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Title	Perspectives and uses of history
Authors	Szakolczai, A#rpa#d
Publication date	2014
Original Citation	Szakolczai, A. (2014) 'Perspectives and uses of history', Max Weber and Michel Foucault: Possible Convergences, São Paulo, Brazil, 20-24 May 2013.
Type of publication	Conference item
Link to publisher's version	http://www.foucaultnews.com/2013/04/25/max-weber-and-michel-foucault/
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Download date	2026-11-04 20:35:06
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/1280

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Perspectives and Uses of History

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The significance of history and the meaning of its ignoring

In our days, if somebody makes any reference to the historical aspects of a particular problem or question in sociology, not to mention in economics, but increasingly even in politics and philosophy, the standard response is a certain bemused smile; the acknowledgement of utter irrelevance and waste of time. In order to be read and heard, to be influential, to receive grants, one must live in the present, become absorbed into the minute details of the current, global reality, which extends in space, due to simultaneous communication, but whose time horizon is increasingly reduced to the now. This leaves only two answers possible: one must follow this lead, as a necessary strategy for survival – or one is forced to step back, following the basic attitude of academic research, but also of painting, and perceive *exactly* here the key that gives an access to what is wrong in the times we are living. As becoming obsessively, claustrophobically enclosed into the present moment, hanging on the daily journals and the television news to get a confirmation that we indeed exist, is a very pathological condition. The onus of proof is not on the part of those who insist on bringing up historical conditions and arguments, rather on those who ignore it, proliferating an extremely short-sighted vision of life, which without the shadow of a doubt will produce unprecedented calamities, whether concerning nature, society, or the human personality. The real problem is not to justify why we need a 'historical perspective', but to understand what could have caused this amazing blindness, a genuine epidemic of mental myopia.

For this, the first point is to realise that literally everything that is concerned with reality, with real, concrete beings, whether living or inorganic, is historical; and that this realisation is one of the most important achievements of modern science. The point is not simply that no human being can be understood without its biography, just as no culture and community without it history, but that nature is also historical, and even our entire planet, with its mountain peaks and valleys, lakes, rivers and seas is a historical formation. One of the most important scientific discoveries of the modern period concerns geology, and evolutionary biology, just as archaeology, all of which radically altered our understanding of not simply life but the character of the planet in which we live, were rendered possible by geology. But if we move to cosmology, we can complete the argument by saying that the formation of the planetary system is also a temporal, historical process.

While all this may sound a triviality, I think the consequences of such trivial facts for our contemporary reality were not properly drawn. This is partly due to a series of major terminological confusions. The first concerns the opposition between nature and culture, leading to the dualism of 'natural' and 'cultural' sciences, and the dualistic mode of thinking, the fateful legacy of Descartes, Kant and Hegel. While nature and culture are certainly not identical, they have a proper, non-conflictual relationship, which is based on their *historical* co-existence and joint formation; that fact that nature, in the proper sense of the word, is a par excellence historical category. What this means is that the flora and the fauna, the plants, animals and other living beings that share our space were not the outcome of some 'necessary' and 'logical' developments which could be reproduced, technologically and in some laboratories, but came into being through the accidents of history, over an extremely long process of development, and the fundamental attitude we

human should have concerning this historical outcome, which is 'nature' as we see it – or rather as we saw it before modern technology – is some kind of awe, respect and humility. The reason we moderns lack such an attitude is because we not only broke, inexplicably and unjustifiedly, the link between nature and culture, but also confused nature and technology, as codified in the absurd expression 'natural science', meaning preparing for technological manipulation. Newtonian science is not natural science, but *anti*-natural science – which does not imply that it is not 'true', rather that, as Nietzsche and Foucault perceived it so well, there are some problems with the meaning and significance of 'truth'. Since at least Newton truth has become a problem, the destruction of the world through truth being one of the most fundamental, no matter how paradoxical problems we have to face.

Before moving further, another conceptual paradox must be solved, and this concerns the relationship between history and tradition. The problem can be seen in an established – though somewhat obsolete – terminology, the so-called 'people without history'. Such people, however, were never supposed to lack traditions as well – and traditions are nothing else but the accumulation of experiences, know-how and knowledge. Thus, in a fundamental sense, every tradition is profoundly historical – which is evident even from the etymology of 'tradition', which is some kind of 'passing on'.

Yet, the distinction between culture and civilisation, or between people with or without 'history' is not completely meaningless. It helps to establish a distinction not simply in the 'time perspective' or 'mentality' of people with or without 'history', but between the character of two different kinds of 'historical' event: one which adds further and further layers to the tradition, which can include differentiation, distinction and sharpening; and one which produces a genuine *break* or *fracturing*. It is to such radical or destructive 'rupturing' that our understanding of 'history' is connected, and this can again be even etymologically connected to the term 'history', which is to be traced back to a PIE root implying 'seeing', implying that – in contrast to the anonymous and long-term transmission of traditions – history is connected to the actual memories transmitted by those concrete individuals who lived through and eye-witnessed such traumatic events, which in Hungarian can evidently be traced back to 'breaking' or 'destroying' (see *történelem* 'history' and *tör* 'break'). Thus, there are two different kind of developments, associated with history: the gradual formation of identities through the accumulation of differences and experiences, or the formation of traditions, which in culture is not so different from the way nature is also the accumulated effects of the various species and geological formations and layers; and radical breaks which fundamentally reorder cultural traditions – which can again be paralleled to the way volcanic activities, earthquakes and the like re-shape nature – and which, by the way, are also fundamental forces altering human cultures as well.

Once such a conceptual clarification between history and tradition established, two further terms must be introduced in order to be able to analyse modalities of the radical and effective confusion of this framework. The first is a concept invented by Gregory Bateson, one of the most important and independent thinkers of the last century, who facing the incomprehensible reality, especially violence, of life in Papua New Guinea came up with the term 'schismogenesis'. This term serves to identify breaks that happened in the past of societies which did not keep a concrete memory of such events, but where the character of culture is unintelligible without assuming the facticity of radical and disastrous breaks that have destroyed the integrity of particular cultures. Bateson's concept is a stunning example of what Nietzsche called the ability to draw 'backward inferences'. The second problem concerns the proper identification of the kind of radical breaks that shaped, over long millennia, the substance and mode of thinking of the modern world.

This last preliminary point concerns the identification of a singular factor that has contributed more than anything else to the confusion between history and tradition, nature and culture, and the general ignoring of the historico-traditional component, and yet has not yet been identified: the alchemic mode of thinking, or mentality, central both for technology and the belief in the revolution. In identifying this mentality I follow the recent work of Agnes Horvath (2009, 2013).

The alchemic mind-set

Central to the alchemic mode of thinking is a radical altering of the value associated with the self-evident negative valorisation of historical disruptions. Any event that represents a radical break with the established, accepted and taken for granted ways of living, whether due to a natural disaster, endemic illness, an internal collapse of social order, warfare or invasion was by definition assigned a negative value, the central effort of any community being to restore order and return to normality. Unique to the alchemic mode of thinking, defining its specificity is the idea that such a disruption can be good – even a prelude to great, unprecedented prosperity. In other words, this is the idea that there are no fixed values – anything that *seems* bad can turned to a good use; and, even more, that therefore one should outright *provoke* bad things to happen, so that such latent benefits, hindered by the existing state of affairs, could be realised. In still other words, *this* is at the heart of what Nietzsche captured as the great 'revaluation of values'.

Given the eminently counter-intuitive, even absurd nature of such a claim, it is necessary to investigate the condition of possibility of such a mentality, and also explaining why I call this mentality 'alchemical'. There are two major possibilities here. First, such an operation can be justified by redefining the existing state of affairs as a trap or a cage from which one must break *out*. This idea can be traced back to the Gnostics, but fails to explain how human reality could have been transformed into such a suffocating form of existence in the first place. One should also note that evidently human cultures that actually stumbled into such trap-like situations had little ability to escape it, as evidenced by Bateson's concept 'schismogenesis' and the need to come up with such a conceptual invention. The solution therefore must be searched at another level: a direct and evident improvement produced by a violent breaking of entities. It is here that a single historical moment gains particular significance, the discovery of metallurgy, of which alchemy was a theoretisation.

The discovery of metal making was of course of one the most important moments in the history of technology, and one could even argue that it still serves as the model for our understanding of 'technology'. It is radically different from the invention of agriculture, for instance, as agriculture does not involve a radical destruction – though even in this case the long-term, even mid-term consequences of the technological innovation were radically destructive (see population explosion and land erosion). Metals can only be gained if stones, proverbially associated with solidity, are liquefied, their stability destroyed, and the resulting liquid ore is poured into containers prepared in advance, by which identical objects can be mass-produced – objects which offer the *illusion* of richness, as more and more people can deploy them, thinking they became suddenly 'illustrious', until it is realised that now 'everybody' has them; and so at a second stage more and more weapons can be used to equip an army which can take away what other people have – until it is further realised that they also mostly only have similar technologically mass-produced, thus meaningless objects – though once the mimetic cycles of imitation and violence is set in motion it is difficult to stop.

The prosperity brought about by technology is always illusionary – yet, the idea creation out of destruction can always be deceptively, physically supported by the

'cheaper' and 'more efficient' objects produced by technology, so the long-term negative consequences are repeatedly overlooked. This is because, and moving closer to contemporary times, the purely technological argument is complemented by the social revolutionary argument, the claim that socio-political destruction, or 'the revolution', is a way to escape the intolerable social and political conditions – which are indeed such, except that they were not perennial, rather produced by the technological-alchemic mentality which now offers itself again as the solution to the problem it itself created, thus spinning the spiral ever further. Here the circle can be closed, and stopped, by realising that the denial of the significance of history, the closing into the present *after* the supposed big bang of the great destruction of all traditions is the ultimate trick of technology, the manner in which it renders its nefarious power invisible invisible. The logic of technology is a peculiar combination of a once-and-for-all revolutionary break, and then the ideal of the permanent revolution; an idea where – through their shared alchemic mode of thinking – the identity of the logic of capitalist entrepreneurship and the Bolshevik revolution, or Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) and Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), exact contemporaries, can be recognised. According to both, in the first stage the power of 'tradition' must be broken; human culture, meaning not just 'high culture' but the set of skills and ways of doing as it existed for millennia must simply be destroyed. In the second stage, a permanent terror of innovativeness must be nurtured, in which the logic of fragmentation and integration must be permanently maintained, until every single community, every human being and every natural object is put into the service of the anonymous and omnipotent 'public' – whether measured through market value or the judgment of the all-powerful party. The central principle of both is that no stone should be left untouched. Here one should notice that, apart from perhaps extreme examples (though Schumpeter is not considered an extremist, rather the classic figure of the theory of entrepreneurial innovation), the central evolutionary logic of structural functionalism, whether in Comte, Spencer, or Durkheim or in the more recent theories of Habermas, Luhmann or Jeffrey Alexander, explicitly identifies the same dynamic: linear, evolutionary progress is achieved through the division and organisation of labour; through the continuous process of differentiation and integration, de-fusion and re-fusion.

The effective re-capturing of history, the concrete analysis of the events that led to the present state of affairs, a genuine 'history of the present' was offered by the genealogical perspective pioneered by Nietzsche, and continued by a significant stream of genuine 'master thinkers'.

Genealogy as method: The advantages of being a philologist

In the previous section social evolutionism, just as political revolutionism, were traced to an identical alchemical mentality: the idea that a prerequisite both to 'genuine' science, and the realisation of an ideal social order is the destroying, breaking down or wiping away of all concrete, existing, historically established traditions,[i] and on the *tabula rasa* or void build something new that is pure, uncontaminated by the previous vicissitudes of history. The identity of the scientifico-technological and politico-revolutionary mentality is established with striking symbolical power by the year 1642, date of birth of Isaac Newton and the moment to which etymological dictionaries assign the first time the word 'revolution' acquired its modern meaning. The link to alchemy is secured by the fact that, as it is well known, Newton was engaged in extensive alchemic experiments, while the Marxist idea of the revolution similarly emphasises that the revolution should not be guided by utopian ideals to be realised, but focus on the complete destruction of

the old order of things – the building up of the new, on this radical basis, will take care of itself.

This alchemic mentality, on the back of the 'scientific revolution', the Enlightenment idea of progress and evolutionism, and the political and industrial revolutions had such a thorough impact on European thinking that in philosophy, historiography and the burgeoning social and human sciences was gaining uncontested dominance. A new and better, indeed right way of thinking concerning history emerged out of a most unlikely combination of sources, in a terminology recalling Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: when a philologist (Nietzsche) encountered geology (the works of Lyell), developing a new idea of 'genealogy', which eventually lead a disenchanted philosopher turned psychiatrist (Foucault) to coin the term 'archaeology of knowledge'.

Nietzsche's profession of being a philologist, as Foucault famously recognised (1970: 305), indeed played an important part in this process, as the first glimpses of his elaboration of the 'genealogical method' can be traced to his unpublished 'Untimely Meditation' about philology.[ii] Philology can be considered as an archaeology of the language, in the sense that there the manner in which texts, or words (in etymology) are built upon each other must be analysed, layer after layer, thus one must, as a professional prerequisite, overcome the modernist prejudice which rather tries to see the past in terms of the magnifying glass of the present. Such a reversal of perspective poses a considerable difficulty even in archaeology, as a recent article argues (Simonetti 2013).

The application of this logic is even more tricky, and difficult, for the social sciences, as the reversal of perspective implies not simply a once-for-all shift – instead of looking backwards, anachronistically, on history, one must return to the 'origins' and then reconstruct 'effective history', or how the tissue of the present was made; but it implies a permanent, iterative oscillation.

This means the following. We envision the history of the 19th century mostly by concepts that were developed in the 20th century, and which, in spite of their analytical usefulness, were also contaminated by taking for granted the reality of the 20th century. Even further, given that the world that still existed in the 19th century collapsed around WWI, evidently becoming decadent – using a central term of the late 19th century – our vision of this reality is furthermore coloured by the later, decadent phase of this reality, projecting the decadence into the very 'nature' of the entity. Now, if we jump back a further century, the situation becomes even more complicated, as our vision of the 18th century is not only shaped by concepts of the 20th century, but also by perspectives developed in the 19th century, having a partial impact on the conceptual frameworks of the 20th century as well, and raising the problem of decadence to another level. Thus, in order to perform 'effective history', we also need to engage in a genealogy of our own conceptual apparatus, sifting through layers and layers of ossified thinking, rendering the undertaking extremely complicated.

Such considerations yield two, somewhat paradoxical and quite uncomfortable, but still inevitable results; points that were spelled out more or less explicitly by the most important scholars whose works fit into the line of Nietzschean genealogy. First, genealogical work can only be done on the basis of a minute and thorough familiarity with the concrete historical research accomplished by the experts in the field; results which, however, must be brought together and situated inside a genealogical narrative, which goes necessarily way beyond the time horizon experts are used to. Second, such a work is rendered even more difficult by the fact that non-genealogical approaches within the social sciences must simply be ignored, as they will be marred by the *failure* to perform the necessary, self-reflexive conceptual work, rather only synthesising the evidence, without questioning the 'alchemic' mindset characteristic of evolutionary and

revolutionary thinking, and therefore only produce a meaningless compendium of selected empirical evidence, no matter how erudite, in support of a present-driven and thus complacent and anachronistic ideological framework. A genealogist must stick to the evidence and to the proper methods, meaning that methodologically unsound historicising works are simply useless – even though, given the nature of academic life, some of the most influential works in the historically oriented social sciences must by force be produced in such methodologically questionable manner, supported both by the dominant 'scientific' (indeed technologico-alchemic) methodology, and the hegemony of present-centred and self-congratulatory normative perspectives.

Fortunately, works that soundly use a genealogical perspective, mostly directly derived from Nietzsche and/or Weber, are not few in numbers. Apart from Foucault, they include the life-works of Eric Voegelin, Norbert Elias, Franz Borkenau, Lewis Mumford, Philippe Ariès, Reinhart Koselleck, and crucial works by Gerhard Oestreich, Albert Hirschman, Alphonse Dupront or Norman Cohn. But one can even extend this to many works in civilisational analysis, inspired by Weberian sociology, and following the work of S.N. Eisenstadt on the axial age (taking inspiration from Karl Jaspers, the most important direct 'disciple' of Weber, in cotrast to the travesty propagated by Alfred Weber, and transmitted to Talcott Parsons), including works by Johann Arnason, Bjorn Wittrock, Peter Wagner, Bernhard Giesen, and Manusos Marangudakis. Obviously, this list merely serves as an illustration, and cannot be construed as intended to be exclusive.

Beyond genealogy as we know it

Thus, apart from the widest available empirical evidence, genealogists can only use the work of other genealogists, not due to methodological dogmatism, but the need to avoid methodologically unsafe, misleading, dogmatic approaches. And yet, I would argue that in three major respects it is also necessary to go beyond the word, though not the spirit, of most existing genealogies of modernity.

1. Incorporating anthropological concepts

The first concerns the need to improve the genealogical method by incorporating certain anthropological concepts. There are two reasons why the incorporation of such concepts into genealogy is fundamental. First, the aim of genealogy is to tear ourselves away from the taken for granted concepts of contemporary, modernising social theory, gaining a distance from the present, and thus reconstructing the manner in which its fabric was made. However, most genealogists use concepts that are themselves part of the dictionary of modern social theory. The incorporation of anthropological concepts can help to improve and upgrade this conceptual tool-kit by ideas developed by anthropologists within their fieldwork, in a non-Western setting.

However, not every anthropological concept is equally valuable for this purpose. There are three fundamental points to mention here. First, and most evidently, anthropologists who developed concepts that could be helpful to improve genealogy preferably undertook extensive fieldwork in a local non-Western setting, as a background for the development of new theoretical ideas. Second, however, it is also of vital importance that such anthropologists not spend their fieldwork for simply 'testing' the same old ideas developed for the study of Western modernity, repeating modernising commonplaces, whether in its structural-functionalist, Marxist or Freudian sense, but be capable of going beyond their education and develop new conceptual tools on the basis of their own experiences. Finally, in developing new concepts a particularly important role can be played by in-depth comparative studies.

The second major reason why anthropologically based concepts could so well balance the distancing of genealogy is that while genealogical analysis, since Nietzsche's work, especially as its central points were formulated in the Preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, is fundamentally concerned with the study of the conditions out of which practices with lasting significance developed – thus, how the spirit of capitalism grew out of the Reformation, or tragedy out of music – it did not have a proper methodological tool to analyse the manner in which certain conditions produce lasting effects.

It will be argued that four concepts developed by anthropological theorists offer a unique potential to upgrade genealogical analysis, by offering a powerful method to assess how certain 'conditions of emergence' can 'stamp' a particular mode of conduct on a particular group of people who become its 'carriers', altering very substantially and for a lasting time the course of cultures or civilisations. These concepts are 'liminality', 'imitation', 'trickster', and 'schismogenesis'.

Liminality

The term 'liminality' was introduced in a classic 1909 book by Arnold van Gennep, *Rites de passage*. The work, based on a magisterial review of existing anthropology literature, was prepared to offer a theoretical foundation of the then young discipline, but had the bad luck of not only preceding Durkheim's boo by three years, but offering a radically different foundational idea, and van Gennep made things even worse by writing in 1913 a strongly critical book review of Durkheim. As a result, van Gennep was basically excommunicated from French academic life, and the book was not even translated into English for half a century. The term would only become widely used after Victor Turner accidentally picked it up in the mid-1960s, and then made it into the cornerstone of his 'processual anthropology' – a concept that, as he explicitly acknowledged, suddenly offered him the tool to make sense of his research experiences which his teachers in Oxford, London and Manchester were not able to do.

However, helped by the work of the three editors of *International Political Anthropology*,[iii] this paper will extend the term in a direction beyond the intentions of van Gennep and Turner. While van Gennep emphasised the transformative potentials of the rite, and Turner placed the emphasis on its playful, creative aspects, its ability to undermine structural ossification, generating a sense of community (*communitas*), its full potential for genealogical analysis is opened up by recognising the fear and anxiety generated by temporary, unsettled, uncertain real-world large-scale liminal situations.

Under conditions of a ritual the explosive potential of liminality is contained by the presence of 'masters of ceremony', whose authority during the temporary suspension of order is accepted without any challenge. However, when in real life the previously take for granted order of things crumbles, this produces a tremendous existential uncertainty, and given that every safeguard of order and meaning is lost, it is not certain that the situations produce persons who can fill the function of real world 'masters of ceremonies'.

Imitation

At any rate, the most evident outcome of a liminal situation, the sudden disappearance of boundaries and ordering principles is the escalation of imitative processes. This phenomenon was analysed, in Durkheim's time, by Gustave Le Bon, an important though not fully acknowledged source of Durkheim's work; by Gabriel Tarde, his arch-enemy, whose work, after long decades of neglect, was revitalised by Bruno Latour and also taken up by *International Political Anthropology*;[iv] and by René Girard, who developed his theory of the triangular of 'mimetics of desire' on the basis of 19th century novels, and then, through an extensive review of anthropological and mythological material,

developed his theories about 'scapegoating' and the 'sacrificial mechanism'. The central idea of Le Bon and Tarde is that whenever the social order is collapsing, the most direct result is not simply the exercising of the brain, implying a rational search for a way out, but rather – or at the same time – escalating processes of imitation, basically following the logic of panic, whether at a natural disaster, a crash of the stock-market, or a fire breaking out in a movie theatre or a ball-room. Girard's work analyses a somewhat different dynamics, when an imitation of desire produces a rivalry between two individuals, then groups, until the community is destroyed by a kind of civil war, and only the killing of a sacrificial victim can restore order.

Rationalist approaches, while ideologically ignore imitative processes, cannot explain the way liminal crises are solved, as rationality requires a stable framework on the basis of which the results of different actions can be properly calculated (a point realised even by John M. Keynes, and placed at the heart of the theory of expectations, the core of his classic book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*), and the legal system that sanctions deviations. Thus, Weber's sociology needed the introduction of the figure of the 'charismatic leader' who is supposed to suddenly come out of the blue and resolve the crises. However, nothing in itself guarantees that such a charismatic person would indeed appear; and thus it might happen that uncertain conditions only provide the breeding ground for a quite different type of figure, for which anthropologists came up with the name 'trickster'.

Trickster

The trickster was introduced into anthropology by Paul Radin, the first PhD student of Franz Boas, the (re-)founder of American anthropology. Radin was thus destined to become the leader of the school, but something was not working out – he never had a fixed position, and his book on the trickster was not published until 1956, under the instigation of Jung and Kerenyi. It is still not clear what was going on and why (Diamond 1981).

At any rate, with the delay of half a century the concept became a widely used tool for anthropologists, mythologists and literary scholars, though social and political scientists are still reluctant to employ it.[v] The central idea is that under uncertain and confusing conditions, when people look for guidance, somebody who could solve the difficulties that seem insurmountable, it might happen that they mistake as a charismatic hero a trickster who can *pretend* or *fake* to offer unusual remedy. According to the various anthropological stories and mythologies, the trickster is an outsider who is not touched by the emotional involvement of the events, and who can therefore insinuate himself at the centre of attention, pretending to hold the key to the solution while he is only interested in proliferating confusion, as his power is conditional upon the rest of the population being kept in a state of limbo. Classical trickster figures include Hermes and Prometheus in Greek mythology, Loki in Skandinavian mythology, the leprechaun of Irish folktales, the coyote of the prairie, or the various Western African spider, rabbit or monkey quasi-deities. The term can help us to understand the nature of the totalitarian systems of the 20th century, and even of manner in which capitalism uses 'passionate interests' (Tarde, Latour), and cannot be reduced to exploitation or oppression. The more European thinking became rationalistic, mechanical, formalistic, structural and institutional, the more social and political life became ready to be infested with imitative processes, like mimetic desire, presented by trickster figures as the nature of the human condition; or passionate devotion to incompetent political leaders, leading people into revolution, or terrorising them with its threat.

Schismogenesis

If social order broke down, imitative processes escalate and guidance is hijacked by trickster figures, normality would not be restored, and the unity of the community would be irretrievably lost, torn apart by 'schismogenic' processes. The term was developed by Gregory Bateson, on the basis of the fieldwork he was completing in the early 1930s in Papua New Guinea. Finishing a PhD in Cambridge, and educated by some of the most famous figures in the field, Bateson was destined to be a leading figure in anthropology – except that in his publication he made evident his disillusionment with the inability of his teachers to offer conceptual tools that would make sense of his fieldwork experiences. The result, alongside the by now familiar storyline, was the expulsion of Bateson from the paradise of academic anthropology.

While Bateson developed the concept for a retrospective analysis of small-scale tribal societies, it is also eminently applicable for a genealogy of modernity. Schisms are fundamental features of medieval and Renaissance history, starting with the Great Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, continuing with the schisms of the Papacy, and ending with the Reformation. The question then becomes the way to identify the liminal moments and the trickster figures of the late Renaissance – something which I discussed, shortly, in my other presentation.

Extending into Archaeology

The second main step beyond existing genealogical approaches, through very much in the spirit of Nietzsche-Weberian genealogy, implies the incorporation of archaeological evidence. Thus, in a sense, it implies an approach opposite to the previous: an extension into the direction of empirical evidence, and not conceptual tools; yet, the two are also fundamentally related, as the main theoretical tools archaeologists use are anthropological. In fact, there is a paradox here, an implicit but definite critique of historical sociology: given that historically oriented social theory does not have either the conceptual tools, or even the interest to get involved in archaeological research, archaeologists – though historical sociology *should* be their evident interlocutor, given that archaeology only represents a temporal extension of history – had to turn to anthropology. The integration of the relevant findings and approaches of sociology, genealogy, anthropology and archaeology thus indeed represents one of the most important frontiers of research in the social sciences.

Such incorporation of archaeological findings is fundamental for Nietzsche-Weber-Foucaldian genealogy, as recent archaeological evidence helps, but also forces, a radical reinterpretation of the still dominant, Enlightenment-based, evolutionary and materialist vision of the dynamics of historical change. Most importantly, it now enables genealogists to develop a narrative that would cover human history from the upper Palaeolithic, not in the sense of fitting into a detailed chronological account everything that ever happened, but in identifying the main liminal moments in history, and their eventual outcomes, thus reconstructing the proper *rhythm* of historical dynamics.

Integrating Hermeneutics

The third point, no matter how evident in may seem, still must be discussed as a novelty, as rarely pursued, and this concerns the need to integrate into genealogy philosophical hermeneutics. The connections between Heidegger and Foucault are evident, and yet still controversial; furthermore, while Heidegger took ideas from Max Weber, much mediated through Karl Löwith, who was an enchanted auditor of Weber's 'Science As A Vocation' lecture and one of the first students of Heidegger, his work was never explicitly discussed by Heidegger. Foucault was also reading, with some emphasis, Dilthey and Gadamer,

though again never discussed it publicly; while the connection between Dilthey and Weber was even more peculiar. While Weber knew Dilthey since childhood, being a frequent guest to his father's house, and was extensively referring to Dilthey's work in his early methodological essays, after a 'chastening' by Rickert, the neo-Kantian high pope of his times, he became much more cautious, as he could not afford to defy the wrath of the German academic potentates. For a similar reason Dilthey, under constant attack by the neo-Kantians, evidently felt constrained to distance himself from Nietzsche, and thus the extremely strong and fecund parallels between the thinking of these two figures are up to our days all but unexplored.

As a final point, there are intriguing parallels between the hermeneutical and anthropological approaches. The most important of these is the similarity between the term 'liminality', developed on the basis of rites of passage, and Dilthey's concept of experience, a recognition that was at the heart of the very last work of Victor Turner, cut short by his premature death, and thus mostly limited to posthumous publications (Turner 1985a, 1985b). There is also a significant affinity between the preoccupation with the question of home as being-in-the-world and the experience of participation, central for Heidegger and Gadamer, but also for Lévy-Bruhl and Colin Turnbull, two other – closely connected – maverick figures of anthropology, and the concern with the uncanny and the experience of the night, central for Heidegger but also the literature on the trickster, the two being connected by the work of Karl Kerenyi (1987).

The basis of such parallels between cultural anthropology and philosophical hermeneutics is provided by the philosophical anthropology of Plato.

Conclusion: The 'not' historical, and the return to Plato

At this point, hopefully, the centrality of a historical perspective, and the proper manner to study the unfolding of the dynamics of history, was sufficiently made – perhaps even too successfully. Is there anything *outside* history? Evidently this paper denies this, as I have explicitly argued that *everything* is historical: even life, even nature, up to minute aspects of the shape of the planet.

However, my argument was slightly different: not that *everything* is historical, but that everything concerned with real, existing *beings* is historical. The not-historical is whatever that has no being; whatever is transcendent; the eternal, the spirit, the divine.

This transcendent is not the Kantian transcendental. The thinking of Kant not only inherited Cartesian dualism, but even more the Newtonian reduction of the real to the filling of the void; indeed, Kant offers the philosophical foundations of the Newtonian vision of 'reality'. However, Newtonian science from the perspective of our human existence is fundamentally *unreal*: instead of starting from the objects of our world as taken for granted, as 'data', in the sense of something that is 'given' – literally as a gift, both by past human generations and by millions and hundred millions of years of history (whether one intuits and posits a divine behind such outpouring of gifts, it does not really matter); it single-handedly breaks, wipes away and destroys the results of all these immense historical processes, and – as a modern Faustian Titan – pretends to play God, by recreating all this, from scratch, in his laboratory. We cannot 'know beyond doubt', can only gain conviction about whether there is a divine will beyond the shaping of such immense processes, or all this was the product of blind forces, only one thing is absolutely certain: human force cannot produce or reproduce it, only destroy it – and we are on the best way towards this.

And so, if Newton and Kant cannot be followed as guides into whatever lies beyond history, as their denial of the meaning of history is identical to the destruction of the realness and concreteness of reality, the returning of the *cosmos* into *chaos* about which

Aby Warburg was so afraid, then we must follow another guide into the nature of the non-historical, and this can only be Plato. This is certainly not the moment to go into any presentation of Plato's thinking about the non-Being, transmogrified into reality by the Sophist, and the realm of ideas, which is different from the existing world but is not non-Being either. Only two short points will be made.

First, most figures of genealogy had a particular affinity, after all, with the thinking of Plato. This is even true for Nietzsche, who was certainly again Platon*ism*, and even problematised the figure of Socrates, but whose work was close to the spirit of Nietzsche. Due to his hostility to Hegel Weber did not incorporate explicit references to the history of philosophy, and yet the parallels between his two main lectures and two of Plato's most important late dialogues, the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* are so close that they cannot be accidental. Foucault, as it is well known, devoted a significant part of his last *Collège de France* coursea to the thinking of Plato. Eric Voegelin, one of the most important direct followers of the Nietzschean Weber, became explicitly a follower of Plato. And the line could be continued. Perplexingly, while genealogy or radically anti-Kantian and anti-Hegelian, in spite of certain occasional affinities and common concerns, it is evidently quite compatible with the thinking of Plato. And the line could be continued.

The last point, helping to understand this seeming mystery, concerns the striking affinities between the thinking of Plato and the four major anthropological concepts brought in to improve genealogy. These concepts emphatically were developed on the basis of empirical studies of distant non-Western people, and were so distant from modern social theory that their inventors literally had to pay for their innovations by their career. And yet, each of them has direct and close parallels with the thinking of Plato. The term liminality has two similes in Plato's thinking: the *apeiron* (the boundless or unlimited) and *metaxy* (the in-betweenness). The first term is often called the 'first word' of Greek philosophy, present in the first fragment of Anaximander; but it was prominently elaborated by Plato as well in one of his most important and in many ways conclusive dialogue, the *Philebus*. Strikingly, this is also one of the dialogues in which the *metaxy* (a term singled out for particular importance by Voegelin) is discussed, the other being the analysis of *eros* in the *Symposium*.[vi] Concerning imitation, it does not require any detailed discussion to argue that this term played a central role in Plato's thinking where – pace Kant – rationality in the sense of reasoning power was not assumed as an anthropological constant but as a *force* that could – and should – be developed in order to countervail the power of imitation, whenever necessary. Concerning the trickster, Plato's analysis of the sophists is one of the most important means to understand the nature of the trickster – and it is from this perspective that the dialogue entitled the *Sophist* could gain its proper meaning and significance, often neglected and denigrated as compared to the earlier Socratic dialogues, but rather representing a more elaborate diagnosis of the illusionary power of the sophists, as it shifts attention from mere rhetoric to using the magical power of images – thus having a particular relevance for our times. Finally, concerning schismogenesis, Bateson received a good grounding in Plato, not surprising for any graduate in Cambridge, but especially relevant given that the main teacher of Plato there during his education was Francis Cornford, an important Cambridge ritualist, and so should not be surprising that, given the failure of his anthropology teachers to offer helpful tools, Bateson reverted on the field, in Papua New Guinea, to three Plato-inspired concepts: ethos, eidos, and schismogenesis.

Plato, however, offered not only a philosophical anthropology, but also a cosmogony, and even a glimpse into the divine. The concern with *ratio* and with the divine are not in conflict, rather belong closely together, joined in a search for harmony which should not

be 'constructed' – this is again only Titanic hubris – rather *recognised* and then *cared for*. The real conflict is rather between technology, instrumental rationality and the underlying alchemic way of thinking, on one hand, and the singular beauty of this planet on the other, as it is; a beauty whose recognition, in the thinking of Plato (in the *Timaeus*), offers – together with *eros*, this crucial in-between or liminal force (in the *Symposium*) – the strength to convert to a life spent on preserving and promoting this beauty, thus a life not wasted without meaning.

Notes

[i] Interestingly, in Hungarian not only *történelem* 'history', *tört* 'fraction' and *tör* 'break' can be etymologically connected, but even *töröl* 'wipe', 'cancel' or 'erase' as well.
[ii] For details, see Szakolczai (2013).
[iii] See the 2009/1 issue of the journal, of which a book version is forthcoming; Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2014).
[iv] See in particular the 2011 issue of the journal.
[v] The term was introduced into the social sciences by Agnes Horvath (2000, 2008, 2010, 2013a).
[vi] About this, see Horvath (2013b), Horvath and Szakolczai (2013), and Szakolczai (2013b) for further details.

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