Universality in the making

The case for an expanded genealogy

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Abstract

This paper studies five approaches on the future of alterity that awaits ideas and doctrines. According to these predictions, embedded in texts by Weber, Meinecke, Butterfield, Merleau-Ponty and Koselleck, the coming forms of thinking shall endure the same destiny affecting the ideas of the past because they will evolve without relying on historical sameness. The future of Western thought, in short, is bound to an unpredictable "destiny of otherness". These claims, taken together, outline a redirection of the genealogical untangling to the future. While they persist on linking present phenomena to realities deemed historically "other", they also foresee that this fate of alterity will prevail in future times, an enlargement of scope that results in a symmetrically expanded genealogy. This universalized "discourse of historical otherness" makes evident that genealogy, in addition to its involvement with past vicissitudes of ideas and beliefs, is also bound to explore their future emmeshing with alterity. Its "forward-looking inflection" will proscribe historiographic prolepsis, contending that the destiny of otherness awaiting ideas and doctrines excludes any surmise about the meaning they will be given in the future.

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1. *Introduction*

The possibility of historiographical prognosis, that is, the foreknowledge of future emergences out of the knowledge of both past and present events, has retained some credit in our time, combined with the belief that the past can attain some sort of survival. Attributing a degree of autonomy to the past, besides, presupposes historical continuity and involves the preservation of sameness over time despite outward alterations. (Allegedly, our present time shall retain this autonomy when in the future it will be converted into past.) These historiographical assumptions, in their

turn, rest on the belief that "what will happen in future times will obey the same logos and will be of the same nature as past and present events", as the German philosopher Karl Löwith phrased it (Löwith 2004, 15).

A position antagonist to historiographic foreshadowing has slowly arisen in 20th century European thought. Discussing the predictable future of ideas and doctrines, some authors have assigned them a destiny of unstoppable dispersion and alterity. They have contended that the likely display of impending ways of thinking will exclude any reliance on historical sameness. Taken together, their approaches configure the adversary view to the confident "prognosis" referred above. Besides ruling out historical continuity, they put forward a relocation of the genealogical impulse. As is well-known, instead of understanding the descent of present time in evolutionary of teleological terms, the genealogists have decoded phenomena whose unfolding started deeply in the past by linking them to realities deemed historically "other".

The defenders of this opponent view, therefore, point out to the fate of alterity shared by the coming vicissitudes of thought, a concern that can be read as a rerouting of the genealogical mindset towards the future. Admittedly, the descent of our ideas and beliefs was not a process of development, but equally the future of present-time's thought is exposed to unpredictable surges of "otherness". This forward-looking procedure, here just sketched, implies an unintended extension of the genealogical attitude. Involving both past *and* future, now it works in both directions. This gain in scope prompts a symmetrical universalization.[1]

Such an extrapolated "discourse of historical alterity" would entail that genealogy, apart from embracing the descent of ideas and beliefs, as has usually been

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[1] Some precisions about "universality" are now in order. Besides its staple connotations, primordially moral and cultural (there exist transcultural standards by which moral and cognitive values and attitudes can be judged), the notion of "universality" has also an operative scope. This "*procedural universalism*" is usually cast in both spatial and temporal terms. Spatial: serviceable criteria and standards exist and prevail everywhere; they apply for all individuals, regardless of culture, race, sex, religion, etc. Temporal: any epistemic, knowledge-attaining procedure reaches actual universality when it symmetrically allows to elucidate the past and forecast the future.

the case, can equally account for their future as well, albeit in negative terms. This means that the staying power of all forms of thought appears endangered, for they had been born out of alterity, and only alterity will come after them. To appraise this reversibility, however, demands a clear view of what is at stake in genealogy. As is well known, this approach has been put to practice in different historiographical fields. It interconnects thoughts and doctrines that at first sight seem unrelated and tackles the unexpected irruption of historical alterity.

2. *The rule of alterity is the litmus test for an authentic genealogy*

A genealogy links historical phenomena into ordered trajectories that are neither the unfurling of their appearance nor the accomplishment of their ends. It analyses multiple, open-ended, heterogeneous trajectories of ideals, categories, identities or actions. It targets the lower origins and the repressed and hidden connections that discourses, practices and events maintain with forms, interests and powers. Their defenders do not derive a fact from look-alike historical outcomes, but from opposites that in no way resemble the fact. As a result, genealogy rules out that legitimacy might be grounded in a sort of genealogical tree.

The concern with pedigrees portrayed by a genealogical tree's, precisely, contradicts genealogy's purposes. Tracing a pedigree is an activity aiming at the legitimation or even enhancement of identities, practices, norms or institutions. A pedigree points out to a singular origin viewed as a source of positive value. This pre-eminence is preserved in every step of the unbroken succession started by the origin and leading to the (usually contemporary) phenomenon whose pedigree is being traced.

The aims of genealogy are just opposite. First, it lacks any intention to legitimize or valorise anything. It deems a fallacy to believe that the phenomena we now value have an origin that we also positively appraise, so that they appear ever more precious the further back we reach. Unbroken value-preserving successions are considered a chimera. Second, genealogy rejects any commitment to discover a single

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origin for the examined object or process. This admission of multiple origins invalidates the "genetic fallacy", that is, the belief that any phenomenon is already entirely pre-formed in its unique origin. Third, genealogy uncovers an "actual history" soaked in contingency and governed by violent forms of domination. Necessity, therefore, appears replaced by chance, accident or randomness.

Fourth, and most important, genealogy is sustained by the notion of historical alterity. It sees the descent of present time not as a process of development but a result from "historically other" kinds of reality. This element of otherness (just what no pedigree considers) runs counter any pretension to preserve sameness in history. It prevents mistaking genealogy for an evolutionary, teleological or developmental approach. The genealogical mindset aims above all at not succumbing to the adversary conceptions of historical sameness discussed in the opening paragraph.

The leading role played by the notion of historical alterity in genealogy is best conveyed by two widely known texts. Friedrich Nietzsche claimed in his *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [*On the Genealogy of Morality*] that

> the origin of the emergence of a thing [*die Ursache der Entstehung eines Dinges*] and its ultimate usefulness [*schliessliche Nützlichkeit*], its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate [*liegen auseinander*]; that anything in existence, having somehow come about [*Zustande-Gekommenes*], is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose [*Nutzen*] by a power superior to it (Nietzsche 1980, 313; 2007, 51).

The classical instance forwarded by Nietzsche contends that morality springs from the will to power and precisely in such a way that they mutate into each other. From a broader scope, likewise, he seems to hint at a symmetrically expanded genealogy:

Purposes and utilities [*Zwecke und Nützlichkeiten*] are only signs that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function [*den Sinn einer Funktion*], [so that] the entire history of a thing can in this way be a continuous sign-chain [*Zeichenkette*] of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related [*nicht im Zusammenhänge zu sein brauchen*] (Nietzsche 1980, 314; 2007, 51).

Notoriously, Michel Foucault concretised Nietzsche's legacy, supplementing his historical criticism with a multifaceted construction. In Nietzsche's wake, Foucault practised what he called "actual history", focusing on the disruptive traffic of mistakes, mishaps, and dispersions:

to follow the complex course of a descent is to maintain passing events [*ce qui c'est passé*] in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals [*retournements*]—the errors, the false appraisals [*fautes d'appréciation*], and the flawed calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are [*la racine de ce que nous connaissons et de ce que nous sommes*], but the exteriority of accidents (Foucault 1994, 141; 1977, 146).

Foucault's contribution to genealogy has attracted a huge array of commentaries. Among them stands out U. J. Schneider's clarifying attribution to Foucault of "the need to understand [*begreifen*] the origin [*Herkunft*] of the present not from a development [*Entwicklung*] but from the very other [*aus dem ganz Anderen*]". Foucault's chief accomplishment, accordingly, would consist in having "proved that it is possible to understand what is one's own [*des Eigenen*] from what is other [*aus dem Anderen*]". (Schneider 2014, 223).

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3. *The focus on historical otherness prefigures an expanded genealogy*

We will examine five contentions about the historical unfolding of ideas and doctrines, extrapolated from concrete texts and suggesting an enlarged genealogy. Each of these historiographical assertions delivers a perspectival view while all of them insist on the premise of historical otherness. Taken together, these five accounts prefigure a genealogy endowed with procedural universality.

These texts appeal to historical evidence and contain broad-ranging statements. They apparently extend genealogy towards the future and thus establish the grounds for affirming its symmetrical scope. As befits any genealogical proposal, these large-scale claims bypass as well every commitment to unity, continuity and meaning in history. In summary, an attentive reading of this five-pronged alternative to historiographical prognosis will furnish a sizeable view on how ideas and doctrines mutate over time.

4. *An in-built fate of self-denial: Max Weber's* Politik als Beruf

In the biography of her husband, the German sociologist and historian Max Weber (1864-1920), published by Marianne Weber in 1926, she reported that

> Above all, one sensed his shock [*Erschütterung*] at the fact that on its earthly course [*bei ihrem Erdenlauf*] an idea always and everywhere [*immer und überall*] operates in opposition to its original meaning [*wirkt ihrem ursprünglichen Sinn entgegengesetzt*] and thereby destroys itself [*sich dadurch vernichtet*] (Weber 1984 [1926], 353).

Marianne Weber's account seems congruent with the copious examples, scattered throughout Max Weber's oeuvre, of historical phenomena transmuting themselves into their opposite. "Always and everywhere" historical entities become their own "historical other". While the certainty of their future upturning, which Weber's wife appears to take for granted, seems hard to ensure, the lecture *Politik als*

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Beruf [Politics as Vocation], given by Max Weber at the university of Munich in 1918, contains an indirect but persuasive endorsement of Marianne Weber's contention:

> It is absolutely [*durchaus*] true and a basic fact [*Grundtatsache*] of all history— which cannot be proved in detail here—that the ultimate [*schliesslich*] result of political action often (in reality: downright regularly [*nein: geradezu regelmässig*]) stands in completely inadequate, often in almost paradoxical relation to its original meaning [*ursprünglichen Sinn*] (Weber 1994 [1919], 75-76; 1946, 100).

Political action is viewed here by Weber as one out of an array of conflicting values, institutions and practices sharing a self-destroying fate (this was one of the prevailing insights of his later thought). A similar destiny of otherness can be assigned to the world of ideas because it was deemed by Weber the "switcher" of action. In his view, while ideas have a contingent meaning because they cannot be reduced to the subject's intentions,[2] only they, according to the famous metaphor of railway's switchmen, accomplish the decisive junction switch and thus determine the tracks along which action is being pushed by the dynamics of interest. In short, ideas have unintended, counter-intuitive and downright perverse effects that in no way can be foreseen.

In his research on the history of religions Weber repeatedly gives instances of his deeply rooted belief, expressed by Marianne Weber's already quoted words, that "an idea always and everywhere operates in opposition to its original meaning". More generally, he also pointed out that "spheres of reality" corresponding to incommensurable values and endowed with autonomous logics display the paradox that he named "of the unintended consequences". The impossibility of controlling the outcomes of both thought and action (paradoxically, results oppose intention) has also been signalled by Weber pointing out to the unwanted sequels [*Nebenfolge*]

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[2] Weber insists that the historical unfolding of an idea or doctrine, besides altering its original meaning, usually deviates from the intentions of its author.

and more accurately to "the unforeseen and thus unwilled upshots [*unvorgesehene und geradezu ungewollte Konsequenzen*]" (Weber 2016 [1920], 74; 2008 [1920], 86) of human conduct. Significantly, this Weberian "paradox of the consequences" echoes Nietzsche's well-known tenet that "everything great destroys itself [*alle grossen Dinge gehen durch sich selbst zu Grunde*]" (Nietzsche 1980, 410), exemplified by the occasions when life produce values hostile to life itself, as is the case with self-destroying moral convictions.

In Weber's oeuvre, four crucial instances throw light on his approach to historical alterity: a) *Charismatic authority survives by becoming routine*. Its institutionalization in doctrinal, priestly or bureaucratic forms is also the condition for its continued existence. When the charisma becomes routine (the process Weber calls *Veralltäglichung*), its power, usually huge and ground-breaking, is reversed into the opposite of its initial might. b) *Rational asceticism creates the richness it essentially loathes*. The inner-worldly asceticism of early Protestantism unintentionally resulted in capitalist "spirit" because it opened the way to professions in business, especially for the most pious and ethically demanding people. Here again, Weber's linking of ascetic Protestantism and the advent of capitalism, where he sees worldliness as a side-effect of rejecting the world, is close to Nietzschean genealogy. c) *Scientific knowledge "de-magifies" the world* (the process Weber calls *die Entzauberung der Welt*). Transforming the initial intentions of most researchers, in modern times science displayed a model of rational activity that banished mysterious powers and magical procedures while encouraging intellectualism. Conversely, despite Luther's and Calvin's anti-scientism, Protestantism and Puritanism buttressed the flourishing of natural sciences. d) *Juridical norms may evolve into measures with utterly opposed meaning*. The consequences ancillary to a juridical rule usually escape the legislator's expectations because they actually depend on private interests. In most cases, the agents enjoy a sizeable freedom of manoeuvre regarding social normativity.

We can conclude that the unintended consequences of individual action, repeatedly disclosed by Weber, concern all areas of human activity (be it political, religious, philosophical, or whatever). Taken together, they amount to a

disconcerting reality. It has been called a "third world",[3] implying that this subsidiary unfolding, contrived by the unplanned effects of both thoughts and actions, exists alongside the "first world" of the natural order and the "second world" assembling the intended results of human projects. Ideas, on account of the switchmen-metaphor, are accordingly the chief protagonists of this hyper-real "third world".

5. *A replacement by an outside counterforce: Friedrich Meinecke's* Die Entstehung des Historismus

The German historian of ideas Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954) published in 1936 his masterpiece *Die Entstehung des Historismus,* translated into English as *Historism. The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*. In this book, he claimed that ideas were fated to a functional recasting, paradoxically contrived by a hidden but crucially supporting force. In other words, according to Meinecke ideas both contain within themselves, and are accompanied by, the drive to become their own opposite. They are destined to belie their original meaning, which is a basic requisite for a genealogy endowed with procedural universality. Let us see this baffling contention in Meinecke's words:

> [A] new intellectual and spiritual force appears to effect an absolute conquest for a certain period, yet it is accompanied from the very start by an opposite [*gegenwirkende*] tendency which later causes its dissolution [*die sie später dann ablöst*] (Meinecke 1965, 243; 1972, 199).

After that, Meinecke specifies this subtle contention about the effects of historical alterity. He points out that there is an opposing impetus alongside ideas and doctrines that eventually takes their place:

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[3] The notion of a "third world" formed by the unintended consequences of individual action has been suggested in Cherkaoui 2006, 23.

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Great intellectual movements, when they first arise, become established and dominant, and indeed often seem to take on an absolute character and prevail at any rate for the time being against all opposing forces. In truth, closer examination often shows that from the start there has been at work alongside and in the background [*in, neben und hinter ihnen*] some force of another kind operating in a different direction. This force looks beyond to a more distant future and is often closely and widely connected with the dominant movement but is destined at some point to take its place, in order to recommence the same process of rise and eventual dissolution [*demselben Hergang von Aufstieg und Zersetzung*] (Meinecke 1965, 243; 1972, 199).

Observe Meinecke's ambiguity as to where is the "opposite tendency" to any "great intellectual movement" located. This "force" seems both "to go alongside" and "to be carried by" the dominant current of thought (this is what the German "*in, neben und hinter ihnen*" actually means). A balanced reading of this text leads to presuppose that the "force" first surrounds the dominant current from the outside, but eventually becomes identical to it because, as the foregoing quote asserts, "at some point takes its place".

Meinecke's argument pivots around the Enlightenment. In his view, the pathbreaking enthusiasm for history, cultural difference, tradition and individuality, already inchoate around 1765, was paradoxically located within the Enlightened impulse, outright rationalist and universalist. Eventually, the most belligerent fraction of the historicist, individuality-worshipping movement stirred a traditionalist, reactionary way of thinking. But otherwise, the Enlightenment internally carried a drive aiming at its own destruction. It harboured impulses that became its unappeasable opposite.

The modes of thinking displayed in the 18th century furnish a neat example of the paradox pointed out by Meinecke:

The century of Enlightenment and of rationalism was never merely this and no more [*niemals nur dieses allein gewesen*]. From the very start, it bore within itself the germs that would spring to life as Romanticism, irrationalism ad historicism in the 19th century (Meinecke 1965, 243; 1972, 199).

Observe again the progression from asserting that the "counteracting tendency [*gegenwirkende Tendenz*]" blandly "accompanies [*begleitet*]" the idea, to admitting in a second step that it is "located" both in and besides the idea, to finally claiming that, at least in Enlightenment's case, the idea "bores it within itself [*hat sie in seinem Schosse*]" (Meinecke 1965, 243;1972, 199).

In summary, according to Meinecke the militant Enlightenment did more than merely trigger a counter-movement (specifically a Romanticism later converted in obscurantist Traditionalism) that would become its unappeasable foe. In fact, it carried within itself an array of inchoate transformations that eventually would emerge as its thorough antagonist.

6. *An exogenous functional recasting: Herbert Butterfield's The Whig Interpretation of History*

In his book *The Whig Interpretation of History,* published in 1931, the British historian Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) claimed that ideas tend to sustain functional alterations caused by the exogenous, invisible but overpowering drive that also ensures the distinctive social support from which they benefit. This exterior might contrives them to work against their original meaning.

According to Butterfield's broad-ranging assumption, original ideas tend to become functionally transformed over time by the collective movements that support them and render them effective. These historical processes (Butterfield calls them "tides") strive in definite directions and pursue specific ends, but they accomplish their hidden historical work thanks to surface events. Deserve to be highlighted,

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among them, the ideas that are so ground-breaking that they transform communal life.

These conflict-eliciting ideas, and the shock they cause to the extant mentality, are often used by the underlying historical "tides" to achieve their own goals. From Butterfield's viewpoint, in other words, the historical crises allegedly centred on pioneering ideas, no matter the significance that their supporters assign to them, are only mere mediations and intensifications of a concealed underground process already in the making.

Extrapolating these basic insights, Butterfield conceives history as the analysis of "the process of historical transition" which "moves by mediations [that] may be provided by anything in the world". He concludes that, in fact, "very strange bridges are used to make the passage from one state of things to another" (Butterfield 1973, 40). On account of this contention, he encourages the historian

> to go to a deeper tide in the affairs of men [sic], to a movement which we may indeed discern but can scarcely dogmatize about, and to a prevailing current, which, though we must never discover it too soon, is perhaps the last thing we can learn in our research upon the historical process. [...] Further it is possible to say that when there is such a tide in the affairs of men, it may use any channel to take it to its goal – it may give any other movement a turn in its own direction. And even if in their origin these movements had been rather of a contrary tenor, still the deeper drift might carry with it the surface currents and sweep them in to swell the prevailing tide (Butterfield 1973, 43-44).

The historical pattern highlighted by Butterfield is the Reformation. This ideological turmoil, in his view, came under the influence of tendencies against which it had originally been intended. More precisely, it became the natural ally of the secularized and ritualized Monarchies of the time. In the case of Reformation, the "underground movement" pointed out by Butterfield was "wider and deeper and stronger than the Reformation itself". It was "the large process which turned the

medieval world into the modern world, the process which transformed the religious society into the secular state of modern times". (Butterfield 1973, 44) It happened, in a few words, that

> if the Reformation had political, economic, or sociological consequences, this was because it had itself become entangled in forces that seemed almost inescapable, and if it gave them leverage this was because it had itself become subject to their workings [...] [In short,] the Reformation came itself under the influence of the comprehensive movement which was changing the face of the world, and was turned into the ally of some of the very tendencies which it had been born to resist (Butterfield 1973, 45-46).

In summary, Butterfield was entitled to claim that "if the Reformation had economic or political consequences we should be more ready to see that this was because it became entangled in tendencies that were already in existence" (Butterfield 1973, 49).

Following Butterfield's viewpoint, a redirected genealogy may conclude that ideas (even the ideas proved true) lack intrinsic force. If they have political consequences, it is because they are nourished and supported by the same tendencies that, at the end, make them work against their original meaning. The British historian Christopher Hill has deftly developed this restrained position:

> Ideas do not advance merely by their own logic. […] Steam is essential to driving a railway engine; but neither a locomotive nor a permanent way can be built out of steam. […] Any body of thought which plays a major part in history *takes on* because it meets the needs of significant groups in the society in which it comes into prominence (Hill 1965, 3, stress in the original).

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7. *The amending might of creative language: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's L'homme et l'adversité*

At a session of the *Rencontres Internationales de Genève* devoted to "The knowledge of man [*sic*: *de l'homme*] in the 20th century", held the 10th September of 1951, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) delivered a lecture under the title "L'homme et l'adversité" [Man and Adversity].[4]

At the beginning of the lecture, Merleau-Ponty states the disconcerting view that our ideas are never adequate to themselves and that their future consists in alterity. Let us see this contention in his own words:

each new idea becomes different from what it was for its inceptor [*chaque idée neuve devenant, après celui qui l'a instituée, autre chose que ce qu'elle était chez lui*]. [...] One cannot receive a legacy of ideas without transforming it by the very fact that one becomes aware of it [*en prend connaissance*], without injecting one's own way of being. [...] Even when [the ideas] have gotten themselves almost universally accepted, they have always done so by also becoming different from themselves [*même quand (les idées) se sont fait recevoir presque universellement, c'est toujours en devenant aussi autres qu'elles-mêmes*] (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 284).

These enigmatic statements deserve a close inspection. How can Merleau-Ponty justify this (apparently universal) vocation of historical alterity embodied by every thought? Why should an idea become different from itself in order to be accepted? Another *passus* in the lecture, some twenty pages further, attempts an explanation:

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[4] Both the lecture and the interventions of Merleau-Ponty in the ensued colloquia were published in Merleau-Ponty 1952. The lecture was later republished in Merleau-Ponty 1960: 284-308. Merleau-Ponty's interventions in the debate have been published in Merleau-Ponty 2000: 321-376.

The idea is produced by words, not because of lexical meanings [...], but because of more carnal relationships of meaning [*rapports de sens*], because of the halos of meaning [*halos de signification*] they owe to their history and daily use, because of the life they lead in us and that we lead in them (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 297).

A further elucidation is located ten pages further, where thinking is seen as:

A labyrinth of spontaneous steps [*démarches*], retaken repeatedly [*qui se reprennent*], sometimes overlapping, sometimes confirming themselves, but always through many detours, many upheavals of disorder [*combien de détours, quelles marées de désordre*]. (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 306).

The reader is brought to conclude that an inchoate genealogy results from the elusive fate with which any idea is emmeshed. Significantly, in the debate following Merleau-Ponty's lecture he disclosed the actual grounds of his quasi-genealogical statements. While he admits "having cut out [from the lecture] a lot of what I had written about language", he thereafter explains his compromise to distinguish between originating or creative expression and secondary or institutionalized language. Discussing this polarity (Merleau-Ponty 2000), he sets the germinative "speaking language [*langage parlant*]" against the banal everydayness of the "spoken language [*langage parlé*]":

What is generically called prose is the kind of speech or discourse in which our words, our signs, awaken in the minds of other people thoughts or ideas that are already there. This language is not difficult. [...] But it is not the interesting language. It is useful, indispensable, but it depends on another language, much more difficult, which consists of saying what has never been said [*qui consiste à dire ce qui n'a jamais été dit*] (Merleau-Ponty 2000, 338).

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Everyday discourse, therefore, is mostly inauthentic. It is steered by conventions where the ritualized exchange of clichés banishes both the creative striving towards expression and the effort to understand innovative thought. In a further passage of the post-lecture debate Merleau-Ponty supplies the key to his surprising statement concerning the destiny of all ideas. In his view, an idea will be accepted and understood only if it "becomes other" than the idea it is now. This baffling requisite results from the following circumstance:

> At the beginning you must talk, of course; to maintain [what you are saying], you have to create [*pour pouvoir maintenir, il faut créer*]. [...] A language that exists is indeed a tradition, but a tradition is a call to renew expression, to begin the initial creative work again [*recommencer le travail créateur initial*] (Merleau-Ponty 2000, 345).

Genuinely significant ideas, ideas worth to be considered are necessarily set in "*langage parlant*" and therefore demand re-creation. Adopting an idea, genuinely believing in it, means to amend it using the expressivity of the "speaking language". Far from merely reflecting existing meanings, such language is the place where that which previously did not have a meaning finally receives one. This has a broad-ranging implication: we must relocate in the future the dependence on historical otherness that genealogy has discovered in the descent of *our* ideas.

How to ensure that ideas "become different from themselves", thus avoiding their perpetuation as banally informative "spoken language", according to the crucial distinction set in Merleau-Ponty 2000, 338? One thing is clear: a blind reliance on their context of emergence would endanger the procedural universalism of a future-oriented genealogy. In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty it makes sense to affirm that an idea is meaningful *only* outside of its initial context:

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a philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than those that are 'contained' in it, [...] that retains a meaning outside its historical context, *that even has meaning only outside of that context* [*qui garde un sens hors de son contexte historique, qui n'a même de sens que hors de ce contexte*] (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 199).

Bluntly stated, an idea has meaning only if suitably de-contextualized. This tenet directed Merleau-Ponty's attempt to uncover in past ways of thinking discursive features which had been repeatedly overlooked. He believed that their exposure would uphold the genuine contents of canonical thought.[5]

8. *An alchemy contrived by conceptual instability: Reinhart Koselleck's* Kritik und Krise

The book by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006) *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, resulted from its author's doctoral thesis, maintained in 1954, and was first published in 1959. In 1988 appeared the English translation as *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* with a new Preface by the author (Koselleck 1989 [1954] / 1988).

This work attempts to prove that the Enlightenment evolved into "patterns of thought and behaviour" which were its exact opposite. Its genealogically relevant contention, however, ensues from Koselleck's reflexive attitude towards his own approach. His insight that "the Enlightenment developed patterns of thought and behaviour which [...] foundered on the rocks of the concrete political challenges that arose", led him to the startling conclusion (crucial for a genealogy redirected to the future) that

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[5] Merleau-Ponty's qualms about the identity of ideas qualifies the "mythological" character of prolepsis, as discussed at the end of this paper. While prolepsis can be deemed a mythology because the meaning of ideas, destined to unending revisions, is unstable and paradoxical, Merleau-Ponty rejects this depreciation because what ideas actually *are* depends on posterity's meaning-giving.

the Enlightenment succumbed to a Utopian image which, while deceptively propelling it, helped to produce contradictions which could not be resolved in practice and prepared the way for the Terror and for dictatorship. Here was an ideal-type framework which time and again made its reappearance in the subsequent history of the modern world (Koselleck 1988, 2).

According to Koselleck, the conceptual instability affecting all historical issues converts "the sense that we are being sucked into an open and unknown future [into a] persistent structure of the modern age" (Koselleck 1988, 4). No less genealogy-slanted is Koselleck's attempt, as he puts it, "to connect two major themes of the early modern period", namely "the origins of absolutism" and "the genesis of the modern Utopia" (by which he understands "a progressive philosophy of history which promised victory to the intellectual elite").[6] He admits having conceived this daring project "with the aim of deducing therefrom the evolution of a long-term process which went beyond what the contemporaries had intended" (Koselleck 1988, 3). These unsettling extrapolations demand a closer inspection of *Kritik und Krise*'s main tenets.

Koselleck attempts to understand Enlightenment under genealogical premises and proposes a broad-ranging view from which universalizing conclusions can be drawn. Indeed, *Kritik und Krise* holds that the enlightened mindset transformed itself in tyranny and all-embracing manipulation.[7] Koselleck roots this paradox in the political processes of the 17th and 18th centuries, which gave rise to an enlightened

[6] In the same "Preface" Koselleck precises his deepest aim: "My starting point [in writing *Kritik und Krise*] was to explain the Utopian ideas of the 20th century by looking at their origins in the 18th" while revealing as well that his main concern was "the loss of reality and Utopian self-exaltation of German National-Socialism". (Koselleck 1988, 3)

[7] Similarly, Horkheimer/Adorno 1969/1993 proves that in the historical process, enlightened criticism turns into its opposite, that is, into despotism and widespread manipulation. Its authors maintain that the Enlightenment, in its utmost progress, reached the deepest failure. They attribute this dialectic to the self-affirmation of the subject. Upholding an enlightened and at bottom internalist self-criticism, they abstain from using the shortcomings of the Enlightenment to belittle its conquests. "Dialectic" means for them that the Enlightenment was a process that in the last instance evolved into the contrary of what was initially intended.

impulse that ended up in political crises and ultimately in revolutionary upheavals. He encapsulates the explicit teleology of his approach by equating "Enlightenment against absolutism" with "revolution and totalitarianism", as the following assertions make plain:

> The Enlightenment, compelled to camouflage itself politically, was the victim of its own mystique. The new elite lived with the certainty of a moral law [*moralische Gesetzlichkeit*] whose political significance lay in its antithesis to Absolutist politics—the dichotomy of morality and politics guided the pre-eminent [*überlegene*] criticism and legitimised the indirect taking of power [*Gewaltnahme*] whose actual political significance, however, remained hidden to the protagonists precisely because of their dualistic self-understanding. To obscure this cover as cover was the historic function of the philosophy of history. It is the hypocrisy of hypocrisy to which criticism had degenerated [*entarted*] (Koselleck 1989 [1954], 185; 1988, 156-57).

Koselleck wields an exogenous argument against the Enlightenment; he exposes its political worthlessness and dubs it "a dangerous hypocrisy" (Koselleck 1989 [1954], 99; 1988, 72). In his view, enlightened criticism sprang out of the absolutist state (itself born from the chaos of religious civil wars) and its unavoidable crisis; the revolutionary catharsis converted afterwards the absolutist world into an ideological and utopian totalitarianism. Fostered by absolutism, the enlightened criticism stirred the crisis. "Absolutism conditions [*bedingt*] the genesis of Enlightenment; Enlightenment conditions [*bedingt*] the genesis of the French Revolution." (Koselleck 1989 [1954], 5; 1988, 22)

The aim of absolutism had been the prevention of war; but accomplishing it meant ensuring its own downfall. Absolutism's *raison d'état* weakened moral legitimacy, which resulted in the Enlightened quest for moral perfection. In sum, according to Koselleck the Enlightened response to absolute monarchy was inadequate. On the one hand, it fostered a moral philosophy severed from politics;

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on the other, it took Franc-masonry's rites as model for sociability. As a result, it undermined the authority of the state, which had been a guarantee of civil peace.

Koselleck's case is somewhat peculiar because the certitudes displayed in *Kritik und Krise* became paradoxes in his later thought. There his views on the Enlightenment appear overshadowed by his contention of history's complete lack of sense. In Koselleck's later view, prolepsis (the confidence that future times will furnish meaning to contemporary events) is unavoidable because the watchful waiting of a retrospective meaning-giving is a paradoxical necessity. The future will bestow meanings that will have to be set anew repeatedly. This is argued against Nietzsche, for whom identity is born out of alterity and will evolve into alterity. According to Koselleck, Nietzsche failed to notice that "the meaning-free [*sinnfrei*] concept of life nevertheless summons questions of meaning [*evoziert doch Sinnfragen*]" (Koselleck 2010, 27-28). He summarizes his mature approach as follows:

> We must learn to deal with the paradox that a history that generates itself in the course of time [*die sich im Verlauf der Zeit erst generiert*] is nevertheless different [*immer noch eine andere ist*] from one that is retroactively declared to be a "history" [*rückwirkend zu einer "Geschichte" erklärt wird*] (Koselleck 2010, 19-20).

9. *Can the outward alterations of ideas conceal their actual sameness?*

An element of contrast to the procedural pattern outlined by the precedent cases can now be clarifying. As exposed at the onset, a milder future for our ways of thinking, and with it the possibility of a reliable prognosis, has been often presupposed. This view holds that while ideas and beliefs usually evolve (at most they endure some dimming or weakening), they somehow remain unchanged at their core. Ideas and doctrines corrode, get hazy, become shabby with long use, worn and torn by allusion and metaphor. Rusted by ambiguity, inevitably they fade out, but this anti-genealogical standpoint excludes that historical otherness could steer their embattled survival.

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The interest in these vicissitudes, predicted to ideas and doctrines holding out in future times, sidelines indeed historical alterity. These expectations of historical change foresee either a development or a dimming, but they are blind to any onset of historical otherness and thus rule out the possibility of a genealogical approach. They insist, in short, that actual sameness is usually concealed by outer alterations. While ideas become reduced, codified, institutionalized or tamed, so that they must be continually re-negotiated and re-fought, their identity with themselves remains intact.

More specifically, the fact that intellectual standpoints often seem to vary out of their interaction with adversary positions[8] presupposes the dynamism that the Dutch philosopher Chris Lorenz calls "negative bonding". This modification may take the extreme form of a "conceptual inversion", aptly described by the Möbius-strip metaphor: a viewpoint gives rise to its opposite. (The best-known example is Marx's materialist "inversion" of Hegel's idealism.) In those cases, though, the conceptual structure of the "inverted" entity remains the same:

> In many intellectual debates, [the assumed] positions often owe their origin and existence to an inversion of the position that constitutes the object of critique. As a consequence, the 'inverted' positions retain the same conceptual structure as the criticised ones, carrying along similar conceptual problems (similar contrasts, dichotomies, etc.) (Lorenz 2013,60).

In summary, not every prediction regarding the future of ideas and doctrines contains a genealogical incitement. It only becomes one if, and only if, it involves dealing with the assured alterity of the phenomena.

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[8] This "paradox of self-destruction" has been highlighted by the sociologist Robert K. Merton when studying the link between puritanism and science: when an idea raises to prominence starts a process that leads to its downfall.

10. *A Conclusions. An expanded genealogy would rule out prolepsis*

Genealogy's feats at registering conceptual alchemy cannot be denied. This protracted success, however, does not justify its persistent and exclusive fixation on the past. Why this insistence on ignoring the future? Its worship of otherness, key for explaining the emergence of phenomena, doesn't it make sense even if forward-oriented? If alterity is what genealogy is all about, why not reversibly project it into the future instead of restricting it to the past? Would not a genealogy be more enlightening if, in addition to dealing with former transmutations of ideas and doctrines, it developed as well a symmetrical concern with their unforeseeable future?

These would seem of course daring questions were it not for the fact that they have already received encouraging answers. As we have seen, a reversed genealogy may result from an in-built fate of self-denial (Max Weber), a replacement by an outside counterforce (Meinecke), an exogenous functional recasting (Butterfield), the amending might of creative language (Merleau-Ponty), or an alchemy contrived by conceptual instability (Koselleck). The task of the present paper has been to systematize these insights. What they reveal, above all, is that an expanded, future-oriented genealogy would clash with the aim of any historiographical prognosis, that is, the foreknowledge of future occurrences out of the knowledge of both past and present events that has been discussed at the onset. Against this contention, genealogy rules out any suggestion that the future will repeat the past.

What would a symmetrically universalized genealogy look like? No future would mirror the past, because if this were possible only alterity would be reflected (which would amount to a sort of negative mirroring). Still, why do not inflect the genealogical concern? While conventional genealogy has been turned to the past, a genealogy promoted to procedural universality would be oriented to the future. With its gaze re-located both backwards and forwards, and the rule of alterity governing both directions, past and future would be involved.[9]

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[9] At this point, the (genealogical) paradox of a genealogy that would vindicate a universality other than procedural should be admitted. When Nietzsche began building up the doctrine, he directed genealogy against universality (specifically, against the alleged universality of moral values). He denounced that

Most importantly, a forward-oriented, reversibly universalized genealogy would contribute an innovative argument to the current rejection of historiographical prolepsis. This criticism has been so drastic that the British historian Quentin Skinner has dubbed prolepsis a "mythology", which in his view "we are prone to generate when we are more interested in the retrospective significance of a given episode that in the meaning for the agent at the time". Skinner does not accept the alleged deferment of meaning that any idea or doctrine is fated to endure. This is why historiographical prolepsis, in his view, is exposed to "the crudest type of criticism that can be levelled against teleological forms of explanation: the episode has to await the future to learn its meaning" (Skinner 2002, 73-74). (This conception deviates in fact from the current sense of "prolepsis", attached to the prognosis-dependent likelihood of a narrative "flashing forward" or "foreshadowing".) Skinner's qualms against historiographic wait-and-see, therefore, would become specified by an expanded, symmetrically universalized genealogy. It would contend that the destiny of otherness awaiting ideas and doctrines excludes any surmise about the meaning they will be given in the future. The passage of time is not an automatic meaning-giving device, time itself does not "declare" anything, only the unpredictable but unavoidable advent of alterity shall determine which meaning will prevail.

In summary, a genealogy endowed with procedural universality would ascribe a gloomy prospect to the staying power of ideas and doctrines. Their lack of self-identical future cannot be questioned and hence prognosis appears impossible. From a genealogically coherent viewpoint, they have been born out of alterity, and only alterity will succeed them. A genealogy routinely interested in the emergence of values, beliefs, categories, institutions and practices, but above all concerned with the vicissitudes of their future unfolding, would dissolve utopian expectations and wipe out prospective certainties.

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purely local values were presumed to be universal, while he noticed as well that historical analyses were slowly corroding all universal certainties, replacing them by a swarm of historical particularities.

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