic content as well as its phonological structure.

A generative grammar, understood in this way, can be compared with the well-known children's toy, Junior Engineer. This consists of (A) a nucleus of primitive elements; base materials that are the building blocks for the manufacture of new objects, (B) instructions setting out the steps that should be followed in order to construct new objects from the base materials, and (C) structural designs for making particular objects. Seen in this way, a startling analogy emerges between generative grammar and the philosophical tree of language elaborated by Kircher and Dalgarno's *Lexicon Grammatico-philosophicum* — which were also generative linguistic systems.

The analogy becomes even more pronounced if we bear in mind that Chomsky, and the other theorists of this new linguistic school, did not attempt to

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[12] *Tabulae Rerum, et Notionum omnium Simpliciorum, et Generaliorum, tam Artefactarum quam Naturalium, Rationes, et Respectus communiores, Methodo Praedicamentali ordinatas, complectentes: Quibus significandis, Nomina, non Casu, sed Arte, et Confilio, servata inter Res et Signa convenientia Analogica, instituuntur. Ex quibus, Rerum et Notionum aliarum omnium magis Complexarum et specialorum Nomina, vel Derivatione, vel Compositione, in una vel pluribus vocibus, per Regulas quasdam Generales et certas, secundum Analogiam Logico-Grammaticam, formantur; Ita ut Nomina sic formata, Rerum Descriptiones ipsarum Naturae consentaneas, contineant.* — Trans.

deduce the generative grammars of existing natural languages through a process of analysis. Instead, they arrived at the construction of purely abstract generative grammars by a procedure they termed 'analysis by synthesis' — whose very name recalls Kircher's analytic-synthetic method. Such grammars are like 'logical machines' that provide the structural description of theoretical and virtual languages, just like the philosophical language of the seventeenth century rationalists.

Turning to the other aspect of Leibniz and Dalgarno's research — the necessary relation that must exist between sign and thing (or signifier and signified) — this finds its precise correlate in the other great current of contemporary structural linguistics: Jakobson's critique of Saussure's theory of the arbitrariness of the sign. Without entering into the detail of this critique here (which would barely be comprehensible to any reader not versed in linguistic theory), we may nonetheless recall that in Plato's *Cratylus*, Socrates and Hermogenes discussed the question of whether, in language, a form should be considered to be related to its content 'by nature' *(physei)* or 'by convention' *(thesei).* In the dialogue, Socrates favours the first answer, and Hermogenes the second.

In modern linguistics, it is Hermogenes' thesis that has prevailed. And Saussure, albeit with some hesitation, eventually established a true and proper theory of the *arbitraire du signe.* Roman Jakobson, on the contrary — taking up themes already signalled by Otto Jesperson, as well as C. S. Peirce, an American — vindicates Socrates' answer, making it the foundation of a series of brilliant analyses in which the emphasis is shifted, in the examination of linguistic phenomena, from language's lexical aspect to its structural quality.

A careful examination thus reveals that the second fundamental theme of contemporary linguistics — alongside the theory of generative grammar — is precisely the construction of the *characteristica universalis* sought by Leibniz: the science that would allow the establishment of a rational connection between sign and thing.

In 1677, at 31 years of age, Leibniz penned a 'Dialogue' on the method that would permit the calculation — a complete calculation, for everything that exists — of the relation between the word, the sign and the thing. In this essay, as Heidegger noted,[13] Leibniz laid the logical foundations for what we know today as artificial neural networks and cybernetic machines. In the margin of the text may be a found a note, made by Leibniz himself, which reads: *Cum deus calculat, fit mundus*: 'As God calculates, the world arises'. Divine 'calculation' is the secret reason written into the universe; and into human language, that man may realise his every project and assume dominion over the earth.

If linguistics currently occupies a privileged place among disciplines it is because in seeking the reason of language, it makes possible the construction of a universal method comparable to that of Leibniz's *rational language,* which finds its

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[13] Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (Indiana University Press, 1996), 101.

definitive elaboration in cybernetics and information theory. In contemporary linguistics, in other words, the phrase 'language is reason' is understood to mean 'language is calculation': a logical machine that transforms information from one form into another by means of mathematical rules. And linguistics studies the operation of this calculation that supplies the rational structure for every possible knowledge.

If this is true, then linguistics is not merely the science that takes as its object the facts of language. It is rather an appeal to language, asking that it conform to the all-pervasive demand of calculative reason and arrange itself in accordance with a universal calculus. From this point of view, the growing convergence between linguistic research, information theory and cybernetics assumes an extremely particular significance. The tree of language is in fact a branch of that 'mathematical science of the soul' (or mathematical psychology) which already proclaims itself the most important discipline of the immediate future, and to which universal linguistic calculus, information theory and cybernetics are but the precursor.

We have seen that the quest for the reason of language has led linguistic research to renounce many of the postulates established by Saussure, developing instead a quasi-mathematical method. This method, to the extent that it recalls Kircher and Leibniz, no longer seems to have much in common with that of traditional linguistics. The growing importance assumed by abstract generative grammar theory, and the introduction of linguistic models, have induced many American universities to offer special courses in mathematics in order to provide the training necessary for linguistic study. Algebraic linguistics, given a marked boost by Chomsky's theories, is decisively on the rise.

From the very beginning of the history of linguistics to the present day, however, one linguistic postulate remains unexamined: the definition of language as a system of signs, understood as indissoluble unities of signifier and signified. Despite radical critiques by philosophers — who have recently even spoken of 'the historical closure' of the 'age of the sign'[14] — the dogma of the sign remains intact. In this sense, it can be said that contemporary linguistics remains faithful to Saussure's semiological project to the very end. Language, for this project, remains *phônê sêmantiké;* a sonic emission that signifies something. The structure of this system of signs is understood as rational, in the sense that it is thought possible to articulate its reason in a formal model analogous to a formal mathematical theory. Hand in hand with this mathematisation of the study of language, we witness an ever more marked convergence between linguistics (which, as we have said, has become a branch of a broader mathematical theory of the soul) and cybernetics, together with information theory. (For this reason, it will not surprise the reader to find a chapter by Silvio Ceccato, a scholar of cybernetics, in the present volume

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[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 13.

dedicated to linguistics). The study of language as a 'logical machine', in fact — reproducing the traditional problem of the relation between language and thought in a new domain — usefully contributes to the resolution of the fundamental problem in cybernetics: the 'modulation of human thought in the universal calculating machine'.[15]

In this sense, linguistics seems to be on a path to realising the dreams of the rationalist philosophers, through the construction of a rational tree of language. Just like the *Arbor philosophica universae cognitionis typus* that Kircher drew at the end of his *Arte magna del sapere*, the trunk of this tree would rise out of the abyss of nothingness, stretch up to the heavens, and furnish us with the structural rationality of the entire logical universe.

Alongside this possibility, however, another one presents itself. Disclosed at the dawn of Greek thought, it has remained in reserve, so to speak, within the history of the western meditation on language. If we consider language in accordance with the path opened up by this alternative possibility, language is *logos* — but *logos* does not simply mean 'reason, calculation'. Instead, according to its etymology, *logos* designates the act of gathering, preserving and bringing something before the gaze so that it appears as what it is. Language, in this sense, is that which enables every thing to be gathered in itself and held before us, in the light of presence. This is why the Greeks said: *to autò estin einai te kai logos*, 'being and language are the same', and it is why they so readily understood the linguistic sign in light of its originary belonging to being.

A fragment from Heraclitus expresses magnificently this ontological dimension of the sign: 'The Lord of whom Delphi is the oracle, neither unveils nor hides, but signifies *(sêmainei)*'. This is to say, in the indissoluble unity of the linguistic sign, the Greeks glimpsed the mystery of being that appears in the sensible sign and thereby conceals itself, and in concealing itself, comes to appear. This dual nature of being is also expressed in the negative inflection they gave to truth: *alêtheia*, un-concealment, unveiling, and the mutual relation between appearance and being-concealed.

The essence of language is not fully expressed, then, in its being a means of communication and expression — a signifying sound. Language's semiological nature is merely a clue to the originary belonging of language to being. The semiological perspective that linguistics opens on language is, for this reason, accurate only to the extent that it opens onto a wider ontological dimension, since it is in language that humankind — that animal endowed with language — draws closer to the problem of its being in the world and recovers, time and again, its fundamental place in relation to Being.

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[15] Sebastian Konstantinovič Šaumjan, 'Cybernetics and Language' (1965) 13 (51) *Diogenes* 129, 144.

The tree of language is the unity of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, possessed by Adam in Eden but then denied to humanity by the confusion of languages at Babel. In this sense, humankind is always on the way to language. And linguistics — this 'science that has been developed around the facts of language' — serves its aims only if, while orienting humankind on the way toward language, it obliges us to pay attention to language's word *and* its reason (we could say, language's reason-word).

D. Today we are confronted by a variety of linguistics: linguistics as applied to machines in general, functional linguistics, various structuralisms, glossematics used by generative grammars, etc. From what point of view do you yourself approach the object 'language'?

R. From the point of view of its possible relation with mathematics. I think that by a perimathematical analysis one can bring to light certain characteristics of a style, and so of the literary enterprise in general. I am working in this direction, but I haven't yet arrived at something like a 'result' and so I have not yet published anything. I am dedicating myself in particular to certain problems having to do with linguistic ambiguity, which I believe quantitative analysis is able to reveal more than any other method.

From an interview with Raymond Queneau for *Paesi Libri*, 1968.

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Superpolitically Apolitical
On Agamben's *Use of Bodies*[1]
Lorenzo Chiesa

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1. *The Use of Bodies* coalesces around what Agamben calls, borrowing from Sophocles' *Antigone*, the 'superpolitical apolitical' (*hypsipolis apolis*). The phrase appears only twice in the volume, but it is absolutely decisive.

2. What is it to live as 'superpolitical apolitical'? It *is* to *live* and, at the same time, to *think* a politics 'set free from every figure of relation' (and representation), in which, however, 'we are *together* beyond every relation'.

3. This non-relational togetherness requires the 'use of bodies' — in the subjective sense of the genitive. That is: another body — unproductive, non-instrumental — is possible for the human being, whereby a 'zone of indifference' emerges between one's own body and that of another. Use becomes common use.

4. The 'superpolitical apolitical' also ambitiously involves deactivating the entire apparatus of Western ontology, beginning at least with Aristotle. Ontology, as inextricable from politics, is in fact founded on the relation of the ban, which ultimately founds every relation. *Homo Sacer I* argued that the separation between natural life (*zoè*) and political life (*bios*), i.e. our understanding of the anthropogenetic threshold as a *fracture* between life and language, is always concomitant with the banning of 'bare life' from the *polis* (or better, its 'inclusive exclusion') — 'bare life' as a life deprived of its form. *The Use of Bodies* complicates and substantiates this scenario. Ontologically, it is the very notion of the subject, the Aristotelian *hypokeimenon* as a singular existence that 'must be at once excluded by and captured in the apparatus'.

5. It is only through the destitution of traditional ontology that the form of life (more and more reducible to bare life in modernity and contemporaneity) can express itself as a hyphenated 'form-of-life', where life immanently lives its own mode of being in a non-relational 'contact' with its context, and finds 'happiness'.

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[1] A shorter version of this review was originally published in 2016 on the Stanford University Press Blog (http://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2016/07/superpolitically-apolitical-.html) (accessed 14ᵗʰ March 2018).

6. The form-of-life as a non-relational commonality with the contextual other can also be grasped as the undoing of the Aristotelian relation between potency (or potential) and act. As use, the form-of-life is a potency which is not exhausted in the passage to the act (the being-at-work), but, contemplating itself as the deactivation of the act, it becomes inoperative, a potency of potency.

7. *The Use of Bodies* answers the central, and at the time rather enigmatic, question first raised in *Homo Sacer I* — that of a new politics understood as a non-relational relation — with the 'superpolitical apolitical' as a further oxymoron. But this is not a mere deadlock: the oxymoron (in its different variants) is both unfolded — through a thorough discussion of the concepts of use and form-of-life — and *used* as a concrete indicator of the radical crisis affecting our political and ontological categories, which functions as a practical call to render them fully inoperative.

8. In the opening pages of *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben opposes any strict division between the *pars destruens* and the *pars construens* of a work. He also rejects the very idea of a conclusion. And yet the reader cannot avoid the, perhaps naïve, impression that this book constructively — and obstinately — does conclude the *Homo Sacer* series, in a certain way. Here, one must first and foremost acknowledge and praise the tenacious determination needed to carry out a twenty-year project, a monumental enterprise that now displays a rare level of consistency. Agamben is all too often revered — and vainly emulated — for the supposed irreverence of his impressionistic, quasi-aphoristic, and circumlocutory style. This is highly misleading, especially when we consider retroactively the *Homo Sacer* series as a whole. Intentionally or unintentionally, Agamben stands out as one of the most systematic thinkers of our time. His fragmentary style (and the notion of style is closely associated with the idea of a form-of-life in *The Use of Bodies*) is probably nothing less than what Agamben would call a 'signature' of his philosophical system. Whether we agree or disagree with Agamben's conclusions — and to what extent — is an altogether different matter.

9. Following Agamben's own admission in *The Fire and the Tale* that 'the genuinely philosophical element' contained in the works of the authors he loves is their 'capacity for development', let us try to develop some of his conclusions — and thus also inevitably begin to challenge them.

10. At one point, *The Use of Bodies* peremptorily states that 'ontology and politics correspond perfectly'. Elsewhere, it also maintains that modal ontology, i.e. the ontology of use, 'coincides with an ethics'. The subject that is constituted in use as form-of-life and 'contemplation of a potential' is, in turn, in various circumstances, referred to as indiscriminately ethical and political. Moreover, the work of the late Foucault on the care of the self as the use of bodies would

positively conflate ethics and aesthetics. Given this vertiginous series of dazzling equations — which courageously updates the traditional branches of philosophy but also runs the risk of rendering them indistinguishable — how is philosophy, still explicitly entrusted with the supreme task of 'construct[ing] a life at once "superpolitical and apolitical"', to preserve its autonomous role here? Is it a question of *critically* 'saying yes' to language (as the greatly underestimated *Sacrament of Language* concludes)? Or — more problematically in my view — is it instead a question of a philosopher-poet, or poet-philosopher, who *contemplates* his dwelling in language (as is hinted at in *The Fire and the Tale*)? If the latter — in spite of Agamben's rigorous distancing of his thought from Heidegger's in *The Use of Bodies,* more so than anywhere else in his corpus — how might the philosopher avoid clumsily mimicking the Hölderlinian 'inhabiting life' or 'life of dwelling' (as form-of-life), which, for Agamben himself, also 'destroyed' Hölderlin's language?

11. Elsewhere I have suggested that Agamben's philosophy amounts to a sophisticated, elegant, and paradoxical kind of linguistic vitalism. His ultimate ontological aim, as stated in *Potentialities*, is an understanding of the '*nature* of thought', and hence of language, from the perspective of 'life [...] as a power that incessantly exceeds its forms and realisations'. The form-of-life — however 'immanently', and beyond the Aristotelian dichotomy between potency and act — still pre-supposes a *force*-of-life. But *The Use of Bodies* surprisingly and yet firmly *dismisses* vitalism: 'to bring to light — *beyond every vitalism* — the intimate interweaving of being and living: this is today certainly the task of thought (and of politics)'. What nonetheless remains to be articulated is, quite bluntly, how the political onto-logy of the form-of-life does not grant life a precedence with respect to its form. This is an issue which very evidently affects a number of leading Italian biopolitical thinkers, independently of whether they openly endorse vitalism and whether they are aware of its lingering Christian connotations — the *evangelium vitae*, or *logos* of life as a silent (or not so silent) paradigm. In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben quickly but neatly demarcates his stance from that of Franciscanism — in previous books, this demarcation was more difficult to notice, a fact which could give rise to ambiguities. The Franciscan concept of use relied on an act of 'renunciation', and thus on 'the will of the subject'; use as form-of-life should, on the contrary, be founded on 'the nature of things'. But, in opposition to the Christian 'eternal life' — which the laicised Church itself now tends to reduce to sheer bio-political 'survival' — how are we to conceive of such a 'nature of things'? How does 'the *vitality* or form of life of the [non-subjectivised] individual', or the 'impulse' and 'virtue' of 'life as such', not relapse into vitalism?

12. Over the last two decades, Agamben has more or less persuasively been linked with a radical Left, which, through authors such as Badiou and Žižek, is attempting to promote a new 'communist hypothesis'. The conclusion of the

Homo Sacer series makes it absolutely clear that Agamben is not a Marxist — but neither did he ever really lend himself to this equivocation. Marx's 'form of production' is not Agamben's 'form-of-life', quite simply because the latter rather amounts to a 'form of inoperativity', which renders works inoperative and thus uses them. Marx would not have thought inoperativity, as is allegedly evident in his understanding of 'human activity in the classless society' (Agamben), i.e. in communist life. This is, to say the least, debatable. More to the point, inoperativity (as the use of bodies of the form-of-life) would allow us to grasp the 'classless society' as 'already present in capitalist society'. What Agamben has in mind is not the presence of the Marxian class-without-class in capitalist society (be it the proletariat or any of its contemporary figures). The classless society that is already present — 'in possibly infamous and risible forms' — is, again, a 'common use', where what is primarily at stake is 'a communication not of the common but of a communicability', i.e. of a potential. Can we really think and live in a community based exclusively on potentiality as commonality?

13. One could still rightfully debate whether the concept of form-of-life — as the use of bodies — tries to think a renewed twenty-first-century version of anarchism. However, two provisos must immediately be added. First, elaborating on Pasolini's insights, the real anarchy is, for Agamben, that of state power and its 'sovereignty'. Second, and in connection with this, Agamben's anarchism — if it is one — resolutely thinks the *archè*. As he succinctly puts it in *The Fire and the Tale*, the origin (and principle) in question is not a remote point in time, but a 'historical *a priori* that remains immanent to becoming and continues to act in it'. Why? Because the structure of the *archè* (not only in politics and ontology, but also in law, governance, and the very definition of the human) follows a precise strategy: 'something is divided, excluded, and pushed to the bottom, and precisely through this exclusion, it is included as *archè* and foundation'. Yet, if, as Agamben himself insinuates, this 'mechanism of exception' is structurally linked to language and anthropogenesis, what would it truly mean for the speaking animal to render inoperative, archaeologically, the structure of the *archè* — that is, to exhibit the void at its centre? Is Agamben's 'anarchic' form-of-life prepared to bear all of the consequences of 'an inseparable life, neither animal nor human'?

14. The form-of-life does not yet 'fully' exist 'in our society'. But examples of lives inseparable from their forms can be attested to in 'unedifying' places. Hence *The Use of Bodies* abounds in positive references to sadomasochism as an inappropriable 'intimacy' which goes against the advance of jealous 'privacy'; to sexual perversion in general as a 'sort of [...] blessed life'; and to a certain Sade who would provide us with a parodic and yet 'most serious' paradigm of the use of bodies as commonality. What is at stake here is not simply, to follow Lacanian psychoanalysis, perversion as one possible basic form of subjectivation/sexuation, which is as such ethically 'neutral' (in fact, the form-of-life as the use of bodies

claims to have done with subjectivity tout-court, however split or vanishing the latter might be). In these *de*subjectivised experiences where 'life has been entirely put at stake [...] in [a] certain perverse behaviour' we are rather confronted with what Agamben has to recognise as pathologies... at least 'under present circumstances'. Is this 'zone of irresponsibility' — experienced in person by Foucault, according to Agamben — the closest we can get to a model of the 'superpolitical apolitical' for the time being?

Archaeology and/or Genealogy: Agamben's Transformation of Foucauldian Method

Stephen Howard

Attentive readers of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* project will no doubt have noticed Agamben's vacillating descriptions of his philosophical method as 'archaeology' or 'genealogy'. These terms derive most clearly from Michel Foucault, a fact that Agamben underlines by regularly situating the *Homo Sacer* project in relation to the French thinker, as development or completion of Foucault's work on governmentality, power and biopolitics (1998, p.3–7; 2011, xi–xiii). However, despite employing Foucault's terms, Agamben furnishes 'archaeology' and 'genealogy' with meanings which deviate significantly from Foucault's use. We will here return to Foucault's use of these terms to describe his method in distinct periods of his work, in order to illuminate the singular way that Agamben develops the archaeological and genealogical methodologies. I exemplify Agamben's approach through one of the later, more political-theological contributions to the *Homo Sacer* series, with the aim of helping to clarify the place that these apparently esoteric works occupy in the series' general political project. Finally, I show that Walter Benjamin is the key figure in the constellation informing Agamben's archaeological-genealogical approach and examine the philosophical consequences of Agamben's transformation of Foucault's methods.

1. Agamben's conflation of archaeology and genealogy

Agamben's 2008 book on method, *The Signature of all Things*, and its third chapter on 'Philosophical Archaeology', is the first place to look for an account of the significance of archaeology and genealogy for the *Homo Sacer* project. It is immediately notable that Agamben silently conflates Foucault's 'archaeological' and 'genealogical' approaches. Agamben begins with Foucault's 1971 essay, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', where Foucault famously states that genealogy 'opposes itself to the search for origins' (Foucault, 1991a, p.77). Agamben, however, defines *archaeology* on this basis. He proceeds smoothly from Foucault's 1971 essay on genealogy to his earlier statements on archaeology in *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). In these works from the 1960s, Agamben notes, Foucault presents archaeology as an inquiry into the '"historical a priori", where knowledge finds its condition of possibility' (2009, p.93). Noting the oxymoronic nature of the phrase, 'historical a priori', Agamben claims that, *'[a]s in the 1971 essay'*, Foucault's use of the oxymoron 'aims to

underscore that it is not a matter of a meta-historical origin' (2009, p.93, my emphasis). On Agamben's account, *both* Foucault's archaeology of the 1960s *and* the genealogy of 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' are characterised by a search not for origins but for the emergence of modes of knowledge from the historical a priori.

Agamben therefore implies that there is a continuity in Foucault's method between the late 1960s and early 1970s, and he effaces any difference between Foucault's archaeological method, which defines the books from 1966 and 1969, and the genealogical approach that Foucault developed from 1970 onwards. This conflation of archaeology and genealogy is apparent in the *Homo Sacer* series. A year before his book on method effectively subsumes genealogy under the term 'archaeology', Agamben subtitles *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2007), 'For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government'. *Opus Dei* (2012) is an 'Archaeology of Duty', but the third chapter is titled 'A Genealogy of Duty'.[1] *The Highest Poverty* (2011) makes occasional reference to genealogy rather than archaeology. *The Use of Bodies* (2014) names among its tasks an 'archaeology of first philosophy' and a 'genealogy of the idea of life in modernity', and summarises the *Homo Sacer* project as an 'archaeology of politics' (2015, pp.115, 214, 263).[2] In these texts, as in *The Signature of All Things*, archaeology and genealogy appear to be, to use Agamben's phrase, in a zone of indistinction.

2. Foucault's archaeological and genealogical periods

This would not be remarkable were it not that the question of the distinction between these two approaches is an issue that emerged insistently in Foucault's work at the time, between the late 1960s and early 1970s, when his method apparently shifted. Moreover, this shift was a central concern of Foucault scholarship from the 1980s and 1990s. Influential books by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1982) and Béatrice Han (1998) foreground Foucault's shift from archaeology to genealogy as a response to the 'methodological failure of archaeology'. Gary Gutting, for all his disagreement with Dreyfus and Rabinow over the nature of archaeological method and whether or not it failed, provides a similar account of the periodisation of Foucault's thought (1989, pp.267–72).

These commentators generally agree that Foucault employed the archaeological approach, with variations, in his early texts, with the method reaching its paradigmatic form in the mid- to late-1960s in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. *The Order of Things* traces the developments in the fields of what are now called linguistics, biology and political economy, between three 'epistemes' or historical blocks: the sixteenth century, the

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[1] Duty (*ufficio*) can also be translated as 'office': see the translator's note in Agamben, 2013, ix.

[2] Agamben refers at one point to 'an archaeology of ontology, or more precisely, a genealogy of the ontological apparatus' (2015, p.114).

classical age and the modern age. Within each episteme Foucault seeks the 'historical *a priori'* that provides the common unifying order across these disciplines (1970, xxii, xxiv). *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is the theoretical generalisation of Foucault's more concrete earlier work. It scales back the implicit claims in *The Order of Things* regarding the fixity of the periodisation of its epistemes and the determinative power of the historical a priori, whilst providing an ambitious account of the unity of discourses, the discontinuity between discourses, and the rules for the formation of objects, such as possible statements, within discourses.

'The Order of Discourse', Foucault's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, marks the first public indication of his shift from archaeology to genealogy. Foucault no longer attends simply to the discursive practices studied in the *Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, but now also to 'the effective formation of discourse' by nondiscursive practices (1981, p.71). The question of the *causality* behind epistemic discontinuities, bracketed in the archaeological phase, can now be addressed through attention to non-discursive practices and institutions: in short, to regimes and relations of power, which famously become central to Foucault's work in the 1970s (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, pp.105–6; Gutting, 1989, p.271; Han, 1998, pp.74–5). Foucault's new emphasis on the relations of power implicated in the regulation of discourses is clear in the lecture:

> in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (1981, p.71)

The shift to a consideration of the non-discursive relations involved in the formation and regulation of discourse pushes Foucault to the more explicitly political considerations that characterise his now more celebrated analyses of power relations in his so-called 'middle period'.[3] He states that,

> since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized. (1981, p.52–3)

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[3] See Negri (2004) for an example of the common division of Foucault's *œuvre* into three phases: the early archaeological study, up to the end of the 1960s, of the 'emergence of the discourse of the human sciences'; the middle-period genealogical work of the 1970s on the 'relationship between knowledges and powers, on the emergence of disciplines, control and biopowers, the norm and biopolitics'; and the late turn in the 1980s to 'the analysis of the processes of subjectivation under the double perspective of the aesthetic relation to oneself and of the political relation to others'.

Foucault says in a later interview that his earlier archaeological period lacked 'this problem of the 'discursive regime', of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements'. He admits that his earlier work had 'not yet properly isolated' the 'central problem of power' (1991b, p.55). What emerges in 1970 in 'The Order of Discourse', at the point of Foucault's shift from archaeology to genealogy, is the tying-together and mutual implication of power and knowledge. This provides the topic of the 1970–71 Collège de France lecture series: a 'morphology' of the will to know or the will to truth (Foucault, 2013).

The English-language commentaries on Foucault from the 1980s and 1990s disagree on the exact nature of the shift from archaeology to genealogy and the extent to which the earlier approach is left behind from 1970 onwards.[4] The separation is far from being cut and dried, Foucault's work tending to resist fixed, stable distinctions, and the shift is best considered a development rather than an absolute break. Two features of the methodological change are clear, however. Firstly, the move from archaeology to genealogy accords greater attention to the *non-discursive* mechanisms that underpin the formation of discourses and positions of enunciation. From a general emphasis on the regularities of texts and statements in the 1960s, Foucault's attention moves to the mechanisms governing the initial appearance and control of discourses, along with the processes of exclusion and inclusion within them. This develops into the analyses Foucault undertakes after 1970: of institutions, the power or will to truth, the micro-physics of power between individuals, and processes of subjectivation. The move is from the analysis of discursive discontinuities in the 1960s, to the work in the 1970s on the socio-political forces involved in these discontinuities.

Secondly, the shift around 1970 constitutes a more *explicitly political* project. Whilst *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was published the year after May 1968 (at which time Foucault was in Tunisia), the student uprising and its political consequences arguably only have their full impact upon Foucault's project in the works written in their entirety after 1968.[5] 'The Order of Discourse', with its new emphasis on power relations, would then be Foucault's first genuinely 'post-'68' text. This is not to say that there were not significant political stakes to the early works, but rather that Foucault's critical engagement with the fundamental categories of the left gained a new urgency with the shift to the genealogical approach in the wake of May 1968.[6]

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[4] As briefly mentioned above, whereas Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982, pp.79–100) and Han (2002, p.38) consider the 'failure' of archaeology to spur Foucault's 'genealogical turn', Gutting argues that 'genealogy does not replace or even seriously revise Foucault's archaeological method. It rather combines it with a complementary technique of causal analysis' (1989, p.271).

[5] As Foucault states in a 1977 interview: before May '68, 'the mechanics of power in themselves were never analysed. This task could only begin after 1968, that is to say, on the basis of daily struggles at the grass-roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the *concrete nature* of power became visible...' (1991b, p.58).

[6] For Foucault's relation to Marxism, see Laval et al. (eds.) 2015. Eldon (2017) provides an account of the political stakes of Foucault's development between 1969 and 1975, although he

3. Archaeology, genealogy, and subjugated knowledges

A commonly overlooked but useful account of Foucault's methodological shift appears in his 1976 Collège de France lecture series published as *Society Must be Defended*.[7] The first lecture has the feeling of a fresh start: this is when Foucault moved his lectures to 9:30 in the morning, to avoid the 'circus' that had accompanied the increasingly cult status of his weekly lecture. Foucault looks back on the work he has done since arriving at the Collège de France, and worries that it might have looked like 'the busy inertia of those who profess useless knowledge', or the 'great, tender, and warm freemasonry of useless erudition' (2003, pp.4–5). To distinguish his work from this freemasonry, Foucault relates his work of the previous years to antipsychiatry, sexual and gender politics, and other 'dispersed and discontinuous offensives' or local critiques of what Lyotard would later describe as grand narratives (2003, pp.5–6). Foucault dubs the focus of his recent work the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (2003, p.7).

The phrase 'subjugated knowledges' means two things. On the one hand, it designates 'historical contents that have been buried or masked' in the systematic arrangements of institutions like the prison or the psychiatric apparatus (2003, p.7). These historical contents are the now-obscured processes through which these institutions came into being; they can be revealed by patient scholarship in order immanently to critique the institutions. *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) attempted this for the institution of modern medicine, through an analysis of the historical conditions of possibility for the medical gaze (1973, xix). On the other hand, 'subjugated knowledges' are positions that have been historically disqualified as naive, insufficient, nonconceptual: knowledge that is marginalised by officially sanctioned discourses, such as the voices of the patient, the nurse or the prisoner (2003, p.7).

Foucault rhetorically asks whether there is not

> something very paradoxical about grouping together and putting into the same category of 'subjugated knowledges', on the one hand, historical, precise, technical expertise and, on the other, these singular, local

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overlooks the effects of May 1968 on the intellectual milieu in which Foucault worked after his return to France in 1969.

[7] Even Han, whose scholarship is comprehensive, makes only a passing reference to the 1976 Collège de France lectures (1998, p.1). Foucault's own retrospective accounts of his trajectory are often problematic as he subtly, and sometimes unconvincingly, reconceives his previous work in terms of the later developments of his project. However, approached with the necessary caution when it comes to taking this retrospective statement as definitive, Foucault's formulation of his move from archaeology to genealogy in *Society Must be Defended* provides useful coordinates for understanding his development.

knowledges, the noncommonsensical knowledges that people have, [...] [which have been] kept in the margins. (2003, p.8)

That is to say, are these two kinds of subjugated knowledge, the buried historical conditions of possibility of modern institutions, and the disqualified knowledge of marginalised subjects, not very different? On the contrary, Foucault answers, it is 'the coupling together of the buried scholarly knowledge and knowledges that were disqualified by the hierarchy of erudition and sciences that actually gave the discursive critique of the last fifteen years its essential strength' (2003, p.8). In both cases — the buried conditions of possibility and the disqualified knowledges — what is at stake is 'a historical knowledge of struggles'.

Foucault defines genealogy as precisely the *combination* of these two approaches:

> If you like, we can give the name 'genealogy' to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics. (2003, p.8)

Genealogy is a politicised synthesis of erudite analysis and marginalised knowledge. It has as its target the couplet that is central to Foucault's middle period: power/knowledge (2003, p.12). Genealogy, Foucault says, is far from 'the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power hierarchy typical of science', but is rather the opposite: an attempt to 'desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free [...], to reactivate local knowledges [...] against the scientific hierarchicalisation of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects' (2003, p.10). Having identified knowledge that has been marginalised in the development of modern institutions and official forms of knowledge, genealogy does not seek to classify it, as this would simply treat it once more as the object of another, more powerful perspective. Rather, genealogy should free disqualified knowledge from its marginalised position and reactivate it for political ends.

On this basis, Foucault summarises the relation between archaeology and genealogy.

> To put it in a nutshell: Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them. That just about sums up the entire project. (2003, pp.10–11)

The account sidesteps the debates in the commentary regarding whether or not archaeology 'failed' and was replaced. In terms of the two-fold characterisation of subjugated knowledges — as buried and disqualified — Foucault depicts archaeology

as an attention to the former: it unveils the buried conditions of possibility through 'historical, precise, technical' erudition, as in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Genealogy then connects the buried historical content unveiled by archaeology to marginalised knowledge, in order to revitalise the latter.

These statements in the 1976 lectures clarify the account of genealogy in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'. Genealogy is 'grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary' and 'demands relentless erudition' because it first requires archaeology's technical analysis (1991a, pp.76–7).[8] This analysis unveils the buried conditions beneath what appears today as normal or unquestionable, such as the medical gaze or carceral punishment. Genealogy then connects this meticulous analysis to the reactivation of marginalised knowledge: in the 1971 essay, Foucault presents this through Nietzsche's notion of *wirkliche Historie*, effective history. History becomes effective — and so not merely the dead past that Nietzsche criticises in the second of his *Untimely Meditations* — 'to the extent that it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man' (1991a, p.87). Foucault highlights Nietzsche's notion of *Entstehung:* this 'emergence, the moment of arising' of knowledge or a norm, is the 'entry of forces' and 'play of dominations' (1991a, 83–5). Norms are thus shown to have a history, and to have arisen in a particular context of warring interests.

A key result of effective history or genealogy in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche is the 'sacrifice of the subject of knowledge' (1991a, p.95). This means that the knowing subject, such as the doctor or the criminologist, is no longer the comfortable possessor of objective knowledge. More generally, under genealogical analysis, knowledge does not attain 'a universal truth' but rather 'releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its [i.e. knowledge's] subversion and destruction' (1991a, pp.95–6). This is the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' that Foucault describes in 1976, made possible by the genealogical combination of archaeological erudition and a politically-motived reactivation of marginalised knowledge.

4. Agamben's archaeology-genealogy: tender, warm freemasonry?

There is therefore significant distance between Agamben's purportedly Foucauldian archaeology-genealogy, in which the two terms are conflated and, at least in his book on method, apparently subsumed under the single heading of 'archaeology', and Foucault's understanding of these terms. In contrast to the account Foucault gives in *Society Must be Defended*, Agamben writes in *The Signature of all Things*:

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[8] Foucault's depiction of genealogy as 'grey' is an implicit reference to §7 of Nietzsche's preface to the *Genealogy of Morality*.

> Provisionally, we may call 'archaeology' that practice which in any historical investigation has to do not with origins but with the moment of a phenomenon's arising and must therefore engage anew the sources and tradition. (2009, p.89)

Agamben stresses the temporal issue of the 'moment of a phenomenon's arising': this does not radically diverge from 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', but rather foregrounds Foucault's discussion of emergence (*Entstehung*) (Foucault, 1991a, p.83). However, Agamben presents Franz Overbeck, a theologian at Basel, a correspondent and close friend of Nietzsche's, as the proper source for Foucault's replacement of 'origin' with 'descent' or 'emergence' (Agamben, 2009, p.84). On this basis, Agamben turns to Overbeck's distinction between prehistory and history (*Urgeschichte* and *Geschichte*). Prehistory is not that which is most ancient (*uralt*) but rather designates 'the history of the moment of arising (*Entstehungsgeschichte*)' (2009, p.85). Agamben suggests that Overbeck's notion of 'prehistory' has the precise function of Foucault's historical a priori.[9] Prehistory, like the historical a priori, is that which conditions knowledge in a given historical epoch. Noting that Overbeck had 'long worked on the patristic sources', Agamben's definition of archaeology as *Entstehungsgeschichte* can claim, in the passage quoted above, that archaeology must 'engage anew the *sources and tradition*' (2009, p.87, 89, my emphasis).

This seems to be the crux of the difference between Agamben's patient, philological discussions, often of theological texts, and Foucault's focus, in his middle period, on bodies, governmentality and power/knowledge. Agamben has stated in an interview:

> Foucault once said [...] that historical research was like a shadow cast by the present onto the past. For Foucault, this shadow stretched back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For me, the shadow is longer [...]. There is no great theoretical difference between my work and Foucault's; it is merely a question of the length of the historical shadow. (Rieger, 2005, p.23)

On Agamben's account, his approach differs, as he also writes at the start of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, only in that he extends the chronological limits of Foucault's archaeology-genealogy (2011, xi). Leaving aside the fact that to make this claim one must ignore Foucault's late turn to antiquity, Agamben's suggestion that his conflation of archaeology and genealogy does not significantly differ from Foucault's method is a misleading one. Agamben appears to remain,

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[9] Agamben, 2009, p.93; see Agamben, 2015, p.112, and Agamben, 2017, p.12: 'Ce qu'Overbeck appelle «pré-histoire» (*Urgeschichte*) et Foucault «*a priori* historique» n'est pas simplement quelque chose de chronologiquement plus ancien, c'est plutôt l'histoire du «point de surgissement» (*Entstehung*)'.

methodologically, within the archaeological period of Foucault's thought. Agamben's political-theological works in particular, give patient, scholarly attention to the kinds of overlooked manuscripts which would for Foucault be the focus of the archaeologist. Agamben's analyses more closely resemble the painstaking archaeological discussions of texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century in the first half of *The Order of Things* than they do Foucault's work of the 1970s, when extra-discursive power was the ultimate target. If Agamben's conflation of archaeology and genealogy proceeds by subsuming genealogy under archaeology, can he be accused of ultimately indulging in what Foucault called the 'great, tender, and warm freemasonry of useless erudition'?

The broad answer to this is: clearly not. If we confine ourselves to the *Homo Sacer* series, the political stakes of particularly the first volume and *Remnants of Auschwitz* are clear. The reader of some of the later more theological-political treatises — *The Kingdom and the Glory, The Highest Poverty* and *Opus Dei* — could be forgiven, however, for wondering whether the emphasis in these texts has fallen too heavily on the dry, patient erudition of the archaeological method as Foucault defines it. To counter this, we shall consider Agamben's method in one of these texts, *The Highest Poverty*, in order to highlight the political significance of Agamben's conflation of archaeology and genealogy.

5. The biopolitical significance of monastic life

The Highest Poverty takes as its topic the attempts to produce a zone of indistinction between 'rule' and 'life' in the Franciscan monastic order. In his close attention to the rules of the monks, as set out in their *regulae*, the manuscripts detailing their mandatory hourly practices, Agamben identifies a form-of-life, a life inseparable from its form, in which rules and life completely determine and interpenetrate one another. The issue motivating Agamben's investigation is forecast in *The Time That Remains*: the creation of a positive biopolitics, or the transvaluation of biopolitics, through reflection on a messianic community.[10] In *The Time That Remains,* Agamben says of the Franciscan messianic community that, 'what mattered was to create a space that escaped the grasp of power and its laws, without entering into conflict with them, yet rendering them inoperative' (2005, p.27). This Franciscan endeavour explicitly motivates Agamben's analyses in *The Highest Poverty*:

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[10] Lorenzo Chiesa was attuned to this before the publication of *The Highest Poverty* (Chiesa, 2009, pp.114–5). The notion of 'the messianic' serves in Agamben's work to indicate 'nothing less than a qualitative change in how time is experienced': 'the relation of every moment, every *kairos*, to the end of time and to eternity' (Agamben, 2012, pp.4–5, 8). An exemplary clarification of Agamben's notion, with particular reference to Benjamin and the complex relation of both thinkers to theology and the secular, may be found in De La Durantaye, 2009, pp.366–82. For further discussion of the Benjaminian context, see the next section of the present work.

> From the perspective that interests us here, Franciscanism can be defined — and in this consists its novelty, even today unthought, and in the present conditions of society, totally unthinkable — as *the attempt to realise a human life and practice absolutely outside the determinations of the law.* (2013, p.110)

Key to this externality to or exclusion from the law is, however, that Franciscan life is also included within it, in line with Agamben's reflections from *Homo Sacer* onwards on the collapse of the categories of exclusion and inclusion into a zone of indistinction.[11] The monastic rule is therefore submitted to the Pope and yet, as a hyper-rule or law beyond law, it escapes determination by Papal law.

Central to the success of this Franciscan strategy, as Agamben describes it, and thus to the deeper political intentions of this apparent digression into monastic practices, is a series of detailed equivocations around the concept of 'use'. In order to simply *be,* separate from the law, and thus to create a *life* that is not determined by sovereign power (or perhaps a positive biopolitics) the Franciscans must separate 'use' from 'right' and 'ownership'. To pursue a mendicant form-of-life free of the law, the monks must redefine the notion of the 'use' of things — clothes, food, shelter — so that the result is neither that they have a right to use these things, nor that their use implies their ownership. Agamben thus identifies the 'critical moment in the history of Franciscanism': when Pope John XXII's papal bull 'calls into question the possibility of separating ownership and use and in this way cancels the very presupposition on which Minorite *paupertas*' — that is, the 'highest poverty' of the Franciscan order — 'was founded' (2013, p.129). The Pope's discursive attack on Franciscan terminology is, for Agamben, the point at which the potentiality inherent in the monastic order was nullified.

The way that Agamben develops this account of interrupted potentiality is important for the relation between his method and its Foucauldian heritage. Agamben writes,

> What is lacking in the Franciscan literature is a definition of use in itself and not only in opposition to law. The preoccupation with constructing a justification of use in juridical terms prevented [the Franciscans] from collecting the hints of a theory of use present in the Pauline letters, in particular in 1 Corinthians [...]. This could have furnished a useful argument against John XXII's theses on the use of consumable things as *abusus.* (2013, p.139)

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[11] On exclusion/inclusion, a 'fundamental categorial pair of Western politics', and the form of the exception, in which an element is included solely through its exclusion, see Agamben, 1998, pp.7–11.

A summary of *The Highest Poverty* in *The Use of Bodies* implicitly clarifies this passage: Agamben denies that what is at stake is simply whether the Franciscans could have provided a better *argument* for their redefinition of 'use'; rather, what is at stake is their very conception of use:

> the problem is not whether the Franciscan thesis, which ended up succumbing to the curia's attacks, could have been more or less rigorously argued: instead, what would have been decisive was a conception of use that was founded not on an act of renunciation — that is, in the last analysis, on the will of a subject — but, so to speak, on the very nature of things. (2015, p.80)

The missed opportunity in the Franciscan moment is not the failure to give a sufficiently strong argument, but rather to have positively defined use in itself. This would have provided an ontological account of use ('founded [...] on the very nature of things'). As Agamben states in *The Highest Poverty*:

> Use, from this perspective, could have been configured as a *tertium* with respect to law and life, potential and act, and could have defined — not only negatively — the monks' vital practice itself, their form-of-life. (2013, p.141)

The Franciscans missed the opportunity to reconceive 'use' positively as a 'third thing': in juridical terms, between law and life, and in ontological terms, between potential and act. Agamben emphasises the latter, ontological aspect. The Franciscans erred in '[h]olding firm to this conception of use as act and *energeia*', rather than considering it as a relation between potential (*dynamis*) and act (*energeia*) (2013, p.140).[12]

Rather than following this thread further, we may remain on the level of method. In his discussion of the missed Franciscan opportunity, Agamben effectively takes a perspective *within* the 13th–14th century debates surrounding the monastic form-of-life. He finds a path not taken, a possible redefinition of the notion of 'use' which would have sidestepped the juridical paradigm in which the Franciscans became trapped and would instead have collapsed one of the great ontological distinctions in Western philosophy, between potential and act. The unactualised potential that Agamben locates in the struggles over the Franciscan

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[12] This latent reconfiguration of use as the relation between potential and act connects the analyses of *The Highest Poverty* with Agamben's attempt to theorise a 'modal ontology' in part two of *The Use of Bodies*. The concept of mode is depicted as an attempt to think the 'coincidence or indifference' of potential and act (2015, p.161). Crucial to Agamben's projected modal ontology is Spinoza's 'immanent cause', which he connects to the notion of 'use': '[t]he immanent cause is [...] an action in which agent and patient coincide [...]. [I]n order to think the substance/modes relationship, it is necessary to have at our disposal an ontology in the middle voice, in which the agent (God, or substance) in effectuating the modes in reality affects and modifies only itself. [...] In a modal ontology, being uses-itself' (2015, pp.164–5).

form-of-life has a direct significance, he implies, for our contemporary biopolitical existence. Had the Franciscans taken this path, the trajectory of history could have shifted and the relation between property, human existence and biopolitical control might have developed differently. *The Highest Poverty* thus points towards the last book in the *Homo Sacer* series and its 'elaboration of a theory of use – of which Western philosophy lacks even the most elementary principles' (2013, xiii).[13]

6. Agamben's Benjaminian archaeology

What does this glance at *The Highest Poverty* reveal about Agamben's conflation of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy? Regarding Foucault's definitions in *Society Must be Defended*, it is evident that Agamben does not simply subsume genealogy under archaeology, but draws the two into an equivalence or indistinction. *The Highest Poverty* patiently reconstructs an obscure moment in the political-theological history of ideas. What may appear at first sight to be the 'tender, warm freemasonry' of excessively detailed scholarship, instead functions in Agamben's work as a return to a path not taken in the history of the West. Agamben's treatment of this missed opportunity is undoubtedly circuitous, proceeding, in *The Highest Poverty,* by way of a dissection of reams of dense monastic *regulae* and Franciscan defences. But his aim is ultimately political: to reactivate a conception of 'use' which was available to the Franciscans and for which they laid the ground, but which they failed to develop. Agamben therefore pursues erudite, archaeological readings of dusty texts, and these, it seems, should be *in themselves* political. How can this be the case?

To answer this question, we must turn to the most important figure when it comes to Agamben's transformation of Foucauldian method: Walter Benjamin. The influence of Benjamin on Agamben is well known. Agamben edited the Italian edition of Benjamin's collected works and discovered important lost manuscripts, not least the book on Baudelaire that he tracked down in the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1981. Although Benjamin is a touchstone throughout Agamben's work, the essays in *The Signature of All Things* might lead the reader to miss the *methodological* significance of the German-Jewish thinker. Agamben situates the three essays – on paradigms, signatures and philosophical archaeology – most

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[13] See the previous note. Agamben remarks that whilst Foucault explores the notion of 'use' in his 1981–82 Collège de France lectures, the concept of use-of-oneself 'remains in the shadows' in Foucault's work on the care of the self (2015, pp.31–4). 'Use' is therefore one of many examples of Agamben's engagement with Foucault on the level of philosophical content; this essay sets this aside to focus on the methodological level of their encounter. I also leave open the questions as to the extent to which Foucault's late work – on ethics, on a more complex account of the subject, and on the care of the self – represents a further major *methodological* shift with respect to the genealogical approach of the 1970s; and, if it does, whether this has a bearing on Agamben's transformation of archaeology and genealogy. My sense is that the latter question should be answered in the negative. I thank Jussi Palmusaari for raising these questions.

prominently in terms of Foucault's work, noting that the essays may well 'appear to be investigations on the method of Michel Foucault, a scholar from whom I have learned a great deal in recent years' (2009, p.7). In contrast, Benjamin is only explicitly discussed in passing (2009, pp.71–3, 95, 106). However, whilst acknowledging the centrality of Foucault to his discussions of method, Agamben remarks that this very centrality 'is because one of the methodological principles not discussed in the book — and which I owe to Walter Benjamin — is that doctrine may legitimately be exposed only in the form of interpretation' (2009, p.7). We shall see that Foucault is less the *source* of Agamben's method in the account given in *The Signature of All Things* than the subject of *interpretation*. By contrast, Benjamin's work provides not only Agamben's undiscussed methodological principle, but also the key to Agamben's interpretation of Foucauldian method.

De la Durantaye (2009, p.112) has noted that many of Agamben's works can be considered attempts to decipher what Scholem called the 'encrypted testament' that is Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.[14] Agamben makes regular reference to the *Theses* and to 'Convolute N' of the *Arcades Project*, which contains notes and further citations regarding the ideas that Benjamin compressed into the *Theses*. The methodological importance of these texts for Agamben cannot be underestimated. In Convolute N, Benjamin writes,

> In studying Simmel's presentation of Goethe's concept of truth, I came to see very clearly that my concept of origin in the *Trauerspiel* book is a rigorous and decisive transposition of this basic Goethean concept from the domain of nature to that of history. Origin — it is, in effect, the concept of *Ur*-phenomenon extracted from the pagan context of nature and brought into the Jewish contexts of history. Now, in my work on the arcades I am equally concerned with fathoming an origin. (1999a, N2a,4)

As we saw above, Agamben's account of philosophical archaeology emphasises the replacement of 'origin' with the 'moment of a phenomenon's arising' in Nietzsche, Overbeck and Foucault. Benjamin claims here that his Arcades project seeks to 'fathom' an origin. In thesis XIV of the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin quotes Karl Kraus: 'origin is the goal' (1999b, p.252). Does Benjamin therefore retain the naïve notion of a return to an origin, which is overturned before and after him by Nietzsche, Overbeck and Foucault?

Benjamin's notion of 'origin' is clarified by a passage in Convolute N, often cited by Agamben.[15] Here, Benjamin discusses the 'historical index' of images, which determines that 'they attain to legibility only at a particular time' (1999a, N3,1).[16] Objects and texts from the past become readable or knowable at a certain

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[14] Likewise, Agamben calls the *Theses,* a 'testamentary compendium of [Benjamin's] messianic conception of history' (2005, p.141).

[15] For example, Agamben, 2005, p.141, 145; 2009, p.72.

[16] Benjamin uses 'image' (*Bild*) in a very broad sense. It encompasses, as Agamben writes, 'all

moment. This moment is Benjamin's famous 'now-time', *Jetztzeit*, a temporal point that flattens out the difference between past and present: 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation' (1999a, N3,1). The constellation formed by the bridging of the present and the past, through an object's 'now of knowability', effaces temporal difference in what Benjamin calls 'messianic time' (1999a, N3,1; 1999b, p.255). The historian attuned to this messianic now-time will 'seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger', perform a 'tiger's leap into the past', and 'blast open the continuum of history' (1999b, pp.247, 253, 254).[17] Benjamin conceives of now-time as an irruption of the past into the present, which destroys the linear conception of history.

Simmel, in the book on Goethe to which Benjamin refers in Convolute N, claims that Goethe's concept of truth is captured in the line, '*was fruchtbar ist, allein ist Wahr*' (only that which is fertile is true) (Simmel, 1913, p.21). Benjamin transposes Goethe's notion of truth in nature into his own notion of origin in history, insofar as objects *achieve fertility* in their moment of legibility that is now-time.[18] This *Fruchtbarkeit* of past objects is captured in Benjamin's affirmation of 'the indestructibility of the highest life in all things' (1999a, N1a,4). Texts and objects have an indestructible life because they will be revitalised in their future 'now of knowability'. Agamben acknowledges the importance of this conception when affirming his 'Benjaminian hermeneutic principle' at the end of *The Time That Remains*: 'every work, every text, contains a historical index which indicates both its belonging to a determinate epoch, as well as its only coming forth to full legibility at a determinate historical moment' (2005, p.145).

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things (meaning all objects, works of art, texts, records, or documents) wherein an instant of the past and an instant of the present are united in a constellation where the present is able to recognize the meaning of the past and the past therein finds its meaning and fulfilment' (2009, p.142). It is significant to both Benjamin and Agamben that 'image' encompasses texts, and is perhaps even predominantly characterised by them. In a famous note on 'dialectical images', Benjamin writes that 'the place where one encounters them is language' (1999a, N2a,3).

[17] In Convolute N, Benjamin compares the method of the Arcades project to 'the process of splitting the atom — liberat[ing] the enormous energies of history that are bound up in the "once upon a time" of classical historiography' (1999b, N3,4). This critique of 'once upon a time' reappears in the *Theses* (1999a, p.254).

[18] The 'Epistemo-Critical Preface' to the *Trauerspiel* book has a dense discussion of the concept of 'origin'. Again, in apparent contrast to Nietzsche, Overbeck and Foucault, Benjamin affirms a notion of origin (*Ursprung*) that is distinguished from emergence (*Entstehung*): origin has 'nothing in common with emergence' (1991, p.226). But Benjamin conceives of origin as a temporal break, at once concrete and a priori, that defines its own pre- and post-history: '[w]ith "origin" is not meant the coming-to-be of that which emerges, but rather that which emerges from coming-to-be and passing-away. The origin is a whirlpool in the river of becoming and in its rhythm drags the material of emergence into itself' (1991, p.226). Benjamin equates the origin with a monadic idea, which contains 'the image of the world', and so the real world is a 'task': an 'objective interpretation' can emerge only from a sufficiently concentrated attentiveness to such images (1991, p.228). Agamben briefly discusses these passages in an early essay (1988, p.180).

The Highest Poverty provides an example of a text coming to legibility in now-time: Agamben contends that we can now read the Franciscan redefinition of 'use' in a manner which the Franciscans themselves failed to. By returning to and reactivating this missed opportunity, Agamben seeks to question a fundamental contemporary political-ontological dogma: that '[o]nly what is effective, and as such governable and efficacious, is real' (2013, xii–xiii).

Agamben's Benjaminian principle entails that archaeology — as patient, erudite attention to dusty texts — can *itself have political effects*. No further genealogical step is required. This contrasts with Foucault's approach in which archaeological erudition should be conjoined, in genealogy, with the reactivation of marginalised knowledge. As we have seen, from the 1970s onwards, Foucault's genealogy seeks to facilitate the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' by highlighting the extra-discursive relations of power present in and around institutions, subjectivities and bodies, which sanction, exclude and produce discourses. In Agamben's conflation of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy, subjugated knowledges are reactivated not through genealogies of modern institutions and forms of knowledge, but through the archaeological analysis itself. For Agamben, moments internal to the history of ideas, philosophical and theological, have a potentiality that can be activated so as to affect biopolitical reality in the present.

The difference between Foucault's and Agamben's approaches is particularly stark in their accounts of the forces of history that are the ultimate subject of their analyses. Foucault writes in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' that '[t]he forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts' (1991a, p.88). Remaining close to Nietzsche, Foucault highlights the contingent forces that determine the historical shifts in the meaning and value of our notions: these forces are the struggles for power enacted by individuals and groups, which research can reveal in their empirical reality. By contrast, Agamben states in *The Signature of All Things* that '[t]he *archē* toward which archaeology regresses is not to be understood in any way as a given locatable in a chronology [...]; instead, it is an operative force within history' (2009, p.110). The *archē* or origin is to be understood as a process of emergence, not as an empirical, chronological point. Agamben ascribes this notion to Foucault and Overbeck, but the force at work is not that of real, historical struggles over meaning and value. Rather, it is the force of the *archē* or origin itself: the force of the original exclusion that defines any particular political-theological-ontological notion, which has since reverberated throughout history, and the deactivating potential force that can be unleashed by newly interpreting the notion in the now-time of its knowability.[19]

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[19] *The Use of Bodies* gives us a good account of this operative force of the *archē* and Agamben's attempt to deactivate it. In the 'dialectic of the foundation that defines Western ontology', the 'strategy is always the same: something is divided, excluded, and pushed to the bottom, and precisely through this exclusion, it is included as *archē* and foundation' (2015, p.264). In the

Agamben's references to archaeology and genealogy should therefore be understood not as faithful citations of Foucault but rather as interpretations of the French thinker's methodological concepts, conditioned by the more fundamental influence of Benjamin. In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben discusses Benjamin's practice of 'citation without quotation marks' (2005, p.138, translation modified).[20] Agamben convincingly argues that certain key terms in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* — *weak* messianic power, the true *image* of the past that *flees* past, *now-time* as an *abridgement* of the entire history of mankind — are citations without quotation marks of the Pauline letters (2005, pp.139–44). Agamben concludes that 'the entire vocabulary of [Benjamin's] theses appears to be truly stamped Pauline [*appare di conio genuinamente paolino*]' (2005, p.144). Similarly, Agamben's account of his methodology, of archaeology, genealogy, origin and emergence, is best read as an exercise in citing Benjamin without quotation marks.

Agamben claims to draw his conceptions of archaeology and genealogy predominantly from Foucault, but, on closer attention, it is apparent that his Benjaminian interpretation of these methodologies conflates what in Foucault are two distinct approaches. Foucault's genealogical method, in the context of his growing concern with the issue of power in the 1970s, seeks to make a more direct political intervention than his archaeology, by bringing to light knowledge that has been marginalised by the 'haphazard conflicts' of the struggles for power throughout history. Agamben, by contrast, pursues detailed readings of obscure texts in the theological and philosophical archives of Western modernity, according

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figures studied throughout the *Homo Sacer* series,

> the same mechanism is at work: the *archē* is constituted by dividing the factical experience and pushing down to the origin — that is, excluding — one half of it in order then to rearticulate it to the other by including it as foundation. Thus, the city is founded on the division of life into bare life and politically qualified life, the human is defined by the exclusion-inclusion of the animal, the law by the *exceptio* of anomie, governance through the exclusion of inoperativity and its capture in the form of glory. (2015, p.265)

The force of the *archē* is evident in the term itself:

> The term *archē* in Greek means both 'origin' and 'command'. To this double meaning of the term there corresponds the fact that, in our philosophical and religious traditions alike, origin, what gives a beginning and brings into being, is not only a preamble, which disappears and ceases to act in that to which it has given life, but it is also what commands and governs its growth, development, circulation, and transmission — in a word, history. (2015, p.275)

[20] Cf. Benjamin, 1999a, N1,10: 'This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks [*die Kunst, ohne Anführungszeichen zu zitieren*]'. Agamben gives this latter phrase as '*l'arte di citare senza virgolette*', which is not well translated in the English version of *The Time That Remains* as 'the art of citing without citation marks'. On Benjamin's and Agamben's art of citing without quotation marks, see De La Durantaye, 2009, pp.145–7.

to an archaeological method that intends to be in itself political, without the need for a further, more concrete genealogical step. Agamben cites Foucault and Overbeck as the sources for the conceptions of 'origin' and 'emergence' that underpin his philosophical methodology, but, on my reading, the meaning that Agamben ascribes to these terms stems instead from Benjamin. Moreover, the political potency of Agamben's method covertly relies on Benjamin's conception of messianic time and the eruption of the past into the present in an object's 'now of knowability'. Agamben's entire methodological vocabulary is, to paraphrase him, truly stamped Benjaminian.

Conclusion

I have sought to show that Agamben's references to the Foucauldian elements of his philosophical method must be read critically: Agamben does not straightforwardly borrow Foucault's conceptions of archaeology and genealogy, but rather subjects them to interpretation. This interpretation proceeds on the basis of notions inherited from Benjamin, a methodological influence so strong that I propose we consider Agamben's discussions of method to be citations of Benjamin without quotation marks. It is Benjamin's notions of history, origin, now-time and messianic time that allow Agamben to ascribe political potentiality to his erudite archaeological excavations.

'Method', Benjamin writes in the *Trauerspiel* book, 'is digression [*Umweg*]' (1991, p.208). Agamben in turn notes that reflection on method comes *after* practical application or extensive research; it is a matter of 'ultimate or penultimate thoughts, to be discussed among friends and colleagues' (2005, p.7). It is true that reflection on method is a belated diversion from the direct aim of philosophical work: the Greek roots of *meta-hodos* show it to be that which comes after (*meta*) the way (*hodos*). But it is nevertheless useful to clarify Agamben's approach, particularly in the context of his Benjaminian practice of citing without quotation marks (to say nothing of 'reading what was never written' [Benjamin, 1991, p.1238]). The political resources that Agamben ascribes to his own work are predicated, according to my reading of his method, on his affirmation of Benjaminian messianic time and the temporal collapse entailed by *Jetztzeit*. This does not necessarily mean that Agamben's thought is at heart theological or Christian.[21] It *is* the case, however, that Agamben's methodological transformation of Foucault requires the acceptance of Benjamin's fascinating but singular conception of history, if it is to share the political ambitions of Foucault's genealogy.

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[21] *Pace* Chiesa, who writes that 'Agamben is able to formulate a transvaluation of biopolitics only in the guise of a bio-theo-politics' and that 'Badiou is therefore correct in emphasising that Agamben's thought ultimately expresses a "latent Christianity" for which the heroic *homo sacer* of politics is silently turned into the *homo messianicus* of Christian religion' (2009, p.115).

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Violence, Political Evil, and Simona Forti's *New Demons:* A Counter-Genealogy of the Dostoevsky Paradigm

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Abstract

Simona Forti's *New Demons* documents how recent philosophical inquiry into the problem of moral evil has relied upon a cluster of concepts inherited from Fyodor Dostoevsky. Forti names this the 'Dostoevsky paradigm' and identifies its influence in such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, thus demonstrating that the problem of evil resides at the very heart of twentieth-century critical philosophy. In this article I show that, parallel to the tradition which Forti traces there exists a separate tradition that turns on the problem of *political* evil, which first emerges in Max Weber's essay on 'Politics as a Vocation'. I contend that Weber reverses the Dostoevsky paradigm in important ways and ultimately locates the origins of political evil not in the nihilistic desire to oppress others, but in the violent means that all State politics must rely upon. I go on to document how two influential political thinkers, Hans J. Morgenthau and Michael Walzer, inherited the theme of political evil from Weber and, in doing so, incorporated Weber's particular version of the Dostoevsky paradigm into the respective disciplines they helped construct. I conclude by returning to Forti's overarching project and her plea for philosophy to break free from the Dostoevsky paradigm.

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the July 2005 London bombings, Tony Blair tells us that he felt compelled 'to paint the contrast in the boldest letters imaginable. Good politics versus evil. Stark. Simple. Undeniable to all but the deranged'.[2] Blair's candid assertion bears witness to the unmistakable fact that in the protracted war of terror on terror, the language of evil continues to be a powerful rhetorical operator. The omnipresence in today's political discourse of the language of evil raises numerous questions: from what archive do our leaders draw when they mobilise the imagery of evil? How can one explain its persistent effectiveness at stirring the humours of the body politic? More fundamentally: what role does the signifier of evil fulfil in our collective social consciousness? How has political evil been thought in the long and wicked twentieth century?

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[2] Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010), 569.

How have its thinkers articulated it with such categories as ethics, violence, and punishment?

Simona Forti's work on critical conceptions of evil offers a fruitful theoretical framework with which to approach these questions. In her *New Demons: Rethinking Power and Evil Today*, she develops a genealogy of a particular philosophical conception of evil which she baptises the 'Dostoevsky paradigm'.[3] By tracing the contours of this paradigm in the Russian writer's novels and documenting its echoes in the critical projects of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Primo Levi, Forti demonstrates how a certain conception of evil underlies and orients the critical tradition we have inherited from these authors. I shall contend that in her preoccupation with a tradition that, in keeping with Dostoevsky's formulation of the problem, conceived of evil as an *existential* and *ethical* problem, Forti risks overlooking a tradition which runs parallel to the one she reconstructs. This latter tradition poses the question of *political* evil and first emerges in the writings of Max Weber, who, also drawing inspiration from Dostoevsky's writings in formulating the problem of evil in politics, similarly becomes heir to the Dostoevsky paradigm. However, Weber reverses the relationship between power and evil that structures this paradigm and, in doing so, plots a distinct course for the paradigm which at points intersects with the trajectory documented in *New Demons*, but never fully aligns itself with it. When Weber's version of the Dostoevsky paradigm is probed, and its influences on twentieth-century political thought traced, what comes into focus is an entire network of reflections on violence and evil in politics that went on to exert a palpable influence first on several discrete disciplines of political thought, and then on US foreign policy.

In what follows, I shall reconstruct Forti's argument in *New Demons* in order to highlight the philosophical stakes of her endeavour, and to sketch a more detailed picture of the Dostoevsky paradigm, while recounting the genealogy she traces. I then turn my attention to Weber's essay, 'Politics as a Vocation' to consider how he inflects the Dostoevsky paradigm. I do so by identifying the links which Weber forges between politics, violence, and evil such that these categories come to exist in a triangular relationship, which in turn prepares the ground for some novel problems concerning the necessary ethos of the politician. I go on to indicate what influence Weber's rendering of the Dostoevsky paradigm has exerted on twentieth-century political discourse. To this end, I turn to Hans J. Morgenthau — the founding father of classical realism in International Relations — and Michael Walzer — who revived political theory's concern with 'just wars', — both of whom inherited the Dostoevsky paradigm from Weber and in turn bequeathed it to the foreign policy of the United States of America.

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[3] Simona Forti, *New Demons: Rethinking Power and Evil Today* [2012], trans. Z. Hanafi (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

Forti: The Dostoevsky Paradigm

Forti's *New Demons* proposes that it is crucial for contemporary critical philosophy to once again construct an analytical lexicon capable of explaining political evil. As Forti puts it, 'we cannot and should not stop talking about evil'.[4] For her, the stakes are high:

> A lot, if not everything, rides on the problem of suffering. Or more accurately, everything depends on whether suffering continues to be a *problem* for us, and in what way. In philosophical terms, it all depends on what significance we attribute to that ultimate phenomenological given — *the fact of pain and suffering* — which, even after its various stratifications of meaning have been deconstructed, remains before our eyes. This is not a question of the inescapable reality that inherently accompanies the finitude and vulnerability of our lives but, rather, what Emmanuel Levinas calls 'useless suffering', which is *produced* out of human relations, and which propagates with varying intensity and range on the basis of the social and political context.[5]

In other words, if philosophers are to understand the existence of suffering and the power structures by which it is unevenly distributed, and if, moreover, they are to grasp that so much human suffering is 'useless', they must develop what might be termed an 'analytics of evil'.

Accordingly, *New Demons* sets itself a twofold task: on the one hand, it seeks to understand how, for much of the twentieth century, philosophers will have approached the problem of evil; on the other, it seeks to uncover the flaws in this approach in order to replace it with a more suitable one. The first half of the book traces the genealogy of what Forti terms the 'Dostoevsky paradigm'; the second turns to the writings of Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Jan Patočka in search of an alternative conception of evil. For Forti, these two tasks are crucially linked, for an adequate account of evil can be formulated only when the limits — and the 'political repercussions' — of previous conceptions of evil are known.[6] In the remainder of this article I engage only with the genealogical aspect of Forti's project since it might be said that my intervention takes shape as a counter-genealogy.

How does Forti see the history of the Dostoevsky paradigm? According to her genealogy, the conception of evil that underpinned much of late-modern continental thought first became possible with the Kantian turn, but reached its fullest expression in Dostoevsky's vivid and chilling portraits of the psychology of evil. It was especially through *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, she argues,

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[4] *Ibid.*, 1.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*, 3.

that the Russian writer bequeathed to twentieth-century philosophy a compelling understanding of the psyche of the wicked and the evil that it brings forth. This is how she constructs her argument.

Before Kant made his presence felt on occidental thought, the problem of evil was primarily a theologico-metaphyscial one: how can there be evil in a world authored by a God who is at once benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent? From Augustine's *Confessions* to Leibniz's *Theodicy*, evil (or 'sin') had been considered the offspring of human free will, foreseen but not willed by divine Providence.[7] This problematic turned on the origins of evil in the world, and was entirely concerned with reconciling theological doxology on God's benevolence with the factual existence of sin and suffering. The attempt to absolve the Author of Nature from having willingly brought evil into the world — which Leibniz famously termed 'theodicy' — eclipsed any concern for the *psychology* of evil.

It was Kant who turned the moral philosopher's gaze towards the *act* of evil. Because his Copernican revolution had brought into sharp focus the moral law as a self-contained, transcendental category, evil could now appear as a facet of the subject's interiority. In other words, evil became thinkable in terms of the will's relationship to the moral law and to bodily incentives, rather than in terms of the relationship between divinity and humanity. For Forti, then, the critical turn thus made possible a seismic shift in the philosophical questioning of evil. '[T]he problem ceased to be purely a theological and metaphysical concern, while the relevant question shifted from "Where does evil come from?" to "Why do we commit evil deeds?"'[8]

However, Kant failed to recognise the implications of the shift he had enacted. In his desire to acquit the autonomous will of any desire for evil, he distinguished between evil and wickedness, a distinction that allowed him to attribute the former to an error of Reason and to deny the possibility of the latter. Because his system cannot suffer the view that Reason desires evil, Kant dissolved rather than explored the problem he had rendered possible. Ironically, by formulating something of a *logodicy*, the philosopher from Königsberg repeated the gesture of the pre-critical metaphysicians whose thought he had precisely sought to vanquish.

Yet Kant's restatement of the problem of evil soon proved fruitful. It was, according to Forti, F. W. J. Schelling who took up Kant's challenge and articulated a view that Kant could not fathom: that '[t]he will to evil for the sake of evil exists'.[9] Schelling arrived at this position by reconceptualising human freedom in relation to God's being, arguing that *evil stems from the human desire to be God*.

In Forti's view, however, Schelling made this thought conceivable, but failed to give it its due substance. The possibility of the *will to evil* had been

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[7] See *ibid.*, ch. 1.

[8] *Ibid.*, 21.

[9] *Ibid.*, 29. Emphasis omitted.

expressed, but the evildoer was to remain a mute until Fyodor Dostoevsky finally made him speak.[10] Indeed, Forti finds the emblematic expression of a philosophy of evil in the Russian author's portrayal of revolutionary nihilism. His most diabolical characters — especially Pyotr Verkhovensky, Nikolai Stavrogin, Alexei Kirillov, and, in a different manner, the Grand Inquisitor — are 'the transhistorical models of an exemplary scene of evil'.[11] This scene is one in which the deliberate wickedness of particular diabolical personae can bring evil into the world, thus producing widespread oppression, suffering, and ultimately death. Here is how Forti describes 'Dostoevsky's phenomenology of radical evil':

> [radical evil] is something that can never be reduced to the mere inclination of the subject, or to the simple result of a single, wicked action or intention. Only by interacting with everyone else do the protagonists engender the prism of radical evil. [...] Each of them gives free rein to his own particular negative power: base instincts, cunning, pride, or envy as the case may be. But they all share the same experience of trespassing, of breaking down limits, and of violating the order of the elements. The lead role is played by absolute free will: freedom of the will taken to an extreme. Each of the protagonists, driven by his own forces, becomes delusional with omnipotence — an omnipotence that was once a divine attribute and is now turned into a human feature.[12]

For Forti, the psychology of the wicked is only one half of the primal scene of evil. The picture is completed only once the wicked demon's Other has been accounted for: the defenceless, innocent victim. This is why, in Dostoevsky's novels, violence against children is an oft-recurring theme: the relationship between the wicked violator on the one hand and the tormented or abused child on the other epitomises the gesture of oppression, 'with an all-powerful perpetrator on the one side, faced by the total powerlessness of the victim on the other'.[13] For Forti, the paradigmatic example of this relationship can be found in the chapter from *Demons* where Stavrogin confesses to having led a child to commit suicide — a chapter that was originally suppressed by Dostoevsky's publisher due to its shocking contents.[14]

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[10] A disclaimer on the gendered language employed in this article. All of the authors I here take as my object of study (as distinct from Forti, who is my interlocutor) are men and write exclusively about men (both in their grammar and in their politics). Here I follow their lead and use masculine pronouns in an attempt to be at once true to their discourse and candid about the biases underpinning it.

[11] *Ibid.*, 35. Emphasis omitted.

[12] *Ibid.*, 36.

[13] *Ibid.*, 40. Emphasis omitted.

[14] See *ibid.*, 39f.

This, then, is what Forti calls the Dostoevsky paradigm. It is a conceptualisation of radical evil that situates evil in the delusional nihilism of a demonic perpetrator who brings his wickedness to bear on a powerless victim, thus providing an answer to the question that Kant first posed — 'Why do we commit evil deeds?' The view that evil resides in the relationship of oppression between an absolute demon and an absolute victim was, as *New Demons* shows so elegantly, accepted and developed in a variety of ways by Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Levinas, and Primo Levi.

My intention is to bolster Forti's contention that Dostoevsky bequeathed to twentieth-century thought the philosophical tools with which to think evil. I do so by tracing a genealogy which runs parallel to the one which her book maps out. However, mine is also a gesture that troubles and complicates Forti's account. As I shall demonstrate, whilst the trajectory outlined here relies upon and prolongs the Dostoevsky paradigm, it simultaneously throws some of the paradigm's constitutive assumptions into disarray. What I shall bring into focus, then, is a particular inflection of the Dostoevsky paradigm; a constellation of concepts and theses regarding the origins of *political* evil that provided much of twentieth-century political thought with its questions and the tools with which to approach them. This story starts with Max Weber's Russophilia.

Weber: Politics and/as Violence

It is well known that Weber was an avid reader of the great Russian novelists. He especially admired Leo Tolstoy,[15] whose writings he routinely cited in his sociological work. In addition to providing him with tools for sociological analysis, Tolstoy's novels also spoke to Weber's 'innermost experiences', as his wife, Marianne Weber, reports[16], addressing as they did his anxieties concerning death, the disenchantment of the world, and his own religiosity.

But there was one problem which Tolstoy could not assist Weber in addressing: the problem of political evil, or, more accurately, the problem of *the evil of politics*. This problem became increasingly acute as, in the 1910s, Europe's empires were marching steadily towards world war. Once, Tolstoy's religiously informed pacifism had earned him Weber's admiration; now, on the eve of cataclysm, it started to appear as something of an absurdity. Thus, in 'Between Two Laws', a short piece published in February 1916, Weber declares

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[15] See especially Edith Hanke, *Prophet des Unmodernen: Leo N. Tolstoi als Kulturkritiker in der deutschen Diskussion der Jahrhundertwende* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993) and Paul Honigsheim, *The Unknown Max Weber* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2000).

[16] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, trans. H. Zohn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988), 466.

the pacifism fashionable at the time, 'truly the worst cant ever to have been proclaimed — quite naïvely — from any tea-table'.[17]

In his view, a pacifist politics, especially one that is grounded in the New Testament, must be wholly consistent on pain of hypocrisy: 'In this case one has to be as consistent as Tolstoy. Nothing less will do'. The allusion is to the Russian author's decision, late in his life, to abandon his estate and live the remainder of his life in accordance with the ascetic ethic he had been preaching for so long. For Weber, the pacifist must, if he is to be consistent, renounce *all* social life, as Tolstoy did:

> The position of the Gospels is absolutely unambiguous on the decisive points. They are in opposition not just to war, of which they make no specific mention, but ultimately to each and every law of the social world, if this seeks to be a *place of worldly 'culture'*, one devoted to the beauty, dignity, honour and greatness of man as a creature of this earth. Anyone unwilling to go this far — and Tolstoy only did so as death was approaching — should know that he is bound by the laws of this earthly world, and that these include, for the foreseeable future, the possibility and inevitability of wars fought for power, and that he can only fulfil the 'demand of the day', whatever it may be, within the limits of these laws.[18]

This short, polemical piece contains the basic contours of what Weber, in his influential essay, 'Politics as a Vocation', would go on to describe as a distinction between two forms of ethics: the ethics of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) and the ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*). I now turn to this remarkable essay, for it is in the final few pages of this piece that the Dostoevsky paradigm is introduced into political ethics.

'Politics as a Vocation' was first presented as a lecture in January 1919 to a crowd of Bavarian students. Weber's aim is well known. He means to subject to sociological analysis the manner in which politics, by which he means the leadership of the State,[19] has become a vocation *(Beruf)* — in the sense of both *profession* and *calling*. The text moves from a detailed consideration of the first of these two meanings, politics as a profession, to the second, politics as a calling. For Weber, the two questions are intimately related, because what it means to have politics as one's vocation becomes clear only once the exact nature of political leadership is understood. Naturally, then, his first step is to inquire into the specific characteristics of the State as 'a *political* association':

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[17] Max Weber, 'Between Two Laws' in Max Weber, *Political Writings*, eds. P. Lassman & R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[18] *Ibid.*, 78.

[19] Max Weber, 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics', trans. R. Speirs in Max Weber, *Political Writings*, 309ff.

In the last analysis the modern state can only be defined sociologically in terms of a specific *means* which is peculiar to the state, as it is to all other political associations, namely physical violence *[der physischen Gewaltsamkeit]*. [...] Violence is, of course, not the normal or sole means used by the state. There is no question of that. But it is the means *specific* to the state.[20]

This definition has immense ramifications. By axiomatically defining political activity as the leadership of the State and by defining the modern State as 'that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a certain territory', Weber tethers the practice of politics to the use of physical violence.[21] To practise politics is, *by definition*, to exert violence on one's fellow humans.

Having identified the problem of modern politics in these terms, Weber turns to the *legitimacy* of State violence. In his view, there are three sources of legitimate rule — that is, three phenomena which lead people to submit wilfully to the violent machinery of the State: tradition, charisma, and legality.[22] The remainder of 'Politics as a Vocation' is an interrogation of the second phenomenon, for it is in the personal charisma of political leaders that 'the idea of *vocation* in its highest form has its roots'.[23]

After devoting many pages to an inquiry into the sociological significance of the emergence of the professional party politician, Weber finally turns his attention to the second meaning of the term 'vocation': 'what kinds of personal qualifications does [politics] presuppose in anyone turning to this career?'[24] At this point the tone of Weber's prose shifts noticeably, to the point of becoming positively lyrical. It is in these pages, amidst numerous references to his favourite Russian novelists and abundant employment of such terms as 'evil' and 'diabolical', that Weber inscribes the Dostoevsky paradigm into twentieth-century political thought, even as he gives it a distinctive twist. Let us see just what this amounts to.

The question of a vocation for politics is not merely a question of skills and capabilities — it is also, and more importantly, an *ethical* question. The politician deals in power, making his a career which is at once attractive and perilous. Attractive because to wield power is to rise above the vacuity of everyday existence; perilous because if the politician lacks a sense of responsibility he might become blinded by the 'instinct for power *[Machtinstinkt]*'.[25] Weber explains: 'The sin *[Sünde]* against the holy spirit of [the politician's] profession

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[20] *Ibid.*, 310.

[21] *Ibid.*, 310–311.

[22] See *ibid.*, 311–312.

[23] *Ibid.*, 312.

[24] *Ibid.*, 352.

[25] *Ibid.*, 354.

begins where this striving for power *[Machtstreben]* becomes detached from the task in hand and becomes a matter of purely personal self-intoxication instead of being placed entirely at the service of the "cause" *[Sache]*. [26] Although he may appear to be strong and forceful, the intoxicated politician's actions 'merely lead into emptiness and absurdity'.[27] Plainly, the allusion is to nihilism, for it is when power is divorced from a cause and when the handling of power is not informed by some kind of 'faith' or 'belief' that power itself comes to be an object of 'worship'.[28]

When presented in these terms, Weber's analysis fits squarely within the Dostoevsky paradigm: hunger for power, self-intoxication and vanity are responsible for bringing evil into the world. Nihilism meets the instrumental use of power and produces suffering; Pyotr Verkhovensky as politician.

However, this is not where the problem of evil in politics reaches its culmination. Because for Weber all politics necessarily entails the strategic deployment of violence, the question of political ethics must be rearticulated accordingly: is political action 'subject to "the same" ethic as every other form of activity? [...] Can the fact that politics operates with a quite specific means, namely power, backed up by the use of *violence*, really be a matter of such indifference as far as the ethical demands placed on politics are concerned?' [29] The implications of posing the question in this manner are vast. Now the problem of morality no longer hinges on the *intentions* of the politician, but on the *means* he employs: that is, on violence.

In order to bring the problem of political ethics into focus, Weber introduces his famous distinction between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. (Seen from this angle, the articulation of this distinction can be viewed as originating in Weber's attempt to rethink the Dostoevsky paradigm.) The ethics of conviction is grounded in noble intentions and demands that one never betray one's moral principles. Although his name is not mentioned, here the allusion is to Tolstoy: 'What about the ethics of the *Sermon on the Mount* then?'[30] In terms that bring to mind Weber's war-time polemic on pacifism cited above, he goes on to insist that 'the meaning of the sermon (if it is not to be reduced to a banality) is precisely this: we must accept it in its entirety *or* leave it entirely alone'.[31] But because Tolstoy's pacifism — which, Weber adds, normally 'expresses a kind of dignity' — rejects *all* use of violence, the politician has no recourse to it: 'For while it is a consequence of the unworldly ethic of love to say, "resist not evil with force" [Matt. 5:39], the politician is governed by the contrary maxim, namely, "You *shall* resist evil with force, for if you do not, you are

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[26] *Ibid.*, 354.

[27] *Ibid.*, 354.

[28] *Ibid.*, 355, 354.

[29] *Ibid.*, 357.

[30] *Ibid.*, 357.

[31] *Ibid.*, 358.

responsible for the spread of evil"'.[32] Weber reaches the same conclusion he had reached before: when one is confronted with the evil of the world, Tolstoy can be of no assistance.

Pacifism, of course, does not exhaust all possible forms of the ethics of conviction. Tolstoy's may be the only *logically coherent* version of such an ethic, but, '[i]n the real world', actual adherents of an ethics of conviction do not always shy away from using violent means to realise their noble intentions.[33] At this point, when the ethics of conviction and the willingness to use violence coincide, the peril inherent within politics rises to the surface. Where can an example of such a politician be found? 'Those of you who know their Dostoevsky will recall the scene with the Grand Inquisitor, where the problem is dissected very acutely'.[34]

What Dostoevsky recognised is that it is *not* true that 'only good can flow from good, only evil from evil'.[35] It is this basic insight that such politicians as the Grand Inquisitor lack. This is pivotal because politics, being the realm of violence, provides fecund ground for evil to erupt. 'The early Christians [...] knew very well', writes Weber in a crucial passage,

> that the world was governed by demons, that anyone who gets involved with politics, which is to say with the means of power and violence *[Macht und Gewaltsamkeit]*, is making a pact with diabolical powers *[diabolischen Mächten]*, and that it does *not* hold true of his actions that only good can come of good and only evil *[Bösem]* from evil, but rather that the opposite is often the case.[36]

To practise politics is to wield power and violence;[37] by implication, all politics is diabolical. Here, evil is no longer constructed as that which comes into the world only when the politician is a demon. Instead, *politics* is that which is 'diabolical', and for this reason it can only negate an ethics of conviction, which ends up corrupted and destructive. Weber draws this lesson from *The Brothers Karamazov* and, in doing so, turns the Dostoevsky paradigm on its head even as he adopts it. Indeed, although he subscribes to the Dostoevsky paradigm by insisting that nihilistic power-hungry politicians — the Verkhovenskys amongst us — produce evil, he adds that in the realm of politics, those who desire to follow a *pure* ethics — the Grand Inquisitors — likewise bring evil into the world.

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[32] *Ibid.*, 358.

[33] *Ibid.*, 361.

[34] *Ibid.*, 361.

[35] *Ibid.*, 362.

[36] *Ibid.*, 362.

[37] Note that the German *'Gewalt'* covers a much broader semantic field than does the English 'violence': the former can also mean force, strength, control, and, significantly, power.

It is, then, Dostoevsky who allows Weber finally to formulate the central problem of political ethics:

> Anyone wishing to practise politics of any kind, and especially anyone who wishes to make a profession of politics, has to be conscious of these ethical paradoxes and of his responsibility for what may become of *himself* under pressure from them. He is becoming involved, I repeat, with the diabolical powers that lurk in all violence.[38]

So who does have a 'vocation' for politics? If, on the one hand, the nihilistic politician produces evil and if, on the other, the politician who cannot bear to abandon his convictions does the same, then the only way to avoid political evil is to combine both forms of ethics. Alluding to Martin Luther, Weber sketches his ideal politician:

> it is immensely moving when a mature person (whether old or young) who feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the real consequences of his actions, and who acts on the basis of an ethics of responsibility, says at some point, 'Here I stand, I can do no other'. [...] In this respect, the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being *[den echten Menschen]* who is *capable* of having a 'vocation for politics'.[39]

In the concluding fragment, Weber declares, dramatically, that this type of politician 'must, in a very simple sense of the word, be a hero *[Held]*. [...] Only someone who is certain that he will not be broken when the world, seen from his point of view, is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer it, and who is certain that he will be able to say "Nevertheless" in spite of everything — only someone like this has a "vocation" for politics'.[40]

In summary: the Dostoevsky paradigm is a conceptual cluster which posits that at the root of evil stand absolute demons who bring their wickedness to bear on innocent victims. Weber troubles this paradigm even as he adopts it. In his search for an answer to the question of political ethics, he mobilises Dostoevsky to show that in the realm of politics, the root of evil lies precisely in the desire to be an absolute *angel*. 'Politics as a Vocation' displaces several of the paradigm's elements, forges a series of new links, and finally yields a significantly altered conceptual cluster, wherein the realm of politics is a realm of evil. In this realm, only a reluctant 'hero', who is neither a demonic nihilist nor a naïve pacifist, can successfully steer the infernal apparatus that we call the State.

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[38] Weber, 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics', 365.

[39] *Ibid.*, 367–368.

[40] *Ibid.*, 369.

Although Weber died a year after delivering the vocation lectures, his authoritative voice was to echo throughout twentieth-century thought. 'Politics as a Vocation' left a deep impression on countless thinkers and on several branches of political theory, including those dealing with the nature of politics, the psychology of the politician, and political ethics. Through this influence, Weber bequeathed to these branches of political theory his own inflection of the Dostoevsky paradigm. In the remainder of this article, I shall document the afterlife of Weber's views in two specific sub-disciplines of Anglophone political theory: International Relations (hereafter: IR) and Just War Theory.

Morgenthau: The Ubiquity of Evil

Hans J. Morgenthau's legacy is by no means inconsiderable. Being the first proponent of what is known as 'classical realism', he is considered one of the founding fathers of IR as a distinct discipline. As is often the prerogative of disciplinary pioneers, Morgenthau helped shape realism's — as well as IR's — agenda along with its central categories. However, his impact reached well beyond the confines of Academia: besides having exerted direct influence on the presidential administrations of Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson, several illustrious actors on the stage of international politics, including Henry Kissinger, have declared their intellectual and personal debt to him.[41]

Although Morgenthau's realism is a comprehensive doctrine about the nature of politics, it is grounded in one foundational assumption: politics is not about the collective pursuit of the absolute good, but about ensuring that humanity's natural tendency towards destruction and evil is neutralised as much as possible.[42] The implications that he believes follow from this basic insight are of little import to my current purposes; rather, my interest lies with the structure and origin of this contention. As I shall demonstrate, this understanding of politics rests upon a series of claims about humanity's innate proclivity for evil, which Morgenthau draws from Weber's 'Politics as a Vocation'. The upshot is that via Morgenthau, Weber's version of the Dostoevsky paradigm was carried over into IR, where it continues to hold sway.

Morgenthau's 1948 *Politics Among Nations* is uniformly considered to be the *Urtext* of classical realism.[43] It is a muscular volume that primarily deals with

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[41] See Michael C. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Kenneth Thompson & Robert J. Mayers (eds.), *Truth and Tragedy: A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984). See also Henry Kissinger, 'A Gentle Analyst of Power: Hans Morgenthau', *Political Science & Politics* 13:4 (1980): 531–532.

[42] For a general introduction to Morgenthau's doctrine, see Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), ch. 6.

[43] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* [1948], 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

practical questions, providing a comprehensive doctrine of *applied realism*. However, *Politics Among Nations* remains silent on the more fundamental philosophical considerations that underlie and inform its doctrines. Morgenthau opens the volume by acknowledging the 'six principles' he is working with,[44] writing that realism,

> believes that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. [...] This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realised but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts. [Realism], then, sees in a system of checks and balances a universal principle for all pluralist societies. It appeals to historical precedent rather than to abstract principles and aims at the realisation of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.[45]

In *Politics Among Nations* — and by extension in the entire realist edifice that was erected upon it — these reflections play the role of axiomatic statements. But whence did they come? What are the philosophical moorings of these sweeping claims about human nature and about the nature of politics? With what philosophical charge is the notion of 'the lesser evil' laden? Answers to these questions must be sought in Morgenthau's lesser-known essay entitled *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, published a year before *Politics Among Nations*.

    Scientific Man vs. Power Politics, Morgenthau's first published monograph, is a critique of a certain rationalist understanding of humans, politics, and science. This brand of rationalism, on his reading, holds that science can objectively and exhaustively understand our social world and can, consequently, venture to change it for the better. What renders such rationalism invalid is its failure to give due weight to the biological tendencies that inhere in all humans. These tendencies make it so that *all* humans strive for domination over others, the result of which is that *any* utopian political project based on a rationally projected ideal society is bound to come to ruin. Morgenthau's hope is that once it is acknowledged that all humans naturally lust after power, we can finally abandon our misguided desire to construct the ideal social world and instead devote ourselves to curbing the destructive tendencies that inhere in all political conduct. This view is rooted in a particular understanding of human nature, one which posits that reason is subservient to irrational passions: 'Reason, far from following its own inherent impulses, is driven toward its goals by the irrational forces the

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[44] Morgenthau added the chapter entitled 'The Six Principles of Political Realism' to the second edition of *Politics Among Nations.*

[45] *Ibid.*, 3.

ends of which it serves', that is, by 'the irrational forces of interest and emotion'.[46] Another such 'irrational force' is the instinct to dominate others, that is, 'the *animus dominandi*, the desire for power'.[47] Every member of the human species is subject to this desire. We humans naturally desire to oppress; we are all of us demons.

It is when he starts to discuss the implications of humanity's innate will to power with respect to political ethics that Morgenthau reveals his debt to Weber's 'Politics as a Vocation'. Although he fails to quote or reference the text even once,[48] he clearly intends to pay homage to it by appropriating its terminology and by emulating much of its argumentative strategy. Let me reconstruct Morgenthau's version of Weber's argument.

Although, for Morgenthau, the desire to dominate others is the cause of much of our behaviour, it is in the realm of politics that this desire becomes acutely problematic, because politics, by its very nature, is an activity which revolves around the governing of others. Indeed, it is *in order to dominate others* that many pursue a career in politics, making the latter to a large extent an *evil* practice:

> To the degree in which the essence and aim of politics is power over man, *politics is evil*; for it is to this degree that it degrades man to a means for other men. It follows that the prototype of this corruption through power is to be found on the political scene. For here the *animus dominandi* is not merely blended with dominant aims of a different kind but is the very essence of the intention, the very life-blood of the action, the constitutive principle of politics as a distinct sphere of human activity.[49]

In other words, because the *'animus dominandi'* is an innate trait found in all human beings at all times, *all* politics *everywhere* is, by its very nature, evil.[50]

For these reasons the practice of politics raises issues which concern morality: 'the political actor has, beyond the general moral duties, a special moral

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[46] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 154–155.

[47] *Ibid.*, 192.

[48] There is a sprawling literature linking Morgenthau to Weber's writings on politics. See, for instance, Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger*, ch. 6, Hans-Karl Pichler, 'The Godfathers of "Truth": Max Weber and Carl Schmitt in Morgenthau's Theory of Power Politics', *Review of International Studies* 24:2 (1998): 185–200 and Tarak Barkawi, 'Strategy as a Vocation: Weber, Morgenthau and Modern Strategic Studies', *Review of International Studies* 24:2 (1998): 159–184. See also Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography: 1904–1932', in Thompson & Myers, *Truth and Tragedy*.

[49] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, 195, my emphasis. Interestingly, Morgenthau cites Jacob Burckhardt in support of his argument — as did Weber in 'Between Two Laws'.

[50] Thus Morgenthau can hold that his realist doctrine describes the universal laws of politics. See esp. *Politics Among Nations*, ch. 1.

responsibility to act wisely, that is, in accordance with the rules of the political art'.[51] But what is it to act 'wisely'? Morgenthau answers that to act wisely in politics is to choose the least evil among all possible evils. 'Political ethics is indeed the ethics of doing evil. While it condemns politics as the domain of evil par excellence, it must reconcile itself to the enduring presence of evil in all political action. Its last resort, then, is the endeavour to choose, since evil there must be, among several possible actions the one that is least evil'.[52] The inverse similarly holds true: anyone who refuses to choose between evils inadvertently produces an even greater evil. In making this point, Morgenthau clearly echoes Weber, and he even draws on the latter's understanding of the ethics of responsibility to drive the point home. Thus he writes that what in the realm of politics is done 'with good intentions but unwisely and hence with disastrous results is morally defective; for it violates the ethics of responsibility to which all action affecting others, and hence political action par excellence, is subject'.[53] As Weber did before him, Morgenthau condemns the 'perfectionist' who refuses to abandon his convictions, who 'shrinks from the lesser evil because he does not want to do evil at all' and who 'thus becomes finally a source of greater evil'.[54]

The 'ethic of responsibility' has thus been rearticulated as the art of choosing the lesser evil. Morgenthau concludes his chapter on political ethics with a passage that, both in pathos and in content, patently mimics the concluding paragraph of 'Politics as a Vocation':

> Neither science nor ethics nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony. We have no choice between power and the common good. To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny. That this conciliation is nothing more than a *modus vivendi*, uneasy, precarious, and even paradoxical, can disappoint only those who prefer to gloss over and to distort the tragic contradictions of human existence with the soothing logic of a specious concord.[55]

The book's concluding chapter returns to this theme of 'tragedy'. That life is base and politics evil is, for Morgenthau, a tragic fact of life. But once naïve utopian rationalism has been rejected and human nature given its due weight, 'there

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[51] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, 186.

[52] *Ibid.*, 202.

[53] *Ibid.*, 186.

[54] *Ibid.*, 202–203.

[55] *Ibid.*, 203.

reappears the *aristeia* of man, his heroic struggle to be and to be more than he is and to know that he is and can be more than he is'.[56]

Whilst, in sum, it is plain to see that *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* is heavily indebted to Weber's 'Politics as a Vocation', the former nonetheless offers a considerably more jejune analysis. Whereas Weber's argument is that all *modern* politics is *potentially* evil because it involves the instrumental use of violence, making his an *historical* argument, Morgenthau jettisons the historicity of political evil by insisting that it stems from the human's innate desire to dominate others.

Despite its vulgarity, Morgenthau's realism inherits Weber's version of the Dostoevsky paradigm. Following 'Politics as a Vocation', *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* depicts the political scene as one in which evil abounds, where the desire to be an angel produces suffering and oppression, and only the tragic 'hero' can navigate the treacherous waters of political evil. In Morgenthau's world, it is because deep down we are all as diabolical as Pyotr Verkhovensky that we need a political ethics to instruct us in becoming heroes who curb their innate and evil desires, rather than demons who let these desires wreak havoc upon the world.

Walzer: Dirty Hands and Just Killing

The notion that some wars might be *just* wars and that it is possible to fight one's wars *justly* was a popular theme amongst medieval Christian theologians and early modern jurists such as Hugo Grotius. This doctrine's influence declined around the time of the Enlightenment and lay dormant until, in the 1970s, several moral philosophers in North America showed renewed interest in its categories and problems.[57] 'Just war' discourse returned with a vengeance: its revival gave rise to a sprawling literature that consists mostly of self-referential, ahistorical, and sterile analyses of the conditions under which the killing of innocents can be justified; a literature that in turn went on to provide the leaders of the Western world with a discourse that renders their acts of military violence 'just'.

Nobody did more to revive the discourse of the 'just war' than Michael Walzer, whose 1977 book, *Just and Unjust Wars* is universally considered to have put the problem of 'just warfare' back on the agenda of political theory. His

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[56] *Ibid.*, 222. In classical Greek tragedy, the *aristeia* (or 'excellence') is the climactic moment where the hero experiences his or her finest moment.

[57] Whilst celebratory overviews of the 'just war' tradition are legion, there exist very few critiques of its basic assumptions. One critic who stands out is Michael Neu, for whom there is something 'utterly repulsive' about 'just war' discourse. See Michael Neu, 'Just the Just Death of Just War', *Critical Studies* 1 (2015): 6–13, 13; cf. Michael Neu, *Just Liberal Violence: Sweatshops, Torture, War* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), ch. 5 and Robin Dunford & Michael Neu, *Just War and the Responsibility to Protect: A Critique* (London: Zed Books, forthcoming).

was an explicit attempt to revive the centuries-old 'just war' tradition,[58] but it was at the same time a contribution to the broader field of moral questions that he labels 'political ethics'.[59] It is through this broader framework of political ethics that I shall consider Walzer's contribution to political thought. My aim is to demonstrate that his concern with 'just war' is part of a broader philosophical project which pivots on the problem of political evil, a project that inherited its contours, its lexicon, and its problems, together with their solutions, from Weber's version of the Dostoevsky paradigm.

Although *Just and Unjust Wars* is a book about 'political ethics', Walzer spends little time exploring the philosophical foundations of his understanding of political evil. Rather, as Morgenthau had done before him, he erects an argumentative edifice on philosophical foundations which he has prepared elsewhere. In Walzer's case, the decisive text is a 1973 article entitled 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands'.[60]

Walzer's concern in this article is a category of actions in which one has to choose between several morally objectionable options. Walzer proceeds to baptise this 'the problem of 'dirty hands'', borrowing the term from a play by Jean-Peal Sartre.[61] The central contention made in 'Political Action' is that in this category of dilemmas, it is possible to do the right thing, even though doing so will render one guilty of committing a moral wrong.

The problem of 'dirty hands' quickly proves to be particularly acute in the political realm: 'the dilemma of dirty hands is a central feature of political life, [and] it arises not merely as an occasional crisis in the career of this or that unlucky politician but systematically and frequently'.[62] This is where a familiar conceptual assumption surfaces, one which orients the rest of Walzer's argumentative structure: 'dirty hands' are especially common in political ethics because politics is the domain of *violence*. Indeed, it is because 'the victorious politician uses violence and the threat of violence' that *all* politicians have 'dirty hands'.[63] Immediately after having connected politics to violence, Walzer pays homage to the originator of this insight: 'This is a point emphasised and perhaps overemphasised by Max Weber in his essay "Politics as a Vocation"'.[64]

What Walzer calls the problem of 'dirty hands' is the problem of political ethics: given that all politics involves violence, what ethics is required of the politician? To this question, the tradition of political thought has provided three

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[58] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* [1977], 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), Preface.

[59] *Ibid.*, xxv.

[60] Michael Walzer, 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2:2 (1973): 160–180.

[61] *Ibid.*, 161.

[62] *Ibid.*, 162.

[63] *Ibid.*, 163.

[64] *Ibid.*, 163.

distinct answers, which were formulated most concisely by Niccolò Machiavelli, Max Weber, and Albert Camus. Machiavelli's answer to the problem, on Walzer's reading, was that one must teach politicians 'how not to be good'.[65] This, he opines, is not a satisfactory resolution of the problem of 'dirty hands' because it fails to inquire about the moral consciousness of a politician with a sullied conscience.

What about Weber's reply to the problem? As discussed at length above, he seeks to confront the problem of political evil by insisting that only 'heroes' who can bear the burden of their sins have a 'vocation' for politics. This 'hero' willingly, though regretfully, resorts to violence, and, as Walzer puts it, '[w]ith full consciousness of what he is doing, he does bad in order to do good, and surrenders his soul'.[66] But, Walzer asks, what is to ensure that any particular politician is a hero and not a demon? How can one guarantee that a political actor who has dirtied his hands will receive punishment? 'Weber attempts to resolve the problem of dirty hands entirely within the confines of the individual conscience, but I am inclined to think that this is neither possible nor desirable'.[67]

For Walzer, the only adequate solution to the problem of 'dirty hands' is a social one, in which the morality of the politician's actions is judged not by him but by the public; in other words, those with 'dirty hands' are publicly punished for their misdeeds, after which their hands will be clean once again. The impetus for this solution comes from Camus,[68] whose play *The Just* tells the story of Ivan Kaliayev and his comrades, a group of Russian revolutionary assassins with such moral fastidiousness that they were willing to kill only on condition that they themselves would pay with their lives in return. This ethos, which pivots on a willingness to accept one's due punishment, is what is required of a politician if we are to face up to the inevitability of 'dirty hands' in politics. However, after having proposed this solution, Walzer scrambles to explain that he does *not* think that we should *execute* our leaders after they have dirtied their hands; in fact, he does not even think that it would be possible to punish them in any way, for 'there seems no way to establish or enforce the punishment. Short of the priest and the confessional, there are no authorities to whom we might entrust the task'.[69] Ultimately, 'Political Action' ends up proposing a highly diluted version of

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[65] *Ibid.*, 175.

[66] *Ibid.*, 176.

[67] *Ibid.*, 177.

[68] Whilst it would take me too far afield to reflect on this topic in any depth, it should be emphasised that Camus's overarching philosophical and literary project was, for the most part, an attempt to reckon with the problem of nihilism and the evil it potentially produces. He finds this problem articulated most acutely in the novels of none other than Dostoevsky. Camus, in other words, was another inheritor of the Dostoevsky paradigm, which he gives a distinctive twist in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. In mobilising Camus to compensate for Weber's shortcomings, Walzer thus simply ends up pitting two versions of the Dostoyevsky paradigm against one another.

[69] *Ibid.*, 179.

Camus's rebellious ethos, one that 'requires us at least to *imagine* a punishment or a penance that fits the crime and so to examine closely the nature of the crime'.[70] It is in the realm of public *imagination,* then, that Walzer seeks a reply to the problem that grew out of Weber's rendering of the Dostoevsky paradigm.

Just and Unjust Wars and several of Walzer's further writings on war — which, interestingly and ironically, are written in explicit opposition to Morgenthau's realism[71] — assign a fundamental role to the doctrine of 'dirty hands', which is routinely discussed in connection with what he terms the problem of 'emergency politics'. This is also where he starts using the term 'evil', a word absent from 'Political Action'. In war, Walzer reasons, one is sometimes confronted with an evil so infernal that one can only respond in kind, such that one must, for example, bomb cities inhabited by innocent people. 'This is the essential feature of emergency ethics: that we recognise at the same time the evil we oppose and the evil we do, and that we set ourselves, so far as possible, against both'.[72] In posing the problem in this way, Walzer adapts the Dostoevsky paradigm once more. In war, *one is confronted with an external evil* and the 'emergency politics' that makes it necessary for the wartime politician to sully his hands stems from the need to confront this evil: it is thus for Nazism that Walzer reserves the term 'evil' — a term, moreover, he claims not to use lightly.[73]

The alteration is this: in war, which is the most extreme of all political scenes, an evil enemy necessitates the deployment of evil tactics. Evil thus no longer originates in politics, as is the case for Weber; nor does it lie dormant in humans' natural desire to dominate one another, as Morgenthau suggests. Rather, evil is *external* to both the politician and politics: 'evil is other people', Walzer — who is so fond of quoting French playwrights — might have said. It comes as no surprise that Walzer's *solution* to the problem of 'dirty hands' likewise relies upon a principle of externality: in other words, he argues that it must be the community that judges and condemns those politicians who found it necessary to dirty their hands in this way.

It is thus by displacing evil that Walzer seeks to dissolve the Dostoevsky paradigm. By detaching evil from both politics and the human, and by locating it outside of humans and their politics, he makes it possible for political actors to absolve their sins. By running the proverbial gauntlet, the politician can 'wash his hands', after which his *name* may remain forever tainted, but his *conscience* will be clean. Plainly arguing against Weber's position, Walzer muses that '[i]t is not the case that when [the politician] does bad in order to do good he surrenders

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[70] *Ibid.,* 179, emphasis added.

[71] See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars,* ch. 1, which is revealingly called 'Against "Realism"', and Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), ch. 1.

[72] Walzer, *Arguing About War,* 49. Walzer likewise employs the term 'evil' to describe a similar problem in *Just and Unjust Wars,* for example on pages 267, 274, 290, and 298.

[73] See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars,* 253.

himself forever to the demon of politics'.[74] 'Forever' is the crucial discursive operator here: the 'dirt' on the politician's hands turns out merely to be a temporary blemish.

Politics, Evil, and Violence in the Twentieth Century

By way of conclusion, let me summarise the trajectory followed by the version of the Dostoevsky paradigm documented here. It emerges in Weber's 'Politics as a Vocation', which explores the ethos required by the career politician. By defining State politics as the realm of violence, Weber can argue that politics is an inherently evil practice, an insight he attributes to Dostoevsky. By constructing a conceptual cluster that fastens politics to violence, by declaring the practice of politics inherently diabolical, and by calling for a specific ethos — that of the 'hero' — to negotiate political evil, Weber's essay heralds a novel series of problems; problems that orbit the central themes of political ethics, evil, and violence. In Morgenthau's hands, Weber's account of politics becomes twisted into a crude, purportedly 'realistic' doctrine of human nature. Evil, on this account, does not inhere in politics, but in human beings themselves. As a result, political ethics becomes the practice of limiting the evil that humans are naturally inclined to do to one another. Walzer, who inherits Weber's understanding of politics as an inherently violent practice, wonders how politicians might cope with the moral guilt that results from political violence. By looking at the politics of war he seeks to push the problem to its extreme, a move that allows him to reserve the term 'evil' for the (unjust) enemy. Thus, evil is once again displaced: this time the threat is evil, and this evil demands to be fought with evil means. The upshot is that evil has been forced to relinquish its firm grasp on political man: all it can do is *temporarily* soil the politician's hands, after which he may absolve himself of his sins.

This, then, is how the Dostoevsky paradigm has changed since Weber took it up and modified it a century ago: the locus of evil has changed several times. The paradigm's basic contours, however, will have remained the same. Regardless of where the root of evil was sought, the conclusion was always that, owing to its very nature, the practice of politics is marked by the diabolic taint of evil, thus demanding that the politician be of a tragically heroic, masculine, sorrowful character. The continuous displacement of evil within the paradigm's conceptual nexus was therefore inconsequential with regard to the anguished conclusions attached to the fundamental assumption that politics is evil. Post-Weberian thought was also powerless to wrest this understanding of politics free from its origins: over the course of the ceaseless reproduction of this paradigm, Dostoevsky's voice may have been largely forgotten but it has not ceased to orient this imaginary at a fundamental level.

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[74] Walzer, 'Political Action', 178.

Being the influential men that they were, Weber, Morgenthau, and Walzer left their respective marks on twentieth-century North-American politics. Their thought made itself felt in a wide range of academic disciplines; in thinktanks of all persuasions; in several presidential administrations; in cultural consciousness; in policy papers; and, of course, on our leaders' tongues. It is largely as a result of their efforts that the Dostoevsky paradigm still presses heavily upon our political discourse.

Concluding Remarks

The counter-genealogy proposed here has three distinct but related implications for Forti's *New Demons.* First, it reminds us that the genealogical work of reconstructing traditional conceptions of evil cannot restrict itself to critical philosophy alone. Whilst an engagement with the critical tradition is crucial if we are to think evil differently, it is equally important to study what we may call *un*critical traditions in order to chart the ways in which they have helped shape our present condition. This is painstaking work, largely because the authors discussed here do not understand themselves as belonging to a coherent Dostoevskian tradition or as having inherited a shared set of problems and discourses. As a result, isolating traces of the Dostoevsky paradigm requires careful hermeneutic analyses of texts that, to a critical philosopher, may seem banal or insipid.

Second, it drives home the importance of Forti's overarching project of rethinking evil. In her view, the critical tradition has reduced the scene of evil to a confrontation between malevolent demons and innocent victims, thus failing to recognise the complexities that are involved in the production of evil. What critical thought requires, she argues, is an analysis that can capture the way in which evil comes into existence. 'Evil', she writes, 'is a system in the sense of a tangle of subjectivities, a network of relations, whose threads pull together into a pernicious event thanks to the perfect complementarity between (a few) wicked actors and originators, (a few) zealous, committed agents, and (many) acquiescent, not simply indifferent spectators'.[75] So long as critical philosophy fails to understand the systemic nature of evil, it risks overlooking the routine exclusion and everyday suffering upon which the continued existence and orderliness of the *polis* is premised.

The particular version of the Dostoevsky paradigm reconstructed here, for all of its differences from the one which *New Demons* addresses itself to, suffers from the same faults. Because it represents evil as an unavoidable element of State politics, of human nature, or of warfare, as the case may be, it is limited to preaching a mournful but heroic acceptance of this fact on the part of those select few with a 'vocation' for politics. Entirely lacking in this picture is an appreciation of systemic forms of evil. However, the tradition charted here differs from the one analysed by Forti in that many of the discourses it has produced — of a

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[75] Forti, *New Demons,* 179.

politics of the 'lesser evil', of 'just warfare' — primarily serve to *justify* forms of (State) violence precisely by effacing the existence and architecture of structural evil. That is to say, it is precisely the lexicon of evil and the concomitant doctrines of political ethics crafted by such figures as Morgenthau and Walzer that our leaders draw upon when seeking, for instance, to condemn the 'evil' of terrorism or to rationalise the extrajudicial and often indiscriminate drone killings carried out all over the world on a daily basis.[76]

Third, this counter-genealogy suggests a range of new themes that the endeavour to rethink evil must take into consideration. For Forti, one of the main shortcomings of the Dostoevsky paradigm is that it locates evil solely in the *individual* perpetrator, while failing to problematise the systemic nature of evil or the relationship between individuals and the system they find themselves in. Thus, a critical understanding of evil must be able to 'question not so much why we become wicked subjects but rather, above all, how we become obedient subjects'.[77] This is why, in the second part of her book, Forti turns to Arendt, Foucault, and Patočka, each of whom offers us the tools to think power as networked, systemic, and fluid, rather than individual, one-directional, and repressive.

Yet, the Weberian version of the Dostoevsky paradigm troubles this image somewhat. Indeed, one of the core features of the tradition mapped here is that it precisely does not locate evil in the wicked individual, but rather continually displaces the locus of evil, seeking it first in the domain of politics, then in humanity's natural inclinations, then in the (fascistic) enemy. Weber's contribution precisely was to tether political evil to the use of violence, thus making possible, on the one hand, the disarticulation of the Dostoevskian connection between evil and the wicked perpetrator and, on the other, the notion that, in the realm of politics, an ethics of conviction is as dangerous as wickedness.

This implies that in order to rethink evil, critical philosophy must do more than insist upon the systemic nature of evil and the crucial role fulfilled therein by what Forti calls 'mediocre' demons — the obedient subjects who contribute to evil systems without necessarily being wicked or malevolent.[78] Indeed, it must also actively seek to reconceptualise the relationship between evil and politics, attempting first of all to trouble the Weberian understanding of politics as leadership of the State and of the State as the institutional apparatus that has a monopoly on legitimate physical violence. As long as these axioms continue to underpin political thought, it will be easy for political realists and defenders of 'just wars' to deny the systemic nature of evil and to justify State violence in the face of (external) evil threats. Critical philosophy will have to ask what it is to act politically, what a non-violent or anti-violent politics might be, how politics relates

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[76] For a similar view see Neu, *Just Liberal Violence*.

[77] Forti, *New Demons*, 9.

[78] See *ibid.* and *passim*.

and may relate to evil, and what the relationship is between ethics and politics. In raising these questions, we may turn to the same tradition Forti is in conversation with, as these are precisely the themes that have occupied critical thinkers from Arendt and Foucault to Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero.

If, for Forti, critical philosophy must abandon the Dostoevsky paradigm because, owing to the simplistic dualism it constructs between absolute demons and absolute victims, it impairs our capacity to understand systemic violence, then it seems all the more urgent that the discourse of evil as it is used by triumphalist apologists for State violence is challenged and overcome. These two ventures are closely interrelated, as a persuasive critique of post-Weberian accounts of political evil can be successful only if it is informed by a convincing critical account of systemic evil. Thus it is that the counter-genealogy offered here serves to underscore the urgency of the philosophical project outlined so forcefully in *New Demons*.

Interpretation and Demythologisation:
The Problem of Truth in Luigi Pareyson's Hermeneutics[1]
Andrea Bellocci

Abstract
The present contribution begins by analysing the oscillation of Pareyson's hermeneutic theory between arguments inspired by 'ontological difference', which deal with the tragic separation between the truth and the person, and his persistent attempt to smooth over its radical character by appealing to personalism's ethically and religiously optimistic approach, which insists on the intimate link between truth and the person. Secondly, the article criticises the most fundamental assumption of Pareyson's hermeneutics, which, affirming the exclusive interpretability of the truth, unintentionally establishes this affirmation as an absolute and uninterpretable truth. Finally, having analysed Pareyson's relationship with Schelling, Heidegger, and Barth, the article describes a fundamental problem underlying the difference between 'revelatory thought' and 'expressive thought', which Pareyson treats as an unquestionable 'ontological criterion' for distinguishing between true and false. If such a criterion is true in itself, it is unable to include and differentiate itself from the truth of revelatory thought, and so risks allowing the same truth to be divided illogically into the 'greater' truth of the containing criterion and the 'lesser' truth of the contained truth; nor is it able to deal with the falsity of expressive thought, and so risks admitting a truth which has the false dwelling within it. The ontological criterion is thus inevitably degraded to become a mere demand for distinction. And, once the 'ontological difference' is put in question, the very possibility of formulating a theory of interpretable truth — that is, of an ontological hermeneutics — becomes problematic.

Ontological personalism: irrelativity and relationship
The work of Luigi Pareyson begins from the Kierkegaardian assumption that man is an individual only if he is placed in relation with God, but declines this theme in a personalistic manner. Unlike Kierkegaard, for whom man is himself negative and a sinner, Pareyson sees man as 'insufficient', open to Being and transcendence. He is an 'ontological person'.

Similarly, Pareyson takes from Karl Barth the concept that God is absolutely irrelative and other, but chooses to relativise himself and build a relationship with man. Pareyson adapts this theme, once again, in a personalistic direction. Unlike Barth, for whom irrelativity is so predominant that it relegates the entire human world — ethics, history, religion — to mere 'human greatness' and nullity of meaning, Pareyson considers Being to offer itself inexhaustibly and positively to

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[1] This essay presents and elaborates with variation, arguments first put forward in a presentation on Pareyson at the conference, *Parola e Scrittura* (Word and Writing), at the Pontificio Ateneo Sant' Anselmo, 7th October 2015, which was then composed as an essay: *Interpretare e demitizzare: il problema della verità nell'ermeneutica di Luigi Pareyson.* In: E.L.T. García, P. Nouzille, O.M. Sarr, ed., Parola e Scrittura. Studia Anselmiana, Roma, 2017.

interpretation, whilst nevertheless remaining irrelative and different: this generosity on the part of Being guarantees that man will be able to relate to it, in an ethical and religious fashion.

In this way, existence becomes both a personal expression that is historically and temporally placed, and an interpretation of truth, a living perspective on Being.

The tightly-meshed interweaving of ontology and religion in this 'first' phase of the Pareysonian investigation mirrors the distinction between 'Christian existentialism' and 'anti-Christian existentialism'. The first, confirming the 'ontological relationship', interprets man in the light of transcendence. The second, on the other hand, by denying the ontological relationship, does not give an interpretation but rather an idolatrous mystification. This distinction, as we shall see, clearly foreshadows the differentiation between 'revelatory thought' and 'expressive thought'.

Ontological perspectivism: the problem of conciliation between unity and diversity

It is necessary to note immediately that Pareyson's hermeneutical approach desires to keep the concept of truth together with the plurality of its interpretations, avoiding however the relativisation of truth. As we will see, 'ontological perspectivism' consists in the belief that truth is unique and inexhaustible while at the same time lending itself to interpretations which know how to reveal it.

Pareyson argues in *Verità e interpretazione*[2] that interpretation is original and universal because it structures the 'person', understood as an 'ontological relationship'. This relationship, based on an assumption Pareyson always considered one of the fundamental, enduring cornerstones of the philosophy of existence, is a combination of auto- and hetero-relations, relations with oneself and relations with Being. It concerns every human activity. As Pareyson writes,

> every human relation [...] always has an interpretative character. This would not occur if interpretation were not in itself originary: It qualifies that relation with in which the very being of humanity resides; in it, the primordial solidarity of human beings with the truth is realised. [...] [T]o interpret means to transcend, and one cannot speak authentically of entities without simultaneously referring to Being. In a word: The originary ontological relation is necessarily hermeneutic, and every interpretation necessarily has an ontological character. (Pareyson, 2013 [1975], p. 47, translation modified)

As should be clear, Pareyson accepts the Heideggerian assumption of the 'ontological difference'. But he combines it inextricably with themes that, as we

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[2] Quotations have been taken from an English translation of *Verità e interpretazione,* entitled *Truth and Interpretation,* published in 2013, by Robert T. Valgenti. These are cited as '2013 [1975]' in the in-text references. Please see the Bibliography for full details of both the original and the English translation.

shall see, he felt Heidegger had wrongly neglected: personalism and the possibility of an ethics.

We cannot fail to note that, while Pareyson speaks of a Being that transcends the entity, and of a necessary transcendence of the entity that takes place when it is interpreted by man, he immediately qualifies man's relationship with the truth (synonymous with Being) in terms of a 'primordial solidarity'. And, to hint at a problem even Pareyson himself will eventually acknowledge, at least in part, nor can we pass over the perplexity which derives from the encounter with a transcendence that is already and immediately involved in a sympathetic bond with man.

However, the criticism directed at Heidegger on this point could also be turned against Pareyson himself, who, despite the perfectly noble intention of joining together the infinite transcendence of Being with its immediate closeness, had some difficulty in avoiding and even ameliorating the radical problems involved in such an interweaving of ontological and ethical difference, of the transcendence of Being and the person.

But, in spite of these difficulties, it is here that we can see the strength of Pareyson's approach, and the originality of his hermeneutic project. He was in no way unaware of the 'drama' concomitant with difference — or rather, of the dramatic implications of a Being which could, precisely by virtue of its transcendence, free itself from the world of the human. Indeed, interpretative failure is not just a dramatic possibility that Pareyson will often consider; he claims even more strongly that it can characterise whole epochs. Arguing against a Hegelian 'objective metaphysics' which imposes a univocal, triumphalist direction on history by identifying the absolute with the finite, Pareyson claims that Being, while it does not 'denounce' historical events in a metacultural state of permanence, 'abandons those who betray it, and thus whole epochs remain devoid of truth' (ibid., p. 37).

All this means that we have immediately to confront the well-known and much-discussed 'formula' in *Verità e interpretazione*: 'This means that *of truth, there is only ever interpretation,* and that *there is no interpretation, lest it be of truth'* (ibid, p. 47).

With the first proposition, Pareyson cuts short any form of dogmatism or 'metaphysical rationalism', his definition of the claim — idolatrous and mystifying, in his opinion — to be able to give a supposedly unitary, definitive, and impersonal formulation to an objective, specular representation of the truth. On the other hand, truth cannot be grasped as an entity, an object, because it is unobjectifiable and transcendent. Nor is it possible to escape from one's own situation, which if anything constitutes the only proper place of truth, and the only point of view from which it may be perceived — as a consequence, truth has to be interpreted. Here, Pareyson is also trying to close off all forms of 'weak' hermeneutic relativism: it is indeed truth which is given in interpretation, rather than many truths, or many

interpretations without any truth.[3]

If we stopped here, we would have an adequate, faithful reconstruction of the formula, but we would not have problematised it. Pareyson — and, it is tempting to think, a good part of the hermeneutics inspired by his work[4] — did not altogether confront the many problematic consequences which might be derived from such a formulation. If it is the case, as many advocates of hermeneutics aver, that the truth can only be interpreted, this claim itself asserts that it is not an interpretation. To use the oldest possible logical rejoinder, which is still perfectly valid: an assertion affirming the absolute interpretability of the truth does not subject itself to what it asserts. In other words, it arises as the 'form' and theory of a content to which it does not itself belong, to which it is not subject, and consequently from which, despite its intentions, it emerges as the sole, absolute, and uninterpretable truth. The problematic implication which this assertion encounters cannot be evaded. If truth, understood as a cogent and unitary 'form', is distinct from the declared truth, understood as an infinitely varied and changeable 'content', how are we to reconcile the asserting form with the asserted content? The greatest possible division and dysfunction arise between them. But form is such only insofar as it is the form of a particular content, and vice versa. Here, on closer inspection, we find ourselves

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[3] Pareyson vehemently attacks the relativisation of the truth, its infinite plurality dissolving itself and depending on a subject which glides over itself: 'this way, interpretation would be limited to the realm of the arbitrary and approximate: the indifferent relativity of the realm of the debatable on the one side, and the shortcomings of a superficial and distorting knowledge on the other' (Pareyson, 2013[1975], p. 50). Importantly, he also refused the spiritualistic, intimist interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of truth's interiority to the human mind, in favour of its 'ontological interpretation' (ibid., p. 224n).

[4] Pareyson's position nonetheless stands out precisely for its originality in proposing to join interpretation to truth. Gianni Vattimo, for instance, encountered 'in Pareyson's relationship with hermeneutics the concern that it looked too much like a philosophy of culture, based solely on the fact that everything is interpretation, everything goes' (Vattimo, 1996, p. 47). Impatient with hermeneutics as a 'vague', overly 'friendly' discipline lacking 'substance', Vattimo emphasised: 'The thing that makes me think about all this is the question of the drama of the interpretive act in Pareyson, and of the apparent or real drama of this act in other hermeneutic theorists I have read' (ibid., p. 48). For instance, Gadamer (and others) do not theorise the dramatic possibility of the failure of interpretation. According to Vattimo, such failure is crucial, 'a sign of a more general situation, that hermeneutics, thus translated and urbanised, may have betrayed one of its basic reference points, which was not only the dispute over *Natur* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, but also its existentialist origins. Existentialism does not seem to resonate in today's hermeneutics, in the sense of that philosophy of authenticity, of choice, of alternatives, of the distinction between true and false, good and evil, in short positive and negative which existentialism contains and which Pareyson preserves' (ibid., pp. 49–50). Roberto Sega has argued that the 'disconcerting fact' of Pareyson's almost complete absence from the most 'authoritative and credible' accounts of the history of hermeneutics, and his very low profile among the non-specialist public, is highly symptomatic: 'This state of affairs probably depends on the underlying character of Pareyson's speculative proposal — a thought which proclaimed existentialism and yielded nothing to fashion or to passing trends, which was anything but easy and accommodating because it was harsh, resolute, clear in its positions, and foreign to 'every irenic attitude and/or spirit of conciliation'' (Sega, 2000, pp. 69–70).

with 'two' truths, separated from one another by a chasm. But truth is not divided into two truths, that of form and that of content, and it is certainly not divided into two truths which are opposed to one another.

And if truth is 'unique', as Pareyson claims, how can we avoid precisely the thing he most wanted to avoid — that is, truth's multiplication and subjectivation, its fragmentation into interpretations that succeed one another *ad infinitum*? The problem is particularly acute because Pareyson speaks of truth as both 'unique' and 'inexhaustible'. Importantly, we find the same idea phrased in the following terms: '*There is only ever revelation of the inexhaustible, and of the inexhaustible there can be nothing but a revelation*' (ibid., p. 20). It is as though the substitution of 'unique' for 'inexhaustible' were simply a matter of using different words to designate the same concept, rather than implying grave problems and a profound irreconcilability. Finally, if truth is 'transcendent', how are we to reconcile the 'fact' of its formulation with that of its 'incarnation'? It is no accident that 'fact' is the word deployed at this point: the depth of the paradox emerges here at the theological level whilst also causing problems on the ontological plane — this latter is the level to which Pareyson wants to restrict speech, and here there are no 'facts' the possibility of which should not be critically investigated.

We should now turn to the second proposition within Pareyson's formula, the consequences of which are even more subtle and dramatic than the first.

As further evidence of Pareyson's wish to exclude all relativism, he says that every human act, practical or theoretical, 'humble' or 'high', has the same character: whether he betrays it or 'witnesses' it, whether he accepts it or refuses it, man is always 'faced with' the truth. This is the bluntly paradoxical aspect of a truth which is unique, immeasurable, and ungraspable, but which nonetheless exists and acts in a radically normative, cogent, and exclusive form. Its interpretations may be infinite, but none will ever escape the bond of ontological necessity, which had previously displayed showed only its character of sympathetic affinity but now appears as an inexorable judge, fatally declaring interpretations to be true or false. Nor will any interpretation ever finally succeed, even one that pretended to deny the foundation, or to escape it. The hermeneutic link between person and truth is ontological, and this determines both its originality and its indissolubility: 'there is no interpretation except of truth'.

Since the second proposition leads to the same problems as the first, which we need not revisit here, we should emphasise the striking drama and originality of Pareyson's conclusion, which, having taken the interpretability of the truth as a premise, does not shy away from a consequence that is far from obvious, peaceful, or comforting, regarding man's 'constraint' in the face of it. From this point of view, Pareyson's 'ontological pluralism', instead of concluding, easily and peacefully, with a free and ultimately indifferent interpretation, 'binds' this freedom to the foundation, to the 'necessity' of being free without being arbitrary. More precisely, it binds the will to the foundation; the will deceives itself into thinking that it can escape from this.

Expressive thought and revealing thought: revelation and denial of the ontological relationship

It is through the analysis of this formula — its depth and the problems underlying it — that the genuine core of Pareyson's work may properly be addressed. This is the clear, categorical distinction and contrast between 'expressive thought' and 'revelatory thought'. The distinction is made not just on the level of speculation, but — in line with the assumption of the universality and co-essentiality of the two terms of the hermeneutic/ontological relationship — with every act. It

> constitutes a dilemma that faces human beings in all of their activities. Human beings must choose to be history or to have history, must choose to be identified with their own situation or to make it a means for obtaining the origin, must choose to renounce truth or to give it an unrepeatable revelation. (Ibid., p. 14)

Based on this passage, we might conjecture that both possibilities — including the renunciation of truth — are 'before' the truth. 'Before' the truth: this is where the profound drama of Pareyson's position plays itself out. But this necessarily implies that, if both possibilities, revelation and of renunciation, lie before the truth, then the truth will find itself before them. From this we arrive at the consequence already noted, and to which we shall return: the truth that is 'before' us, to be revealed or denied, risks losing the transcendence, uniqueness, and difference that are supposedly characteristic of it, and assuming the status of an entity — or, rather, as 'identical' to the entity which it 'faces'. Only an entity can indeed be affirmed or denied. If we want to argue that Being is enclosed in the 'mystery' of the singular entity, we also have to admit that every entity contains within it the same Being and the same mystery. With this we lose not just the entity's uniqueness and singularity, along with the mystery we were trying to preserve, but also Being itself, which is now forced to be identical in everything. This identity leads inevitably to one of two mutually exclusive consequences: either Being is the 'identical', which refuses to be enclosed in a fact or in infinite facts — in which case entities disappear — or else entities are such that Being is a mere word.

This dilemma, Pareyson argues, is resolved through a free choice. Freedom has a 'very special nature' — the investigation of which he has 'only deferred' for now — which characterises both man's being and his relationship with Being. The person, originally rooted in Being, can see in his own situation a merely historical position, a fatal limitation and an inexorable boundary, or else a metaphysical position and a means of access to the truth. Truth, Pareyson argues, is not that which is found and discovered by a subject overlapping with it; nor is it what the person disappears into in an impossible attempt at depersonalisation. It is not self-sufficient and absolutised egoism, because the means of access becomes an

impediment and obstruction; nor is it the disappearance of the person, because the person is the only means of access. The deformation, covering-up, or alteration of the truth will not be seen in the person to whom it is entrusted; the truth will surrender and reveal itself to precisely the same measure in which it too, as the person's only 'revelatory organ', is expressed and exposed. As Pareyson writes:

> Thought that starts from this originary solidarity of person and truth is at the same time ontological and personal, and therefore at the same time revelatory and expressive. Such thought *expresses the person in the act of revealing truth and reveals truth to the degree that it expresses the person.* (Ibid., p. 15)

He concludes: 'The complete harmony that reigns over saying, revealing, and expressing therefore characterises revelatory thought — saying is, at the same time and inseparably, to reveal and to express' (ibid., p. 16). The truth of the ontological relationship is preserved by speaking 'revelatory thought', which, avoiding the opposing reefs of complete explanation and ineffable silence, is neither infinitely distant nor exhaustive, making itself guarantor and guardian of the paradox of the infinite transcendence of ontological truth, whose presence is always grasped as ulterior and different. As further proof of this, the ambiguous oscillation between the truth that the ontological relationship is in itself, and the truth to which it refers, while intentional, runs the logical risk of flattening and confusing the two truths (assuming we can legitimately speak of two truths here).

If, on the contrary, the person does not recognise the radical difference of ontological truth, or disregards the ontological relationship, the person ceases to be its guarantor or guardian and inevitably degenerates into a mere historical product, destined only to 'express' its own time without being able to 'reveal' it.

As Pareyson writes, 'the truth disappears, leaving thought empty and unanchored, and the person also disappears, reduced to a mere historical situation'. Pareyson claims that speaking expressive thought, which expresses without revealing, here manifests a latent function of mystification and concealment: 'The harmony among saying, revealing, and expressing breaks, and all relations become distorted and profoundly altered' (ibid.). The harmonious, almost 'magical' balance between expression and revelation that characterises revelatory thought is so perverted and corrupted in this case that it can lead to a genuine 'divorce' between the truth and the person.

Incidentally, expressive thought is clearly analogous to what Pareyson defined in *L'Ontologia della libertà* (*The Ontology of Freedom*) as 'mythological thought', the type of expression which conceptualises and eternalises mere historical and pragmatic manifestations, giving them the appearance of timeless, absolute and abstract universality. This operation in fact arises from a free denial of the truth, an 'act of bad faith' by which a person refuses to recognise the truth and claims to rise above it. It should however be noted that this divorce implies the

possibility of a final parting; since the ontological relationship is indissoluble, it would have been more appropriate to speak of 'separation'. On the one hand, Pareyson wants to preserve truth's power to free itself from the human world; on the other, he also wants the person to be understood as the site of the advent of truth, whether in revelation or expression, good or bad, and bind the person to the truth just as much as truth is bound to the person. The obvious danger of this approach is that the two will become indistinguishable.

The unsaid between the implicit and the insinuated

Pareyson notes that in both types of thought there exists a gap between the said and the unsaid. In the case of revelatory thought, however, 'the word reveals much more than what it says'. It is revelatory and eloquent, in that it speaks the truth that resides eternally within it: 'here *legein* [saying] is *sēmainein* [meaning or signifying]' (ibid., p. 19). It is rooted in and nourished by a single source, which constitutes an incessant radiation of meaning, so that the unsaid is present in the word itself as an inexhaustible, implicit element that can be infinitely interpreted (and not demythologised). In expressive thought, by contrast, the interval between said and unsaid is a concealing one: 'the word says one thing but means another' (ibid., p. 18). Speech presents itself as a transparent conceptual construction, with the unsaid lying outside of it. It is the disguised expression of a merely historical and personal situation: the *legein* of the expressive thought is a *kryptein* and the word does not 'illuminate' but covers up and hides an insinuated element — not an implicit one — which is to be demythologised rather than interpreted, and this is achieved by offering a complete coherent explanation of it. On one hand the unsaid refers to the implicit inexhaustible to be interpreted, while on the other, it refers to the insinuated and merely historical, personal situation to be demystified.

Expressive thought, finally, inevitably lends itself to instrumental purposes, and Pareyson identifies it with 'ideology'; it is for this that the corrosive theoretical approach of the 'masters of suspicion' can, and indeed must, be reserved. If the understanding of an ideology is limited to its deconstruction, or to the discovery and unmasking of the *insinuated*, of *unconscious bases* and *hidden expression*, then the understanding of a philosophy will amount to an infinite interpretation that 'consists in the unending deepening of a *discourse rendered inexhaustible by an infinite presence*' (ibid., p. 99).

Ultimately, it is the person who decides between ideology and philosophy, between expressive and revelatory thought — a choice which presents itself as a genuine 'existential dilemma'. The person can freely decide whether to affirm his original ontological openness and its constitutive opening up to Being, or, vice versa, to deny that he constitutes a relationship, thus elevating himself to a closed, self-referential ipseity. *Truth is entirely in the hands of human freedom.* But, as Pareyson points out,

the act through which freedom decides for or against Being is also the act by which it decides to either confirm itself or deny itself because it is a matter of confirming or rejecting the ontological relation that constitutes the very being of the human beings. Freedom is so tied to Being that freedom validates Being through its own decision for or against it, and it affirms it, albeit in the form of a betrayal, even when it rejects it, thereby negating and destroying itself. (Ibid., p. 43)

'There is no interpretation if not of truth': the act of confirming or negating Being is constituted by the act of confirming or negating one's own being. The ontological-hermeneutic relationship is indissoluble because the two acts of acceptance and rejection, revelation and expression, both serve — if only *sub contraria specie* — as witnesses and even protagonists with respect to the truth to which the relationship is inexorably connected and to which it refers. Failed interpretation, then, is a much more dramatic sign than a mere 'failure': exercising this freedom is connected to the possibility of error and evil, the *positive reality of whose negation* Pareyson argues for. He emphasises once again ideology's characteristic denial of the ontological and of truth — evil is willed intentionally, in its paradoxical and terrible, positive reality. For Pareyson, 'this is a point where the philosopher must abandon any irenic intention and cooperative spirit' (ibid., p. 124); he attacks those

> well-known theories aimed at making error and evil disappear, as with a roll of the dice, either because they would be dialectical moments necessary for truth and the good, or because they cannot sustain themselves, and should be in some way supported by truth and goodness, if only by taking on their appearance or assuming their intent because it does not seem seriously probable that human beings could consciously and intentionally want evil and error. At this point, one could begin a discussion on the reality of error and evil that would in itself require an endless treatment if it were to be sufficient, let alone exhaustive. (Ibid., p. 124)

Freedom and Evil: The contradiction of foundation and founded

The endless discussion of evil is 'deferred', just as that of freedom was. We have to wait for *L'Ontologia della libertà* for Pareyson's treatment of these topics. In the meantime, Pareyson opposes those interpretations which see error and evil as mere dialectical moments, necessary for truth and goodness, arguing instead that the 'positive outcome that they can have is completely external to their character of falsehood and wickedness and is in no way either the result of some internal process or the coherence of a logic immanent to them' (ibid.). Further, the fact that the human formulation of the true and the human practice of the good presupposes the possibility of error and evil, is the most general sign of

that situation of *insecuritas* [uncertainty], precariousness and risk, that comprises the essentially tragic nature of the human condition, *which realises the positive only within an act that contains the constant and effective possibility of the negative*, to the point that *the suppression of the possibility of evil would not be possible if not as the suppression of freedom itself*, that is, as the suppression of the unique source through which human beings are capable of realising the good and being worthy of praise. (Ibid., p. 125)

Freedom is a tragic experience because it is constitutively 'double', a closely-woven indissolubility of good and evil which, in its negativity, is always, if not absolutely, a positive and effective exercise. Evil and error have a 'parodic, simulative' character. They are counterfeits and caricatures of truth and goodness. Evil's character makes it more accessible and 'familiar'. Pareyson warns that this

> still depends on the tragic character of the human condition, which is expressed in the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the human being, caught between opposites and strained between extremes [...] human nature is ambiguous in itself, able to [...] even *turn not only good into evil* [...] *but also evil into good,* as when the overwhelming power of conversion reveals and announces itself right in the soul of the most obstinate sinner, or as when, speaking in Barth's terms, one finds ecstasy in the trivial. (Ibid., 125–6)

It is only in *L'Ontologia della libertà*, however, that Pareyson regards freedom as the originary principle, rather than Being, as is the case in *Verità e interpretazione*. But this does not solve every problem; more will emerge, with serious consequences. To mention just one of these, already present in the passages quoted above: while Pareyson senses that a privative conception of evil leads only to a softening that smooths over its scandal and dread, and affirms against tradition that evil understood as a necessary 'part' or 'moment' of the good becomes itself a good, he does not see the problem of claiming both good and evil in their existing, positive reality.

From this point of view, good and evil can be differentiated empirically but not at that ontological level on which one existing, positive reality is indistinguishable from any other, save axiologically. It is no accident that the dialectical and implicative structure of this freedom becomes not only necessary from this point of view — it is free to choose good only when the freedom to choose evil is present — but, problematically, it reveals itself to be founded on what it should itself be. Indeed, it cannot serve as a foundation by itself, but only on the basis of evil. It is only the implicative, dialectical foundation structuring it that enables it to call itself a foundation. It thereby becomes 'structure', not freedom, declining from a foundation into something founded — or rather, like evil, it is as much foundation as founded.

It is no accident that we have spoken here of evil, rather than good: the good achieves reality only insofar as it vanquishes and overcomes evil, which as an inevitable consequence seems to acquire a complex logical priority. This is not to defend any sort of trivial, foolish 'supremacy' of evil, but only to point out the logical danger threatening both freedom and evil, both of which are established, contrary to Pareyson's intention, as both foundation and founded. Importantly, the suppression of evil may be obtained only by suppressing freedom, and the positive is achieved only when the negative is conquered.[5]

Importantly, Pareyson goes on to argue that choosing truth implies — against any contemplativism that allegedly follows from the derivative distinction between theory and practice, objectivity and subjectivity — a genuine 'ethics of testimony' (Pareyson, 1975, p. 107) by which a person's original act of accepting Being may be transformed into life and action. The undoubted theological and religious significance of this phrase is accompanied, on the side diametrically opposed to it, by another. Pareyson declares that inauthentic thought is 'still susceptible to a *speculative redemption*' (ibid., p. 104). As we have said, error and evil are constitutively negative statements of the same truth aimed at by the good.[6]

Yet in spite of this eventual redemption, Pareyson is unwilling to allow any compromise between philosophy and ideology.[7] Indeed, he emphasises that the contrast between them is 'metaphilosophical', serving as a metahistorical and ontological point of distinction. Pareyson rightly rejects the demand for criteria to specifically distinguish the one from the other as 'pseudophilosophical':

> One cannot expect that from a definition — let's say a definition of art — there automatically follows a division between beautiful and ugly works, or successful and unsuccessful ones. This distinction, possible only on a case by case basis, is a single act of judgment, whose responsibility is not

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[5] For a more thorough discussion of these issues and related criticisms, see Bellocci, 2012.

[6] Incidentally, Pareyson seems to be thinking here of Schelling's remarks on error, which he understands as a voluntary distortion of the truth, present and traceable enough that it can be redeemed:

> Error is not something indifferent, no mere lack; it is a distortion of knowledge, it belongs to the category of evil [*male*], malaise [*malattia*]. If error were simply false — that is, without any truth — it would be harmless [...]. There is always something respectable in error, always something of the truth; but this deformation, this distortion of the truth, these traits of the original truth which are still recognisable, or at least obscurely perceptible in the most terrible of errors, give error its characteristic atrocity. (Schelling, 1974, p. 222)

[7] Pareyson recalls Dostoevsky's frequent use of the term 'idea', which designates two opposing realities: in one case, 'seeds of other worlds', in the other, the products of man, errant and fallen. *Demons* should be considered the genuine 'tragic novel of ideology; as such, it cannot be overlooked by anyone who takes the problem of ideology seriously from a philosophical point of view' (Pareyson, 1975, p. 170).

attributable to a *definition assumed as a criterion,* but to the person who makes the judgement. (Ibid., p. 116)[8]

'Mystique of the ineffable' in Heidegger and 'ontology of the inexhaustible' in Pareyson

Before examining the problems which arise from these remarks, we should come back to something mentioned at the outset of this essay: that all of Pareyson's writings take Heidegger (and Hegel) to be among his major 'adversaries' as well as his privileged interlocutors. By identifying Being and nothingness, Pareyson argues that Heidegger fell into a form of 'ineffability', denying that the truth could be reached positively. If, with good reason, one denies that truth has the nature of an object standing open to view, this does not mean that one has to keep silent about its natural site. We have already seen how Pareyson claims a revelatory character for the person and the word; while 'attentive' to their speech, he believes he must continue 'beyond the impasse of negative ontology into which he [Heidegger] has unfortunately and hopelessly forced it' (ibid., p. 117).

We must avoid the 'blind alley' into which philosophy has been led by Heidegger's proposal of 'a solely negative ontology and by rejecting the totality of Western philosophy from Parmenides to Nietzsche' (ibid., p. 5).[9] Heidegger thereby ended up concluding that

> *philosophical discourse disappears in silence* [...] *the possibility for an ethics is denied* [...] the rejection of all of Western thought becomes an invitation to total revolution rather than a solicitation to remember that *at each point of the historical process there exists an alternative between positive and negative, and that the most important thing is freely to make the former*

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[8] No wonder such an approach is inconceivable to those who stay within the remit of classical ethical intellectualism. This position is exemplified by Giovanni Santinello, who argues that the distinction between the two attitudes 'can be sustained at the level of philosophies, not at the level of meta-philosophy; otherwise, we would have to radicalise the problem, admitting that we can deliberately choose error, with the aggravating factor, of course, of also knowing what the truth would be' (Santinello, 1972, p. 182).

[9] Ugo Maria Ugazio clearly identified the gap between the two thinkers which already existed at the very beginning of Pareyson's thinking: 'When Pareyson grasped the specificity of Heidegger's existentialism in the distinction between existential and existentiell, he simultaneously grasped the point at which the path he wanted to take diverged from Heidegger's' (Ugazio, 1989, p. 100).

> Pareyson proceeds from a modern point of view, and so does not need to set aside modernity and the history leading up to it in order to access the germinal point of existence [...] because in modernity he already recognises the effort to keep the relationship with the transcendent open [. . .]. Heidegger, however, did not recognise this new beginning of thought in modernity, and so had to defend the originary against the whole history of thought, particularly against modern thought and therefore inevitably also against Christianity. (Ibid., p. 101)

prevail over the latter [...] *ignoring the personalistic aspect that is inseparable from a genuine ontology*, he ultimately alters the relations between Being and time, between the atemporal and history. (Ibid., p. 5)

The spiritualistic character that marks Pareyson's personalism is all too visible here — the very same thing that will always mark a radical, perhaps deliberate distance from Heidegger's thought. This should not be misunderstood as a sort of sickly-sweet moralism; Pareyson quite consciously accepts some of the fundamental requirements of Heidegger's thought: for instance, he embraces the Heideggerian critique of Being conceived as value:

> *Understanding Being as value turns everything upside down:* Being is then subordinated to human needs and human beings are released from the service of Being; as a result, *Being depreciates and falls into oblivion, whereas human beings are degraded and consigned to the negative.* [...] [W]hen humanity strives to make itself super-human [*superuomo*], its destiny is to become nothing but sub-human [*subuomo*]. (Ibid., p. 36)

In the same way, Pareyson proposes his own Heideggerian conception of 'ontological difference' — 'to interpret is to transcend' — whose true precursor was Karl Barth, in Pareyson's early reading (God as distinct from the greatness of the world, and indeed distinct from himself and in himself).[10] But the eternal crushes time conceived as its fatal, inexorable betrayal and oblivion. Pareyson's project is, once again, to show how the difference between Being and entity in Heidegger emphasises the first of these to such an extent that the second disappears, rendering ethics impossible. Pareyson's polemical reading of Heidegger should be understood from this point of view — a reading which, leaving aside the question of the intention driving it, is clearly not just questionable but in many ways unacceptable. What sense does it make, from a Heideggerian perspective, to

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[10] Pareyson, 1943/2002. Pareyson claims in this essay that God's primary characteristics are irrelativity and absolute transcendence. In this moment God is everything, and 'facing' him, man is only nothingness, because nothing can be contemplated outside of him. Yet God chooses, with a 'gift', to become relativised, part of the ontological relationship which man consists in. Pareyson warned, ambiguously, that if God, as something relative, seemed to be a comforter and completion of the human world, in his contrasting irrelative character, the latter disappeared; the person who stopped at this secondary moment of relativisation would be mistaken in thinking they could grasp God, for in truth they are capable only of attaining a merely 'human greatness'. This was a highly consequential point because, on closer inspection, it did not just bring into question the spiritualistic God, but pointed out that the relative God was derivative of a first moment where, faced with the absolute, nothing could subsist. Of course, while in Barth the irrelative, free, arbitrary God is relativised through a dialectical modality, appearing as the God of good and evil, anger and mercy, in Pareyson he is relativised so as to appear in a much more placid, reassuring mode. But Pareyson certainly made the distinction between the two moments. Importantly, it re-emerged just after his discovery of Schelling; Barth's dialectical God came on the scene in *L'Ontologia della libertà*.

reproach him for having neglected or made impossible the need for a foundation of the person, an ethics, and a consequent division between the positive and the negative in history? From this Heideggerian point of view, these remarks would belong to the very 'humanism' which Heidegger set himself to criticise from the very beginning. Heidegger's concern was to put the question of Being and its meaning at the centre of philosophical attention because he considered it to have been forgotten, especially by humanistic discourses. An ethical and personalistic conception would once again make it subordinate to man's needs. But Pareyson's distinction between 'revolution' and 'tradition' must precisely be understood in the light of the personalist concern to find a different way of conceiving ontological difference. The revolution Heidegger brought about is located, with respect to tradition, on an ontic, secondary, and derived level:

> First of all, revolution wants to start again from the *beginning*, whereas tradition is a continual recovery of the *origin.* The true object of a revolutionary stance is the *past* as such, whereas in tradition it is above all *Being.* Revolution longs for a new beginning *in time*, whereas tradition refers to the origin when only a regeneration *of time* can come. (Ibid., p. 42)

'Ontological renewal' belongs to tradition, which is placed between time and eternity, 'at the heart of the temporal advent of Being' (ibid., p. 41). Because of its proximity to Being, tradition is 'perennial regeneration', and it should not be confused, Pareyson emphasises, with 'conservation' or 'historical durability', because 'truth is neither effective nor recognised in the human world, and evil is often more popular and successful than the good' (ibid., p. 36) — 'whole epochs remain devoid of truth'. Moreover, the Heideggerian conception conceals ontic differences and levels out historical epochs onto the same plane of forgetfulness, involuntarily leading to a return to precisely that absolute knowledge which he had apparently eradicated: 'The philosophical exaltation of mystery, of silence, and of the cipher, risks being a simple overturning of the rationalistic cult of the explicit and preserving all of the nostalgia for it' (ibid., p. 23.

If Heideggerian Being withdraws into a purely negative movement, identifying itself with nothingness, Pareyson conceives of Being as a 'shapeless presence', an overabundance of light, a radiation of meaning. This stimulates and nourishes the interpretation it is subject to and with which it even identifies itself, but its infinite, radical difference means that it never exhausts itself in it:

> inexhaustibility is that thanks to which, instead of presenting itself under the false appearance of concealment, absence, or obscurity, ulteriority shows its true origin, that is, its richness, fullness, and excess, through its inexhaustibility: not nothingness, but Being [...], not *Abgrund* [abyss], but *Ungrund* [ungrounded ground]. (Ibid, p. 24)

Pareyson recalls a number of analogies with the work of art, which, 'far from dissolving in a plurality of arbitrary performances, remains the same work while entrusting itself to always newer interpretations that know how to grasp and render it, and while coinciding with them' (ibid., p. 39). As we can see, the theme of truth returns unchanged; remaining unitary, it is also inexhaustible, and preserves its integrity intact across time, incarnating itself in an entity, a 'work', in order then to return to itself. We have already seen some of the problems underlying Pareyson's remarks about 'ontological difference': here we want only to emphasise once more how Pareyson wishes to put himself in a position that is just as original as Heidegger's, while opposing a movement that, according to him, would fatally compromise the possibility of safeguarding Being and entities, ontological difference and the person, ontology and ethics. As we have seen, he says nothing about the very problematic nature of these distinctions

Original freedom in Schelling and ontological personalism in Pareyson

While the character of 'tradition' in Pareyson is emphatically personalistic, it should not be misunderstood as 'traditionalistic'. The proof of this lies in an interpretive, historiographic move that is uncommonly original and innovative. For 'confirmation' of the 'ontology of the inexhaustible' which he has proposed, Pareyson turns to Schelling, whom he interprets as a 'post-Hegelian' and a 'post-Heideggerian' thinker.

Schelling tried to overcome the double danger of, on the one hand, a total explicitation of the truth, and on the other, an avowal of its complete inexpressibility (and so avoid the outcomes of Hegelian and Heideggerian speculation): 'in essence, Schelling wants to avoid both mystical negative ontology and also Hegelian explicated ontology [...]. [T]o such an end, Schelling proposes a dialectic that neither ends with not knowing nor blooms into absolute knowledge' (ibid., p. 143). Above all, in Schelling's Erlangen lectures, there arises 'the demand to transform the concept of the indefinable and the ineffable into that of the originary and the inexhaustible' (ibid., p. 142). Schelling anticipates Heidegger's ontological difference but eludes the impasses of both negative and explicit ontology.

Being is incarnated in history, which it takes as its site. It resides there without identifying itself with it and is therefore able tragically to abandon it.[11] This power of incarnation and disengagement, affirmation and negation, belongs to being

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[11] The positive is given by the freedom 'to be or not enclosed in a form' (ibid., p. 146). See also Schelling, 1974, p. 205. Pareyson notes that Schelling's move is the same as one made by Plotinus, for whom the primordial principle is the 'formless' from which every form derives. Pareyson points especially to the eighth treatise of Plotinus' Sixth Ennead (ibid., pp. 249–50n). Gian Franco Frigo has emphasised how Pareyson's interpretation of Schelling — which is capable of wholly renewing Italian historiography in the direction indicated by Walter Schulz, Heidegger, and Jaspers — transcends 'the scope of pure historiography, becoming a constitutive part of the development of his own thought, with implications of the greatest importance' (Frigo, 1979, p. 473).

conceived along the lines of 'eternal freedom'. But it is only in *L'Ontologia della libertà* that Pareyson will claim Schelling's concept of Being as his own, with all of the consequences that this leads to. (These, as we have seen, are in themselves highly problematic.) He no longer describes it as 'inexhaustible Being', but 'originary freedom': the 'absolute subject' should be understood as 'power', 'will', a freedom which, if truly free, is also absolute, and therefore free not to be free, being able to deny itself. In this lies its Janus-faced, dialectical nature:

> *The subject is, indeed, eternal freedom, but not in such a way that it is not also capable of not being it* [...]. [I]*t is pure, absolute freedom itself. In fact, if it were freedom only so that it could not even become non-liberty, so as to be forced to remain freedom, then freedom itself would be a limitation, a necessity for it, and so would not be truly absolute freedom.* (Ibid., p. 167)

This is a very important clue and 'symptom': since it is clear how the ontological personalism of *Verità e interpretazione* can only incorporate some of these motifs from Schelling, for internal and structural reasons: it evades the tragic themes of negation, contradiction, duplicity — precisely those things which will serve as first principles in *L'Ontologia della libertà*. According to Pareyson himself, it is necessary that Being (declined as we have seen in positive and moral terms) is conceived as originary freedom; only in this way can the negative aspects of reality be traced back to their first roots. It is no coincidence that in *L'Ontologia della libertà* personalism will be completely relegated to the background. Pareyson will maintain that philosophy really can deal with the problem of God, freedom and evil to the extent that it no longer considers them purely philosophical or ethical problems, but looks at religious experience (in particular, Christian experience) as a source, before these problems are present in their reality. Philosophy, then, must be reconceived as a 'philosophical hermeneutics of Christianity'.

It should be noted that, in spite of the reference to Schelling, *Truth and Interpretation's* primary conceptual inspiration comes from a youthful, purely Barthian movement. Pareyson never tires of repeating that formless, shapeless truth lies at the origin of the historical and personal formulation he gives to it, and which resides in the 'form' or the shape, coinciding with it whilst not quite resolving itself into it. Interpretation, indeed, takes on the deliberately paradoxical status of 'the possession of an infinite' (ibid., p. 39): it is characterised by its absolute, unstoppable difference.

This is the peculiar dialectic of *Tempo ed Eternità* (*Time and Eternity*), a youthful essay where Barth's influence is particularly powerful: 'as in the essay *Tempo ed Eternità*, the irrelative establishes the relationship and is in the relationship, just as in *Verità e interpretazione*, truth is in interpretation and coincides with it, even if it is not exhausted by it' (Furnari, 1994, p. 145). But Pareyson agrees with Barth that the irrelative which establishes the relationship, and which it enters as one of the two poles of the ontological relationship, does not

coincide with it because, as irrelative, nothing can subsist which faces it.

This concept leads to a series of problems for Pareyson's ambiguous oscillation between the truth that is unitary, with nothing 'before' it, and the truth that becomes part of the ontological relationship. Certainly, the 'two' truths do not coincide; Pareyson himself warned in the essay against confusing them, since this would risk falling back into a spiritualistic conception that misleads us regarding truth's primary nature, and which granted no sympathetic affinity to humanity because it could not even be contemplated.[12]

Indeed, the paradox of unitary, transcendent, inexhaustible truth, which establishes the relationship, coincides with the shape that embodies it, and then either passes into other shapes or, abandoning all shape, returns to itself, finds its greatest depth at the theological level. It inevitably becomes problematic at that ontological level, which is in fact the only one that ultimately interests Pareyson here. Here, it acquires the character of a 'fact' — certainly suggestive, but with no critical investigation about its possibility. It should be explained how it is possible that the unrelative is relativised, that truth is both transcendent and at the same time immanent and 'incarnated'. Finally it should explained how it is possible that truth can be unique whilst delivering itself over to different figures and interpretations.

On the other hand, Pareyson's 'personalistic concern' is to safeguard his own 'ontology of the inexhaustible' against the Hegelian claim to know a complete totality, and against the Heideggerian claim to a negative ontology and a 'mystique of the ineffable' — that is, to safeguard the positive nature and infinite richness of the foundation, keeping person and Being, personalism and ontology together in perfect balance.

It is no accident that the descriptors Pareyson uses for revelatory thought, or for the person who chooses the good and the truth, approach absurdity: 'revelatory lighthouse', 'receiving antenna', 'keeper of the truth', 'tuning apparatus', 'truth-penetrating organ', and so on. Importantly, the terms reserved for the person who 'reveals' match up with those attributed to Being itself: it is 'source and origin', 'stimulus of an interminable explication', 'inexhaustible source of discourses and meanings', 'inexhaustible origin', 'superabundance of light' and 'illuminating richness'.

The danger Pareyson courts is clear: the person acquires the same distinctive characteristics as Being — or, at least, insofar as the person approaches Being, which takes away from him what was supposed to be his primary characteristic, that of being metahistorical and transcendent. From this point of view, the person encapsulates the characteristics which Pareyson rebuked in the idealistic Ego, with its romantic, organicist overtones; in specular fashion, Being tends to appear as an entity, and the ontological difference which Pareyson so valiantly defended is at risk of being lost.

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[12] See note 9 above.

The problem of the distinction between revelatory thought and expressive thought

Furthermore, Pareyson seems not to attend to a fundamental problem underlying the distinction between the two types of thought, revelatory and expressive. The distinction between revelation and expression, as we have seen, is metahistorical and metaphilosophical, an ontological 'criterion' for distinguishing between true and false, good and evil. But if the criterion for distinction is true in itself, it cannot differentiate between and include within itself the truth of revelatory thought, or the falsity of expressive thought. In the first case, truth becomes divided into the greater truth of the criterion and the lesser truth of the revelatory thought contained therein; on this view, Being is both greater and lesser than itself. In the second case, the truth would include the false within itself; on this view, it would still be divided, and would not be truth. The false, in fact, made 'part' of truth, would be true. Yet truth does not distinguish itself into parts, otherwise it would not only be greater and less than itself, but all of its parts would be true. The objection proposed here should not be misunderstood as 'formalistic'. It moves, in fact, on the same ground, that of truth itself. Pareyson in *L'Ontologia della libertà* will argue against those conceptions which make of evil a 'part' and a moment necessary to the achievement of the good, rendering evil itself a 'good'.

This last consideration, logically correct, was neither made as we have just shown on an ontological level of truth. In such a way, Pareyson reveals himself to belong at least partially to the dialectical tradition, which we have seen him criticising elsewhere.

The other option is that the criterion of distinction is neither true nor false. In the latter case, however, it would be a mere requirement and never the ontological criterion, which Pareyson nonetheless established without being troubled by the problems we have seen to infect it to its very roots.

Finally, if what Pareyson claims is true — that truth is available only through personal access to it — this would lead us to conclude that truth is unobtainable, and to what he himself defines in terms of an 'impossibility of comparison', characterising interpretation in general, between truth itself and its formulation.[13] On closer inspection, this problem challenges the very concept of interpreted truth: without the possibility of comparison, how can we trace its nature of truth? By what right can true and false interpretations be distinguished? The distinction between expressive and revelatory thought would be unfounded.

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[13] 'If truth only gives itself within a personal perspective that already interprets and determines it, a comparison between truth in-itself and its formulation within an interpretation is impossible' (Pareyson, 2013 [1975], p 21).

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Umberto Eco's Adventurous Orders:
A Critical Review–Essay on
Claudio Paolucci, *Umberto Eco: Tra Ordine e Avventura*
(Milan: Feltrinelli, 2017)

Lucio Angelo Privitello

> Reading the morning newspaper is the realist's morning prayer. One orients one's attitude toward the world either by God or by what the world is. The former gives as much security as the latter, in that one knows how one stands.
>
> G. W. F. Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 247

Umberto Eco masterfully navigated between this Hegelian *aut aut*. He knew how one can be taken in, entitled, and effortlessly drift into the apocalyptic censoring shore on one side, or manoeuvre towards integralism, academic control, and conspiracy, on the other, and how each churns currents even within itself. He sailed through these haunted straits with his nimble craft of truth — narration — and he did so with intellectual emancipation and cultural production as his goal. Narration gives the 'gift of the present', it gives flashes of Truth *(Verità)* that briefly illuminate our existence, and forge passages through those of others. Narrated moments grant a virtual *sostenuto* where life, and the social aspect of theory, is held in place, intractable, gifted, and where events fit together as in a great work of art, to which Charles Sanders Peirce compared the Universe.[1]

Even with his beloved Peirce, Eco would theoretically object to going this far. Instead, à la Foucault, he would turn and say: 'I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you'.[2] This was Eco's *summa*tion at the end of *Foucault's Pendulum,* the laughter in *The Name of the Rose,* his idea of a third type of intellectual (neither apocalyptic nor integrated), his sense of humour, and his moves through multiple cultural dimensions and domains. This is what we find in a mixture of reverence, erudition, and examples of a philosophical apprenticeship in Claudio

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[1] Peirce, 'The Seven Systems of Metaphysics', *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 2 (1893–1913), (EP2: 194).

[2] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 17.

Paolucci's recent book, *Umberto Eco: Tra Ordine e Avventura (Between Order and Adventure).*[3]

Paolucci's book is not an intellectual biography, nor a straightforward biography of Umberto Eco.[4] Paolucci also does not engage in polemics, sustained criticism of previous established studies, or essays on Eco, volumes of which are well on the way to becoming an encyclopaedia of their own, going back even further than Teresa de Lauretis's 1981 monograph.[5] We do find a surprising mention of — and retort to — Father Sommavilla's 1981 criticism of Eco's humour, irony, (and laughter) in *The Name of the Rose,* spread across seven pages. It gives away how far (and far back) a student's defence of their beloved mentor can go, especially when setting straight a misnaming of Eco's laughter as 'happy nihilism', 'that takes nothing seriously', where 'everything is equivalent to everything else' and is made so by this 'juggler of nothingness' (UE, 147–153).[6] We also find Paolucci's call for a 'third position' in reference to the debates surrounding Eco's semiotic–philosophical work. Do they constitute a distinct genre with respect to his novels and essays? (UE, 18, 226n14, and UE, 166–190).[7]

Paolucci mentions fifty-three texts by Eco, and skilfully uses most of them; others are left only as title references to key issues or concepts. The use of the recent

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[3] See Paolucci, UE, 93. Quotations and references from Paolucci's *Umberto Eco: Tra Ordine e Avventura* are cited parenthetically as UE plus the page number. All translations from Paolucci's text, untranslated texts by Eco, and Apollinaire's poem, are mine.

[4] Perhaps in years to come we may expect a series of volumes on Eco's lectures, drawings, letters, conversations, and transcribed videos, accompanied by a definitive biography similar to Nicholas Boyle's life of Goethe, which so far includes two volumes, with Volume 3 yet to come. Eco, no doubt, would cringe at the thought of such closure.

[5] There are two previous studies on Eco which readers may find highly instructive, which share in some of the spirit of Paolucci's text. One is by Francesca Pansa and Anna Vinci, entitled *Effetto Eco (The Eco Effect),* which adds some detail to Paolucci's account regarding Eco's intellectual and social ties, and employs interviews with fellow educators, intellectuals, and figures from Italian culture. The other, arranged as essays on the work of Eco, is edited by Patrizia Magli and entitled *Semiotica: Storia Teoria Interpretazione: Saggi Intorno a Umberto Eco.* Here, too, we find critical reflections on the many areas of Eco's work, something that Paolucci's texts covers very well, here written by those who taught alongside Eco, fellow philosophers, and, most importantly, many of his students. That they display the full breadth of a community of interpreters engaged with Eco prompts me to recommend these as direct ancestors of Paolucci's text.

[6] See Sommavilla, *'L'allegro nominalismo nichilistico di Umberto Eco'* (The Happy Nihilistic Nominalism of Umberto Eco), 502–507.

[7] On this issue, Eco has said plenty, and spoke of three categories of reader, beginning with his dust jacket blurb written for the first Italian edition of *Il Nome della Rosa*, in 1980 and most recently, in 2016, in his 'Intellectual Autobiography', 57–61, and responses to a few authors, found in the same volume, *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco,* 560–561, and 654–655. See also Eco, 'Writing from Left to Right', 1–32.

Pape Satàn Aleppe (February 2016), a collection of Eco's commentaries from 2000 to 2015, found on the back page of *L'Espresso*, entitled 'La Bustina di Minerva', while correctly described as Eco's active part in a *'guerriglia semiologica'*, leaves the reader wanting more. While this can be understood as a necessary restriction of sources, it leaves open the question of what should come next: we suggest a sustained study of how Eco, as Paolucci explains so well, uses the crisscrossing of dimensions in cultural productions and histories, between low–high (*elevation*), high–low (*fall, irony, laughter*), and high–low–low–high (*feedback*) (UE, 75–77).

It would be a daunting and unlimited task to cover the full breadth of Eco's works. What Paolucci has done is to give us an expansive view of Eco's development and production, whilst maintaining an intimate grasp of what is most alive and central in Eco's intellectual, pedagogic, and literary gifts. Paolucci's text does so without sacrificing what remains clearly encyclopaedic in Eco's range, interests, and influence. Paolucci clearly reveals what is distinctive in Eco's position as a continental philosopher who works within historical studies, and ultimately as a historian of culture. This is also how Eco described his own position, although he was well-versed and engaged in problems of analytic philosophy.

To stay true to this approach, this essay will be built around what I see as four integral parts of Paolucci's text, along with a brief conclusion. The first section will follow the theme of 'order and adventure' that makes up a living core of the text, and Paolucci's assessment of Eco's historical and theoretical weave. The second section will follow the emergence of a philosophical apprenticeship (Eco's mentorship of Paolucci), that gives the text its unmistakable humanity and vitality. The third section will engage with a few details of Paolucci's approach to Eco's works, and the fourth section will focus on the influence, use (and abuse) of Charles Sanders Peirce in Eco, along with Paolucci's critique.

1. INSOLITUS TEXERE INTER FALSUM VERUM

Part of the strange weave between the false and the true in Eco's work (UE, 14) was born from the dialectical struggle between order and adventure, *'legge e creatività'* (law and creativity), tradition and innovation, the past and the present. The subtitle of Paolucci's book, 'Between Order and Adventure' (*Tra Ordine e Avventura*), is borrowed from Apollinaire's 'La Jolie Rousse': it comprises a line that stands on its own, according to the definitive edition of Apollinaire's *Œuvres Poétiques* produced by the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paolucci believes that this dialectic between order and adventure is the most important tension throughout the works of Umberto Eco, and bursts forth in all its mature narrative strategies in *Foucault's Pendulum.* Paolucci's take rings true, especially when we consider the tripartite constitutive dimensions of Eco's approach; History, Theory, and Narration, and, more interestingly, when we

notice their inmixing throughout Eco's novels. The struggle between order and adventure, together with the reasons why such an inmixing was necessary, can be explained by reference to the problems of aesthetics, and in particular to what Eco called the *'germ of formativity'* (a ghost of Luigi Pareyson[8]), or that which halts a lavish disorder due to its work in progress. This 'poetics of openness' resists becoming a static 'poetics of art'. It does so by embracing the continuum of historicised life, and thus of interpretative indeterminacy and fallibilism.[9]

There is a clear sense that Eco wanted to save the raw experience of inference-less perception (*contra* Peirce), and found a way to *show* this (not *say* it) in his novels, which are a mix of cosmos, community, and continuity. As Eco objected to following Peirce all the way in this regard (a fact to which we shall return), he also objected to remaining within a particular historical period. This objection was a reaction to the expression of the medieval *summae*, in which one encounters the 'magisterial ease of a module of Order in which all is justified'. [10] Here, too, Paolucci correctly claims that all the works of Eco, beginning from his youthful, and intense, immersion in Thomas Aquinas, and love for the Middle Ages, will move between the poles of order and adventure (UE 47). Even in the later text, *Kant and the Platypus*, a deeply theoretical example of Eco's struggle to highlight the dominance of adventure over order, we witness his attempts to find some kind of rule, or module, within which to place this blessed creature (exemplified as a conceptual hybrid) that is inmixing incarnate.

From his earlier period and involvement at the RAI *(Radiotelevisione italiana)* of Milano (1954–58), Eco exploded on the scene with *The Open Work* (1962). It is here that we find him for the first time invoking several verses from Apollinaire's 'La Jolie Rousse' which act as a key note (like Jacopo Belbo's virtual note in *Foucault's Pendulum*), revealing not only the time for experimental techniques and cross-pollination of fields and theories, but a creative approach, reworked from Eco's religious crisis, the spell of the medieval *summae*, Pareysonian aesthetics, and

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[8] Luigi Pareyson (1918–1991) was one of Eco's professors at the University of Torino. Pareyson's range and influence on his students was profound, from his early (Christian) existentialist position, to his focus on hermeneutics, and his historically-minded activities, which he deployed in his theoretical studies, on aesthetics in particular. His understanding of 'formativity' and interpretation so akin to the artistic experience itself, is what set him apart from the aesthetics of Croce. Pareyson believed that philosophical thought is hermeneutical in the fullest sense, due to the way in which interpreting experience is simultaneously interpreting truth. For a rare photograph of Pareyson with both Eco and Gianni Vattimo, as well as a concise biography, see www.pareyson.unito.it/Par_vit.html (accessed 16th March 2018). (For more on Pareyson's work, see Andrea Bellocci's 'Interpretation and Demythologisation: The Problem of Truth in Luigi Pareyson's Hermeneutics' in the present volume.)

[9] Eco, 'Openness, Information, Communication', in *The Open Work*, 65, 21–23. See also Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, 1999: 97–98.

[10] See Eco in Paolucci (UE 47).

personalism à la Emmanuel Mounier.[11] *The Open Work* incarnates these verses of Apollinaire, more so than those used in Eco's text:

> We are not your enemies / We want to give you vast and strange domains / Where mysteries in flower spreads out for those who would pluck it / There where new fire of colours never seen before / A thousand imponderable phantasms / Which still need to be given of reality [...].

Paolucci should have cited these lines from Apollinaire's 'La Jolie Rousse' while reflecting on Eco's *The Open Work* (UE, 69), notwithstanding Eco's use of others in his first introduction to the 1962 Italian edition of *L'Opera Aperta*.[12]

In Eco's attempt to encompass different cultural domains, and to have them communicate and share their workings, we find his reliance on the idea of the global and local Encyclopaedia. In its global state, the encyclopaedia is an example of a grand adventure, one in which there is no meta-domain, but only a proliferation of forms, a rhizome as an open labyrinth. But in its local state, the encyclopaedia assumes the form of order, and theory (UE, 42, 119–120, 122, 172–173). This global–local, and local–global movement is one of Eco's distinctive theoretical characteristics.

Paolucci is correct in stating that 'the concrete enactment of the encyclopaedic model resides in [Eco's] novels' (UE, 173). This was experienced early on in Eco's career, but from the side of theory. When he was defending his dissertation on the problem of aesthetics in Thomas Aquinas, Eco's second committee member, Augusto Guzzo (1894–1986) raised the astute observation that '[in your dissertation] you have revealed [and kept] the various stages of your research as if it was an investigation, noting even false leads, hypotheses that you then eliminated; in contrast the mature scholar goes through this but then gives [his readers] only the conclusions' (UE, 44).

From what I see in Paolucci's texts, and in Eco's works, I believe that Eco realised that this astute criticism was not a limit (a negative realist's 'No!'), nor a hindrance, but rather that 'research is to be "told" in this way', and more importantly shown. Here too we notice a double use of fallibilism: both against the negative realist's 'No!' as well as towards the possibility of recognising stages of knowledge in (and from) a *continuum*. From then on, Eco practised this technique, so that his essays, articles, and theorising could, in some way, also satisfy his longer-running passion for narration (cf. Eco, *Sulla Letteratura*, 329–330).

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[11] See Emmanuel Mounier (1905–50), *Existentialist Philosophers*. Trans. E. Blow, London: Rockliff, 1948.

[12] Paolucci believes that Eco constructed *The Open Work* as a history of culture based upon the aesthetic object and domain. See UE, 68, and 229n10. These verses do not appear in the second edition, or in the English translation.

In Eco's hands, narration is a manoeuvre designed to avoid the loss of the initial, or spontaneous, flash of indeterminacy (the evanescent iconic variety of Firstness, a 'quality of feeling', as Peirce would see it).[13] Eco desired to hold on to that beautiful fleeting moment, and in Eco's novels, both homogeneity and variety are revealed to be on the side of adventure that may be couched in terms of orders.[14]

Eco remained deeply indebted to his Thomistic training, and that order (peppered with adventure and perhaps imaginary duels), prevails in his theorising, his semiotic interpretations, and his use of Peircean abduction, that is, interpretative inferences as spontaneous conjectures on various levels of a text (UE, 39, 176, 172). But within Eco's theorising, and his orders, we find his laughter, his doubting materialised, where what is closest to him is exposed, tested, and inspected for further possibilities of innovation.

Laughter was the first touch of adventure that a theory must withstand. All this was clearly noted in Eco's 1963 *Diario Minimo* (UE, 144–145). Laughter is the shaking up of order within which some truths 'must fall' (UE, 150), not where another truth, essence, or order arises (UE, 153). If a truth or an essence cannot withstand the critique of laughter, it must be re-formed (UE, 161–162). Humour and laughter, as Paolucci repeatedly tells us, constitute Eco's 'maieutic of possibilities' (UE, 163, 144), the constant thread that he weaves between order and adventure — in short, laughter is 'one of the most important notions within the works of Umberto Eco' (UE, 138, see also UE, 144, 188, 191).

What is lacking in Paolucci's account is, first of all, the mention and some use of Eco's 1998 text, *Between Lies and Irony* (*Tra menzogna e ironia*), which not only contains a microcosm of Eco's approach with respect to what comes between order and adventure, but in one of the four readings, 'Campanile: The Comic as Estrangement' *('Campanile: Il Comico come Straniamento'),* is a sustained investigation of the comic and humour.

Perhaps it is with Borges, Eco's anxiety of influence, that we should round this section off, and where, in commenting on the work of Apollinaire, Borges noted that, 'in the long run each individual adventure enriches the order of everyone and time legalises its innovation'.[15] This sounds so very Peircean, and also what will forever haunt Eco's literature of attics, the cult of antiquarian books, and the debris, dross, and detritus of a global encyclopaedia.

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[13] See Peirce 'A Guess at the Riddle', EP1: 257, 275, and especially 278. It is in 'The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Sciences' that Peirce would have interested — or perhaps did interest — Eco's counter-position, and in Eco's doubts about 'unlimited semiosis' concerning indeterminacy and interpretation. See Peirce, EP2: 394.

[14] As Eco paraphrased his character, William of Baskerville, 'there are many kinds of order, and all of them must be tried in order to reach some (provisional) solution', Eco in Rosso, 6.

[15] Borges in Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*, 246.

We now pass on to another section, and one which shows how the apprentice (in this case, Claudio Paolucci) learned from his *maestro,* and how Eco's individual adventure, and teachings, indeed enriched the order of what is most alive in a philosophical-cultural apprenticeship.

2. THE AURA OF A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRENTICESHIP

Recognition, reverence, and a demand that can be satisfied only later, commingle to form an emergence of the aura of a philosophical apprenticeship. Paolucci's text is a clear example of this. Umberto Eco was his mentor. Published within the Feltrinelli series entitled *'Eredi'* (Heirs), directed by the Italian (Lacanian) psychoanalyst, essayist, and pedagogue, Massimo Recalcati, we have a canvas with the right texture. This enables us to contemplate the gestures of acknowledged symbolic debt, scholarly details, and the highlights of a living heritage that Paolucci displays in his relation to his beloved *maestro,* Umberto Eco. There is an ethics to the shimmer of this aura. It aspires not only to future emergence, and heirs *(eredi),* but also to future works in the art of teaching, theorising, narrating, and living, exemplified by dedication and by a promise. There is a thread that ties together what is at stake here to what Eco saw in fiction, and its place in the domain of ethics, as it is born from storytelling (*muthos*), and therefore entails 'models of human behaviour'.[16] What we have in this apprenticeship is what Eco believed is the 'ethical dimension [that] comes into play when the other arrives on the scene [...], a natural ethics — worthy of respect for the deep religiosity that animates it'.[17] What Paolucci's text gives us is this living model through mentoring and storytelling. Here we approach a Spinozistic pedagogy, *tam difficilia quam rara sunt* (as difficult as [it is] rare), but it is precisely here that we are encouraged to realise that such rarity was made real.

In past interviews with Umberto Eco, in print, audio, and video, we have caught glimpses of his lively interaction with individuals, their questions, and key points that they raise with respect to his works, both theoretical and narrative, along with his longstanding dedication to the pedagogical. In Paolucci's text these come together as never before; not only is his a 'book intended as a testimony to [his] great affection for [his] *maestro*' (UE, 11), but it is even more a link forged from a twenty-year apprenticeship between student and teacher, that reactivates a heritage.

More on this would have been most welcome, but it provides at least the rudiments for a future study of Eco as pedagogue. The aura intended here, the aura of a philosophical apprenticeship, is possible only as a work of pedagogical artistry, through the dialectical activation of a heritage. Here, too, we have the tension between

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[16] See Eco, Lopez, Costa, Tucker, 50.

[17] See Eco, 'Ethics Are Born in the Presence of the Other', 93–94, 102.

order and adventure, between law and creativity. We see this so clearly in Eco's relations to his teachers, and how he transformed or sublated these relations into his adventures in teachings, into key characters in his novels, and into his scholarship. We now see how Paolucci forms these into an ordering of adventures for future heirs. With the exception of his 'Introduction', Paolucci structures each of his ten chapters that span Eco's intellectual, political, and pedagogical commitments, according to a show and tell of mentoring moments. This is where the pedagogical aura emerges, and where this text stands alone in the countless studies on Umberto Eco.

Eco showed how 'a great student is one only when they are able to raise the stakes' (UE, 68). In Chapter 2, *'La formazione',* we are reminded of a few of these stories and mentoring moments from Eco's own educational background.[18] These are extremely useful, grouped as they are, to highlight the deeply human aspects of Eco's generosity, humour, toughness, and ability as a *maestro della vita*. In *Numero Zero* (2016), Eco gives a superb narrative of the intellectual fallout from Italian academic life.[19] Paolucci gives us the inside story of Augusto Guzzo's question at Eco's dissertation defence. It is here that one can tease out a germ of formativity that became clear in Eco's method, both in his theory and in his novels. Perhaps this was his 'one idea', a quip relayed to Eco by Pareyson in 1954, according to which, each of us are born with just one idea, and that for the rest of our life we circle around it. By 1990, Eco had realised that Pareyson was correct, but added with his noted humour 'only that it is still early to say what it is'.[20]

I believe that part of Eco's 'one idea' was his method, as astutely pointed out by Augusto Guzzo. Another insight could be what Enzo Paci told him when he heard of his dissertation topic: 'thinking of [writing] a dissertation on [...] medieval aesthetics was to behave like those characters in nineteenth-century novels who had to begin their careers in society with a duel'.[21] This insight was carried into Eco's works, and in the realisation that one cannot use an encyclopaedia's non-hierarchical rhizomatic model for theoretical analysis, but only as a *mise en abyme* in narrative discourse (UE, 173). There is a reliance on the *mise en abyme* in much of Eco's work, and his sense

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[18] See also Eco, *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco*, 5–11, 17–19. Here one can trace Eco's raising the stakes in relation to his teachers, beginning with Luigi Pareyson, and then with Pareyson's teacher, Augusto Guzzo, before moving on to Nicola Abbagnano, Noberto Bobbio, and Carlo Mazzantini.

[19] Eco, *Numero Zero*, 3–11, see also Paolucci (UE, 33–34). What Paolucci also gives us is the story of the 1964 *'concorso'* (competition) for a tenure-track position in Aesthetics and Theoretical philosophy at the University of Turin, which, due to Pareyson's final decision, went to Pareyson's other student, Gianni Vattimo. Eco was saddened every time this matter was subsequently brought up. Paolucci says of this incident, 'I believe that not being selected by his maestro was a deep wound, given the sincere esteem that he had for Pareyson' (UE, 73).

[20] Eco in *Autodizionario degli scrittori italiani*, 152. See also Paolucci UE, 192.

[21] Eco, 'Intellectual Autobiography', 9–10.

of humour shows framing narratives as a core narrative, and cores as frames. Through Guzzo, Pareyson, (and Enzo Paci), we have examples of reactivating (and transfiguring) a heritage, one that Eco used widely and positively in his openness to various methodologies, and to his student's interests and approaches.[22]

Just like any other pedagogue, Eco has also struggled with the development of the university system. He was made keenly aware of its effects while participating in its Oedipal set–up (another order and adventure story), and could at times come off as 'rash, un-self-critical [when] speaking about it'.[23] Recall his 1987 interview in *Diacritics*, where he expands upon his criticism of contemporary universities and their becoming 'parking lots for youth', of older students, hangers–on, and that, in all this, he felt like an accomplice. He did belong within the margins of university life (between tradition and innovation), and believed that students, as with Paolucci and many others, not only could but actually must carry the torch of scholarship onwards. There is a sense that Eco's approach to teaching was similar to that which was sought by Barthes when he prepared his courses: that is, 'an introduction to living, a guide to life...' [24] But, all in all, Eco's pedagogical criticisms can be re-adopted to loosen the 'reciprocal corruption', or, as he also called it, the '*pax sceleris*' (contaminated peace) of educational parking lots.[25] It is here again that we can hear the voice of Apollinaire in 'La Jolie Rousse' and move towards a particular type of recalibration of *'cette longue querelle de la tradition et de l'invention'.*

I am certain that due to Paolucci's book we may expect texts dedicated specifically to Eco's pedagogical work, lectures, and assignments from his many years in academe. What remains certain is that in Eco's approach we have a palpable sense of his links to tradition and, at the same time, his openness to innovation. This is seen in Eco's working under the great influence of Barthes who, as Paolucci tells us, was a dear friend and inspiration for Eco's approach to cultural analysis (UE, 9, 16). Eco aimed at a text of pleasure, that 'fills, grants euphoria: the text that comes from culture and does not break with it', while in his novels Eco aimed at texts of bliss, texts that 'impose [...] a state of loss, a text that discomforts, [...] unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, [...] brings to a crisis [their] relation with language'.[26] The orders of pleasure and bliss have been interwoven in Eco's use of tradition and innovation, and his career worked these into a fine weave, especially his

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[22] As one example, among the many hundreds which could be given, see Bruss, Waller, and Eco, 416.

[23] Carpenter, 'Eco, Oedipus, and the 'View' of the University', 78.

[24] Barthes, *The Neutral,* 11, 51.

[25] See Eco, Lopez, Costa, Tucker, 47–48. For a very recent description of Eco as professor, see Giovanna Cosenza, *'Faceva paura: sapeva tutto',* 28–29, as well as Cotroneo in Paolucci, UE, 218–219, and 237n6.

[26] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* 14.

involvement in DAMS (*Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo*) at the University of Bologna. This much is made very clear by Paolucci's text and by its author's twenty-year apprenticeship with *maestro* Eco (UE, 34–37, 29, 113–114, and 221–224).

Next, we pass on to a section dedicated to a few details regarding the way in which Paolucci approaches Eco's works, and how he sees laughter (humour) as the core element of Eco's philosophy, cultural reflections, and literary works.

3. QUID SIT ECO

Let us return to the 'one idea that each of us are born with [...] and that for the rest of our life we circle around'. By 1990, Eco had realised that Pareyson's words from 1954 reflected something of the truth, but, as we have seen, he added that it was still too early to say just what his one idea was. As we have already suggested, a part of this 'one idea' was Eco's method. This was pointed out by Augusto Guzzo, on the very day of Eco's dissertation defence — and there, Eco was given two key ingredients of his future work. In Paolucci's text, we find various suggestions as to how we might further build on this 'one idea'. What follows will give us a map.

In *Nel nome del senso* (2001), Eco recounts Pareyson's proposal of the 'one idea'. Due to the occasion of a conference on his work in Cerisy, Eco felt courageous enough to give a face to this one idea, saying, 'I suspected that the idea had to do with the question of whether the world existed, and (as a consequence) with the other question, *quid sit veritas*' (UE, 192).

By asking whether the world exists, we notice how Eco works the many orders in–between the Hegelian idea of orientating 'one's attitude toward the world either by God or by what the world is', and, more adventurously, avoiding those straits altogether, and seeking, as in his work on 'primary iconism', for a ground of reality itself (*pace* Peirce's refusal of such a claim).[27] Paolucci notes that the ideas of Truth, and Essence are enemies of Eco's thought, and can only be used if they pass the test of laughter (a primary laughter?) within which they can be transformed (UE, 161).

This became the kernel of Eco's thought after *The Name of the Rose*, where we find a parallelism between narration and theory, theory and narration, each feeding the other, in 'an all–out *sui generis* Spinozism'. What happened with this 'one idea' statement, that first appeared to Eco to express a reactionary position, was that he began to play with its spectral seriousness, and then with choreographing a narrative dance that encircles this appearance–disappearance, or haunting, and fall, of the 'one idea', or thing–in–itself (UE, 191, 18). Eco's narrations are not as much *about* as they are *within* the world narrated. In laughter, the existent Order (whatever that was

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[27] For Peirce, '[r]eality is an affair of Thirdness'. See 'The Three Normative Sciences', EP2; 197

imagined to be) is put in question from the inside. It is put into the path of questions which avoid the stasis of doubt that does nothing but pine for certainty. It is about questioning the *quest*ions (the very kernel of searching itself).

For Paolucci, this laughter has a fundamental function, and is one of the most important notions at the core of Eco's philosophy (UE, 163, 138). Questions, not doubt (of the Cartesian kind), fuel Eco's tracking of the choreography of signs, a movement of signs that are not Truth, since signs can be used to lie. Only in the stasis, in the arresting of signs, does Truth (justice?) enter the scene (UE, 24).

Quid sit veritas, then? Certainly not in the asphyxiating stranglehold of the correspondence between things and thought, which results in nothing but a fainting world, albeit in narration. 'To tell a story you must first construct a world'.[28] This world was where Eco could ground reality beyond the continuum of mediated signs that Peirce's spectre reminded him of:

> the entire universe, — not merely the universe of existents, but all that wider universe, embracing the universe of existents as a part, the universe which we are all accustomed to refer to as 'the truth', — that all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs.[29]

Quid sit Eco, residing in the choreography of ideas, signs, histories, and in this 'gift of multiple presents', movement, bodies, and lives (UE, 27). Only there, on the stage of narration, can one make Truth laugh, where truth becomes something primary for the subject. If you can make truth laugh then you may perhaps find where Truth actually lies.

What surrounds a domain of inquiry, and what can be made to participate in that inquiry from other domains of inquiry is a mainstay of Eco's approach. Again, we have a choreography of cultural products and movements. This lends itself to what Paolucci lays out extremely well as the set of transitions that happen between low–high (*elevation*), high–low (*fall, irony, laughter*) and high–low–low–high (*feedback*). In Paolucci's words:

> It is not possible to understand Mike Buongiorno without understanding Husserl: and phenomenology (DM). It is not possible to understand avant-garde poetics without understanding theories of information and the indeterminacy principle that regulates order and research in physics (OA). It is not possible to understand Superman and popular literature without understanding Marx and Gramsci (AI, SM). It is not possible to understand the

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[28] Eco, 'How I Wrote *The Name of the Rose'*, 35.
[29] Peirce, 'The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Science', EP2: 394.

platypus without understanding Kant, nor is it possible to understand Kant without understanding the platypus (KO). (UE, 56, 19)

As Paolucci explains, these are a few examples of the 'three "vertical" movements within the works of Eco' (UE, 77). These are exchanges of domains, and that within those domains, produce exchanges that create passages through which one may question and choreograph a reading that remains on guard against a fundamental protective blindness of the single domain. To explain this vertical movement, or conceptual dance step, Paolucci shows us the horizontal tools of critique which Eco employs: the encyclopaedia, semiotic theory of interpretation, narration, and historical analysis. From this working through of horizontal structures, we are able to plot the 'philosophy of passage' or 'philosophy of transport' that Eco deeply admired in Michel Serres (UE, 78, see also 83, 85, 136). We see much of this in Eco's *Open Work*, and his *Diario Minimo, Apocalitti e integrati: Communicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa*, and in the articles and studies he composed throughout his career.[30] Paolucci sees this pre–semiotic approach as what *'always gives form to another form, to another formed-matter that circulates in the universe of knowledge and that comes from another domain'* (UE 65, 229n8).

In these early approaches, we see the link between history and theory, Eco's reforming of Pareyson's influence, and his *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino*. With the historical moment the problem is initially placed within its domain (exemplified in Eco's dissertation). There then follows the work of theory that can propose solutions only by noticing and using links to other domains (UE, 71).

This was a start in what Paolucci calls Eco's '*sui generis* philosophy', or his 'platypus philosophy'. It served Eco in creating (or at least in projecting) a third type of intellectual: one outside the apocalyptic intellectual, and academically integrated intellectual. This served to eliminate the all–too–easy antithetical poles of high and low, and thus plays in turn with elevating, bringing down, and recognising the feedback in products of diverse cultural and historical domains (UE, 86, 88–89, and 102). As we shall see, this will be a passage–between, not an entrenched technicality, or a vantage point from outside. As Paolucci explains,

Eco's philosophy is a philosophy made from works of non–philosophy, and semiotics represents the universe of Theory that is most intimately this (non)philosophy. It is a theory of transport, of passages, of mediation, of interpretation, precisely in the sense in which 'to interpret' means to pass *inter-partes*, between two different domains between which one looks for a linking–

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[30] For a brief selection, see the articles listed in the bibliography from Eco, *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco*, 709–712.

up. In this, the semiotics of Eco was interpretative: corresponding to an intellectual attitude of its author and an epistemological need of his Theory. (UE, 132)

The *inter-partes* is the passage between the apocalyptic and the integrated, an in-between passage, not a vantage-point beyond them. Eco is there-between and, in his own words, more interested in how these intellectual positions 'needed a unifying theoretical framework'.[31] With this in place, we can follow what Paolucci sees as the first steps towards a comprehension of the thought of Umberto Eco. These entail five points:

i.   'One cannot theorise on truth (of truth one can only laugh).
ii.   What cannot be theorised, one must narrate.
iii.   Narration serves to "give presents" to our lives.
iv.   Narration is introduced to supplement the impossibility of theory in the moment that theory works in absence, and through signs and conjectures'. (UE, 28)

In addition, the complexity of Eco's position can only be understood if one realises the constitutive characteristics of his view on narration, which are:

i.   *A cosmogonic structure:* to narrate is always, and first of all to 'construct a world' (SL, 334–339).
ii.   *A 'surrogate' form;* the constructed world constitutes an *Ersatz* (substitute) of the real world.
iii.   *Constitutive Spinozism,* the narrated world, *Ersatz* (substitute) of the real world, is constructed in such a way that within the interior of this 'world–model', the 'order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas' (*ordo et connexio rerum ide nest ac ordo et connexio idearum*), even when this order is invalidated, as in *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum.*[32]
iv.   *A regulative Kantianism;* the structure of narration is defined as a *transposability* that we use in non–narrative worlds. This transposability defines a Kantian narrativity (UE, 204).

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[31] See Eco, 'The Reactions of the Author: Now (1974 and 1977)', 56. Eco's 'reactions' were to the continued interest in his 1964 text, *Apocalyptic and Integrated Intellectuals: Mass Communication and Theories of Mass Culture.*

[32] The passage in Latin is from Spinoza, but the order of the original statement has been modified: 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 2, Proposition 7, see also *Ethics*, Part 1, Axiom 4, and Spinoza, *Letter* no. 58).

Paolucci sees the high point of this approach of theory and narration in the parallelism between *Kant and the Platypus*, and *The Island of the Day Before*, with the added 'detritus of the encyclopaedia', most prevalent in *Foucault's Pendulum* and in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, 'one of the most undervalued, and most important books of Eco if one wants to understand the structure of [his] thought' (UE 18).

There is much to take in with this overview that Paolucci grant us, but it is precise, and clearly telling of the armature of Eco's approach, method, and style. It allows us now to enter into what has transpired in a life, and through an apprenticeship. Let us recall Eco's words to his grandson: 'There it is; life is like a film from my [youth]. We enter into life when many things have already happened, for hundreds or thousands of years, and it is important to apprehend what has happened before we were born'.[33]

4. PEIRCE ECO

This section will focus on the influence, and Eco's use (and abuse) of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). The history of the reception, critique, and development of pragmatism in Italy, is a long and winding story.[34] It is one that Paolucci's book justly avoids, seeing that his focus is on Eco's use of Peirce alone (and only certain parts of Peirce's work, at that), not Eco's place in the history of Italian pragmatism, or pragmatism more broadly construed, or even Peirce studies.

Eco mentions how he came to discover Peirce (and before that, the more palatable Dewey), in his recent 'Intellectual Autobiography'.[35] He heard mention of Peirce during his university studies through Niccolò Abbagnano's interest and translation of Peirce's *Chance, Love, and Logic* in 1956, and through Guzzo's student, Nynfa Bosco, who published the first Italian monograph on Peirce, with one chapter even dedicated to Peirce's semiotics in 1959.[36] What we do not know is the extent to which Eco was influenced by Niccolò Salanitro's groundbreaking 1969 study, *Peirce e i problem dell'interpretazione*, the first full-length study in Italian dedicated to Peirce's semiotics. In any event, Eco began his study of Peirce in 1960, and wrote on Peirce from the later 1960s right up until 2015. In 1998–9, as Paolucci's thesis advisor,

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[33] Eco, *'Impara "La vispa Teresa"'*, and UE, 112. See: http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/2014/01/03/umberto-eco-caro-nipote-studia-a-memoria-1.147715 (accessed 5th December 2017).

[34] See Maddalena, 'The Three Waves of Italian Reception of Peirce', 9–14, as well as Maddalena and Tuzet, 'The Sign of the Four: Italian Pragmatists Retold', 147–162.

[35] See Eco's 'Intellectual Autobiography' in *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco*, 17–19, and 21–23.

[36] See Nynfa Bosco, *La filosofia pragmatica di Ch. S. Peirce*.

he followed his student, 'a twenty-four year old', who critiqued his take on Peirce's categories, and his rereading of Kant through Peirce in the then recently published *Kant and the Platypus* (UE, 34).

Eco was not, by any means, a card–carrying Peircean, or, in his own words, a Peirce–*ologist*.[37] His early discovery, interest, and intense study and application of Peirce's semiotics (*semeiotics*) can be compared to Josiah Royce's adoption of Peirce to clarify key concepts in his mature work, *The Problem of Christianity*, his famous *Seminar of 1913–1914*, and his 1915–1916 philosophy course, *Metaphysics*. One can safely see that Eco did use and expand applications of Peirce's theories of signs, and thus can be considered, in Peirce's own words, as one of its 'future explorers'.[38] That said, the use and application stop there, since Peirce's theoretical architectonic, his view of intelligibility as a structure of the universe, his cosmology, the idea that logic and ethics ultimately depend on aesthetics, and all that synechism (the principle of continuity), was far too theoretically rich for Eco's taste, and perhaps displayed too much 'metaphysical lust', as Eco would say.[39] Unless, that is, we enter the world of Eco the novelist, where contradictions are offered, not solutions.[40] In Paolucci's words, 'for Eco it is not the world, but rather the novel — that is purely made of signs and only signs that represent the ideal model of truth' (UE, 150).

Peirce's philosophical/scientific theory building was cosmogonic, while for Eco, narrating usurped such an all–producing and consuming drive. In Eco, the cosmogonic was the 'model [narrative *Ersatz*] world in which the internal order of ideas corresponded to that of things' (UE, 211, see also 207). Thus, it was *regulative* in contrast to Peirce's *constitutive* synechism.

According to Paolucci,

> [i]t is truly here that Eco, who began rereading Kant through Peirce, does the exact contrary, and rereads Peirce through Kant. It is the fundamental threshold of the 'as if', a Kantian constitutive idea of 'narrating' that is capable of co-adapting the semiotic order of interpretations (determinations) with the ontological order of things (determinable), guaranteeing them a possible commensurability. (UE, 211–212)

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[37] See Eco In Paolucci, *Studi di Semiotica Interpretativa*, 147.

[38] Peirce, 'Excerpts from Letters to Lady Welby', EP2: 477–491. See letter from 23rd December 1908, EP2: 482.

[39] Eco in Bruss, 413–414.

[40] Paolucci explores this connection throughout his text: see chapter 1, 'Two citations', UE, 23–31, chapter 8, 'The laugh and the rose', UE, 138–165, and chapter 9, 'Parallelisms', UE, 166–190. Eco clarifies the relation between theory and the novel in his 'Reply to Norma Bouchard', and his 'Reply to Brian Mchale, in *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco*, 560, and 654–655.

Paolucci believes that the greatest difference between Peirce and Eco resides in Peirce's use of '*il lume naturale*' (the natural light [of reason]), and Eco's 'power of the false' (UE, 201).[41] I believe that this is an exaggeration, and misses the undercurrents of Eco's agreement with Peirce's understanding of the place of reason. Even if Eco turns to what he himself has dubbed a 'negative realism', or what is 'reasonable' over and above the need for reason, that 'reasonableness' would still rely on what Peirce called his 'three sentiments': 'interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility that this interest be made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity [— these are] indispensable requirements of logic'.[42]

This can be seen as a take on what is reasonable enough (or, even 'retroductive', in Peirce's terms; the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason).[43] Eco should have realised, and Paolucci as well, that for Peirce, 'the only desired object which is quite satisfactory in itself without any ulterior reason for desiring it, is the reasonable itself'.[44] Further, we find Peirce speaking of the laws of nature and saying that 'an energising reasonableness [...] shapes phenomena in some sense, and that this same working reasonableness has moulded the reason of man into something like its own image'.[45]

It is difficult to imagine Eco not siding with Peirce at this level (yet, he doesn't), even when Eco himself would say that, 'if we accept the premise that our behaviour in the world ought to be not *rational* but *reasonable*, then I will say (and with a certain satisfaction) that if there is a crisis of Reason, there is no crisis of Reasonability'.[46] One can easily identify Peirce's view of the general nature of Instinct, otherwise seen as the Insight for best guesses, in what Eco describes as 'our behaviour in the world' (given that he is a negative realist). He adds that, 'for though it goes wrong oftener than right, yet the relative frequency with which it is right is on the whole the most wonderful thing in our constitution'.[47] This is what Peircean synechism simply proposes.

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[41] For an overwhelming example of Peirce's idea of *'il lume naturale'* see his 1901, 'On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents' in Peirce EP2: 73–114, esp., 108. See also Peirce, *'Il Lume Naturale'* in EP2: 211.

[42] Peirce, 'The Doctrine of Chances', EP1: 150.

[43] See Eco in Rosso, 4.

[44] Peirce, '*Pearson's* Grammar of Science', EP2: 60.

[45] Peirce, 'Laws of Nature', EP2: 68. Further on in this same text, Peirce sets up the clash between Ockhamism and evolution, and states that in his day, a philosophy must be either Ockhamism or a variant of evolutionism. We must remember the likes of Chauncey Wright, Nicholas St. John Green, John Fiske, and Francis Ellingwood Abbot, friends of Peirce, each working on a certain evolutionism. What Peirce (unlike Eco) strives for is to 'eventually restore that rejected idea of law as a reasonableness energising the world (no matter through what mechanism of natural selection or otherwise)' (ibid., 72).

[46] Eco in Rosso, 4.

[47] Peirce, 'The Nature of Meaning', EP2: 218.

Eco sought to swerve away from this conjectural necessity when outside of his narrative world–making. Paolucci, in disagreement with his *maestro*, cites Roberto Rampi to support his own worries regarding such synechistic abandonment:

> A certain Peircean synechism seems necessary for any conjectural thought. One
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> needs to believe that there is a bottom-line rationality in what happens in the universe — a logic — to be able to formulate a personal hypothesis of explanatory observations of the world that connect them in a consequential manner, while conjecturing what this logic might be. (UE, 207)[48]

A reference to Peirce would help give this more depth. Again from his 1901 'Laws of Nature' we see the extent of Peircean reasonableness:

> By reasonableness, I mean, in the first place, such unity as reason apprehends, — say, generality. [...] The green shade over my lamp, the foliage I see through the window, the emerald on my companion's finger, have a resemblance. It consists in an impression I get on comparing those and other things, and exists by virtue of their being as they are. If a man's whole life is animated by a desire to become rich, there is a general character in all his actions, which is not caused by, but is formative of, his behaviour. [...] It is the law that shapes the events, not a chance resemblance between events that constitute the law [...]. But if things can only be *understood* as generalised, generalised they really and truly *are;* for no idea can be attached to a reality essentially incognisable. However, Generality, as commonly understood is not the whole of my 'reasonableness'. It includes *Continuity,* of which indeed Generality is but a cruder form. [...] There are certain ideas [which] have a character that our reason can in some measure appreciate but which it by no means creates, which character insures their sooner or later getting realised. [...] These, then, are the naked abstract characters that must be recognised in the 'reasonableness' of a law of nature.[49]

Whether one turns to Eco the theorist, essayist, or novelist, Peirce's 'reasonableness' can, or should, be found in his attitude, for 'we call that opinion reasonable whose only support is instinct'.[50] Peirce also captures Eco's Lacanian love of the encyclopaedia, and reminds us of Yambo from *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana,* when he states that,

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[48] See Rampi, *L'ornitorinco. Umberto Eco, Peirce e la conoscenza congetturale,* 63.

[49] Peirce, 'Laws of Nature', EP2: 72.

[50] Peirce, 'The Nature of Meaning', EP2: 218.

in all his life long no son of Adam has ever fully manifested what there was in him. So, then, the development of Reason requires as part of it the occurrence of more individual events than ever can occur [...]. [T]his development of Reason consists [...] in embodiment, that is, in manifestation. [...] Under this conception, the ideal conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever, as the slang is, it is 'up to us' to do so.[51]

Peirce would agree that 'no "I" truly has the first word', and as Paolucci has it, quoting Eco, 'to speak is to use the "dribble and detritus of the encyclopaedia"[52] to construct one's own word in relation to those spoken by others. Enunciative activity is always held together in a chain [...] into which each single enunciation gradually disappears' (UE, 17). Peirce's agreement, most simply put, resides in his view that, 'individualism and falsity are one and the same'.[53] In denying the notion that the semiotic structure is also the structure of the world, Eco (who believes that any enunciative activity is part of a chain-link within what has already been said) seems to misread his own view of the 'wisdom of the community', as well as his call for 'reasonableness', that works to justify how a theory of the false could function as a way to reveal the place where truth lies. In Eco's words:

> To recognise that our history has been motivated by many tales that we now recognise as false, must make us attentive, capable of putting into question those self-same tales that we now hold as true, because the criterion for the wisdom of a community is founded on constant vigilance in relation to the fallibility of our knowledge. (UE, 235n10)[54]

Eco beautifully describes life and history in the following way: '[i]n my times, you could enter a movie theatre at any time, I mean even in the middle of a film you could arrive while many things were happening and one tried to understand what had happened before' (UE, 112) — but how can he say so whilst relying on Peirce's view of signs, divested of their resting place within 'habit'?

Habit, on a Peircean view, amounts to the *showing* of what went into *saying*. It is also, more importantly, a showing–up of saying and the said, when in a 'habit-

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[51] Peirce, 'What Makes a Reasoning Sound?' EP2: 255.

[52] Paolucci is here citing Eco's *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, 54.

[53] Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5: 402. Peirce also stated that, 'Truth and Falsehood are but special varieties of necessity and impossibility; namely such as are determined by omniscience. For to omniscience, the universe of possibility is obviously no wider than the actual fact' (5: 333).

[54] Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, 322.

change [there is] a modification of a person's tendencies towards action, resulting from previous experiences ... [thus] as final logical interpretant',[55] and as habit–change (or previously, as habit), is different from a sign; it is 'self–analysing, [and] a modification of consciousness'.[56] This is something that is not followed through in Paolucci's otherwise informative critique. Even in Eco's view, one can see that 'in order to implement any interpretation, there must be some fact to be interpreted',[57] and 'habit' could very well be that node of fact(s). As Eco has most recently stated, 'the process of unlimited semiosis stops when we produce a *habit* that allows us to come to grips with the reality (the Peircean dynamical object)'.[58]

It is still unclear how Eco's pragmatism (or a version thereof) could have been so 'strongly [...] influenced by Peirce',[59] when Eco's use of Peirce's view of knowledge of the world does not take into account his idea of a reasonableness in nature, and history.[60] In chapter 10, '*Quid sit veritas*, on what one cannot theorise, one must narrate' *(Di ciò di cui non si può teorizzare, si deve narrare)*, Paolucci returns to his longstanding critique of Eco's use of Peirce, and shows us the break between Eco and Peirce, the break with the principle of synechism, where,

> there is continuity between mind and matter, between sign and object, between Immediate Object and Dynamic Object, in that the mind is part of the world through which the world represents itself [...]. This is why for Peirce there exists 'a natural instinct to guess correctly', that guarantees our semiotic grasp of the world. (UE, 200)[61]

Eco also loses Peirce (only to meet him again in the darker alleys of narration), by working against the grain of interpreters of his novels, setting up empty segments, forged trails, endless dead-ends, and fakes, where he 'makes play of anyone who believes that *patterns* of interpretation are in a natural accord with things' (UE, 201). Yet, in his novels we find a link between the order of ideas and the order of things,

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[55] Peirce, *Collected Papers* 5: 476, 491.

[56] Peirce, *Collected Papers* 5: 485.

[57] Eco, 'Some Remarks on Fictional Characters', 88.

[58] Eco, 'Intellectual Autobiography', 46. See also 54, and Paolucci's 'Eco, Peirce, and the Anxiety of Influence', 261. I would only add that a series of interpretations comes to rest (as in a node) rather than, as Paolucci stated, 'a series of interpretations [...] in a certain respect ends [...]'. Also, rather than 'unlimited semiosis', or 'infinite semiosis', it is best, with Peirce's understanding of the laws of nature, to call it 'continuous semiosis'.

[59] Paolucci, UE, 110–113.

[60] For his view of a science of history hypothesis, see Peirce's 'On the Logic of Drawing History from the Ancient Documents, Especially from Testimonies', EP2: 75–114.

[61] See also UE, 35, and 228n1.

their co–adaptation, with a touch of cosmogonic world–building, a splash of the false, read as stories, as if surrogates of the real. Again, we are lied to by Eco, and that opens us up to the dross and dribble of what, in narration, cannot be but theorised, so that we are given more experience of the world in the richness of experience as continuity.

5. ECO'S DANTESQUE SEND–OFF

Eco's brilliantly titled and posthumous, *Pape Satàn Aleppe* (February 2016), belongs with his semiological analyses of culture, and his political and social commentaries. It also shows not only how he felt about the issues he commented on, recomposing a selection from 2000 to 2015, of his *'Bustine di Minerva'* from the back pages of *L'Espresso*, under various headings and themes irrespective of their original dates, but how he wished to leave his readers: ... guessing, perhaps for five centuries, (re–Joyce, re–Joyce), as to the reasons why he selected this infernal title, and not another particular infernal glossolalia. My guess is that Eco did not select the other jewel of infernal glossolalia (from *Inferno*, XXXI, 67–69), because, as a semiotician, he would not second the belief that, as Virgil tells Dante, 'Waste no words on him: it would be foolish. / To him [Nimrod] all speech is meaningless; as his own, / which no one understands, is simply gibberish'.

Meaninglessness was not an option for Umberto Eco. The confusion of tongues in Plutus's words gives way to greater issues in interpretative semiotics due to the exchange of signs of currencies. This is one reason why Eco chooses these words of Plutus to stand as a title for his volume, and as his send-off for us to ponder: *'Papè Satàn, papè Satàn aleppe!'* (*Inferno*, Canto VII). How much more appropriate it is against the nihilistic gibberish, and unlimited multilingual semiosis of Nimrod: *'Raphèl maỳ amèch zabì almì'* (*Inferno*, Canto XXXI).

Another reason for Eco's choice of citation is that within *Inferno*, Canto VII we have a sublime rendition of the power and figure of Fortune *(Fortuna)*, guide to all earthly splendours (*Inferno*, VII, lines 61–96). There too we have a maestro's winking back (perhaps at Paolucci's apprenticeship). As Paolucci describes it, 'If I think of the relation that I have had the privilege to have with [Umberto Eco], I consider myself, without a doubt, immensely fortunate, as I have tried to recount in this work' (UE, 220). Eco could weave a tale, and deliver an open lesson, even with a choice of a title, that itself is a citation.

With such fortune though, there comes the weight of a heavy tradition, a fate in the task of maintaining the stakes, and even more, of raising the stakes. This is now left to us. Such is the intimate power of a profound cultural apprenticeship, and intellectual currency, and a warning of the use and abuse of these cultural, intellectual, and political riches by hoarders and wasters. Eco, part Plutus, and part Virgil, leaves us with this reminder.

But, why not a citation from *Paradiso*, VII, 1–3, where angels joyfully express themselves in a weave of different languages? Here perhaps is another reason that Eco selected the opening line from *Inferno*, VII, 1. It is a brilliant reading of intertextual mirroring of what would (much later in the *Commedia*) be a counterbalance to the battles between hoarders and wasters in Plutus's reign, with those who, by contrast, act honourably, and whose opening lines are: *'Osanna sanctus Deus Sabaoth / superillustrans claritate tua / felices ignes horum malachoth!'* (*Paradiso*, Canto VII, 1–3). But, why then not use this citation from various languages as his send-off title? Too long, for a start. It would also have truncated Eco's lessons to his readers, that is, 'to cultivate the art of lingering', and to resist anticipating the end.[62] All this made using this quotation from *Paradiso* too facile, and optimistic, even though Eco felt that

> Dante's *Paradiso* was the apotheosis of the virtual world, of nonmaterial things, of pure software, without the weight of earthly, or infernal hardware [...]. After all, with regard to ecstasy, Dante's [*Paradiso*] keeps its promises and actually delivers it.[63]

What is certain is that Eco selected his title, *Pape Satàn Aleppe*, from one of his favourite authors, known to have baffled, enticed, and embattled scholars for centuries. Here, too, Eco signals back to the issues with an 'infinite semiosis' (or continual semiosis) that worried him in Peirce's rendition, replete with a groundless process of mediation, over-interpretation, hermetic tendencies, loss of both source and target, double-coding, and the like. Perhaps the more hermetic citations from Dante are a way to warn of an unregulated exchange of terms from the various languages employed (Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and perhaps dialects), or even a language invented by Dante.

I would leave the author, Claudio Paolucci, a bibliophilic challenge: Did Umberto Eco, in his vast library, have a copy of Giovanni Ventura's, *L'incompreso verso di Dante Pape Satan Pape Satan Aleppe spiegato dopo cinque secoli e la nuova maniera di intendere una scena delle più celebrate della Divina Commedia (The misunderstood verse of Dante Pape Satan Pape Satan Aleppe explained after five*

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[62] See Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994). See also Helen Bennett, 'Reading Lessons in *Foucault's Pendulum*' in Eco, *The Philosophy of Umberto Eco*, 563–586.

[63] Eco, *On Literature*, 16–22.

centuries and the new manner of interpreting one of the most celebrated scenes in the Divine Comedy) (Milano: coi tipi di Giuseppe Bernardoni, 1868)?[64]

Eco's Dantesque send-off is a challenge, a final lesson, and a late self-portrait of his role. Paolucci sees this text, and similar social commentary-based texts by Eco, in three dimensions: as a function of philosophical emancipation, as reading lessons from the media for the education of the masses, and as a critique of ideology at the semiotic level (UE, 100).

There is another dimension to Eco's choice of citations from Dante: its self-portrayal, its mirror, and its call to the reader. Paolucci admits that, in his twenty–year apprenticeship under Eco (unfortunately, the Berlusconi years), he saw Eco's worries regarding persuasion techniques, mass-manipulation, and disinformation deepen. He fought, but felt that the battle was being lost (UE, 102). It is this loss (and how deep in the pit we feel today), that contributes part of a self–portrait in Eco's quotation from *Inferno*, Canto VII, line 1. As Eco shows us by example how to make continual and more skilled valuations based on the versions of what is to be interpreted, he also makes valuations of the very economy of evaluations. Eco plays himself out as an nth version of Plutus, similar to one of Rembrandt's final self-portraits as the laughing Democritus.[65]

They could easily have exchanged their final self-images.

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[64] If not, perhaps he would find the texts on Dante's passage from Domenico Guerri (1880–1934), or by Orazio Bacci (1864–1917) who read the exclamation by Plutus as addressed to Dante in surprise, and as a warning.

[65] This portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn is from 1662, and is in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne.

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Review-Essay
Roberto Esposito, *Da Fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa*
(Turin: Einaudi, 2016)
Sevgi Doğan

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I

Crises within history never cease — no sooner has one ended than another begins. This circular return within capitalistic life, the capitalistic world, and simply human history as a whole, has come to seem more and more inevitable. Today, the European Union, along with certain European countries, are involved in a crisis with respect to their very existence. Roberto Esposito's recent book, *Da Fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa* (*From Outside: A Philosophy for Europe*),[1] takes as its point of departure this fundamental problem within Europe so as to discuss it *philosophically.*[2] Or more precisely, within a philosophical investigation Esposito tries to suggest a *political* solution that would rescue Europe from its crisis. Above all, perhaps, the question that the book tries to answer is what Europe is. According to Esposito, the concept of Europe does not refer only to a history, or a geography, but is rather an intrinsically philosophical concept.[3] Europe is the place in which Philosophy was born and where the latter continues to create new perspectives.

Esposito considers the roots of the European crises not from a political or economic perspective but from the standpoint of Europe's *philosophical* stance. He believes that this philosophical and intellectual stance begins to change at the end of the 19th century with the deterritorialisation of European philosophy or thought towards its *outside (fuori)* — Europe, particularly after the Second World War, starts to lose its domination and hegemony in terms of philosophy. Therefore, the centre of power has shifted from Europe to the outside of *(fuori di)* Europe, or towards North America. The deterritorialisation which seems to lead to the decline of European philosophy is however perceived by Esposito as a potential resource for its *recreation* — as a philosophy for Europe (*una filosofia per l'Europa*).[4]

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[1] The book has now appeared in an English translation by Zakiya Hanafi, under the title of *A Philosophy for Europe: From the Outside* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018). Esposito's latest book, at the time of writing, is entitled *Politica e negazione. Per una filosofia affermativa* (*Politics and Negation. For a Philosophy of Affirmation*) (Turin: Einaudi, 2018) and represents an ongoing discussion that is also taking place in *Da Fuori.*

[2] Roberto Esposito lectures at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa. For information, I have included a full list of his works in both Italian and English translation at the end of this review.

[3] Roberto Esposito, *Da fuori. Una filosofia per l'Europa* (Turin: Einaudi: 2016), p. 26.

[4] Esposito, *Da fuori,* p. 50.

On this point, we can observe certain analogies between Esposito and Bertrando Spaventa, an idealist, neo-Hegelian philosopher who spoke of the 'nationality' of philosophy in the 19th century, in the preamble to his lecture at the University of Bologna in April 1860, 'Carattere e Sviluppo della Filosofia Italiana dal Secolo XVI sino al Nostro Tempo'. Spaventa discusses the circulation of Italian philosophy throughout European philosophy and tries to create a 'dialogue'[5] between Italian and European thought. As a contemporary Italian philosopher, Esposito begins to speak of a similar subject matter in his discussion of a 'philosophy for Europe'. He refers to Italian philosophy with the English expression, *'Italian Thought'*.

At the beginning of the book, *Da fuori,* Esposito invokes Hegel in order to explain why Europe needs philosophy for its existence. Hegel writes in one of his early texts, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy:* 'When the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses have lost their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises'.[6] When the power of unity cuts itself off from life — specifically, human life — and when oppositions lose the dynamism of their dialectical relation, philosophy for Europe will not be possible. By these means, Esposito gives an answer to the fundamental question posed by his book at the very beginning of it. He tries to explain this impossibility by indicating the risk of the European Union's dissolution: if the intersecting oppositions are not able to establish or achieve a significant and substantive relation, then this union will become unavailable. This is also true when it comes to the possibility of a philosophy for Europe. How will philosophy be possible? Philosophy is possible only when opposed moments attain a significant unity, but this unity is possible only if it has a vivid and dynamic relationship with human life.

II. The Solution to Save Europe

Esposito's basic question about the existence of Europe is as follows: Will Europe remain a political subject that can decide and act according to its principles or will it become just a simple geographical reference point like any other place in the world, without having any especial significance?[7] His answer to this question is in the affirmative because, according to him, Europe can and must be a political subject capable of making economic, political, and even cultural decisions.

The author argues that (one of) the fundamental errors of Europe is that, within its structures, the economy interferes with politics but not the other way

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[5] This expression I owe to Dr. Paolo Vanini from the University of Trento. I would like to thank him for his critique of my work on Spaventa. I must also thank Sophia Catalano and Mirela Balasoiu for their contributions to this article in the form of comments and criticisms.

[6] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 91.

[7] Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori.*

around. It should be politics that intervenes in the economy. The 'economic Europe' took precedence over the 'political Europe'. 'Europe' is united primarily by economic interests and actions. It should be politics that decides with respect to economy. Esposito writes that, 'only a political vision of a high profile — as Nietzsche defines it, "great politics" — responds to the economic, social, military challenges that we face'.[8]

The unification of Europe around the economy creates more problems than it does solutions and resources. Since economy has no border, it can be global and not merely confined within a single continent. Economy or the market has a universal and global power, rather than remaining a continental or governmental power. This fundamental problem creates a political one because wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small number of capitalistic institutions which are not democratic because they are not legitimated by any election.[9] As a result, economy is not the most appropriate motivation for European unification, as Esposito insistently emphasises.

For the author, there is another important aspect of the united Europe: 'if Europe had become a federal state, it would have a constitution', and this would be a 'great container in which the legal limit of powers could be established'. Europe has never had a constitution, even though it was suggested in the 1980s by France and Germany, before being rejected by a referendum held in Holland and France. For Esposito, this refusal of a European constitution was partly a result of the fact that there was not a real European 'people'. According to him, a European people can be created, but it needs a common language, a media, public opinion. However, there was not a European people — it was not created by public opinion. These, for Esposito, constitute the original crisis of Europe. Then, in 1980s, there appeared other dramatic events: mass migrations and terrorism. These events exacerbated the crisis, which showed itself to be, therefore, a biopolitical crisis. What does 'biopolitical' mean? More than the distribution of wealth, more than the distribution of power, the line divides death from life because the ruling class had to make a dramatic choice regarding the immigrations. They had to choose whether they should leave those migrating to live or die.

In any case, the reason for the failure of a European constitution to materialise, according to Esposito, is the lack of a united European people or the unity of a people, which is necessary in order for a constitution to be adopted, and this does not exist in Europe because of the common yet different histories of various European countries based on tradition, culture, and war.[10]

Esposito describes our current situation in the transition from national state to nationalist state. The idea of a 'nation' is important because it endows political

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[8] Esposito, *Da fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa* (Einaudi: Torino, 2016), p. 3.
[9] Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori.*
[10] Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori.*

states and peoples with 'spirit'.[11] For Spaventa, 'the nations [...] each have their own spirit [...]'. These national spirits are as sacred and inviolable as an individual's spirit. He presents national spirit and consciousness as a creation of a unity.[12] Esposito holds that the idea of the nation leads to the creation of a state. The difference between Spaventa and Esposito is that, for Esposito, the unity of a nation is due to a certain *theory*.

Theoretical thought or 'thinking' (*il pensiero*) includes not only philosophical thought ('professional thinking') but also the thought or thinking which has a *constituent* function or plays a crucial role in constituting Europe.[13] It is very important to observe that the function and role which Esposito gives to thought was given by Spaventa to *philosophy*. Spaventa talks about this function in his article, *La rivoluzione e l'Italia*, published in 1851 in *Il Progresso*. He writes that philosophers create and transform the mood of a people into a thought. This thought is a sort of mirror in which they can see their nature, needs and themselves:

> When the political and social conditions of a people's life do not correspond to the new principle that has developed in the world of intelligence; when the fact is in contradiction with the idea; the revolution already exists as a germ in national consciousness [*coscienza nazionale*]. But then in the people the revolutionary idea is a vague, obscure, indeterminate feeling. Philosophers transform this feeling into a certain thought; this thought is like a mirror in which the people recognise themselves, their new instincts, their new needs; in which people find the contradiction between what is and what it should be.[14]

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[11] 'Per l'unità spirituale della nazione italiana', in *Unificazione nazionale ed egemonia culturale*, ed. Giuseppe Vacca, (Laterza: Bari, 1969), p. 195.

[12] Spaventa, 'La rivoluzione e L'Italia', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, ed. Giovanni Gentile, (Messina: Principato, 1963), p. 69.

[13] Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

[14]

> Quando le condisioni politiche e sociali della vita d'un popolo non corrispondono al nuovo principio che si è sviluppato nel mondo dell'intelligenza; quando il fatto è in contraddisione con l'idea; la rivoluzione già esiste come germe nella coscienza nazionale. Ma allora ne' popoli l'idea rivoluzionaria è un sentimento vago, oscuro, indeterminato. I filosofi trasformano questo sentimento in un pensiero determinato; questo pensiero è come uno specchio nel quale il popolo riconosce se medesimo, i suoi istinti nuovi, i suoi novelli bisogni; nel quale egli trova risoluta la contraddisione tra ciò che è e ciò che dovrebbe essere'. (Spaventa, 'Rivoluzione e utopia'. *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, established by Gentile [Florence: Sansani Editore, 1963], p. 69).

Spaventa published his articles in the journal, *Il Progresso,* on the 3rd and the 15th June 1851 as *'La rivoluzione e l'Italia'* and, on the 31st August and the 11th October as 'Le Utopie'. He then added another article, 'Rousseau, Hegel, Gioberti' on the 26th December 1851. See Italo Cubeddu, 'Rivoluzione e Utopia: Articoli di Bertrando Spaventa su "Il Progresso"', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, ed. Giovanni Gentile, (Messina: Principato, 1963).

Philosophy, thought, or thinking, assumes the responsibility for supporting the unity of Europe. Philosophy can save Europe, which means that *theoria* takes precedence over *praxis*. Philosophers, or as Esposito described them, those who profess philosophy, are adepts when it comes to changing their perspective and interpretation: in this regard they are much swifter than economics or politics.[15] Only philosophy is capable of combining theory and praxis when there is a transformation which all are undergoing. Speed is important when it is a matter of resolving the problem of how to save Europe, because, according to the author, there is no more time to lose.

III. Biopolitical Crisis

Esposito's book concentrates on the basic questions of philosophy: what is the role of philosophy today? How can we combine philosophy with politics? Esposito tries to respond to these questions in light of the existing political situation of Europe.

In Europe, according to Esposito, the perpetual state of crisis has been exacerbated by two things: 1) mass migration and 2) terrorism. And it is here that he finds it necessary to invoke his own conception of biopolitics: the position taken by the governments of European countries in the face of mass migration can be explained, for him, primarily by means of the concept of biopolitics, for these political decisions concerned nothing less than the biological life and death of those about whom the decision was made. It might be the first time since the Second World War that the governments of Europe find themselves in the extraordinary situation of being faced with the fact that politics stands in direct relation with the life of millions of human beings.[16] Esposito describes mass migration and terrorism as part of a biopolitical crisis. For him, these appeared in the 1980s.

In terrorism, a biopolitical game is played between life and death, in which the terrorist decides to choose whether s/he lives or dies. It is a game between biological life and politics. On the one side, there is life; on the other side, there is political purpose.

However, for this crisis, he suggests some tragic and alarming political solutions: creating a European police and European military to defend Europe's borders in addition to the integration of investigative information.[17] The question is: would the taking up of arms constitute a real solution? Or does it create merely a temporary peace? Is the security of Europe a unique problem? Esposito has as yet given no answers to these questions.

However, Esposito's solution is the advocacy of *both* a European identity and its constitutive differences. To ensure its continued existence, Europe must defend its identity and also its differences — and this means the differences between

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[15] Roberto Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 4.
[16] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 5.
[17] Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

Europe and those others who remain *outside* of Europe. Esposito adopts the Hegelian position according to which identity and difference are mutually dependent upon one another. But what kind of identity are we talking about? Is it an identity based on the concept and which demands certain human rights and liberties? These are questions which the book attempts to answer.

IV. What is *il fuori* (outside)?

Esposito compares some philosophers, like Adorno, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze with other contemporary Italian philosophers. In European philosophy of the twentieth century, Esposito hopes to find a new philosophy for Europe, and in particular somewhere within the tense relationships between 'critical theory', 'the philosophy of difference', and 'biopolitics'.

The purpose of the book, as Esposito defines it, is to relate European philosophy or the philosophy of Europe to its *outside*. The philosophers of continental Europe of the past century have in some sense produced their philosophies somewhere other than their origin, — as in the case of Adorno, who was compelled to flee his native Germany. The relationship of thought with its exteriority constitutes the theoretical frame of Esposito's book. He aims explicitly to re-establish a philosophy for Europe along with the creation of a 'new spirit' of Europe, constituting a break with its bloody past of war, violence, and exclusion. But it seems that Europe, instead of learning the lessons of the past, prefers to re-establish it. Europe never confronts or even seems willing to confront its colonial past. If it had done so, it might be able to find a permanent solution to the problem of mass enforced migration.

Esposito speaks of two transitions to the 'outside':

1) the exile of Frankfurt School Critical Theory to North America;

2) French Theory in North America. Esposito subtitles his book in a way that is intended to echo and yet at the same time distinguish itself from German Philosophy, French Theory, and Italian thought: European Philosophy — *Una filosofia per l'Europa* (A Philosophy for Europe). Speaking of German philosophy, French theory and Italian thought, he is referring to philosophy after the 19th century. For Esposito, the adjectives 'German', 'French', and 'Italian' do not describe particular nationalities, but are rather 'conceptual expressions' (*espressivi [piuttosto di un certo stile] concettuale*).[18] And yet the book does not perhaps give a truly decisive and *positive* account of what 'conceptual expressions' actually are.

To provide the rudiments of such an account, let us turn to Esposito's notion of biopolitics. This will help us to understand precisely what Esposito means by 'European' and by a certain non-nationalistic understanding of nationality, and indeed what he understands specifically by 'thought'. The category of biopolitics originates from Foucault's research. Esposito states that Foucault finds its origin in

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[18] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 157.

Nietzsche. One finds a confluence of different nationalities entering into the formation of a single concept. Italian thought is not independent from French and German philosophy. Italian thought has merely developed in a different direction and with a distinct style, and this alone is perhaps what bestows upon it its originality. Besides, the original root of Italian thought may be traced back to 1960s.[19] Esposito differentiates between the concept of 'thought' and the terms 'philosophy' and 'theory'. He shows that the term 'thought' stands in intimate relation with political praxis; that is, Italian thought finds its essence in praxis, in political action, and in particular the *Operaismo* of the 1960s. The term 'thought', instead of preceding praxis, derives from praxis and thus distinguishes itself from the autonomy of 'philosophy' and the neutrality of 'theory'.[20] The concept of 'thought' is characterised as being always in action, active and actual (*attivo e attuale*).[21] 'Thought', unlike theory and philosophy, is related to a collective process that transgresses the limits of the latter.

While German Philosophy, which Esposito takes in the guise of Critical Theory (the Frankfurt School) was forced to emigrate by certain traumatic events, French Theory lacks such a 'tragic resonance' (*risonanze tragiche*).[22] French philosophers like Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard are invited to North America to teach and to speak: this is their 'exile'. Esposito expands upon this situation using Deleuze's concept of 'deterritorialisation' (*deterritorializzazione*), through which European thought manages to disseminate itself throughout the globe.

Esposito here makes a claim similar to that of Spaventa who speaks of the circulation of Italian philosophy within Europe; here Esposito speaks of the circulation of European philosophy or European *thought* throughout the world. According to Spaventa, after relating to other philosophies and becoming a part of these philosophies, Italian philosophy or 'Italian thought' returns to itself by means of a deterritorialisation of European philosophy, including Cartesian and Hegelian thought. For Esposito, Italian philosophy deterritorialises itself by means of French Theory, which refers to deconstruction, and by means of German Philosophy, which refers to the philosophy of the Frankfurt School. Thus, Italian thought ceases to be merely national and disseminates itself throughout Europe, precisely by learning from French and German Philosophy.

V. What is the Main Characteristic of these Philosophies?

According to Esposito, German Philosophy is based on the concept of negation (*negazione*); French Theory on neutralisation (*neutralizzazione*); and Italian thought on affirmation, or 'affirmative thought' (*pensiero affirmative*) which alludes

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[19] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 157.
[20] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 158.
[21] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 158.
[22] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 10.

to 'thinking in action' (*pensiero in atto*).[23] Italian thought is related to praxis and politics — for this reason, the outside (*il fuori*) of Italian thought is 'politics' (*politico*); for German philosophy, the outside is 'the social' (*il sociale*), and for French theory, it is 'writing' (*scrittura*).[24]

Let us examine Italian thought in particular in more depth: Italian thought is active (*attivo*) but not reactive (*reattivo*). Italian thought was characterised by 'workerism' (*operaismo*) in the 1960s and has more recently become involved in developing the category of biopolitics (*biopolitica*). Italian thought develops according to three bipolarities between the 1960s and the 1990s:

1) In 1966, Mario Tronti writes for the *Quaderni rossi* (1961–66) and *Classe Operaia* (1964–67), and in these political journals he discusses the bipolarities between capitalist society (*la società del capitale*) and the proletarian party (*partito operaio*);

2) Antonio Negri's *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (*Il potere costituente*) presents us with a conflictual bipolarity between the *constituent* power of liberal and democratic force and the *constituted* power of a central authority and a stable power;

3) Finally, we come to the bipolarity between *communitas* and *immunitas* urged by Esposito in his books *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (2002). These two concepts may be said to capture Esposito's own unique take on the notion of biopolitics. It seems that *Communitas, Immunitas,* and the third book in this de facto trilogy, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy,* together with *Da fuori,* are four books which complete each other, and may be read in hindsight as a tetralogy composed with a view to the emancipation of Europe from its seemingly endemic crisis.

The author, as we know from his book, *Communitas,* attempts to reveal a different perspective on the notion of community, distinct from the classical conception, which means to 'have something in common', through a deep etymological analysis of the Latin term *'communitas'*.[25] Generally, this term is defined as the opposite of that which is *proper*. By contrast, Esposito examines the term *communitas* with the thought that it will be better understood if it is taken to be composed of the words *'cum'* and *'munus'*, but he points out that contemporary and classical theories of community have laid stress on the *cum*[26] at the expense of *munus*.[27] The term *munus* originally signifies *dono* — duty or obligation (*dovere, obbligo*), and gift.[28] Esposito explains *munus* in terms of gift, or the gift that one

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[23] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 13.

[24] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 12.

[25] Esposito, *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), p. IX–X.

[26] For Esposito, Jean-Luc Nancy's analysis of community (in *La communauté désoeuvrée* [*The Inoperative Community*]) is one example of this (p. 180).

[27] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 180.

[28] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. x–xi.

gives but not the gift that one receives; in this sense, *munus* rests on the *act* of giving.[29] There is, therefore, a firm relationship between community and *munus* (*dono*) or gift, present. According to one etymology of 'community', the word derives from *communitas*, that is from *cum-munus*. *Cum-munus* means reciprocal or mutual gift (*dono* [*munus*] *reciproco*). *Munus* involves both gift and obligation (*obbligo*). But here the key word is 'reciprocity' (*reciprocità*). Esposito asks in what sense a gift (*dono*) is a duty. Should a gift not be a voluntary affair? *Munus,* for Esposito, is obligation — that is, a contract made with the other; *munus* demands to be released from this obligation. The giving consigns one to a commitment or task with respect to the other.

Esposito asks: what do the members of a community have in common? It is not wealth or property — but rather, it is a task, a burden. The community is bound together by a shared obligation, a duty or debt, by a limitation and by a lack The ancient meaning of *'communis'* must be one who shares a burden (*carico*) or a task (*incarico*). *Communitas* is not understood with regard to 'property'. *Communitas* is the totality of a people united not by property but by an obligation (*dovere*) or a debt.[30]

In other words, it can be observed that *communitas* is a people united not by an addition, but by a subtraction (*meno*). In the community, subjects or individuals leave their proper (*proprio*), they depart from themselves. By giving a gift to someone, or by owing a debt to them, subjects or individuals become a part of the community by way of a lack, a limitation. The *munus* appearing in *communitas* is not a property or possession. It is a debt, a pledge (*pegno*), a gift that is to be given.[31] For this reason, a lack is established. For Esposito, the members of a community are united by an obligation. This obligation is established by the idea that 'I owe you something' but not 'you owe me something'.

Esposito finds something more subjective, private, proper or more precisely privileged in the term *'munus'* than is to be found in *cum*. From this discovery, he is then able to say something important and novel about the contrasting term, 'immunity' (*immunità*). *Immunitas* and *communitas* are opposites. *Immunitas* exonerates the members of the community from the duties and obligations (the *munus*) which they owe to one another. Community connects the individuals by way of a shared task, by the lack of an individual proper.

According to Esposito, the philosophical tradition was always aware of the relationship between community and death.[32] But only in the modern period has this fact appeared as a problem, and even a fundamental problem for political philosophy. Esposito explains the relation between *communitas* and death starting with the Middle Ages. In this regard, he writes that, '[i]f the community of sin from which we originate is marked by fear, no one can be secure in this life, which is

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[29] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xii.
[30] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xii–iii.
[31] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xiii.
[32] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xvi.

literally besieged by death'.[33] Here, immunisation appears as the opposite of *communitas.* Esposito believes that this category, *immunity*, will explain the modern paradigm more adequately than the categories of secularisation, legitimation, and rationalisation. The main point of Esposito is the encounter of the subject with its 'nothing', its death or its end. While community breaches the putatively watertight boundaries of the individual and their identity, immunity establishes this identity in a defensive and offensive way, guarding against whatever threatens its existence from the outside — or at least that would be the traditional understanding of immunity; Esposito proposes another, not based upon the military analogy, but modelled rather upon a relation of hospitality.[34]

For Esposito, while immunity, despite everything, tends towards the protection of the individual, community opens the individual onto the other, breaching these supposed defences. It seems that community is not a place where we can establish a secure life but rather a place in which we are free to shed our very obsession with security (*ossessione securitaria*).[35] Community 'is always contemporary with immunity — not as its negative reverse-side but as its affirmative obverse'.[36]

VI. Biopolitics in Italian Thought?
Esposito deploys his account of biopolitics to demonstrate the place of Italian thought in relation to European philosophy.

According to Esposito, the character of Italian thought may be demonstrated by the different inflections given to the notion of biopolitics by Italian thinkers in recent times:

1) Giorgio Agamben, contrary to Foucault, argues that biopolitics is not a characteristic of modernity but may rather be found in political thought and practices from Aristotle to Roman law, right up to the present day, by way of Auschwitz, in the shadow of which we still stand. Agamben defines and conceptualises the biological existence of human beings as a 'naked life' or 'bare life' (*nuda vita*). This life is incorporated into the political order by means of its very exclusion, and this establishes the sovereign ruler's political power over this life. The life of *homo sacer* determines also the field of sovereignty. In Roman law, the name of this figure of a life included by its very exclusion is *homo sacer*, the man, holy or damned.

2) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
3) Esposito in his book *Bios.*[37]

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[33] Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xx. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Camphell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 12.
[34] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 181.
[35] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 181.
[36] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 182.
[37] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 147.

VII. Towards a European Philosophy?

It seems that, for Esposito, his own definition of European philosophy remains confined within the geographical territories of France, Germany and Italy. Nevertheless, as already stated, these territories are not to be understood simply as nations and nor are the territories themselves without a certain deterritorialisation: we have seen Esposito mention two that took place in the 1960s and 1970s:

1) German philosophy was deterritorialised and took up residence in France,[38] in the sense that — referring to Alain Badiou's account of the history of French thought — French philosophy can be considered as a continuation of the philosophy produced in German in the 19th and 20th Centuries: for example, Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology*; Husserl's philosophy is formative for Sartre and Merleau-Ponty; Heidegger's thought is radically reworked by Derrida; Nietzsche is perhaps the determinative influence for Foucault and Deleuze. 'When French thought is recognised as postmodern, it is necessarily also post-Hegelian'.[39]

Esposito underlines that in 1960s the philosophical trajectory changed from critical theory with the decline of Frankfurt School, especially the philosophy of Marcuse, towards the idea of the deconstruction (*decostruzione*).

2) The second deterritorialisation within European philosophy rests on a series of lectures on French philosophy — under the name of 'French theory' — given by French philosophers in America. Esposito calls it a 'new hegemony' (*una nuova egemonia*) created by French philosophy in the American universities after Critical Theory. On the one hand, there is the philosophy of a certain Enlightenment, represented and defended by Habermas who directed for a time certain extremely intemperate criticisms at his own distorted vision of French philosophy (under the heading of 'postmodernism', which for him comprised the works of Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault, among others) understood as a kind of irrationalism. And yet, despite this critique, he was never led to approach *Italian* thinkers, and particularly not those who think politics according to Carl Schmitt's categories.

Esposito claims that even when he refers to his modern antecedents, such as Hegel, as opposed to a cosmopolitan Kant, or to his Italian-French heirs, Schmitt is the polemical idol of his recent production. Schmitt is, for Esposito, at the present time, the most crucial philosopher. In this respect, Habermas tries to establish an idea of politics which is different from Schmitt's understanding. According to Esposito, the confirmation of his attitude toward Schmitt can be seen in Habermas' distance from those authors in Germany, France and Italy who are influenced by him. Esposito writes that Habermas never directly deals with Italian

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[38] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 100.

[39] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 101.

operaismo because Mario Tronti, one of the founders of this school, discusses politics within Schmittian categories or in a polemic with his categories.[40]

On the other hand, French theory does indeed criticise certain elements of modern philosophy, particularly Hegel and his dialectic, most notably from the 1960s onwards.

Esposito finds the root of postmodern French theory in the heart of German thought.[41] He differentiates the thought of the Frankfurt School from French thought in that the former retains the contradiction between theory and reality through the critique of Hegelian ideology (understood in terms of Absolute Knowledge and a closed system rather than an open one), while French thought considers ideology by means of an anti-dialectical approach. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School criticise Hegel's dialectic but they still adopt something like it as their own method, while 'postmodern' French philosophers reject the dialectic as a method more or less altogether.[42]

VIII. A Philosophy for Europe or a New Politics for Europe?

Esposito writes that 'the crisis of Europe in the first decades of the 20th century united the thought of Valéry and Husserl, of Heidegger and Benda, of Croce and Ortega', and similarly at the end of the century, the basic role of Europe was still to establish 'the point of intersection between views of different origins'.[43] For Esposito, compared to earlier debates, now a crisis was rearing its head in which Europe and philosophy were knotted together in the same destructive spiral.

Between 1930 and 1940 something begins to change. The ruins which war left behind were not just material, economic, and social, but also cultural: that is to say, the war engendered changes within *philosophy*. It led Europe to a thought which for Esposito was not able to 'establish a shelter against this deviation'.[44] This situation explains why European philosophy moved to its outside *(il fuori)*. For Esposito, it is only outside of its borders that Europe may find the reason for this defeat. But when we ask what this outside is, a great problem regarding its delimitation still awaits us: 'outside' includes those places where we can find France and Germany. The question is as follows: does this idea or theory of the 'outside' enable 'dialogue' or exclude it? — A dialogue between different philosophies, philosophers, ideas or thoughts, between different cultures.

Esposito tries to reveal the role of Europe through different aspects of European thinkers such as Julien Benda, Stefan Zweig, and Albert Camus, who investigate the role of Europe in the constitution of a future. In the 1930s, Benda, in his *Discours à la nation européenne,* responded to Stefan Zweig's *Einigung*

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[40] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 208.

[41] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 104.

[42] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 104.

[43] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 196.

[44] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 196.

Europa not only by evoking the necessity of the unification of Europe but by proposing to give to the task of bringing together the people of Europe the appropriate symbolic and mediatic significance.[45] Benda believed in the unifying force of a common language, the military uniform, the evocative power of the anthem and national flag. Esposito seems to agree with Benda's European project. According to Zweig, to create a European spirit or people, it would be necessary to receive people's support or win people's approval. For him, the realisation of this idea is possible only with such 'grassroots' support, because, in history, changes never appear only as a result of alterations within the intellectual sphere or by simple reflection.

Besides, there is another fundamental question that must be asked in order to determine the role of Europe in the future history of human beings: what was the role of Europe in history? What kind of role is being sought? The answer to this last question given by Alexandre Kojève at the end of 1945 is to found 'a sort of Latin empire',[46] which is able to stand up to both Soviet and Anglo-American power by resisting the economic hegemony of Germany. Esposito draws our attention once again to Kojève's now largely forgotten work, *L'empire latin. Esquisse d'une doctrine de la politique française.* Kojève theorises the opportunity to establish a sort of Latin empire, able to resist the other two world superpowers as well as German economic power.

According to Esposito, 'European philosophy from Machiavelli to Hegel, through Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Kant remains always an expression of a political project [*progettualità politica*]'.[47] He establishes his thesis on the role of Europe by basing it not on economy but on politics. In this regard, his main concern is: what is the response to the question asked by European philosophy with respect to the role of Europe? Different authors gave different answers. The particular aim of the book is to present a connection between politics and philosophy. It seems that both Esposito and Massimo Cacciari propose '*one multiplicity*', 'the unity of distinct elements [...] which draws a common figure'.[48] Esposito affirms that Europe will always live with the tension between differences and diversities in a society. There will always be a threat that creates a violent attempt to eliminate one pole in favour of another.

Esposito suggests a political decision for the European Union against the economical. According to Esposito, the connection between unity and difference or dissimilarity (*differenza*) is the origin of the relationship between politics and philosophy.[49] Esposito emphasises that the economy is globalised and deterritorialised. This deterritorialised economy has always corresponded to politics. Esposito believes that the unification of European countries by way of the

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[45] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 198.
[46] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 199.
[47] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 202.
[48] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 204.
[49] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 204.

economy or in terms of property does not work well. The main solution that we can find is politics itself. Esposito explicates this idea by means of the creation of a European Constitution, to save Europe from disintegration, because the European Union lacks legitimacy. For Esposito, even if the European Union is not a State, the idea that the Union is suitable to receive a constitution originates from the fact that the Union has a sovereign power over certain areas which are transferred to it by the State members. But Esposito marks the differences between a Constitution as a juridical basis for a State and a Treaty as an instrument for international relations. When Esposito considers a constitution for Europe, he has a European people in mind. This European people is understood not in the sense of the ethos of a community but rather as a political unity suited to taking and supporting decisions expressed by its majority.[50] However, Esposito is also aware of the lack of a united European people which might activate a constituent process.[51]

According to Esposito, the possibility of the existence of a European people in political life will not rest on treaties or conventions.[52] In other words, it will not result from mediations between governments. He stresses that the existence of a European people in political life should not be the product of existing political dynamics. Rather, Esposito attempts to imagine a Europe and a European Parliament in which different peoples in different economic conditions will find their political representations. It is a 'Europe of *peoples*'. The real or true Europe of peoples, or the political unification of Europe, for Esposito, will be the 'result of real political dialectics', and it will not be the result of agreement between those who command or dominate, the ruling class, those who have economic power — whom Esposito describes as the 'vertices' (*vertici*). The political unification of Europe will be achieved through the categories that Italian thought has 'handed over to European philosophy'.[53]

For Esposito, in France and in Germany, discussions of the nature of French and German philosophy is dominated by Derrida and Habermas, respectively. Derrida develops his idea of a 'thought from outside' *(pensiero del fuori)* in the *Other Heading: Reflection on Today's Europe* by identifying a certain continuity between Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Patočka, and therefore, 'deconstructs the Eurocentric perspective of Hegel which both Husserl and Heidegger differently propose'.[54]

This is to say that French theory develops by means of a thought deriving from its outside *(pensiero del fuori),* which is to say, German philosophy. For Derrida, the outside refers to writing and, for Esposito, Derrida opposes writing to logos. Regarding Foucault, the outside addresses, on the one hand, the sphere of power and its relations, inherent within the whole of discourse, and on the other

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[50] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 213.
[51] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 212, 215.
[52] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 238.
[53] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 238.
[54] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 216.

hand, biological life, over which human beings do not always hold dominion. The author develops the idea of Europe through Derrida's argument in *Today's Europe* in which he speaks of a Europe which loses its proper identity and becomes something more than itself. For Derrida, we have to be the guardians or protectors of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, but this Europe should not be withdrawn from its identity and come forth towards what it is not.[55] He proposes that to think Europe means to think the world itself because Europe can share the decentralisation.[56] This seems contradictory if 'Europe' must refer to a geographical area, and hence to a certain 'centre'. After all these philosophical discussions of Europe, it can be said that 'Europe is no longer a privileged point of view on the world, but the world is the deterritorialised place to interpret Europe'.[57]

European philosophy, including German, French, and Italian philosophy, never severs all ties with *metaphysics*. When Esposito asks after a philosophy for Europe, he displays a philosophical panorama by means of the development and fracturing of European philosophy, its transplantation to North America — this produces a new beginning for metaphysics which stands beyond the boundaries of Europe (when understood geographically) and produces the philosophy of Europe.[58] This is to say that Esposito believes that philosophy began with the Greeks and that it remains a fundamentally European invention — Modern Europe was born at the intersection of Greece and Christianity.[59] But with the discovery of America and then the American Revolution, philosophy begins to lose its origin.

Esposito is convinced that, as in the history of Europe, also today, Continental thought is returning to question the destiny of Europe. Continental thought attempts to confront the problem in a peculiar way to which other disciplines, such as political science, law, and economics, have difficulty in providing an adequate solution. For Esposito, at that dramatic moment in the history of Europe, Europe directed itself to philosophy. As during the French Revolution, which Kant and Hegel considered to be a great philosophical movement, an event destined to change world history. Esposito defines Europe as 'constitutive' in the sense that Europe always tries to constitute new ideas, new forms of the State, philosophy, science, and so on and so forth. On this point, according to Esposito, we can imagine that philosophy is able to introduce a new perspective and a new idea — for our own time — in order to see things in a different manner. Philosophy, according to *Da Fuori*, is able to present a fresh new thought in order to comprehend the European situation or crisis. Considering most fundamentally the problem of European identity, Esposito in his book on the one hand tries to concentrate on European philosophies and on the other hand tries to discover and take up the possibility of a philosophy for Europe by elaborating its

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[55] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 217.

[56] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 218.

[57] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 218.

[58] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 65.

[59] Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 24.

new dimension oriented to the *outside*. This *outside* leads to great discoveries in philosophy.

In *Da Fuori*, Esposito tries to analyse the history of European philosophy in the late twentieth century, which is identified with Critical Theory in Germany, post-structuralism in France, and Italian thought.

Critical Theory, or what he calls German Philosophy, is a great discovery emerging by means of its exile to America. French thought finds its outside in German philosophy — for Deleuze, for example, the outside might mean to be external to the dialectic. In Italian thought, in the case of Machiavelli, it can be found in the political — outside or external to the State. However, Italian thought also has a connection with its geographical outside, just like Germany and France and their thought and philosophy. Italian philosophers relate themselves to the Foucauldian biopolitical paradigm and represent and develop it in different manners. For Esposito, the Foucauldian paradigm concerning biological life and the relationship between biology and politics has both negative and positive aspects. Italian philosophers try to develop this paradigm in these two different dimensions.

The recent political and economic situation of Europe and the European Union, which seems for Esposito to have reached its final challenge, provides us with one of the reasons to turn to philosophy. The economic crisis, the crisis created by the increased flux of migration, and the crisis produced by Islamic terrorism, are both interpretable by the philosophical-political categories of 'biopolitics' and 'immunisation'.

To conclude, Esposito attempts to demonstrate that the deterritorialisation of European philosophy creates new perspectives and allows philosophy to re-create itself. This re-creation assists politics, by suggesting a new perspective and approach to political problems. According to Esposito, philosophy may not be a solution but it presents or introduces a different view, and can change perspectives. In short, philosophy does not change the world but provides another type of help. These new perspectives combine philosophy and politics through the categories created by Italian thought, which means 'being in act' and placing philosophy in relation to praxis.

In the end, the problem addressed by this book is simply what the *identity* of Europe is — it asks how to *philosophise* it, and how to *politicise* it, and finally how a European identity might be re-established.

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Virno's Philosophical Anthropology
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Michael Lewis[1]

Virno's contribution to philosophy

What is Paolo Virno's contribution to philosophy?

To philosophise is to produce one's own theory of what philosophy *is*, and therefore we could rephrase our question to ask: what is it to be 'philosophical' for Virno?

Let us assume that philosophy is inextricable from a certain metaphysical gesture, even if philosophical thought need not strictly *be* metaphysical. Philosophy would then be defined by its concern with the difference between the metaphysical and the physical, the ideal and the real, the two worlds of the intelligible and the sensible, which Heidegger summarised in all their historical variation under the title of being and beings, the ontological difference — a separation between two senses of the word 'being' (*ousia*) which the philosophical tradition had left unthought. The particular form in which Virno takes up this difference is the mediaeval and, in truth, Kantian distinction between the transcendental and the empirical.

Virno's contribution to philosophy is to provide us with a thinking of the relation between the transcendental and the empirical, in which the transcendental, the supposedly ahistorical and non-empirical conditions for the possibility of things which *are* historical and empirical, *itself* appears in an empirical form; but not only this, the guise in which it shows itself varies *historically*.

But this would not be enough to ensure Virno's originality. What perhaps does is the idea that these transcendental conditions are nothing besides *human nature,* specified in a *biological* manner. We shall see that this notion of the human being is, as has almost always been the case, tightly bound up with *language* (Aristotle's *zōon logon echon* or *animal rationale* supplied one of the founding

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tenets of philosophical anthropology). But Virno's originality here will be to think this linguistic human nature with the assistance of at least three disciplines: biology, linguistics, and philosophy. This will allow him both to treat language as a *biological* faculty *and* to rethink it according to the *philosophical* notion of potentiality (*dynamis*).

By means of this deployment of anthropology, Virno is able to conceptualise the transcendental-empirical relation in the following way: the transcendental understood as the putatively *a*historical character of human nature is first specified *empirically*, by means of a selection of scientific facts gathered from anthropology and zoology, and is then interpreted *philosophically* in terms not of actuality but of potential: 'The concept of potentiality sums up and *clarifies anew* some remarkable biological (Bolk, Portmann, Gould), paleontological (Leroi-Gourhan), and anthropological (Gehlen, but already Herder) discoveries' (WW195–6/163, emphasis added). Perhaps it will turn out that these scientists and thinkers are even chosen precisely *because* their data are susceptible to modification in terms of potentiality.

In any case, of all the features which Virno will attribute to human nature, from neoteny to bipedality and an environmental lack that is transformed into an infinity of world, the most fundamental trait of man seems nevertheless to be language. By reading Virno's recent work on 'linguistic anthropology', the *Essay on Negation* (2013), we shall attempt to demonstrate that language seems to be an important *empirical* fact about the human precisely because it is the origin of potentiality as such, in its infinitude. Indeed, we shall venture the hypothesis that language is (thereby) the source of all of the other characteristic features of humankind, which seem otherwise to derive from the fact of neoteny. The potential stemming from language modifies all of the other facts of human nature to render them potential in their turn, at the same time unifying them. Thus, Virno's empirical anthropology becomes philosophical and linguistic in the same moment.

We shall expand on these schematic points by examining and bringing to light the joints which articulate together three of Virno's most philosophical (and anthropological) texts: *When the Word Becomes Flesh* (2003), *E così via, all'infinito (And So On, Ad Infinitum)* (2010), and the *Essay on Negation* (2013). The connection between these three books is manifest even at the level of their subtitles (*Language and Human Nature*, *Logica e antropologia,* and *For A Linguistic Anthropology,* respectively). They comprise a grand trilogy of anthropological works, the resources of which we shall marshal here in order to illuminate Virno's contribution to philosophy by way of philosophical anthropology.

Nature and history: Biolinguistic capitalism

First, let us focus on the fundamental matrix of Virno's philosophical contribution: the supposedly impossible overlapping of the transcendental and the empirical.[2]

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[2] Virno speaks of 'an endless circularity between the transcendental and the empirical' (ID134).

On a certain reading of the Kantian moment, the transcendental was supposed to be kept rigorously distinct from the natural or the empirical (for Kant, 'nature' simply is that which can be experienced, and so the two are indissociable).

'Transcendental philosophy prides itself on affirming that the presupposition of human praxis, which determine facts and states of affairs, never appear as facts of states of affairs themselves' (WW214/179). This is summarised in the following way: '[w]hat founds or allows all appearance does not appear' (WW214/179).

The transcendental field, the transcendental subject together with its faculties and processes, makes all experience possible, but remains radically distinct from that experience, supernatural, and hence unknowable in a certain sense. This is why Kant would never have described the transcendental subject as 'human nature'. In such a gesture cannot but bring to mind the English empiricists of the 17th and 18th Century, and in particular Kant's description of John Locke as attempting a 'physiology of the human understanding' (CPR, Aix), an empiricism which has not yet learnt to separate causation and conditioning. Yet, flagrantly, Virno speaks of the empirical, material basis of transcendental conditions, as anthropology does.

The deconstruction of the transcendental-empirical divides seems to begin with Hegel (but perhaps earlier, with J. G. Hamann, and even before that — perhaps always, Derrida would avow). Hegel espied a 'bad infinite' in the Kantian picture, a radical distinction between an absolutely inapparent structure and its empirico-sensible apparition, and thus the opposition between the transcendental and the empirical began to deconstruct itself, as if the absolute precedence of the transcendental could never have been so straightforward, so distinct from that which was supposed to follow (from) it.

In the twentieth century, apart from Heidegger's monumental attempt to insist on the inherence of 'facticity' within the instantiation of transcendental structures (Virno speaks of 'the visibility (or facticity) of the transcendental' [WW218/182, translation modified]): 'life' and eventually 'Dasein' in its irreducible potential for singularity, perhaps most prominent in the twentieth century refusal of a radical separateness on the part of the transcendental are the deconstructions of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Each theorises the elevation of a certain empirical element to the level of the transcendental, and either think this inevitable (Derrida) or use it as a spur to rethink the transcendental beyond its 'resemblance' to the empirical (Deleuze).

But it seems likely that, for different reason, none of these thinkers would be happy straightforwardly to invoke such an apparently defunct and so *empirical* a notion as 'human nature', having had done with man each in their own way.

But following in the wake of such attempts, Virno can say that his philosophy 'dethrones [*destituisce di fondamento*] transcendental philosophy' (WW213/178). And this leads him, up to a point tendentiously, to describe his own project as an 'empiricism' of a certain kind: 'atheism coincides with the affirmed empirical appearance of transcendence: it coincides with an empiricism to the n$^{\text{th}}$ power [*un empirismo all'ennesima potenza*] able to reclaim even the presuppositions of experience' (WW216/181). Virno also speaks of the 'integral [*integrale*, i.e. inherent] empiricism [...] of natural history' (WW217/181).

(N.b. Throughout this essay, in quoting Virno, I have invoked the original Italian more frequently than might be decent or decorous, but certain of Virno's translations have suffered from a lack of standardisation, to say the least. In general, I cite the original when a potentially important ambiguity is elided, as when different words are translated by single English equivalent — this frequently happens with words relating to lack and poverty, and since these are important

We shall return to the curious matter of transforming an empirically specified *nature* into a *transcendental* condition of manifestation. But for the moment, let us examine the way in which these transcendental conditions (human nature) manifest themselves in history, in a bid to specify Virno's originality and to clarify certain of his choices, particularly when it comes to the way in which he specifies human nature.

Virno's gesture here is not to 'historicise the transcendental', nor is it to 'transcendentalise history', which is to say, respectively, to demonstrate the conditions for the possibility of manifestation to be historically variable (Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault), or to include history itself among the conditions for the possibility of experience (Wilhelm Dilthey, and his progeny; perhaps originally, Hegel).

In Virno's theory of the transcendental, despite its contact with history, the transcendental remains ahistorical, or as Virno will put it '*meta*historical' (in a Latinate version we are more familiar with, 'transhistorical').[3] The transcendental is not historically changeable, nor is history straightforwardly a part of the conditions which govern appearance. Rather, the transcendental, while remaining constant, proves itself capable of *manifesting* itself in an empirical form. But, tellingly, it reveals itself in a different guise in each historical epoch. Thus, the transcendental, understood as human nature and its faculties, will make itself available empirically for certain deployments — malign or benign — in a manner that depends upon the historical phase in question. Today, at the very end of history, we find a historical configuration which Virno describes as standing at the mercy of 'biolinguistic capitalism' (to mix the Greek and Latin languages in a Babelic hybrid perhaps forgivable given the state of as yet unactualised potential which it represents).

It is our contemporary moment that might be taken to justify the particular way in which Virno interprets human nature as such, and indeed the very manner in which his entire philosophical anthropology unfolds — retrospectivity is rampant.[4] Virno's anthropology would be a genealogy of our present, therefore,

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to our consideration of philosophical anthropology, we shall frequently interject them. I also recall the Italian when the same word in the original is translated by a number of different words in the target language, which risks suggesting an ambiguity when there is none.)

[3] In *Déjà vu and the End of History (Il ricordo del presente)*, Virno will deploy the cognate term 'pre-history' (*preistoria*) in a very similar manner (DV117/93). The only difference is that the prehistoric should be invoked when speaking of the *beginning* of history, while the metahistorical speaks intra-historically, of different epochs *within* a history that has already begun. That said, the difference is not clear, since Virno speaks precisely about the way in which the anthropogenic assumption of historicity is repeated in a different way throughout history — the manifestation of the transcendental is nothing besides such a repetition of the very first moment in the ascent of man.

[4] '[I]t is because of this superposition ['of eternity and contingency, of the biological invariant and socio-political change'] that the notion of "human nature" has been enjoying a new prestige in

and be based, as such genealogies necessarily are, on a certain diagnosis of our present moment. Virno's account reads our historical moment as one in which our biological linguistic faculty — in all its potentiality, its 'power' — has become the most valuable commodity on the 'job market'. This will mean that capitalism today has fastened not just on one potentiality among others, but on the very root of all potentiality.

This allows us to propose the following: it is not simply that the transcendental is revealed differently over history, but that the very difference between historical epochs is most fundamentally *defined* by the different manner in which these conditions are allowed to show through it (although this way of putting it risks drawing a little nearer than might be desirable to the Foucauldian position). Fundamentally, it also becomes clear that Virno's philosophy of history — basically presupposed rather than proven — is Marxist: history is the history of technology understood in the guise of the means of production, together with the history of its ownership and the manner of extracting profit with respect to labour that derives from this arrangement — a history of 'political economy'. Adopting this vision of history entails the definition of our current epoch as that of the thoroughgoing sway of the capitalistic mode of production (while rendering 'capitalism' as such more than just one facet among the many that would characterise our current epoch) and this capitalism is understood as employing the labour-power of the human being in such a way as to manifest the 'metahistorical' nature of this human being's zoological life in a certain historical way.[5]

Virno's genealogy of this situation is motivated and directed precisely by the need to resist this exploitation of human nature, and the necessity to reveal the possibility of *another* way in which our nature might be made manifest within history and mobilised politically. Any attempt to overcome the present moment in history would need to insist that this history is not in fact at an end, and that to understand how to supersede it, practically, we must, theoretically, comprehend with precision the overlapping of transcendental and empirical, nature and history, life and power, that it involves.[6]

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the last few decades' (WW204/171), 'because the biological properties of the human animal have acquired an unexpected role in today's productive processes' (WW205/171).

[5] Virno will describe the account of this form of history as a 'natural history', and since we have given our preliminary definition of 'philosophy', it is only fair to present Virno's own: 'the preeminent task of philosophy is to come to terms with the unprecedented superposition of eternity and contingency, of the biological invariant and socio-political change that uniquely characterises [*connota*] our time' (WW204/170, translation modified).

[6] In a word, but one which Virno is for the most part reluctant to use, 'biopower' or 'biopolitics'. He comes closest to explaining this reticence when he describes biopolitics as a *derivative* of 'labour power', a more original instance which nevertheless it is perhaps the distinguishing mark of the philosopher to ignore (DV159/121). Indeed, perhaps this particular declination of 'potential' is avoided precisely by speaking about 'biopolitics'.

In the *Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno expands on this point and tells us that '[o]ne should not believe, then, that biopolitics includes within itself, as its own distinct articulation, the

Given this political motivation, while we shall confine ourselves as absolutely as we can to Virno's most explicitly anthropological works, we shall, once or twice, cast our gaze towards Virno's more directly political works. By indicating the articulation between these two strands, whilst also picking out the intertwining of the fibres that constitute each thread, and most of all the first, we should be able to clarify the connection between philosophy, anthropology, and politics, in Virno's work, and above all the political motivation for this philosophy and anthropology, which in certain ways explains the very nature of the latter.

Naturalism, natural science, and human nature

All of which leads us to think again about the invocation of *natural scientific* data in the definition of this human nature, for Virno might to an unsympathetic reader seem guilty of a certain naïve naturalism in his definition of the 'human animal'.[7] In truth, as we shall come to see, the retrospective character of Virno's philosophy is what allows him to decide upon the particular empirical facts which he deploys in his definition of man's nature. In fact, Virno will end up almost equidistant from a naïve naturalism and its opposite, a purely philosophical transcendentalism, locating himself somewhere between a purely empirical anthropology and a philosophical anthropology which would ignore the empirical sciences altogether.[8]

Let us therefore examine just what Virno means by 'human nature', and we shall discover that the apparent 'ahistoricality' and 'empiricism' of Virno's approach are not so straightforward as they might have seemed.

In *When the Word Becomes Flesh,* Virno speaks of human nature as the 'biological invariant' or the 'meta-historical' invariant; elsewhere he will speak of the 'bioanthropological constants' (M12/ECV Part II 1). What are these, and whence does Virno draw them?

Two things should strike us first of all regarding Virno's anthropology:

1) The fact that it does indeed have a very pronounced empirical moment;

2) Apart from Stephen Jay Gould, and perhaps one might cite Noam Chomsky, Virno rarely employs *contemporary* empirical data.

Both of these points are philosophically significant.

Let us deal with the second. In general, Virno borrows his determination of human nature from the early to mid-twentieth century ethologists and philosophical

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management of labour-power [*forza-lavoro*]. On the contrary: biopolitics is merely an effect, a reverberation, or, in fact, one articulation of that primary fact — both historical and philosophical — which consists of the commerce of potential as potential [*potenza in quanto potenza*, the buying and selling of labour power *as* power]' (GM83–4/79).

[7] At least one recent book has come close to suggesting Virno is guilty of a certain naturalist naivety, from an historicising Foucauldian point of view, which remains difficult to reconcile with the account of the Foucault-Chomsky debate that Virno himself provides, and which we are distantly preparing to recite, together with the account of Virno's 'empiricism' that we are here developing (cf. Murphy 2017, 129–34).

[8] Virno speaks of 'an anthropology *inspired by* naturalism' (2011, 68/ECV Part I 1.3, emphasis added).

anthropologists, Jakob von Uexküll, Helmuth Plessner, Konrad Lorenz, and, above all, Arnold Gehlen. Less explicitly and perhaps only indirectly in all but a handful of cases, Virno also makes reference to the eighteenth century and one of fathers of this particular strain of anthropology, J. G. Herder. He also invokes André Leroi-Gourhan and the biologists Louis Bolk and Adolf Portmann, as we have already seen.

Slowly to approach the significance of this selection, let us first note that one feature of all these writers is that they avow human nature to be radically distinct from animal nature, just as human language (our prime distinguishing trait, for Virno) is radically distinct from animal language.[9] But to leave language aside for a moment, in general, the features of human nature which Virno gleans from his predecessors remain fairly constant, with only minor fluctuations. In *Multitude*,[10] it is said that man has no defined environment, and therefore no determinate and limited set of behaviours with biological purposes that would be triggered instinctually by signals emanating from that environment. Thus, our instincts, not standing in a biunivocal relation with a finite set of elements that would constitute our environment, may be said to be 'unspecialised', not necessarily developed or deployed for particular tasks relating to our vital survival needs.

Virno utilises the terms of Gehlen and Uexküll to affirm that the human being's lack of a (finite) environment *(Umwelt)* gives birth to an (infinite) world *(Welt).* The human being is capable of perceiving a potentially infinite set of signals or stimuli, to none of which is an instinctual response given innately within it. This lack gives rise in turn to a potential infinity of *responses* (and non-responses), and gives us some sense of how these thinkers might allow Virno to propose that, purely on a natural basis, the human being is an animal of quite incomparable potential.

The lack of a natural habitat, together with the infinity of world, necessitates the production of human cultures, which are geographically and historically variable, and contingent in their character. Nature and history find their joint in man. Culture is ambiguous in protecting man from the worst effects of his

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[9] Virno will accept this difference, apparently as straightforwardly as Jacques Lacan at his most seemingly naïve (cf. WW28/20). Following Noam Chomsky and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Virno takes 'recursion' to be one of the defining features of a specifically *human* language (cf. Virno 2011, 66f/ECV Introduction 1.2). In the *Essay on Negation*, Virno posits the ability to negate, which he had nevertheless earlier on related to recursion, as if the latter were (merely) one particular species of the former ('not not not not...' [with the multiplying parentheses assumed]) (cf. 2011, 66 & 75/ECV Introduction 1.2 & 1.5) (*Negation*, 1.1). One might also consult the typology Virno provides in *Mondanità* (MN3.1) which distinguishes infinite regress into two principal forms: cosmological and linguistic regression, with the latter being characterised in terms of the nesting of meta-languages and their object-languages.

[10] This hybrid does not exist in Italian: it is a partial translation of *E così via, all'infinito: Logica e antropologia* bound together with a full translation of *Motto di spirito e azione innovative,* and an appendix contained in neither (the English translation itself reveals none of this information). This nevertheless has the advantage of allowing the book to juxtapose very starkly the anthropological and the political.

'plastic[...] and indecis[ive]' nature, but also *manifesting* this nature and so assisting in its full deployment with all the dangerous aggressivity this implies. Political and cultural life allows for a level of destruction and aggression that man in the state of nature would not have been able to achieve: it allows for a certain peace, but also makes possible an unimaginable war (M18/ECV Part II 1 I.I).[11]

In a way that I think one could ultimately find in Heidegger, to paraphrase Virno rather broadly, this dangerous, unhinged character of the human animal has its promising side, and this is precisely where we move beyond the need for this wild animal to be 'tamed' by the state, in authoritarian fashion, an idea which led Gehlen himself (not to speak of Carl Schmitt) into a certain conservatism and worse. The potential character of the human animal means that it has a capacity for infinitely *innovative* actions, the ability to produce events of novelty, to modify customs, norms, laws, in a manner that is absolutely complete and thus absolutely revolutionary (M20/ECV Part II 1.2).[12] Thus the biolinguistic conditions of evil or vice are the same as those of virtue. What decides between them is the different relation we have, politically, with respect to our infinite negativity and potentiality.

Virno links this openness of man and his world with the human being's neoteny — 'the permanence of infantile characteristics' in adults, which is to say that the unspecialised character of instincts persists into adulthood. We never learn. It also implies the persistence of 'a congenital fragility of inhibitive mechanisms' which is to say man's 'virtually unlimited' aggressiveness. Unlimited precisely because of the unlimited number of its possible occasions (cf. M17/ECV Part II 1.1).

The precise list of human features Virno provides tends to vary each time he supplies it, and he seems quite content with the fact that his list is only 'approximate':

> poverty of instinct, undefined nature, and characteristic, constant disorientation. Having faculties is the sign of a lacuna: that is to say, it demonstrates the lack of a pre-given *environment* [ambiente *prefissato*] in

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[11] When it comes to man's exceptional aggression, Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* remains Virno's primary reference, one of those texts of the period that Virno appears to refer to absolutely uncritically.

[12] More or less paraphrasing Carl Schmitt, Virno writes: 'If, however, as everything leads us to believe, Homo Sapiens is dangerous, unstable and (self)destructive animal, then in order to hold his animal in check, the formation of a "united political body" seems inevitable' (M14/ECV Part II 1). It is Schmitt's *political* inference that Virno wishes to resist absolutely. For Virno accepts the 'anthropology of evil' but *not* the idea that this necessitates a strong state; quite the reverse: an abolition of the state and its capitalist economy. Virno puts it like this: 'the risky instability of the human animal — so called evil, in sum — does not imply at all the formation and maintenance of that "supreme empire" that is the sovereignty of the state' (M16/EVC Part II 1). In the current context, for completeness, one might also mention that Noam Chomsky's notion of a certain innate creativity of the human being, with particular reference to the use of language, may stand in the background of Virno's thought here.

which we can take an innately secure place once and for all. [...] Language, the intellect, memory, labour-power and the undifferentiated disposition towards pleasure [...]. This list — an approximate, and thus disputable one [*Approssimativo e quindi disputabile*] [...]. (DV87–8/72)[13]

*Pro*spectively, if the cluster of anthropic traits may be said to be unified by a single one, Virno appeals to neoteny. And yet, at other times, for instance in a text translated in *The Italian Difference*, Virno summarises these features in such a way as to make them revolve around not neoteny, but potentiality: 'The potentiality of *Homo sapiens*: (a) is attested to by the faculty of language; (b) is inseparable from instinctual non-specialisation; (c) originates in neoteny; (d) implies the absence of a univocal environment' (ID135, translation modified). We shall show in the end that to think of these features in terms of potentially is to think of them in a *retro*spective fashion, and we shall see that this potentiality is introduced — or at least generalised and infinitised — by the ultimate feature of the fully humanised animal: language. This explains why, in other contexts, Virno is quite unequivocal that the unifying trait is language. Defining 'nature' and the 'natural', Virno could not be more direct: 'we mean the physiological and biological constitution of our species, the innate dispositions that characterise it phylogenetically (starting, of course, with the linguistic faculty)' (WW172/144). Later on, he places language emphatically first in order of rank: 'the language [*linguaggio*] faculty as distinct from historical languages [*lingue*], raw potential [*potenzialità grezza*], non-specialisation, neoteny, and so forth' (WW202/169). And again, without hesitation: 'Instinctual unpreparedness and chronic potentiality: these invariant aspects of human nature, *deducible from the linguistic faculty*, imply an unlimited variability of production relations and life forms without, however, suggesting any blueprint for a just society' (WW189/158, emphasis added).

From the beginning, neoteny, and from the end, language. But perhaps things are not quite so simple, since, as we shall see, language is part of our *biological* heritage too, and not something that is simply *cultural*. We shall therefore need to propose a precise understanding of the relation between neoteny and language. In general, our hypothesis will be that neoteny and language *in conjunction* are responsible for the unprecedented level of potential which the human being has at its disposal, with language constituting something like a necessary supplement to our neoteny and at the same time its passage to infinity...

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[13] An alternative list, this time related directly to Gehlen, who generally inspires everything but remains in the background: 'the way of being of the multitude has to be qualified with attributes coming from very different, even contradictory contexts. They can be found, for instance, in Gehlen's philosophical anthropology (biological insufficiency of the human being, lack of a well-defined "environment" [*mancanza di un "ambiente" definito*], scarce [*povertà*] specialised instincts) [...]' (WW223/187).

Eternity enters time: the beginning of man

We are now in a position to substantiate a little more the hypothesis that Virno's assertion of an ahistorical constant of human nature is not as naively realist or as straightforwardly naturalist as it might have seemed.

Let us attend to the way in which Virno speaks of the *eternal* quality of this determination: most remarkably of all, eternal human nature has a *beginning*. That beginning is called 'Cro-Magnon Man' (WW174/145). This determination of the chronological moment of emergence appears to be due to Chomsky, whose debate with Michel Foucault on human nature we are getting ready to rehearse.[14] Such things are, as we shall see, never irrelevant when it comes to deciding upon the time and character of anthropogenesis. In any case, man's ahistorical nature has a date of birth. Does this imply that the supposedly eternal nature of man was never as eternal as all that?

Is it merely the case that there will always have been a human nature, a kind of Platonic idea, and it merely had to await the empirical emergence of the hominid in order to be incarnated? Or is the very essence (for what else is a transcendental 'invariant'?) itself something that has emerged over time, at and as the very origin of history, as it breaks away from 'prehistory'?

But if the transcendental is historicised in this way, then the empirical is automatically historicised too, because what *counts* as an empirical object then changes historically in line with the transformations of the transcendental in the guise of what Foucault called the 'historical a priori'. The human in its nature is the transcendental condition for the manifestation of all objects — and yet this will *include* the human in its empirical aspects. Thus perhaps, the particular empirical details that we attribute to the human will alter depending upon how we understand the transcendental subject. And we have already suggested that, given that this transcendental subject appears within history in various ways, the manner in which this transcendental is understood will depend upon the historical moment which preoccupies us.

We intend finally to clarify this imbroglio of transcendental and empirical when we arrive at the *Essay on Negation* and discover that language itself similarly embodies these two forms, and unveils their relation in a clearer way.

For the moment we shall attempt to clarify these questions in a preliminary way by examining Virno's reading of the debate between Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky that took place in 1971 in Eindhoven. This allows Virno to exposit his own complex conception of the relation between history and human nature, and allows him clearly to exceed the position to which some would wish to confine him, of a simple empiricist affirmation of a natural scientific account of human nature.

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[14] '[T]he nature of human intelligence certainly has not changed in any substantial way, at least since the seventeenth century [a reference to a question from the audience, who is referring to a supposed transformation in human nature affirmed by Foucault], or probably since Cro-Magnon man' (Chomsky in Chomsky & Foucault 2011 [1971], 40, quoted in WW179/150).

The Foucault-Chomsky debate

This encounter is staged in the crucial sixth chapter of *When the Word Becomes Flesh*, where Virno considers the relation between transcendental and the historical by means of a kind of prosopopoeia (WW175ff/147ff). Foucault and Chomsky represent the Scylla and Charybdis that Virno aims to negotiate — a full historicisation of human nature, and a blunt assertion of a fully natural human nature outside of the vagaries of history (cf. WW175/146–7). This is precisely the question. That Virno describes the debate as a 'failure'[15] evinces his desire to avoid both horns of this dilemma and to imagine how the debate might have reached a(nother) resolution. To describe such a sublation, Virno is forced if not to invent a new term, then at least to give an entirely novel signification to an old one: 'natural history' (*storia naturale*) (WW182/152).[16]

‘Nature’ here means, simply, human nature. Of natural history, Virno says this:

> The possibility of natural history hinges on two conditions: one is natural, the other historical. The first one implies that human nature, which in itself is unchanging, does allow for a maximum of variations in experience and praxis, since otherwise there would be no history. The second one implies that the historical variations sometimes concern themselves with the biological invariants and show them as concrete states of affairs, since otherwise nothing would be "natural". (WW173–4/145)

Virno continues:

> The last sentence [just quoted] is decisive, because it is both necessary and sufficient, and it offers us the thread enabling us to define, although still in abstract terms, the concept-oxymoron at the centre of this discussion. Naturalist historiography focuses on the social and political events that confront the human animal with *metahistory*, that is, with the inalterable traits of his species. This kind of historiography collects empirical facts (linguistic, economic, and so forth), that, within a unique cultural conjuncture, manifest what repeats itself since the age of Cro-Magnon. (WW174/145)

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[15] ‘Eindhoven saw the last important attempt at keeping history and biology together as well as its theatrical failure’ (WW177/148).

[16] The terms of the phrase have to ‘remain in perpetual tension’ to give the concept its ‘energy’, its ‘force’: the ‘oxymoron [...] postulates an electric spark resulting from the connection of two clearly contrasting elements [*cortocircuito,* a short-circuit]’ (WW173/145). Perhaps more intuitive is a synonym which Virno sometimes employs: ‘naturalist historiography’ (*storiografia naturalistica*) (WW184/154).

And among these 'metahistorical propertie[s] [*metastorica prerogativa*[17]] of *homo sapiens*', Virno singles out the faculty for *language*, which will, as we have intimated, suggest that retrospectivity is at work.

Virno often describes these moments within 'natural history' as repetitions of this foundational event: if these transcendental conditions — human nature — are capable of manifesting themselves in some form within experience, 'when we experience the transcendental conditions of experience' (WW174/146), then manifest are the very conditions for the possibility of being counted as human: at such moments one relives one's 'anthropogenesis'. So natural history reveals the moments when man once again lives through the process of becoming-man.

On such occasions we witness a certain eruption of eternity into history: 'in the historical sequence, also and maybe especially the *mobile* articulation of eternity and contingency, of biology and politics, of repetition and difference'.[18] And crucially, with respect to the debate between Foucault and Chomsky: 'Rather than dissolving the eternal (the distinctive traits [*proprietà*] of the human species) into the contingent (productive systems, cultural paradigms and so forth) or even worse, reducing the contingent to the eternal, *natural history chronicles meticulously their ever-changing intersection*' (WW175/146, emphasis added).

In other words, one should precisely not cede everything to either, but rather to plough one's own furrow somewhere between them, documenting the moments when history unfolds itself precisely by fastening upon (what it perceives to be or presents as) nature.

To make things more 'sober' when it comes to the grand question of human nature and the relation between nature and history, which is to say, to bring things manifestly 'down to earth', Virno turns to *language* as a test-case of human nature, for language appears to be an ahistorical faculty, condition for the possibility of any human being anywhere at all times, but also to be historically variant in each case: 'The issue of "human nature" can find a sober *experimentum crucis* [decisive experiment or experience] in our understanding of the linguistic faculty [*la facoltà di linguaggio*] and of its relation with definite historical languages [*lingue*]' (WW175/146).

Virno then describes his task in a way that will become very interesting to us, in terms of a difference of methodology — naturalist and historicist. What is so unusual in Virno's way of posing the problem is that we normally think of naturalism as instituting a *continuity* between humans and animals, between history and nature, and yet here, Virno sets himself the stiffest challenge of not just positing an *opposition* between nature and culture, quite brazenly, but also of explaining

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[17] Throughout the translations of Virno's anthropological writings, *'prerogativa'* is rendered simply as 'prerogative', but in this context, it seems like a false friend.

[18] The Christian resonances are evoked deliberately here, though Virno tells himself that one can deploy a theological conceptuality whilst freeing one's self absolutely from any commitments to the divine: '[n]atural history is the materialist, rigorously atheistic version of theological Revelation' (WW212/178).

such an opposition *naturalistically*: 'we will ask how we can explain *naturalistically* the recurrent opposition between "nature" and "culture", but also what are the socio-historical conditions for the suturing of this break' (WW175/146–7).[19] Nature opens up something other than itself, and certain moments in history allow the gap between the two to close once again, in a 'short-circuit', or to open up a rent in the historical fabric so as to allow human nature to show through at a certain historical moment in a certain historically mediated form, and sparks begin to fly.

The question concerning human nature
a) Chomsky

In a debate that is perhaps less polemical, less oppositional, at the level of its account of human nature, than Virno, for his own purposes, may present it, Chomsky says of human nature: 'I think that as a matter of biological and anthropological fact, the nature of human intelligence certainly has not changed in any substantial way [...], probably since Cro-Magnon man' (Chomsky & Foucault 2011 [1971], 40).

Virno takes such lines as justifying his employment of the figure of Chomsky to represent naturalism, nature, metahistory. Chomsky's own example — primary, but by no means unique (Virno exaggerates here, too) — of an invariable, necessary feature of human nature is the linguistic faculty: 'This faculty belongs to [*una proprietà*] the species, is common to all of its members and is essentially unique with respect to the other species[20]' (WW177/148). Perhaps it is from Chomsky that Virno derives the courage to think of language as a *biological* faculty. Chomsky indeed comes very close to thinking language as both biological and transcendental at once: 'Like a self-developing organ, language is endowed with selective structures and combinatory schemas whose autonomous productivity are independent of the speaker's empirical experience. Universal grammar, underlying the various historical languages, is part of our genetic patrimony[21]' (WW177/148).

Chomsky's continuous stress on linguistic 'creativity' shows that this 'nature' does not in fact keep us bound within certain limits, like a prehistoric community happily stagnating in its backwater, an ox-bow lake cut off from the onward surge of progress. Rather, if this linguistic faculty is creative, and infinitely so, then the

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[19] And perhaps even more strikingly: 'Those who object that this discontinuity is nothing more than a mediocre cultural convention due to the melancholy anthropocentrism of spiritualist philosophers [*filosofi spiritualisti*] are just trying to make their own lives a bit easier, instead of attending to a far more interesting task: finding the *biological* reasons for the lasting separation [*divaricazione*] between biology and society. Naturalising the mind and language [*linguaggio*] without giving a *naturalistic* explanation of the antinomy "nature" and "culture" reduces the whole issue to a [...] clash of ideas, and ends up in the most shameful incoherence' (WW201/168, cf. ID138–9).

[20] That this is a literal quotation from Chomsky (1988) is entirely elided by the English translation.

[21] '*Patrimonio*', another false friend; 'inheritance' or 'heritage' might be more apt, signifying that material which is inherited genetically.

invariance of our nature is in truth the source of an infinity of languages and an infinity of possible actualisations of that language in the form of speech. This is a creativity that is founded in biology, a novelty grounded in eternal sameness: 'Each speaker makes "an infinite use of finite means"' (WW179/149).

b) Foucault

So far at least, Virno's own position would seem more proximate than we might have imagined to Chomsky's, but the picture will be altered by a brief consideration of what Virno takes to be Foucault's diametrically opposite approach.

How, then, does Foucault depart from Chomsky's supposedly naturalistic position?

In response to Chomsky's assertion that a certain linguistic element of human nature may be susceptible of natural scientific treatment, Foucault responds:

> It is true that I mistrust the notion of human nature a little [...]. I would say that the notion of life is not a *scientific concept;* it has been an *epistemological indicator* of which the classifying, delimiting and other functions had an effect on scientific discussions, and not on what they were talking about.
> Well, it seems to me that the notion of human nature is of the same type. It was not by studying human nature that linguists [like Chomsky himself?] discovered the laws of consonant mutation, or Freud the principles of the analysis of dreams, or cultural anthropologists the structure of myths. In the history of knowledge, the notion of human nature seems to me mainly to have played the role of an epistemological indicator to designate certain types of discourse in relation to or in opposition to theology or biology or history. I would find it difficult to see in this a scientific concept. (Chomsky & Foucault 2011 [1971], 6–7)[22]

In regard to the rules or regularities (of language) from which, for Chomsky, free creativity takes its departure, Foucault says the following:

> Where perhaps I don't completely agree with Mr. Chomsky, is when he places the principle of these regularities, in a way, in the interior of the mind or of human nature.

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[22] In truth, despite the opposition Virno would like to set up, at certain moments Chomsky broadly agrees with Foucault on this point: 'Personally I believe that many of the things we would like to understand [...] such as the nature of man, or the nature of a decent society, or lots of other things, might really fall outside the scope of possible human science' (Chomsky & Foucault 2011 [1971], 33), and Foucault concludes by saying, not without some exaggeration in the opposite direction, 'finally this problem of human nature, when put simply in theoretical terms, hasn't led to an argument between us; ultimately we understand each other very well' (ibid., 69).

> [...] [I]t seems to me that one must, before reaching that point [...] replace it [the human mind or its nature] in the field of other human practices, such as economics, technology, politics, sociology, which can serve them [these regularities] as conditions of formation, of models [...]. I would like to know whether one cannot discover the system of regularity, of constraint, which makes science possible, somewhere else, even outside the human mind. (Chomsky & Foucault 2011 [1971], 34)

For Foucault, on Virno's account, human nature is described in different ways, in different discourses, which vary geographically and historically. It would seem then that, if we understand these 'discourses' broadly as languages or as so structured, that no part of language may be considered for Foucault to be a part of nature. Foucault agrees that creativity can only arise from a system of binding rules, but Chomsky is wrong to locate these rules in the individual mind; rather, they 'are born out of economic, social and political practices', which is to say that, 'they originate in history' (WW179/149–50). In Chomsky, 'the socio-historical vicissitudes of the species are reduced to the psychological structures of the individual' (WW179/150). Thus, Foucault's account edges us towards the idea that, '[i]f a *naturalistic* explanation of the autonomy that "culture" maintains in traditional societies is indeed pertinent, so is a *historical* explanation of the essential role that human "nature" has achieved within Post-Fordist capitalism' (WW205/171).

The future of the debate, the future of human nature

But each of Foucault and Chomsky give us only one side of this dual explanation, and so the debate carries on, without resolution. Such a situation — in Virno's reconstruction — has endured ever since:

> Chomsky's supporters [cognitive scientists?] affirm that the 1971 conversation inaugurates the decline of a historical relativism guilty of dissolving human nature, just like an aspirin tablet, in a kaleidoscope of cultural differences. Foucault's followers, instead, think that Eindhoven saw the defeat of the last of many attempts — at once pretentious and naïve — to promote the myth of a natural reality immune to the density of historical experience. (WW181/151)

We have not yet escaped its shadow.   In an attempt to reopen the debate and to lead it in another direction such that it will not this time peter out, Virno gives the following assessment of Foucault's position: he is both right and wrong. He is *right* to say that all discourse on human nature is socially and politically determined, but *wrong* to use that to justify a denial of the very existence of such a thing as 'human nature':

> This is a classic case of excessive, overzealous inference. The fact that phylogenetic meta-history is the object of multiple, historically conditioned and fully contingent representations doesn't imply its own disintegration as meta-history. In other words, it doesn't prevent the persistence of certain species-specific characteristics [*prerogative*] ["]from Cro-Magnon onwards["][23]. (WW182/152)

Virno goes on: 'It is true that the biological invariant cannot be separated from a changing historical development, but this is not enough to negate the invariant itself, or to neglect its different modes of appearance — as invariant — on the surface of different social and productive systems [viz. systems of production]' (WW182/152). This phrase, 'as invariant', demands close reading. The invariants of human nature appear in variable ways throughout history, but they appear '*as invariant*'. Does this mean that each historical constellation has to present its own vision of human nature, and that each epoch may present something different, but they are nevertheless compelled to present human nature in each case *as if* it were invariant, as if it had always been — and appeared — that way? This would suggest that the nature of the human does indeed change, and that each moment appears to be something like an 'end of history' at which the natural and eternal truth would finally be unveiled, as it was before the beginning. In this case, the invariability of human nature would be a necessary retrospective mirage.

    In any case, this passage allows us better to understand Virno's ultimate objection to Foucault, to whom, on such an interpretation, he would remain surprisingly similar: Foucault's position will amount — unwittingly — to a kind of 'idealism' if it refuses to allow that beneath these manifestations of human nature there *could* be an ahistorical, invariant core:

> if we don't want to fall into the most unbridled transcendental idealism, we need to recognise that the existence of a priori categories (also called schemata or epistemological indicators) is grounded in a species-specific *empirical* reality: the innate language faculty, the structures of verbal thought, and so on. Human nature fully coincides with the empirical reality that stands behind all 'epistemological indicators', and therefore does not differ from the material conditions underlying the formation of a priori categories. (WW182–3/152, emphasis added)

Not that this should return us to Chomsky's naturalist position, since if Foucault absorbs the invariant into the variant, the natural into the historical, Chomsky remains unsatisfying because he does precisely the reverse, 'he reduces history to meta-history' (WW183/153). And what is wrong with this 'Rousseauian pastiche' (*pasticcio rousseauiano*) (WW184/153) is simply the way it conceives the linguistic

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[23] Once again, the last three words are in Virno's text marked as a quotation (from Chomsky), but not in the translation.

faculty.[24] Virno asks 'which aspects of Chomsky's linguistics prevent him from articulating a credible relation between the innate and the acquired, the variable and the invariable, the meta-historical and the historical?' (WW184/153–54). Crucially, where the linguist fails, and in this he remains close to natural science, is in failing to conceive the faculty of language as a pure *potential*. By assigning to it a universal grammar, the faculty ends up resembling a particular empirical historical language, and this reduces the pure potential to speak to 'the lowest common denominator of the historical languages'. For Virno, this means that, de facto, the language faculty on Chomsky's account ceases to be properly meta-historical. Without admitting as much, it becomes historical, or perhaps we have an example of the mistake Deleuze denounces, which involves modelling our understanding of the transcendental faculty on its empirical actualisation. This has the effect of leading Chomsky to conceive history in such a way as to 'freez[e] historical change', since the underlying grammar which he identifies does not ultimately vary (WW184/154).

The second mistake on Chomsky's part is one reiterated by the cognitive scientists who follow in his wake, and that is to conflate the species with the individual. The result of this is to 'deny [*misconoscere*] or remove' the '*transindividual* character' of language.

What does it mean to be 'transindividual'?

> [W]e call 'transindividual' not the set of specifications shared by all individuals, but only what pertains to the relation *between* individuals, without belonging to any of them in particular. Transindividuality is what articulates, within one single mind, the difference between the species and the individual. It is an empty, *potential space*, and not a set of positive properties [*proprietà*] which [...] would be the exclusive property of a certain I. (WW185/154–55)

For Virno, *'the life of the mind is public'* from the beginning; Chomsky risks privatising it (WW185/155).

In general, the mistake promulgated by the latter and his extremely institutionally successful inheritors in the discipline of cognitive science, is to fail to think the mind in its linguistic capacity as *potential* and *public*, instead conceiving it as an implicitly *actual, private* and hence *non-political* place: 'Having neglected the transindividual dimensions, Chomsky and the cognitive scientists think that the individual mind is self-sufficient and therefore non-political. [...] [S]ocial praxis intervenes only in the second act of the play, when self-sufficient, essentially private minds start to interact'. And crucially, Virno continues, for Chomsky and his progeny, '[t]he "linguistic animal" *[L'"animale che ha linguaggio"]* is not, as such

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[24] In general, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Claude Lévi-Strauss considered the father of modern anthropology, is not among Virno's frequent points of references, in his strictly anthropological works, at least. Perhaps this passage gives us some hints as to why.

[in quanto tale], a "political" one *[un "animale politico"]*' (WW185–6/155), and this affects their understanding of the relation between nature and history: 'The noise *[frastuono]* of history does not take root *[non getta radici]* in human nature' (WW186/155). They are not natural historians, in other words.

So much are history and human nature distinct for Chomsky that he tasks human nature with alleviating the injustices imposed upon us and our infinite linguistic creativity *by* certain historical configurations. In other words, the very distinction between nature and history *allows* Chomsky to derive a politics directly *from* an anthropology, which Virno warns time and again that, for all the relevance of anthropology for politics, we should *not* do.[25]

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[25] Natural history 'as such doesn't found or support any politics' (WW219/183), but it 'indicates with precision what the terrain of political conflict really is', which is to say that, 'it formulates the most important questions for which there might be radical alternatives and violent conflicts'. All political theories have to contend with 'the empirical revelation of metahistory', but they do it 'in the name of contrasting interests', with 'antipodal responses, whose realisation depends on power relations'. 'Politics in general, and today more than ever, finds its raw material in historical-natural phenomena, that is, in the contingent events that reveal the distinctive traits of our species. The raw materials, though, and not a paradigm or an inspiring principle' (WW219/183).

That human nature is fundamentally a non-actualisable *potential* from which no single determinate politics ensues, implies that political praxis will always be up to a point *contingent.* Politics is, in Gehlenian terms, a 'compensation' for our natural disadaptation, a taming or, better, a channelling of the dangerous potential which results from it.

Unlimited potential is the prerogative of an organism which does not have a natural habitat, and so has to constantly adapt itself to (or co-apt with) an indeterminate vital context, constructing a (historical) world for itself: 'we have a world *only* where there isn't any habitat [*difetto un ambiente*]', which is to say a single environment that would be ours, and to which our sensory and motor organs along with our instincts would be bi-univocally adapted (WW201/168). Virno describes that which compensates for the disadaptation of the human race, its relation with no specific environment, as 'action', just as Gehlen does. Political praxis builds '*pseudo-habitats* [pseudoambienti]', 'where indiscriminate and multi-directional stimuli are selected in order to promote useful behaviours' (WW202/168). This action, which compensates for non-specialisation, is described as 'social and political praxis'. In other words, the task of *politics* is to respond (historically) to a (natural) anthropic characteristic — a response to 'its unchanging meta-historical presupposition' (WW202/168). The way in which one responds to a natural state in this regard is *always* political: 'the true risk amounts to certain ways of responding to the omnilateral riskiness of the vital context (for example, by relying on the sovereign, or nourishing the nightmare of a racist "little nation" [...]). [...] The unrealisable *dynamis* of the world-context is a source of both threat and protection; however, this ambivalence becomes obvious only in the contrast between different strategies of reassurance; the behaviour meant to provide a shelter turns out to be dangerous *or* redemptive [...] (and this alternative is always articulated anew by political action)' (MN4.2).

Thus, it is easy to be misled by Virno's statement against Chomsky according to which, today, 'the biological invariant is part of the problem, not the solution' (WW220/184), since the biological invariant clearly *is* part of the solution, unless we were to assume that there was some politics *beyond* 'biopolitics', that does not involve the relation between power and life understood as human nature — a non-anthropological politics. Virno says the following of the desired political solution: 'It is an irreversible fact that the innate potential of the human animal appears in the economic-social field, but that this potential should assume the aspect of marketable labour is

Virno's natural history

So what may we say of Virno's own positive resolution of the Foucault-Chomsky debate? What is 'natural history'? Virno once again, in defining this discipline implies that its very invention is dependent upon the precise historical and politico-economic conditions in which the author finds himself:

> The questions confronting natural history are the following: which socio-political circumstances expose the lack of biological specialisation typical of Homo sapiens? When and how does the generic ability-to-speak, different from the historical languages, assume a fundamental role within a certain mode of production? Under which economic or ethical guise does neoteny become visible? (WW201/167)

It is precisely and only at this level of the becoming visible (and indeed being put to work) of a potential as such that nature and history short-circuit, and at this moment they appear in the form of an encounter between anthropology and politics, a politics which puts to work a potential *without* transforming it into an

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not an inescapable destiny. In fact, it is only a transient occurrence that is worth opposing *politically'* (WW220/184).

    If biolinguistic capitalism politicises our generic biological features in one way, how may we politicise them otherwise? Such is the question of Virno's political thought. One of the manners in which Virno conceives of this problem is in terms of the opposition between the people and the multitude, as two different ways of organising a plurality, and two disparate operations of power, and this does not fail to involve the linguistic faculty, understood in just the way that Chomsky failed to: 'the people tends towards the One, while the many derive from it. [...] The people gravitate toward the One of the State, of the Sovereign, of the *volonté générale*. The multitude is backed up by the One of language, by the intellect as public [or what Marx called 'general intellect', as Virno describes it elsewhere] or inter-psychological resource, and the generic faculties of the species. If the multitude refuses the unity of the State it is only because it relates to a completely different One' (WW222/186, cf. MN4.6). Speaking of multitude, we need to think of the passage from the generic human animal to the unique singularity, individuation, deriving a 'many' from a universality or unity. Virno speaks of 'the collectivity of the multitude, as individuation of the general intellect and the biological basis of the species' (WW236/197).

    For Virno, 'the multitude is composed of an inextricable texture of "I" and [pre-individual] "one", of unique *singularity and* the *anonymity of the species.*' (WW230/193, emphases added). In *Mondanità,* Virno had understood the genesis of the multitude to follow from the universalisation of the indeterminate concept of the world in all its dangerous potential, following the collapse of traditional societies, that induces a kind of generalised anxiety, which contrary to what Heidegger might seem to think, is not individualising, but rather produces a collective: 'The as yet nameless feeling that results from the complete coincidence of fear and anxiety is characterised by the unavoidable relation with the presence of the other; it is a matter that concerns *many* people [molti]; it even contributes to founding the very concept of *multitude* [moltitudine]. The "many" are effectively such insofar as they *share* the experience of "not-being-at-home". [...] The exacerbated precariousness of the "many" opens the possibility of a *public sphere'* (MN4.2).

actuality. This latter fact may be important when it comes to justifying Virno's own attitude towards potentiality.

Natural history cannot be understood without taking into account Virno's own philosophy of history, which we unfortunately do not have the space to engage with fully, but we can at least proffer the following passage:

> the main task of natural history consists in collecting the social and political events that put the human animal in direct relation with metahistory, that is, with the unchangeable biological constitution of the species. The maximally contingent phenomena that show the *unchanging human nature in different ways* but with the same immediacy can be considered historic-natural. (WW200/167, emphasis added)

Virno divides history into just two epochs, which are defined by the way in which human nature is revealed and employed, theorised and transformed into praxis, in each of them: in one case, in 'traditional societies' (Virno will be no more specific than this[26]) this occurs exceptionally, in a rare state of emergency (*stato di ecceptione*), while today, the state of exception has become permanent, as the potentials of our nature are routinely employed in our everyday work practices.[27] All of this explains why Virno tells us that, 'natural history mostly coincides with the *history of a state of exception'* (WW202/169).

It is worth noting that today, in liberal democracies, at least, the form in which we most frequently encounter potential as such in the 'workplace' is *flexibility:*

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[26] Earlier on, he had spoken of 'traditional communities in which a network of consolidated habits channels praxis' as 'substantial communities' and even gone so far as to compare their relatively stable and unchanging culture with an animal '"environment"' (MN4.2), a contrast we have elsewhere seen him greatly to distrust (Virno 2011, 69/ECV Introduction 1.3, but cf. fn. 27 infra). In such contexts, the dangerous excess of perceptions only intrudes when the circular and repetitive (and, as Virno has suggested, quasi-*natural*) order of this society undergoes crisis and breaks down. A glimpse of modernity is then vouchsafed those still living 'traditional' lives, a post-traditional era in which '[t]he permanent variability of forms of life, the uninterrupted undoing of habits that are already in themselves artificial and contingent, and the training aimed at facing a limitless randomness all involve a direct relationship with the *raw* world, that is, an immediate confrontation with the "last condition" of danger' (ibid.).

[27] 'Our amorphous potential, that is, the persistence of infantile traits, does not flash ominously during a crisis, but pervades every aspect of the most banal *routine'* (WW204/170). 'In traditional societies, including — to a certain extent — classic industrial ones, inarticulate potentiality [*la potenzialità inarticolata* — as yet without voice, without reality] gain the visibility of an empirical state of affairs only in emergency situations, that is, during a *crisis'* (WW201/167). 'In ordinary situations, on the other hand, the species-specific biological background is *hidden* [*occultato*], or even contradicted [*contraddetto*], by the organisation of work and solid communicative habits. In other words, there is a sharp discontinuity, or rather an antinomy, between "nature" and "culture"' (WW201/167–68, emphasis added).

the shortage [*carenza*] of specialised instincts and the lack [*penuria*] of a strictly defined ecosystem [*ambiente circostanziato*] from Cro-Magnon until today, are now considered remarkable economic assets [...]. The biological non-specialisation of *Homo sapiens* doesn't remain in the background, but rather acquires the utmost historical visibility as the universal *flexibility* of professional tasks. (WW205–6/171, translation modified)[28]

We need to be able to react to the unusual, to the unknown, which will be thrown at us ever more frequently in an accelerated situation, and in a precarious world. Luckily, one might say, we are naturally well equipped to deal with the unexpected, thanks to our lack of innate specialisation: this precarity 'reflect[s] in historically determined ways the original lack [*mancanza*] of a uniform and predictable *habitat* [habitat]' (WW206/172). And this lack, once again, stems from our prematurity: 'neoteny, that is, chronic infancy and the constant need to train oneself, immediately translates itself, without any mediation, into the social rule of continuing education' (WW206/172). In the contemporary economy one experiences something like a reversal of a deficit into a surplus, a handicap into a benefit, a 'compensation' of the kind Gehlen considered to be ahistorically a part of the human being: 'The deficiencies [*carenze*] related to the "premature birth" of the human animal have become productive assets' (WW206/172).

It does not matter what we learn, but 'what matters is showing the pure ability to learn' (WW206/172). As we know, 'flexibility' is the way the Right describe what the Left would describe as 'precariousness' (*precarietà*), the fragility and temporary character of employment, and the instability of praxical life into which the contemporary economy has precipitated its most vulnerable members (a population that has grown noticeably).

This leads Virno to his 'most important observation' regarding today's economy:

the inarticulate potential [*la potenza inarticolata*] that cannot be reduced to a series of predetermined potential acts acquires an extrinsic, even pragmatic aspect in the definition of labour-power [*forza-lavoro*]. [...] [O]ur labour ability, today, is largely synonymous with our linguistic faculty. [...] Linguistic faculty and labour-power are situated on the border between biology and history, except that today this border has acquired specific historical characteristics. (WW206–7/172)

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[28] Catherine Malabou (2008 [2004], esp. 12/55–7) has understood this coincidence in terms of cerebral plasticity, and not so directly in terms of non-specialisation. It would be worth at this point opening up a long parenthesis which would explain this divergence.

Virno himself is not reluctant to deploy the word, on occasion: 'these faculties oppose the threatening indeterminacy of the world-context with their own indeterminacy or plasticity [*plasticità*]' (DV117/93), and quoting Gehlen, who speaks of man's 'terrifying plasticity [*plasticità*] and indecision [*indeterminatezza*]' (M18/ECVPart II 1 I.I).

Thus, when it comes to the various facets of human nature which manifest themselves historically, Virno unquestionably gives priority to our *linguistic* capability: 'When and how does the generic ability-to-speak, different from the historical languages, assume a fundamental role within a certain mode of production?' (WW201/167)

Not that such an unleashing of capacity goes without the imposition of fetters; rather, in the present regime this power is all the more strictly governed by regulations. The effect of this strict governance of potentiality, in the case of language, for instance, is that the infinite potentiality of action, which animals, in their specialisation, do *not* have, is reduced to a form of biunivocal, automatic — which is to say machine-like, animal-machinic — 'signalling' of the biunivocal kind, that was so often attributed to animals: 'Just when the linguistic *faculty* acquires its utmost socio-political importance, it ends up appearing, rather ironically, as a system of elementary *signals,* aimed at facing a certain situation' (WW207/173).

We witness 'a compulsive recourse to stereotyped formulas and can assume the characteristics, in an apparent paradox, of a *deficiency* [difetto] in semanticity' (WW207/173). Indeterminacy of world, excess, 'needs to be contained and delayed each time anew', for it 'causes stilted behaviours, obsessive tics, the drastic impoverishment of our *ars combinatoria* and the inflation of fleeting but ironclad rules' (WW207/173). Meaningless neurotic tics, like the behaviour of caged animals, save that our behaviour is frequently linguistic. Thus we are reduced to the state of living automata, of the kind which Bergson found so amusing, but which in today's world no longer seem so funny (cf. Bergson 2010 [1900], 5–32). We remain in a permanent state of 'puerility', playing repetitive games, but without the sincerity, seriousness and constant delight of the actual child (MN4.4).

In sum, Virno describes our situation like this: 'today's industry — based on neoteny, the linguistic faculty and potentialities — is the extroverted, empirical, pragmatic image of the human psyche, of its invariant and metahistorical characteristics (including the transindividual traits happily ignored by the cognitive sciences [contra Chomsky])' (WW208/174).

In light of all this, Virno defines his discipline of natural history, which is to say philosophy, in the following way:

> Natural history proposes to assess the different forms taken by the biological characteristics of our species on the empirical plane, as they incarnate themselves in fully contingent socio-political phenomena. In particular, it focuses on how the phylogenetic conditions guaranteeing the historicity of the human animal can sometimes take on the *semblance* [*sembianze*] of specific *historical facts* [Virno's emphasis]. It defends, therefore, both the invariability of the invariable and the variability of the variable, excluding all apparently judicious compromise. (WW186/155, emphasis added)

We have underlined 'semblance' here: are we to understand Virno to mean that whatever these metahistorical conditions are, they can only be *accessed* in an historically variable form? As we have suggested, this might explain Virno's often apparently uncritical reliance on certain early twentieth century anthropologists for his own description of human nature in its invariability. This would just be the particular way in which a certain invariance *manifests* itself to a certain moment of twentieth century science and to us today, how these invariants *appear — some* invariants will always have been posited by any discourse that is not entirely historicised, and yet they will not necessarily have been *these* invariants. What precisely goes without variation will appear differently at different times and from different perspectives (each with different interests in mind). Human nature, the transcendental, would thus be akin to Heidegger's 'being', or more precisely the 'event', the Same which always appears differently, throughout the historical epochs which it nevertheless makes possible while hiding behind them, and indeed the implicit human nature which Heidegger must presuppose as belonging to those mortals who watch over this event.

Does Virno believe there is a single 'fact of the matter' as to *what* these invariants are (this would be a strong 'ontological' reading of his approach to human nature) or is it rather the case that *something* invariant is posited at each point in history, but no assumption is made by Virno himself that the invariants *he* chooses are in their content timelessly adequate (this would be a weaker 'epistemological' reading)?[29]

Linguistic potential

To draw closer to a decision as to which of these readings is the more appropriate, we need to consider in greater depth the particular manner in which Virno understands human nature. And here it becomes necessary to devote some more time to the concept that is perhaps more closely associated with Virno's work than any other: *potentiality*.[30]

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[29] In *Mondanità*, Virno suggests the latter is, at that point, closer to his heart, as he suggests there can be no prior or unmediated access to the natural beyond the historical and political responses we make *to* that (perceived) natural character: 'Believing that we first perceive the world-context as an unbearable dangerousness and only subsequently devote ourselves to devising a protective network is an optical illusion. The risk inherent to belonging to a shapeless and always potential context is never perceived as such, in the pure state, or preliminarily. On the contrary, it is manifested only because we are always already busy circumscribing and mitigating it [...]; any further reference to a chronological sequence or a cause-effect relation is misleading. There is no danger-stimulus and shelter-response. Rather, the search for protection constitutes the original and indivisible experience in which, by elaborating an antidote, we manage to glimpse something evil' (MN4.2).

This does not of course preclude a change in Virno's position over the subsequent quarter of a century.

[30] 'I have discussed the category of the possible, at times remaining trapped in it, in all that I have written in the last twenty-five years' (Virno 2011, 64/ECV Introduction 1).

Let us read what Virno says of that invariant human feature, the linguistic faculty, understood — or rethought — as a kind of potential for language. As we have already seen intimated in his description of Chomsky as having privatised this public affair, individualising the common, Virno considers everything to be at stake in precisely how we conceive the nature of a 'faculty' or a 'function' in this sense:

> Natural history finds its true testing ground in the way it conceives the linguistic faculty. To say it in one breath, I am convinced that the existence of a generic faculty separate from the myriad historical languages, clearly attests to the non-specialised character of the human animal, that is, to its innate familiarity with a *dynamis*, a potentiality, that can never be fully realised. Instinctual unpreparedness and chronic potentiality: these invariant aspects of human nature [... are] deducible from the linguistic faculty [...]. (WW189/158)

What we wish to fasten upon in this last citation is the fact that Virno does not just urge the rethinking of human faculties in terms of potential, but asserts *language* to be the source of all of the other faculties — at least insofar as they are thought in terms of potential: such is our hypothesis. But once again, here an ambiguity opens, as in everything to do with Virno's natural history: either language has an *ontological* priority, and the other features exist only if language does, or it has an *epistemic* priority, and so they may be *known* or properly understood, for instance, in their own character as potential, and perhaps in the unity of their multiplicity, only if language is comprehended first of all.

Language is a vital capacity, as Chomsky will have taught us, but to avoid his mistake of translating it into something resembling an actual determinate language, and a private one at that, we need above all to insist upon the distinction between potential and actual: 'The linguistic faculty is both biological and potential'(WW193/161). This compels us to understand the relation between the transcendental (which is nevertheless biological) and the historical or empirical (the manifestations of language as such [*linguaggio*] in various historical languages [*lingue*]) *as* the relation between the potential and the actual (WW190/158–59).

It is worth dwelling upon the following fact: Virno's account of the language faculty, renders it, in spite of its transcendental status, in a way that is very tangibly material, extremely biological, even empirical. The transcendental invariant beyond history, however much we have been probing the possibility that it remains a kind of negative theological object, is nothing mysterious — it is basically the ability to move our mouth, tongue, and throat: 'By faculty, we mean the innate physical ability to enunciate articulate sounds, that is, the physiological requirements that allow us to produce an enunciation: a mouth emancipated from prehensile tasks thanks to our erect position, lowering of the epiglottis [... etc.]' (WW191/159).

This reference to the palaeoanthropological story of the anthropogenic movement from quadripedality to bipedality could be taken from André Leroi-

Gourhan (whom Virno refers to in passing, but not in any depth at WW195–6/163). The latter attempted to rejuvenate the science of anthropogenesis by stressing the latter's ultimate dependence upon a change in posture, a freeing up of hand and face for 'gesture and speech', and ultimately a space in the skull for a brain, in which *logos* might reside and expand — a material prerequisite of the ideal 'logical' features long ascribed by metaphysics and anthropology to the *zōon logon echon* (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1993 [1964]).

If one were to be a strictly orthodox follower of Leroi-Gourhan, one would be inclined to take this as implying that language itself was *not* primary, but rather derived from at least *certain* other invariant features of human nature, such as the upright stance. This would make linguistic potential dependent upon a prior potentialisation, and we have already hypothesised that Virno does not take this route, and indeed we would pursue this idea and suggest that even in the case of Leroi-Gourhan, Virno would translate his empirical discoveries into the language of potential, and that the *infinitisation* of potential takes place only thanks to language. Is this infinity what allows Virno to assert a radical *opposition* between potential and actuality, in the case of language, an opposition that in all strictness could not be said to exist in any non-linguistic real? In any case, Virno finds it necessary to affirm an unbridgeable distinction between the faculty of language and its empirical or historical manifestations: that is, an opposition between nature and history. When we earlier broached Virno's call for a naturalistic understanding of this opposition, we did not then suspect that the most original form of the latter might be internal to language. 'The faculty and the historical languages show a persistent heterogeneity, which prevents any kind of *reductio ad unum* [reduction to unity]', and, *'[t]he linguistic faculty fully coincides with the ancient notion of* dynamis, *or potentiality* [potenza]' (WW192/160). They are one and the same: language and potency. The distinction between human nature and its historical manifestations will be understood correctly only if we have sufficiently understood the opposition between *potentiality* and *actuality*, and indeed only if we have understood the opposition as such, and that means *language.*

Potentiality and actuality — language and neoteny — priorities

Let us first turn to the notions of potentiality and actuality, before returning to the idea that language is the origin of this opposition, and this opposition even more than all of the others. Originally, '*dynamis* is synonymous with *mē einai:* non-being, lack, emptiness' (WW192/161). This is so in the sense that potential results from a certain negation which does not insist upon anything determinate to replace that which has been negated, and hence it leaves the field open for the eruption of an infinite range of possibilities. Here Virno is implicitly quoting from Plato's dialogue, the *Sophist*, which will be the focus of an extended reading in the *Essay on Negation,* and this in itself, given the content of the dialogue, which we are gradually approaching, suggests that language and *its* negation are the ultimate

provenance of potential. '[Our] condition [of chronic lack and infancy], marked by a *mē einai,* is nothing besides the indeterminate *potentia loquendi'* (WW194/162).

Virno goes on to tell us that, '[t]he separation between faculty and historical languages [*lingua*] cannot be bridged because the faculty can't manifest itself independently [*autonoma*]' (WW192–3/161). This is crucial because we know that 'natural history' is concerned precisely with those moments at which transcendental conditions *do* manifest themselves. Therefore, to clarify what it might mean that nature could manifest itself in history — linguistic potential in linguistic actuality — we should read the four 'theses' or rather hypotheses which Virno proffers on the nature of the linguistic faculty:

1) The most important thing with respect to a faculty and its actualisation is neither of the two poles of this difference, but the difference itself, that separates and joins.

2) The linguistic faculty coincides with the ancient-philosophical notion of potential.

3) '*[T]he potential-faculty* [potenza-facoltà] co-exists *with the historical language, and characterises the entire experience of the speaker*' (WW193/161). Potential is not exhausted and does not vanish upon its actualisation. Thus, our task, each time we speak, is to *appropriate* this inexhaustible potential: 'this predisposition ['innate but unrefined, biological but purely potential'] persists as an inalterable background even when we master a certain historical language' (WW195/163).

4) Finally, Virno clarifies the relation between the linguistic faculty and the other facets of human nature. He does not altogether confirm the ontological reading of the priority of this faculty, and in fact seems to suggest that *knowledge* of language may be *secondary* to knowledge of the other aspects of humanity. The linguistic faculty merely 'confirms' what we might already have suspected about the nature of the human animal: '*The linguistic faculty confirms* [comprova] *the instinctual poverty* [la povertà istintuale] *of the human animal, its undefined character and the constant disorientation that defines it*' (WW195/163). But standing second in the order of knowledge does not imply being second in the order of being (*ratio cognoscendi* need not correspond with *ratio essendi*): and indeed, Virno almost immediately goes on to say something stronger, and to move resolutely towards an *ontological* priority of language: 'The lack [*penuria*] of specialised instincts characteristic of Homo Sapiens can be *deduced* [*evince*] first and foremost from the linguistic faculty' (WW196/164, emphasis added).

Nevertheless, as if somehow to undercut the idea of such an ontological priority, Virno suggests, in accord with Adolf Portmann in particular, that the *basis* of all anthropic traits is, in fact, *neoteny*: 'Potentialities [*Potenzialità*], lack of specialisation: the phylogenetic basis of both is neoteny' (WW197/164). Borrowing from Portmann, Virno speaks of man's 'premature birth': 'Homo sapiens is "always

born prematurely"' (WW197/164).[31] *Because* he is born prematurely, man is always 'an undefined animal'.

In reading the following, however, and in our pursuit of the question as to whether language is subsequent or prior to neoteny, or indeed contemporary with it, we should bear in mind that the linguistic faculty itself is *not* cultural, but rather *biological*, and that the transition from nature to culture occurs only with the process of individuation or determination (including that of language itself as it passes from potential to actual, natural to historical, the generic potential for language becoming a particular language). This is marked by the fact that language is said here to 'coincide' with prematurity, neoteny, or 'prolonged infancy': 'Neoteny explains not only the instability of our species but also its related need for uninterrupted learning. To our *chronic infancy* corresponds a chronic non-adaptation [*inadattamento*] that has to be constantly alleviated through social and cultural processes. A prolonged infancy coincides with the transindividual component of the human mind [which is to say, language?], always unrecognised by the cognitive sciences' (WW197/165). Thus the persistence of infantile traits into adulthood is in some way related to the persistence of the generic potential of language with historical languages and their empirical deployment, as if childhood were 'infancy' in the sense Agamben gives to this word, a permanent potentiality from which the anthropogenesis of maturation must continually be initiated. As Virno has it,

> [t]he instability of the human animal never disappears completely. This is why our potentiality [*la potenza*] remains the same, without exhausting itself in certain acts. This is why the generic faculty of language [*linguaggio*], the aphasic ability to speak [*poter-dire*], is not resolved in a language [*lingua*], but is present as such in every enunciation [... ,] the act does not realise the potential [*l'atto non realizza la potenza*], but is opposed to it. (WW200/166–67)

Neoteny and linguistic potential seem to be concomitant, but we shall persist with our hypothesis that the *conception* of potential which we acquire from linguistics allows us to understand the *scientific* data regarding neoteny in a new, more philosophical fashion. In another reference to the *Sophist,* Virno tells us that, 'the

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[31] The quotation marks and reference are inexplicably elided from the English translation (the reference is to Portmann 1965). The text appears not to have been translated into English, but similar and very accessible accounts of neoteny by Portmann are available (cf. Portmann 1990 [1944/1968], 99): 'Usually our growth mode has been described as "delayed" in comparison with that of an animal. Correspondingly, retardation and the related concept, fetalisation, have also recently become key words for theories of anthropogenesis and all biologically oriented anthropological research'. We have come to associate this way of speaking of neoteny with Jacques Lacan (cf. Lacan 2006 [1966], 78/96).

only thing that is neotenic is the living being which is continuously faced with the *mē einai* of inactuality and absence' (WW199, translation modified).

If we can finally say that the origin of potential *as such* is language, then we shall be able to understand more precisely the relation between the language faculty and the other features of human nature, for if we imagine that Virno, the linguist, derives the other features from the philosophical anthropologists and zoologists whom he names, then he suggests that these broadly empirical insights may not be altogether grasped *unless* they are brought into connection with the *philosophical* concept of potentiality: 'We can understand neoteny and all the other traits typical of our species only if we fully grasp the concept of *dynamis*, or *potential* [potenza]' (WW198/165).

All of which at least suggests that the *philosophical* gesture in relation to empirical scientific insights into human nature is to describe these 'metahistorical invariants' *as potentials*: 'The biological invariant characterising the human animal since Cro-Magnon is a *dynamis*, or a potential: it is a lack of specialisation, neoteny, and the absence [*mancanza*] of a univocal habitat' (WW200/167). Plausibly, in fact, one might probe the idea that this insight into potentiality and the potentialistic understanding of these invariant features of human nature is not *exclusively* Virno's own, for it might well have been derived from the more philosophical among his influences, Gehlen in particular. Perhaps we might in the latter case say more precisely that what Virno will have contributed is a very particular interpretation of the *nature* of this potentiality, which differs from these other thinkers, and which concerns *language*.

For whence the 'evil' or 'dangerous' character of man? Whence this unlimited, untamed potentiality that either needs containment or channelling, whether to serve the state or to hasten its decline (or some third option)? For Virno, as it is now — finally — our aim conclusively to prove, this power issues from a certain limitlessness introduced into the real by *language*: the contingency of the linguistic 'as not' (*hōs mē*) opens up a multitude of possibilities the multiplication of which is infinite.

An investigation of Virno's *Essay on Negation: For a Linguistic Anthropology* should resolve at least some of the questions we have raised in the course of our interpretation of Virno's project up to this point.

The *Essay on Negation*: Two forms of negation

It is a crucial question in the philosophical anthropological endeavour to explain anthropogenesis, which of the numerous features of human nature has ontological and epistemic priority.

The very second sentence of Virno's *Essay on Negation* reads as follows: 'Explaining the main characteristics and uses of the sign "not" means explaining some of the distinctive traits of our species' (*Negation*, 1.1). Linguists and logicians, who deal with such a sign, thus 'become anthropologists', or rather, they will always have been such. It seems that linguistic negation and the potential which it generates

are prior to any other form of potential, and the former explain the latter's very existence and essence. As Virno puts it with respect to the relation between anthropology and negation, we are speaking of, 'a theory inclined to clarify the *anthropological* range of linguistic negation, that is, the eminent role that the syntactic connective "not" plays in the material and emotional *[sentimentali]* vicissitudes of our species' (*Negation*, 4.6).[32]

But when it comes to linguistic negation, we need to make distinctions. In Virno's *Essay*, the distinction between transcendental and empirical, natural and historical, is revealed in a new light as it assumes the guise of two forms of negation, which Virno calls 'ontological' (or 'original' [*Negation*, 3.1]) and 'empirical' ('negation *stricto sensu*' [*Negation*, 3.1], or even 'contingent negation' [*Negation*, 3.3]).

Following Saussure and others in the tradition of structural linguistics, Virno tells us that language is, ontologically, an infinite system of differences, with no positive terms. In other words, each phonic signifier is defined solely by its difference from all of the other signifiers in the relevant system or chain. It is defined by its opposition to those other things which it is *not*: thus, negation is what produces determination (Spinoza's famous: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, but perhaps reversed). Language has no positivity, only negativity, the only identity it contains is produced by difference. This is what gives it its peculiar ontological status which sets it apart from 'being' in the sense given to that word by a tradition that has almost always taken it to mean presence or substance (*ousia*). Hence the deconstructive power of language for someone like Jacques Derrida, since language, the very means of expression employed by all philosophical treatises, itself fails to fit into the ontological scheme that philosophy attempts to posit as all-pervasive. The philosopher's very language thereby risks undermining their First Philosophy, and there seems no way around this impasse.

Thus, language is constituted by 'ontological negativity'. This basic negativity of the signifier conditions the more familiar type of negativity that we deploy every day in many mundane uses of our *actual* language, in the form of the word 'not', 'non-', 'im-', 'in-', or even '*mē*' — 'empirical negations'. Thus we have a distinction, and a hierarchy, within language, between *primary* and *secondary* negation (*Negation*, 3.3).

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[32] The relation between linguistic negation and human nature in its non-linguistic aspects is described in the following way in the Introduction to *E così via, all'infinito:* 'negation, the modality of possibility, and infinite regress [*regresso all'infinito*] [...] amount to the syntactic equivalent of significant phylogenetic matters of fact (for instance, the retention of infantile characteristics into adulthood and a related poverty [*penuria*] of innate inhibitions)' (Virno 2011, 63–4/ECV Introduction 1).

In the difference between these two forms of negation, we find recapitulated in a new way the relation between human nature and human history, the biological transcendental invariant and the historico-empirical forms it makes possible.[33]

We know that, on Virno's reading of the transcendental, the conditions for the possibility of manifestation are themselves manifest one way or another: in the case of language, this involves precisely the negative definition of every sign as such appearing within particular languages in the form of the particle 'non-' and its kin.

Pre-linguistic biological foundations of sociality — negation in language — negation of negation (in language)

Human language, on Virno's hypothesis, differs from animal codes, 'because it is able to *negate* every kind of representation' (*Negation*, 1.1). In this context, Virno speaks of a potential *double* negation carried out by language, the first poisonous and dangerous, the other curative and rescuing. It is important that we stress this fact because Virno uses it to describe our current social situation, and in order to clear up a misunderstanding — an ideological misunderstanding we might say — which elides the negativity upon which the semblance of positivity rests.

In one particular context, in order to bring out the effects of linguistic negation upon the incipient human animal, Virno considers a certain biological capacity which is *pre*-linguistic. This Virno describes as the 'innate sociality of the mind', an 'original intersubjectivity', preceding the very existence of individual subjects. This does not mean simply ontogenetically prior, but ontologically more basic: 'Intersubjectivity [...] by far precedes the operations carried out by individual self-conscious subjects' (*Negation*, 1.2). Virno is willing to go so far as to attribute this original 'empathy' to something so empirical and biological as the mirror neurons — an innate capacity for mimicry on the part of the brain that functions *as if* what the other were undergoing were actually happening to us (psychoanalysts used to speak of 'childhood transitivism' in such cases). Virno speaks of an 'automatic and non-reflective co-feeling' (*Negation*, 1.2).

This sharing of the feelings of another is understood by Virno to constitute the originally 'public' character of the mind (*Negation*, 1.2). Most intriguing, however, is the fact that this 'field of pre-individual experience' is described as *pre-linguistic* (*Negation*, 1.1): 'It is totally incongruous to ascribe to verbal language that immediate intra-species empathy established by the mirror neurons' (*Negation*, 1.2).

This is a curious usurpation: the mirror neurons seem to have assumed the place of the linguistic faculty as the public and transindividual potential which Virno upbraided Chomsky for neglecting, while at the same time, as we shall see, this has

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[33] Albeit with the caveat that the language system does seem to be distinct from the *biological* faculty for *having* language, and to be precisely *non*-natural, *non*-biological — everything hangs on the question of where the language system lies for Virno: can it be absolutely identical with the linguistic faculty and hence biologico-natural? Or is it entirely uprooted from nature by its very arbitrary, oppositional, supernatural character, or perhaps by its infinity?

the consequence of rendering language a *non*-biological negation of this biological feature. It is not the human animal's natural lack of a finite environment that makes it dangerous, but the non-natural acquisition of linguistic negation. To make things clearer, let us note that these mirror neurons are in truth not enough to distinguish the human from the other animals, and hence *on their own* they are not enough to explain even the beginning of anthropogenesis: 'Human sociality and that of other animal species are *united* by the functioning of mirror neurons. We still need to ask what separates them' (*Negation*, 1.3, emphasis added). To situate retrospectively the mirror neurons in an anthropogenic account, we will need to introduce language.

Language, in the first place, is the apparently (or possibly) *non*-biological capacity able to *negate* this original sympathy. This is the first of language's two negations, on this particular version of Virno's account, and it is the most dangerous, for the linguistic particle 'not' makes possible the refusal to recognise the humanity of the other: 'this is *not* a man'. Virno stresses that the linguistic faculty is unable to *stop* the mirror neurons firing, but rather 'brackets' the sympathy that we neurologically and naturally feel: the verbal negation *retains* what it negates, but suspends its operation.[34] 'It is only thanks to this tendency to repudiate what is nonetheless admitted that the sign "not" can destructively interfere with the "sub-personal" biological apparatus that is our neuronal co-feeling. Negation does not certainly prevent the mirror neurons from being activated, but it makes their sense ambiguous and their effects reversible' (*Negation*, 1.3).

That said, linguistic negativity is remarkable in that it is also capable of, up to a certain point, undoing the damage that it inflicts, for it is possible for language to *recur* with respect to itself, to double back upon itself. In the particular case under consideration, this means to *negate* its original negation. This is the second form of negation that language enables us to carry out, and the social situation which

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[34] Much later, in speaking of the way linguistic disavowal ('that is *not* my mother') undoes the previous non-linguistic 'negation' of repression, Virno can hardly avoid the locution '"repression" of repression', or better, [...] 'negation of "negation"'. He even confesses thereby to '[f]lirting [*civettare*] with Hegelian dialectic' (*Negation*, 5.5) and indeed it is hard to see how one could avoid something even more than trysting at this point.

Virno seems to think that it is enough to say that these are 'two *radically heterogeneous* types of annulment' (ibid., emphasis added) and to speak of a 'non-dialectical understanding of the negative' (M22/ECV Part II 1.2) that he insists it is necessary to create (relating to the terms, 'ambivalence', 'oscillation', and 'perturbation') — one could well imagine that the ontological negativity and its empirical avatar encountered in language could be considered to be the transcendental condition for the possibility of dialectic, which itself escapes and precedes dialectic as such. Such seems to be the implicit thrust of Virno's thought. The indeterminate negativity of the *heteron* might well be interpreted as a third form of negation between determinate and abstract negation (the former being the dialectical replacement for the latter which implies pure destruction), for it does not destroy the entity it negates altogether, but nor does it suggest any determinate result of the negating process. Such we can imagine was the reason why this notion of 'otherness' became so prominent a feature of French philosophy in the 1960's, as part of an informed attempt to elude Hegelianism.

is its result (mutual recognition) is more commonly — and mistakenly — thought to be the more original kind of sociality, that of the discursive public sphere of unrestricted rational communication. Virno's understanding of linguistic negativity is partly designed to undo this ideological misimpression of a somewhat Habermasian stripe:

> The public sphere, which is the ecological niche of our actions, is the unstable result of a laceration and of a suture, where the former is no less important than the latter. It therefore resembles a scar, the imperfect negation (the imperfect healing) of a former but also not total negation (the inflicted wound which nevertheless did not altogether obliterate us). In other words: the public sphere originates in a *negation of a negation*. (*Negation*, 1.1)

Virno by no means conceals the fact that the structure he is here outlining bears a striking resemblance to the dialectic. By 'dialectic' here we mean a relational definition which involves negation, and that is to say, a negative differentiation which stands at the root of an identity. Perhaps incautiously, Virno will occasionally speak quite openly of the 'dialectic' of '[m]irror neurons, linguistic negation, [and] the intermittent status of reciprocal recognition' (*Negation*, 1.4).

The retroactive relation of the symbolic and the pre-symbolic: culture and biology

It will perhaps help to clarify the status of the prelinguistic here if we refer to the way in which Virno thinks of the relation between language and what he terms the 'drives'. For here it becomes clear, once again, that language must have a 'retroactive' effect upon everything that precedes it.

In *E così via,* Virno speaks of the relation between human language and sub-human drives in the following way: 'the life of the human animal distinguishes itself from the life of other animals because of the retroaction of the symbolic plane on the sub-symbolic; because of the replacement of the scream of pain with equivalent propositions, and of the compulsion to repeat with infinite regress' (Virno 2011, 68/ECV Introduction 1.3). In other words, while the pre-linguistic, which includes the mirror-neurons, does not differentiate man and animal, nevertheless, with the incursion of language *on* this pre-linguistic substance, anthropogenetic differentiation may begin, and what language introduces into the real or nature is a certain infinite self-duplication, recursion or infinite regress: 'Infinite regress is an exclusively linguistic phenomenon that, however, is able to exhibit the juncture between language and the drives' (Virno 2011, 69/ECV Introduction 1.3).[35]

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[35] An earlier, slightly different account of infinite regress which relates it not just to language but also to world, and hence to the cosmology of Kant in particular, and the Kantian sublimes, leading naturally onto Hegel's critique of the bad infinite, may be found in *Mondanità* (MN1.1–3.6). Here, in this relatively early work, Virno suggests that 'infinite regression is not an original phenomenon' (MN3.1) but is rather derived from two more fundamental experiences of the

The infinite regress made possible by the recursive capacity of language renders the opposition between nature and culture possible but also extremely subtle:

> The alternative between novelty and repetition usually prepares and substantiates the dichotomy between culture and biology. According to a traditional opinion [e.g. Hegel], which should not be revered, culture would be innovative and biology conservative. Many authors have claimed the exact opposite [e.g. the philosophical anthropologists, Gehlen in particular]: culture would stabilise and render consistent the behaviours of the human animal, while biological drives would condemn them to unpredictability. These assertions are [both] perfunctory and untrustworthy. However, it is interesting to observe that, independently of which opinion one privileges, in both cases infinite regress — revealing a logical link between novelty and repetition [this is the 'compulsion to ambivalence' that Virno speaks of as

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world and of language, which turn out to be an experience of the world as a reservoir of unactualized potential, or what Virno describes as the continuum of 'raw sensible being', the unformed matter of our perceptual world, sensibility without concept — a world that is not an environment (MN3.2), and the experience of language as the infantile potential to speak, enunciated in those statements which reflect on the 'event' of language, which may always not have happened, 'completely alien to the interminable backwards flight of meta-languages' (MN3.4). Indeed, Virno asserts that the bad infinite of the Kantian cosmological regression is due to what he here is happy to describe as 'metaphysics', which is defined by its failure to think pure and unactualisable possibility (in world and language) and to replace it instead with a vision of the world and language as pure actuality, a totality which would be fully given. This would be an actuality that only *appears* to be as yet unrealised — which is to say, *possible* — as a consequence of our finite human intellect. 'The metaphysical idea of the world as totality postulates the surreptitious realisation of what is exclusively possible; once again, for this reason, it generates the interminable cosmological regression', the interminability of which, 'Kant and Wittgenstein [otherwise inspirational for Virno here] [...] ascribed to the insufficiency of the human intellect [thus showing themselves, despite themselves to belong to metaphysics, as Virno determines it] (MN3.2). And analogously, with language: 'The infinite regress of meta-languages [...] in fact emerges from the attempt to represent the faculty of speech [potentiality, *dynamis*] as a *fully given totality'* (MN3.4).

In a way that perhaps hints at the solution at which, we are arguing, Virno eventually arrives, he goes on to say that in order to understand this pure potential without 'realisation', it will be helpful to turn from the experience of the *world* to the experience of *language*, an experience indeed which is only partly vouchsafed us in the case of an infinite regress of metalanguages. And here we arrive at the question of language's ability to refer to its own taking place. Following Wittgenstein, in such a way as eventually to carry him beyond the metaphysics to which he remains confined by his conception of the possible, Virno tells us that, '[t]he event of Creation (the existence of the world) is redoubled to form the event of the Word (the existence of language) [...]. Accounting discursively for the existence of language, that is, for what enables every discourse, would also mean expressing the world as a "limited whole" [according to the metaphysical expression, at least]; a truly successful self-reference would unravel at the same time the cosmological question' (MN3.3).

the result of a reorganisation by language of the psychoanalytic 'compulsion to repeat' (*Wiederholungszwang*)] — constitutes an immediate synthesis of culture and biology. Yet it is insufficient and even misleading to speak of a synthesis. The *compulsion to ambivalence,* which is the true emblem of regress, rather signals [...] the lack of distinction between culture and biology. (Virno 2011, 69/ECV Introduction 1.3)

Virno then attempts to identify, in light of this retroaction of language upon the biological real, the 'naturalistic' basis of infinite regress, speaking of 'the naturalistic foundation of the countless instances in which the solution reproduces the initial problem' (Virno 2011, 72/ECV Introduction 1.5). In this context, he tells us that, '[t]he logical or pragmatic circles that, recursively reiterating themselves, give rise to an infinite regress have their common origin in the relation of the human animal to the environment [*ambiente*]. To be more precise, they have their common origin in the three [bio-anthropological] properties which allow this animal to adapt to a vital context' (ibid.). And these are:

1) Hyper-reflexivity, 'the biological necessity of representing one's own representations'.

2) Transcendence, 'the biological necessity of projecting one's self beyond the here and now'.

3) A twofold or dual aspect, according to a phrase adapted from Plessner (Virno 2011, 74/ECV Introduction 1.5), 'the biological necessity of an artificial or historical-cultural existence, which is, however, extra-biological' (Virno 2011, 72/ECV Introduction 1.5). This duality is expressed in the wonderfully direct contradiction in terms that Virno ventures in the following passage: '[M]an is a *naturally artificial* animal, an organism whose biologically distinctive trait is culture' (Virno 2011, 74/ECV Introduction 1.5).

These features of man's adaptation to his environment 'promote' the infinity of the infinite regress. Virno expands upon this point with reference to Gehlen and the latter's description of the gap between man and animal: the excessive stimuli which flood the human organism without automatically leading to a behaviour that favours self-preservation. The *meaning* of this flood is 'undetermined, or better, only potential' (Virno 2011, 73/ECV Introduction 1.5). 'The permanent gap between stimuli and action induces a certain lack of adherence, or even an actual *distancing*, of the human animal from the states of affairs that surround it', and this gap is the basis of the three conditions that must be in place for the disadapted animal to adapt: hyper-reflexivity, transcendence, and the dual aspect (Virno 2011, 73/ECV Introduction 1.5).

The abyss between stimulus and response, or between the human being's action and its putative environmental occasion is the 'naturalistic basis' of infinite regress, the natural feature in which the unnatural system of language takes root.

'In so far as its perceptual impressions do not dictate univocal behaviours, in order to survive, the human animal needs to control and form them always again

by means of a hypertrophic development of reflexive performances' (Virno 2011, 73/ECV Introduction 1.5). Taking the place of a biunivocal relation between stimulus and response is a doubling of representation:

> Meta-representation [a second and more powerful representation *of* a representation] compensates always anew for the discontinuity between environmental stimulus and cognitive response. It retrospectively fills in the void that such discontinuity has inserted into experience. We could say that meta-representation stands for the stimulus, taking on the orientating function that the latter fulfils in other living species. (Virno 2011, 73/ECV Introduction 1.5)

Thus, for the human being, '[r]eflexive performances [...] constitute a primary biological resource' (Virno 2011, 73/ECV Introduction 1.5). In other words, the natural gap between man and environment necessitates an infinite regress of representations, which is to say the first and perhaps most foundational of the three preconditions for human adaptation: hyper-reflexivity.

The gap also produces the second 'bioanthropological property', transcendence: 'The distancing from the environmental context also entails a distancing from one's self as an integral part of that context'. And also, 'the human animal, because of its distancing, senses the limits of the context in which it is situated, and precisely for this reason does not have an ecological niche, that is, an environment in a strict sense, but an historical world' (Virno 2011, 73–4/ECV Introduction 1.5). And beyond the limit, one senses another limit, and so on *ad infinitum:* 'The transcending of the vital context is the kernel of experience that infinite regression articulates in the guise of an ascending hierarchy or of a spiral' (Virno 2011, 74/ECV Introduction 1.5).

As to the third bioanthropological moment, Virno describes the 'twofold aspect' as a *consequence* of the first two moments: 'The distancing from its vital context obliges our species to establish a supplementary relation with it', and 'the unity of the two aspects ['biology and culture, nature and artifice, the individual and the social mind'] only manifests itself in their gap' (Virno 2011, 74/ECV Introduction 1.5).

> The historical-cultural actions would have to alleviate the very high degree of contingency, that is, of omnidirectional potentiality [*potenzialità omnidirezionale*] that characterises the 'flood of stimuli'. However, inasmuch as they do not derive from a precise environmental signal, these actions have an unforeseeable outcome, and in their turn increase the contingency and potentiality from which they were meant to protect us. Thus, what we need are new historical-cultural actions that, carrying out a meta-operational task, reorganise the relation [...] between a single human animal [...] and the vital context. (Virno 2011, 74–5/ECV Introduction 1.5)

So all three 'bio-anthropological prerogatives', 'always applying themselves again to the situation they have generated, give rise to infinite regress' (Virno 2011, 75/ECV Introduction 1.5). *Without* this recursion, Virno suggests, these properties might well be found in animals:

> It is important to add that only syntactic recursion renders these prerogatives species-specific, that is, properly human. Undoubtedly many other animals are capable of reflexive performances [...]. The authentic discriminating factor lies in the tendency to reiterate meta-representation recursively, [but also the other two prerogatives, as if animals do *not* have this, but only the first, a potential for reflexivity, if not, perhaps *hyper*-reflexivity], the distancing from one's here and now [transcendence], and the construction of a cultural relation with the context [dual aspect]. (Virno 2011, 75/ECV Introduction 1.5)

The symbolic (language) has to retroact upon the pre-symbolic, in order for anthropogenesis to begin. Curiously, then,

> [s]yntactic recursion is an intra-linguistic property [...]. And yet it is precisely recursion, and not the denotative vocabulary, that moulds the prerogatives thanks to which the human animal adapts to the world. We witness here a peculiar displacement that, on closer inspection, characterises the union of logic and anthropology as a whole: an immediate pragmatic-existential value pertains only to the functions that govern the inner life of verbal language [...]. The organism's impulse for preservation first and foremost avails itself of those traits of human eloquence which are furthest from (and most independent of) somatic and sensory-motor impulses. (Virno 2011, 75/ECV Introduction 1.5)

Our natural life survives by the most unnatural means: speech.

In any case, we have seen that the infinity of the sign in its self-recursion may be seen retrospectively to have precursors in the pre-linguistic life of the (human) animal, the supernatural in the natural. And it becomes clear from the following passage that recursion should not be taken merely to characterise *empirical* negativity (for instance, in the repeated use of the word 'not' to negate previous negations), but also to define the very differential texture of language's *ontological* negativity: 'Using a concept dear to Chomsky, we could say that the primary negativity of which the texture of language is made is endowed with the prerequisite of *recursion*'. This in the sense that we should not positivise or reify the difference between terms in language, since 'each difference between linguistic terms exists only by virtue of... its negative-differential relation with another difference' (*Negation,* 2.2).

It is as if the property of recursion provides a joint between the non-biological infinity of the system of signs that comprises language in its potency and the other (biological) characteristics of the human animal, and in particular the infinity that is bestowed upon its world by a natural lack of a single environment (perhaps indeed the only thing that allows us to speak, comparatively, of the human animal's environment as 'lacking', as negative or absent, is *language*). Or does the confusion of culture and biology here allow us to speak of the language-system *as* biological? Is it identical with what Virno elsewhere speaks of as an unequivocally *biological* linguistic faculty? This was the problem we began with in our account of Virno's surprising deployment of the mirror neurons, and we have yet satisfactorily to solve it.

Language and human nature in *Essay on Negation*

In the exposition we are focussing on, language is taken to negate a primary and biological *sociality*. Here, language seems unnatural. Can we render this compatible with Virno's earlier enunciation according to which language as a faculty is itself part of our biological heritage, our human nature?

Perhaps this question might be resolved if we assume that these initial three 'hypotheses' that comprise the 'dialectic' of prelinguistic sociality, negation of sociality, and negation of negation, refer solely to *empirical* negation. After all, it is to this empirical negation that Virno refers in the following account of anthropogenesis, which takes place precisely in and as this dialectic. And more generally, it seems from this statement that language *makes* the other aspects of human nature *possible,* or at least certain others:

> Precisely insofar as it converts the way of (not) being of language into a particular communicative resource, negation is one of the main axes of human nature. Deferring the satisfaction of desire, reshaping drives, contradicting the ruling order, punctuating time as 'not any longer' and 'not yet'; all of this, and many other things, *would not be possible* if the primary negativity of language were not embodied in an independent symbol. (*Negation*, 2.6, emphasis added)

And again: 'In this inclination to *suspend without substituting*, made possible only by the logical operator "not", we should recognise a characteristic trait of human praxis, or even an anthropogenic apparatus [*un dispositivo antropogenetico*]' (*Negation*, 3.3).

In any case, Virno clarifies that language is indeed, for him, at this stage, still to be understood as *innate*, a *biological* faculty which does indeed seem to characterise the peculiar sociality of humans in distinction from the rest of the animal kingdom: 'The Nazi officer is able *not* to recognise the old Jew by virtue of a prerequisite of the primate *Homo sapiens* that is entirely *natural* (and hence innate and invariant). That is, he is able not to recognise him because the sociality

of *homo sapiens* is not only forged by mirror neurons, but also by *language'* (*Negation*, 1.3, emphases added). 'The suspension of neural co-feeling is closely linked to the most relevant feature of human discourses: *negation,* the use of "not"' (*Negation*, 1.3).[36]

It is important for our thesis now to establish once and for all that this negativity *must* be linguistic, it cannot occur elsewhere. Virno is indeed emphatic: any other uses of the word 'negation' besides the actual linguistic deployment of the word 'not' and its cognates, together with their 'ontological' correlate, are 'metaphorical or simply senseless' (*Negation*, 1.3).

There are apparent 'contrasts' among 'extra-linguistic perceptions, desires, or events', 'the opposition between physical forces [like attraction and repulsion], the contrast between perceptions, the conflict between drives' (*Negation,* 2.5), 'it has the appearance of opposition and contrariness' (*Negation*, 2.3). But 'a non-verbal fact even when it hinders another fact or annuls it, does not deserve in any way the label of "negative"' (*Negation*, 2.3). These extra-linguistic facts are themselves ultimately 'positive'. Referring to Kant's text on 'negative magnitudes', Virno insists that, 'demerit and error are positive' (*Negation*, 2.3). In extra-linguistic reality, opposites and contraries do not relate to one another in a *dialectical* way, in the sense that the negated force is not *preserved* in this negation as an inherent part of the *identity* of the negating force — the identity of the latter is not manifest as the *result* of the negation of its opponent; whereas this preservation does occur in the sublation of linguistic negation, or more precisely and more fundamentally in the *non*-dialectical preservation of the *in*determinate negation: 'when repulsion clashes with attraction, being itself a positive force, it does not preserve the "content" of the latter, but annuls it, and, if it overwhelms it, it replaces it with an alternative "content"' (*Negation*, 2.5).

Virno appears to agree with Saussure's assertion that, 'it is reasonable to define a fact as "negative" if it fully obtains its reality from a relation of opposition with other facts; if it does not pre-exist the opposition, but results from it. Language is the only field in which this paradoxical condition is satisfied' (*Negation*, 2.3). *Negation is primarily — and indeed exclusively — linguistic.*

Plato's *mē on*

That negation is *only* linguistic is one of the primary reasons for Virno's appeal to Plato's *Sophist*, of which his book contains an extremely close reading, for he reads this dialogue as an account of the acquisition of language in infancy, and specifically the language of negation. It tells an ontogenetic story of '[t]he radical change caused in the first years of life by the grafting of verbal language onto previous forms of thought' (*Negation*, 1.3). The *Sophist* is 'perhaps the only philosophical work that takes seriously the traumatic advent of the "not" in human life' (ibid.).

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[36] He also speaks of 'negation as a natural phenomenon' (*Negation*, 1.3), and language as 'naturalistic' (*Negation*, 1.4).

The most absolutely novel possibility which language introduces into life is that of negation. The negation of a predication in a proposition is understood to introduce the *possibility* of a *different (heteros)* predicate, which — crucially — is *not specified.* This distinguishes the *different* or the *other (heteron)* from the *contrary, opposite* or *antithesis (enantion).* If one thing is said to be 'opposed' to another, then that subject or substance must have a positive and determinate property predicated of it, and this attribute must stand at the farthest limit of the same genus, as beauty stands with respect to ugliness, positively asserting, and yet antithetical: 'by opposite [*contrario*], I mean the term that is furthest from that in question within the kind [*genere,* genus] they both belong to' (*Negation,* 3.4). On the use made of the word in the *Sophist,* Virno expands the notion of opposition even further to include, 'also terms that, unrelated with regard to their kind, radically oppose [*oppongono*] each other even if they do not have points of contact, or better, precisely because of that' (*Negation,* 4.2). We should contrast contrariety with contradiction ('not x' or 'x & not x'), which, perhaps precipitately, Virno elsewhere identifies with negation, speaking of 'the difference between contradiction and opposition [*contrarietà*]' — perhaps here contradiction is intended as a *third* option beside otherness and contrariety (*Negation,* 3.7 Marginal Note I).[37] Perhaps such a confusion explains Virno's ambiguous presentation of his own relation with the dialectic, which is driven by contradiction and the need to produce a determinate negation in order to resolve it. In general we should prefer to say that both contrariety and contradiction issue in a determinate *actual* outcome, even if contradiction need not and may simply reduce us to absurdity and aporia; while otherness is the *indeterminate* result which takes the form not of actuality but of *potentiality.*

In any case, negation produces a statement of *difference* or an *indeterminate* otherness, not specified but rich in an infinite possibility, and this is what is inflicted upon our biological mirror relation with the other when we acquire the ability to think linguistically:

> Nobody can claim that the Jew [...] is located at the antipodes of the attribute 'human' [i.e. that he or she is the *contrary* of 'human'] [...] given that the mirror neurons attest to the fact that the living being in question belongs to our species. Non-recognition is rather grounded on the tendency of the sign 'not' to evoke a *difference* [*heteron*] which, being as such potential and undetermined, is at each turn accounted for through some contingent property [...]. When the child says to his mother [in anger] 'you are *not* my mother' [the reference to Freud should distantly resonate here, as becomes

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[37] In terms of translation, we shall generally prefer 'otherness' to 'difference' as a translation of *'to heteron'* since *to heteron* is opposed to *to auton,* the other and the same, or, chiasmically, the one and the other, an alternative comprised always and only of two. Generally, Virno tends to translate *to heteron* as *differenza,* but occasionally, although much less frequently, as *alterità* and *altro* (cf. *Negation,* 4.2).

clear much later (cf. *Negation*, 3.5)], he in effect says that she *is not* what in another sense she undoubtedly *is*. (*Negation*, 1.3)

Which is to say, human, the predicate suspended, without being either sublated (as in dialectical contradiction) or replaced with another altogether (contrariety), or simply annihilated.

Thus one can translate Virno's former description of the public sphere as a negation of negation by deploying a certain number of Platonic terms in the following way: here Virno starts to speak, as is his wont, not so much of 'verbal (or spoken) *language'* as of 'verbal *thought'* (once 'verbal language' has been 'grafted onto' *pre*-linguistic thought), an internal rather than an external monologue or dialogue, which is precisely tantamount to the famous description of thought that one finds in the *Theaetetus* (189e): 'verbal thought erodes the original certainty of co-feeling. Only this erosion, which is as such lethal, paves the way for a complex and ductile sociality, scattered with pacts, promises, norms, conflicts, institutions that are never stable, collective projects whose outcomes are imponderable' (*Negation*, 1.4).

As we have seen in our earlier account of the quasi-dialectic of sociality, this very same capacity to negate can 'deactivate' the 'partial deactivation' of the original pre-linguistic, pre-negative intersubjectivity, and Virno relates this second, more complex and strategic use of language, a verbal thought that relates only to itself, to its initial negations, dwelling as it were on its past crimes, with *rhetoric:* 'traditional resources of rhetoric linguistically restrain the violent negativity that language itself has inserted into animal life; they regulate the use of the "not" and delimit the [formerly unlimited] range of the *heteron;* all in all, they allow the reciprocal recognition of living beings which could also *dis*-avow each other' (*Negation*, 1.4). Language thus has the same role with respect to the unlimited that politics has been said to, to channel a potentiality which might prove dangerous. Indeed, this rhetorical use of language may be said to provide precisely the matrix of Virno's political response to man's 'dangerousness', one which — contra Schmitt — would not be authoritarian and pro-State, but which — contra the anarchists Schmitt depicts as his enemy — would not presuppose an 'anthropology of meekness' or 'goodness'.

Speaking of the *katēchon* invoked by St. Paul in his Letter to the Thessalonians, the 'restraining force' or 'force that holds back' the arrival of the Antichrist, Virno tells us that 'language is the naturalistic *katēchon* that, favouring the formation of a public sphere (through the application of a "not" to a previous "not"), *holds back* the catastrophe of non-recognition' (*Negation*, 1.4). And the proper use of this language, within a certain public, economic, political sphere, is precisely what constitutes 'anti-capitalist and anti-state political action':

The fragility of the 'we-centric space' [pre-linguistic mirror neuron intersubjectivity] [...] must constitute the realistic background of any political

movement that aims at a drastic transformation of the current state of affairs. [...] An accurate analysis of the social mind allows us to ground 'radicalism vis-à-vis state' [Schmitt 2007 {1932}, 61] and vis-à-vis the capitalist mode of production on the dangerousness of human nature (a dangerousness that is fed by the polyvalent use of the 'not'), rather than on its imaginary mildness [the fantasy that humans are naturally 'good']. Anti-capitalist and anti-state political action [...] is dedicated to experimenting with new and more effective ways of negating negation, of appending the 'not' before 'non-man'. (*Negation*, 1.4)[38]

The transcendental and empirical qualities of language

We must now return to the questions with which we began, as we prepare to draw our long essay to a close.

Our hypothesis is that the relation between the ontological and empirical forms of negation within language will allow us to clarify the relation between the transcendental human nature and its empirico-historical manifestations (which as we have already seen in the previous section, will in turn allow us to render our vision of the future politics more precise, a politics inextricable from the philosophy or natural history that Virno advocates). Virno tells us the following: 'it seems to me very likely that negation arises from the negative-differential nature of language, i.e. that the sign "not" isolates and concentrates in itself an aspect that pervasively characterises the life of all signs' (*Negation*, 2.3). This is the difference between 'what language *is*' and 'what language *expresses*:* 'the philosophical enquiry into negation [Virno instances Plato's *Sophist,* as we have seen, but also the opening of Hegel's *Logic*, and later on, what is in its way a response to it, and by far Plato's most important interlocutor, according to Virno: Heidegger's 'What is Metaphysics?'] has always been de facto an enquiry into the way of (not-)being of language' (*Negation*, 2.4).

All of which is to say that the sign 'not' is a reflexive indicator of the very taking place of language itself, or perhaps, to use a less Agambenian idiom, it reflexively indicates the very nature of language, like a rhetorical trick drawing attention to its own verbal dexterity.[39] As Virno puts it, this might be said to be

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[38] Virno refers to his, *E così via*, pp. 148–94, which is translated as pp. 11ff of *Multitude*. Here we find more detail on Virno's ultimate political position, which we have too little space to expand upon in the present work.

[39] Virno is in truth most indebted to Agamben when it comes to this question of reflexivity, at the very least for the way in which the relation is described in *Mondanità*, where he differentiates a 'presuppositional' conception of the relation between word and thing from a conception which is less 'vulgar' and that is ultimately to say, 'metaphysical' (MN3.4). This latter conception leads Virno to the remarkable statement according to which 'the fact that humankind has a "world" [...] rather than an "environment" (into which one is [...] irrevocably integrated as in amniotic fluid) is due to the *limits of language*, not to its representational power', with limits here being understood in a non-metaphysical fashion as the reserve of inactual potential which language will always retain (ibid.). We might wonder if this amounts to assigning a priority to linguistic potential

because negation at the level of language, unlike its analogues in reality, leads to 'difference', that which is simply 'otherwise', without its being specified quite how. It is merely 'different' (without further determination). Its sole 'determination' is that it is *not* what it differentiates itself *from*. Thus it is not a contrary, opposition or antithesis (*enantion*), which would posit something determinate (and so nor is it the result of a determinate negation).

This indeterminate negativity, this *potential* to be something determinate without *actually* being it, is precisely the gift of language and its *transcendental* negativity, a transcendental or ontological negation which every *empirical* use of the negative may be said to bring to manifestation: 'When it is negated, "is beautiful" [for instance] does not give way to a new *signifié* [signified — like "is ugly", its opposite]; it rather undergoes an indetermination that takes it back to the negative-differential relations that are responsible for the establishment of all *signifiés'* (*Negation*, 2.5). The 'not' is the empirical manifestation of the transcendental, a transcendental which in this case is just as internal to language as the empirical.

In an analogy with the Marxist analysis of money as both a good and a representative of all goods, Virno suggests that 'it is as if the Platonic idea of "horseness" managed to acquire its own empirical existence alongside individual horses in the flesh. [...] [A] part functions as an image of the whole. Both money and negation reveal the hidden nature of the system of which they are a mere component' (*Negation*, 2.6). In relation to negativity, or more precisely the *heteron* in the *Sophist,* Virno speaks of 'condition of possibility and phenomenon' (*Negation*, 4.5). Language seems to be a remarkable place, in that it comprises the transcendental, the most essential feature of human nature and the condition for the possibility of what is uniquely its own, distinguishing it from the other animals: the (empirical) negation and potential that this opens up, the ability to transform an absence, a lack of adaptation (for instance) into the resource (the potential) for an unheard of domination and creativity. Language, then, is both the transcendental but also the location for the empirical, the actual uses of the word 'not' and its various cognates and translations.

When is ontological negativity revealed? The question and the possible

Since we are precisely interested, philosophically and politically, in the moments at which the transcendental manifests itself, and the precise manner in which it does so at different points in history, let us examine what Virno says about the revelation of ontological negativity in the empirical. It should be instructive.

Virno points to two occasions in particular on which ontological negativity is revealed, or as he puts it, when the disjunction of sense from presence, logic from psychology, the original negation between a representation and what it represents, is brought most glaringly to light:

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as we have suggested Virno does elsewhere, even though Virno immediately proceeds to speak of the relation between language and world as 'chiasmic' (MN3.5).

1) The question — which admits of an affirmative or negative response to the same content. Heidegger will have made much of this, in a very different idiom.

2) The modality of the possible: 'the independence of verbal thought from facts and psychological drives, which is undeniable, yet only implicit in assertion and in pragmatic statements, fully emerges when this thought is accompanied by the clause "it is possible". [...] [I]t brings to light a trait shared by all discourses' (*Negation*, 3.6).

The possible has a certain advantage over the question in that it removes the impression that the neutrality of sense between affirmation and negation — its potential character — is a temporary matter that may eventually be overcome: 'Possible is synonymous with *untimely* and not-present. [...] [T]he temporal discrepancy constitutes the very theme of the discourse [...]. The waiting is no longer a mere setback, or a parenthesis to be quickly closed, but becomes something permanent. Only the possible, not the question, thus attests to the permanent *untimeliness of sense'*, which is to say its discrepancy with respect to the present or the actual (*Negation*, 3.6).

Thus, Virno is prepared to go so far as to say that, 'the possible is perfectly coextensive with the "not"' (*Negation*, 3.6), 'negation alone is able to trace the watershed [...] between potential being and actual being' (*Negation*, 3.6). Potentiality may be thought in terms of the ontological negativity that can be introduced into the real by language alone.

As we have been hypothesising all along, this negativity seems to 'make possible' all of the other traits which comprise human nature. Of this mutual implication between the possible and the negative, Virno says that, 'this circular relation [...] is an eminent element of a plainly *naturalistic* anthropology (i.e. one that is able to acknowledge the importance that some logical structures have in defining the nature of the primate *Homo sapiens*)'. This would be a *naturalistic* anthropology which nevertheless did full justice to the idea of a *linguistic* anthropology, with all its complex intertwinings of transcendentality with the empirical, and hence to the *natural* production of the *super*natural, the biological generation of the cultural (*Negation*, 3.6). Language, as both biological and cultural, an intimation of infinity and infinity *stricto sensu*, is responsible for the emergence of a number of human characteristics, once it has acted retrospectively on certain prelinguistic features (including our mirror neurons and our drives): among these human features we have seen numbered hyper-reflexivity, transcendence, and the dual aspect. Of the first, Virno tells us that it emerges with language's ability not so much to self-*refer* (*pace* Agamben) as to *recur*.

Even if there is not always an avowed *ontological* priority of language over man, there is certainly an *epistemological* one, when it comes to the reflexivity that empirical negation and ontological negation form: 'If we overlook the convergence [...] of [...] empirical plane and ontological plane, we are doomed not to be able to grasp our typically human *reflexivity*' (*Negation,* 3.7 Marginal Note II). Such reflexivity, which might indeed be identified with the reflexivity of a transcendental

self with respect to an empirical one, is ungraspable without an understanding of the way in which language as such embodies a relation between the transcendental and the empirical. And the unique features of the human produced by a natural genesis of the supernatural and a subsequent (or perhaps contemporary) retroaction of the symbolic upon the real, cannot be understood without an account of language. No anthropology without linguistics.

The *Sophist* and 'What is Metaphysics?': a non-linguistic negation?

For all its helpfulness as a reading guide to Plato's text, the long section in Chapter 4 which Virno devotes to Plato's *Sophist* assumes its full importance only in conjunction with what follows after it: a reading of Heidegger's 'What is Metaphysics?' (1929). In Virno's hands, Heidegger illuminates Plato by offering a contrasting view on the relation between negativity (or nothingness) and language.[40]

At stake is still the most original form of negativity, the *mē on* of the *heteron*, the non-oppositional otherness of that 'non-being within being' which is the potential that lies coiled at the heart of actuality. What is in question is precisely whether this original negation is fundamentally linguistic or not. Or, as Virno puts the alternative, 'on the one hand, a Nothing that is indistinguishable from the way in which our speech is made; on the other, a nothing strongly linked to the non-linguistic experience of the world', an experience that will paradigmatically for Heidegger take the form of *anxiety* (*Negation*, 4.6).

If we are to substantiate our hypothesis on the precedence of *linguistic* negation for Virno, we shall have to deal with this comparison of Plato and Heidegger.

Crucially important for Virno is the fact that, '[f]or Plato, not-being and [linguistic] negation are united by the category of *heteron*', while 'Heidegger *separates* the two poles that the polysemy of the *heteron* joined and made commensurable' (*Negation*, 4.6, emphasis added). Indeed, the original *heteron* is not, it seems, understood by Heidegger as the differentiality of language but rather as,

> the *non-linguistic* relation that the human animal has with the world [...].
> Radically heterogeneous with respect to verbal thought, the Heideggerian *mē on* mostly manifests itself in certain characteristic *states of mind* [stati

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[40] Virno points out something which is rarely noticed, although it might have seemed glaringly obvious: four years earlier, Heidegger had lectured on the *Sophist*, and 'What is Metaphysics?' should be considered the 'continuation' of those lectures, even though it goes its own way with respect to Plato. 'Heidegger distances himself from the setting of the *Sophist* only to endorse its most conspicuous result: the discovery of a form of life [*una forma di vita*] that is shaped by not-being [as the sophist himself is]. This singular mixture of distance and proximity is very useful for understanding, independently of Heidegger and in open contrast to the hypothesis he promotes, which problems should be taken charge of by a theory inclined to clarify the *anthropological* range of linguistic negation' (*Negation*, 4.6). Virno, then, as a quasi-dialectical sublation of Plato and Heidegger's positions on negation?

d'animo]*. Among them, anxiety is especially important, a feeling [*sentimento*] of fear and disorientation that [...] signals our permanent maladjustment [*disadattamento*] to the environment. (*Negation*, 4.6)

Already one can see Virno interpreting and translating Heidegger's notion with his own anthropological — and one might be forgiven for supposing less than Heideggerian — purposes in mind: he speaks, in a way that Heidegger did perhaps only once in his career, in the aberrant 1929–30 course on animals and humans, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, of 'disadaptation' and 'the non-linguistic experience of the world as a vital context that is partly undetermined and unpredictable' (*Negation*, 4.6, cf. MN4.1, where Virno refers to this particular text of Heidegger's). For Heidegger, in any case, '[w]e thus need to recognise the "factual reality of the *mē on*" in the individual who falls prey to an anxiety resistant to words, and not in the loquacious author of negative propositions' (*Negation*, 4.6).

But this is just the aspect of Heidegger's interpretation of negativity that Virno disputes: he criticises Heidegger's understanding of anxiety and other emotions as *pre*-linguistic, while at the same time, on a generous reading, one should not read Plato's *heteron* in the way that we may presume Heidegger is assumed to, as failing to open up emotional possibilities: '[t]he Platonic not-being [...] is never emotionally inert' (*Negation*, 4.6).[41] So emotion is not pre-linguistic,

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[41] Thus, contrary to the prevailing reading, '[t]he fact that the feeling originates in the negative experience of logos is, after all, also suggested by a cautious, or at least not mesmerised, reading of "What is Metaphysics?"' (*Negation*, 4.6). That said, we should not lose too much time on this reading, since it is erroneous: it rests on the idea that the nothing revealed in anxiety is *akin* to the Platonic nothing, in that the *heteron* introduced by negation is *non-oppositional*, 'Like the Platonic *heteron*, the Nothing supported by Heidegger is itself inseparable from being' (*Negation*, 4.6). And indeed, for Virno, beings themselves are precisely revealed to us in their being, in their 'as such' *in* the experience of anxiety.

So far, Heidegger would broadly agree, but the step Virno goes on to make, Heidegger would at this stage in his career refute absolutely. Virno adds, innocently, as if remaining within the letter of a 'non-mesmerised' reading of Heidegger's text: 'Let us ask on what conditions we can understand a being *as* such, i.e. maintaining a distance from it. The intuitive answer is: on condition of *saying it*. I depict the thunder *as* such because the word "thunder" is *not* the thing it stands for', 'the "as" is in turn indiscernible from the life of language' (ibid.).

For the later Heidegger, possibly, but here, as Virno himself has already shown, Heidegger is precisely attempting to think man's transcendence of beings as a whole in the direction of anxiety ultimately in terms of a wordless experience, a voiceless voice, and ultimately the sheer negativity of *death*, which extinguishes all words and all communication. The apophantic 'as' is preceded by a more originary pre-linguistic conceptualisation of the world in the form of a 'hermeneutic' 'as', as Heidegger will say in *Being and Time*, and in the briefest sentence in the text, 'to significations [concepts], words accrue' (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 204/161). There is a certain precedence of thought over language, even before one starts to consider the relation of 'states of mind' or 'moods' to all this.

To defend Virno's reading, one would, I think, have to return to *Being and Time* in a different way, and to its depiction of conscience, which opens us to anxiety and the possibility of

and ontological negativity is not unemotional. This constitutes a charitable reading of Plato that, wittingly or not, Heidegger will have taught us to give. 'The possession of a biological organ characterised by a "complex of eternally negative differences" generates by itself specific states of mind' (ibid.). At stake are 'those passions correlated with the mere *capacity* to enunciate' (ibid., emphasis added). The 'disorientation' in one's environment that Heidegger, according to Virno, takes anxiety to reveal, is said to be 'caused' *by* the linguistic faculty itself, as are the emotions associated with it.

Playing along with something he does not truly believe, and assuming that anxiety does indeed have some absolute priority (he also instances what he demonstrates to be its opposite, Freud's 'uncanny'),[42] Virno describes the anxiety which would be consequent upon the linguistic capacity as 'the state of mind that is born out of a heightened relation with ontological negation, an astounded contemplation of the heterogeneity between logos and being, an abnormal dilation of the voids and pauses caused by the untimeliness of sense. In anxiety, ontological negation is transformed into an existential attitude' (*Negation*, 4.6).

In the end, Virno simply concludes the position he began the book by affirming, that, '[i]f we do not lapse into metaphorical or simply senseless uses of the term (for which even a punch would in a way negate), negation is a function that

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the pure potentiality that is being, as 'primordial discourse' or the 'origin of discourse' (Heidegger 1962 [1927], 342/296), which one might be able to align with the 'faculty for language' in Virno, though not, it seems certain, with the *biological* declination that it receives in the latter's work.

In general, much is at stake here, for the way we are directing our reading of Virno: is it true that negativity is *only* and *always* the negativity that the differentiality of the language-system introduces into nature with the emergence of the human being? At least in the limited context of this reading, at the end of Chapter 4 of the *Essay on Negation*, Virno can hardly be said to *justify* his position, and resorts in the end merely to pitting one position against another: in this case, a simple remark of Wittgenstein's ('Heidegger's explanation [...] can be countered with an exasperated remark Wittgenstein makes [...]' [*Negation,* 4.6]), which in truth gives far less justification of its own position than 'What is Metaphysics?' gives of Heidegger's.

The skewing within Virno's reading of Heidegger gives us pause here, and should stimulate us to search all the harder for the justifications of this precedence Virno gives to a linguistic negation, which Heidegger himself manages to do without, early on, at least. But there is nothing to say that the later Heideggerian position is *necessarily* superior to the earlier, or that resources may not be found in the work of the 1920's and 30's which are more productive for contemporary problematics.

[42] 'The familiar-uncanny therefore appears in all its finery [*celebra dunque i suoi fasti*] when words appear to fuse with the objects for which they stand; when the *heteron* that keeps statements and facts separated is eclipsed; when the sign, being entirely juxtaposed with what it designates, abruptly ceases to be a sign. The uncanny obscures for a short period of time ontological negation: the very negation whose effects are instead exasperated by the feeling of anxiety. [...] While the state of mind of anxiety is the climax of the autonomy of the symbol with respect to what is symbolised, the feeling of the uncanny brings us back for a moment to the threshold between symbolic and pre-symbolic life [...]. Anxiety and the uncanny are the two polar versions, one paroxysmal, the other defective — of the same fundamental experience, which never lacks an affective gradient: the experience of *having* language' (*Negation*, 4.6).

belongs exclusively to verbal activity' (*Negation,* 1.3): in the end, 'apart from what the functioning of the sign "not" teaches us, we do not have any notion of negation, or of not-being, and hence we do not even have notions of negative actions or passions' (*Negation*, 4.6). What is therefore somewhat difficult to understand is that in the final chapter, immediately after this introduction of the relation between emotions and negations in the context of Heidegger's work, Virno raises the matter of certain 'pre-linguistic' (*Negation*, 5.2) or 'pre-symbolic' (*Negation*, 5.1) drives and emotions. Here we are clearly in the realm of the retrospective, once again, and Virno tells us that this assertion of a rigorous separation between the pre-linguistic and the linguistic is precisely what allows a retroaction of negation upon the non-negative pre-linguistic. These pre-linguistic emotions do not seem to include anxiety, but at least they comprise such things as 'hunger and fear', and also such similar intimations of negation in the pre-linguistic realm as 'hatred and rancour', 'unsatisfied desires', and 'mockery'. Those 'negative' emotions and states which seem to cry out in advance for a linguistic description that will include a negation.

We investigated the retroaction of language on such states, and its crucial role in anthropogenesis, earlier on, but the stress here is laid more firmly on the priority of drives and emotions with respect to language, and it is not immediately clear how Virno can so simply distinguish his position from that of the Heidegger which he will have criticised in the previous chapter (*Negation,* 5.1). There seems little room for equivocation: in speaking of a repression which can later be mollified by linguistic disavowal, Virno will speak of 'pre-linguistic *negativity'* (*Negation*, 5.5, emphasis added). No longer the simple positivity or neutrality of the mirror neurons, but something which may take another valence. This will not be radically countered by the linguistic capacity for explicit negation that will come later, but rather, in it language will recognise its own kin.

Later still, Virno will speak of negation — in the context of his projected ontogenetic 'phenomenology of the negating consciousness' — in the following way: 'Having settled accounts with what is *similar* prepares it for influencing what is alien' (*Negation*, 5.6, emphasis added).

Whence this similarity? What licenses one to describe as 'similar' two things which, when the mirror neurons and their suspension were at stake and here in terms of the radical opposition between the pre-linguistic and language, seemed so radically opposed? According to what criterion? Can it only be retroactive? Retroaction, after all, does seem to be the order of the day in this fifth chapter of the text (*Negation*, 5.1 especially), where Virno comes to address the question of whether, despite the fact that there is no 'perceptual or affective *genesis* of the "not"', there is nevertheless 'the *retroaction* of the "not" on perception and affects' (*Negation*, 5.1). And perhaps his primary goal in this chapter is 'showing how and why maximum separation paves the way for a lasting interweaving [of linguistic praxis, which really means linguistic negation, and pre-linguistic drives]'. Such retroaction is perhaps suggested in the curious phrase from the last paragraph of

the book: 'both benevolence and hostility are never immediate since they presuppose the paralysis of what could have paralysed them' (*Negation*, 5.6): no immediate state, either 'positive' or 'negative', but only something that can be what it is by means of a refraining, a negation of negation, paralysis of paralysis.

But what is supposed to distinguish an earlier, pre-linguistic state that is (perceived as being) amenable to a negative linguistic description, to being viewed retrospectively as a natural precursor of negativity, from one which is not? Anything can be negated, but some pre-linguistic states seem to necessitate or at least encourage it.

To conclude: in retrospect

How has this journey through the *Essay on Negation* illuminated our initial questions concerning human nature, and the relation between the empirical and the transcendental: Virno's position when it comes to philosophy?

We began with the question of the metaphysical and the physical, transcendental and empirical, and their intertwining. We said that it was no surprise that, at this jointure, one should find the figure of man, and the necessity of considering a philosophical anthropology. We have found in the end one of the oldest of such anthropologies: Aristotle's. Man is the linguistic animal, *zōon logon echon,* which is also to say the political animal, *zōon politikon.* Virno takes this definition of man absolutely seriously and absolutely literally. So much so that our very linguistic capacity is understood to be *part* of our animal nature. Our language is biological. We suggested that the ultimate warrant for such an assumption is *retrospectively* given, on the basis of our contemporary moment and the 'bio-linguistic' character of today's capitalistic work. Contemporary capitalism would bring to empirical manifestation this ancient ('transcendental') definition of man. Indeed perhaps this transcendental itself is to be understood so only *because* of the contemporary moment, which it is attempting to make sense of and to revolutionise.

To move beyond this moment, we cannot simply do away with it. Revolution, as all of Hegel, deconstruction, and Lacan have shown us, is not so simple: we often end up simply going round in circles that way, and thus remain within that very (circular) structure we were meant to be doing away with. So we need to take this biolinguistic labourer and to analyse their activity philosophically, which will involve returning to the Aristotelian philosophy and its anthropology, rethinking the labour-power of this worker as potentiality (*dynamis*), and yet bringing this philosophical notion into connection with the natural science of life, to reconceive it as a *biological* capacity.

Such was the merit of those early- to mid-twentieth century ethologists and anthropologists upon whom Virno primarily draws, those *philosophical* anthropologists: to have made such strides in thinking that intersection of language and animality, language as in some way the most essential part *of* our animality, which necessitates the transition from biology to culture and at the same time

ensures the enduring presence of biological nature *within* cultural history. This then to explain the — again retrospective — necessitation of, or at least the justification for, Virno's choice of empirical scientist in his assertions regarding human nature.

The affirmation of this transhistorical invariant of humanity, the linguistic capacity, is founded upon a very deliberately limited range of empirical scientific research, but this eternity of nature is also found to have some sort of beginning, with Cro-Magnon man. Man, whose *essence* is 'eternal', is very much finite as concerns his *existence*. The provenance of this dating is to be found in the work of the linguist, Chomsky, and we might again assume that this decision as to the point of emergence of the 'human' which concerns Virno is determined retroactively by the definition of man which has come to appearance in contemporary labour. To what extent, therefore, must this moment of emergence still be considered in a certain sense 'mythical', as so often such phylogenetic tales of origin seem to be in philosophy? Can a chronological location of an initial moment of genesis *only* be retrospective...?

In any case, what Virno adds to those philosophical (linguistic) anthropologists who preceded him is this: with the benefit of his training in linguistics and the philosophy of language, he is able to provide a more rounded understanding of what the human being's linguistic faculty actually is. Virno himself embodies all the virtues necessary for the task he has undertaken: as a philosopher he can bring to bear on the anthropologists' account an understanding of the faculties that characterise human nature as *potentialities*, and as a linguist, he can give a fuller account of the nature of language than the anthropologists could.

Above all, what the *Essay on Negation* demonstrates is Virno's ability to bring together both of these in producing a theory of language which allows him to explain why potentiality itself originates *in* language. Language itself is ontologically negative, in such a way as to generate an infinity of negations, as are necessary for the delimitation of so much as a single signifier. Recursion begins here, in the very formation of the merest linguistic sign. But thanks to this, language in its empirical form can itself negate empirical entities to infinity, and recursively negate its own negations, eventually giving rise to such a thing as 'dialectic' — our philosophy.

Language is biological human nature, when understood as a potentiality, and it is the source of infinity, and this potential infinity can be expressed *empirically* in actual instances of speech which deploy the particle 'not', perhaps to infinity, recursively, because language has the form of both the transcendental and the empirical, human nature and an empirical-historical manifestation of the same, for 'not' will always have to be spoken in some *particular* historical culture's language. Thus, it is thanks to language and its negativity that human nature can take the form that it does in Virno's account — manifesting itself, in exceptional circumstances, or in normality, empirically within history. It is only because man is *linguistic* that such can be his nature, and his history. In the fracture of *linguaggio* and *lingua*, we find the human being.

In language as such, the transcendental and the empirical meet, in the form of negativity and its infinity, and thus engender the *potential* to say and to do anything, which is our destiny as animals possessed of language. Such a destiny is the topic of a 'linguistic anthropology'.

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Stephen Howard wrote his doctoral thesis on Kant's conception of 'force' at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University, London. He has published on Leibniz in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy,* and has various articles on Kant forthcoming. He is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Leuven.

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Coccia, and *Categories of the Impolitical* by Roberto Esposito (Fordham University Press, 2015).

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Links

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