



# Power, Politics and the Quest for Prognostication

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## **Prelude: The Complaint of a true Social Scientist**

In the good old days (say fifty years ago), social scientists hoped that their art would achieve a status equal to and analogous with that of the natural sciences. The social science of economics was at the forefront of the irreversible process of scientism. It was expected that a data-based theory could be developed that, in principle, would not only allow for an explanation of phenomena in a given area, but, beyond that, would also be able to predict future events. It was assumed that, in the field of politics, regularities exist that could be discovered and expressed in theories, or generalizations, of predictive value. This kind of social science produced many medium-range generalizations that, by making inferences from the current trends of phenomena, predicted the future, but, and this is my *ceterum censeo*, the predictive claim of the scientific the-

ories failed to forecast *any* of the fundamental upheavals in modern politics – neither the rise of political Islam in Iran and the Near East, nor the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism, nor the crises of the global economy. This is not to say that, on the basis of well reasoned reflections on political affairs, human intelligence is unable to make educated guesses regarding the future course of events. My point is that there is no science of society comparable to the natural sciences, with their working concepts of prognostication (although some social science court-astrologers in our government are university professors). Let the above remarks constitute my introduction.

In the following, I will briefly elaborate on a few essential aspects of the problem.

### I.

Political societies, as clearly distinguishable power units in history, are not fixed points in the cosmos that have existed from eternity. Quite the contrary, they grow, change and ultimately disappear back into history. Of necessity, an awareness of this predicament informs the process by which political orders create the symbols of their self-understanding. On the one hand, social identity must be reinforced in terms of the lastingness of a respective concrete order; on the other hand, rulers know that, in the last analysis, action must be taken under conditions of short or long term exigencies that cannot be controlled. In this predicament, between the need for permanence and the reality of change, divination has played an important part in every political setting from the time of the pre-axial cultures to the current, post-axial period. Divination is indeed an integral aspect of human

existence. “There is an ancient belief (*vetus opinio*),” Cicero averred, “handed down to us even from heroic times, and firmly established by the general agreement of the Roman people and all peoples, that divination of some kind exists among men; this the Greeks called *mantike* – that is, foresight and knowledge of future events (*scientia rerum futurarum*).”<sup>1</sup> Thus, for example, in Mesopotamia, the omens manifested themselves in the intestines of sacrificial animals as well as in the constellation of the heavenly bodies, and in both they signaled the will of the gods, to be acted on by mortals. However, the axial breakthrough (800 BC-600 AD) added new modes to the original means of divination and prognostication, thus enlarging its perspective. Defined in brief, the axial spiritual outbursts involved a profound spiritual change, implying “the conceptualization and institutionalization of a basic tension between the transcendental and mundane orders”; i.e. the transcendental order embodying the universal vision of a higher moral or metaphysical realm and the mundane realm of the pragmatic life-world.<sup>2</sup> From this basic tension evolved the image of a differentiated cosmos that separated the divine from the human and nature from society and history. It thus evoked new ideas of the order of human community. The symbols of the axial experience that became effective, and thus relevant to this day, are those that were welded to the power structures, either in the series of imperial foundations, extending from the rise of the Persian empire to the fall of the Roman one, or in those of the socio-culturally

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I, 1, 1, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge 1923, 222.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Gebhardt, “Political Thought in an Intercivilizational Perspective: A Critical Reflection”, in: *The Review of Politics* 70 (2008), 5-22.

minor political units, such as the Greek *Polis*-civilization and the Judean communities. Although the blending of the symbolic and the political forms extended over time and space, it resulted in drawing a manifold of concrete societies into one political power field by means of pragmatic expansions that started at various centers. A crucial byproduct of the evolution of the competing power units were the insights that: a) a plurality of societies claimed to represent a 'truth', and each society was challenged by the others; and b) in order to assert itself, a society needed to have an understanding of the beginnings, development and future prospects of its order; these were to provide the political leadership and subjects with an interpretation of the society's existence in time. In this way, the internal and external order would obtain legitimacy. In other words, a new type of divination and prognostication emerged in post-axial societies: one that required the prognostication of the domestic course of events in terms of order and disorder, stability and instability, and in terms of the institutional structures. What came to the fore was a symbolic self-understanding of one's own history that allowed for a reasoned prognosis of one's own future as far as it relates to natural or political events and reveals schemes of rally and relapse that function as a means of orientation for the thinking observer.

Cicero's critical discussion of the philosophical meaning of 'divination' reflects on this problem. He takes issue with the Stoic argument that the existence of the gods implies that there also exist human beings with the power of divination and goes on: "For it is possible that nature gives signs of future (*futura*) events without the intervention of a god and it may be that there are gods without their having conferred

any power of divination upon the human kind”.<sup>3</sup> While the discourse focuses on the question of divination, the notion of an alternative view of prognostication comes into view. “...(M)en make predictions, not as a result of direct heavenly inspiration, but by the use of the human reason. For example, they foretell natural events, such as a flood, or the future destruction of heaven and earth by fire. Others, who are involved in public affairs, like Solon of Athens, discover the rise of tyranny long in advance. Such men, we may call prudent; that is they are foresighted but not divinely inspired.” Accordingly, their predictions are not considered to be divinations. Thus, as Cicero observed, divination is prudently withdrawn from conjectures based upon skill and experience in public affairs, from those drawn from the use of the senses and from those made by persons in their own callings. Whatever can be foreknown by means of science (*ars*), reason (*ratio*), experience (*usus*), or conjecture is to be referred to experts (*periti*).<sup>4</sup> In Cicero’s disquisition on divination, a conceptual approach to prognostication is recognized, that had emerged from the post-axial understanding of natural and societal processes, which brought forth a multifaceted, analytical paradigm, making sense of the past, present and future destinies of one’s own social existence. Cicero realized that, within the Hellenic frame of intellectual rationalization, there came forth a type of prediction based on human reason. His reference to the political realm and the legacy of Solon is not accidental. Solon’s discovery of law-like, cause-and-effect relationships governing social

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3 *Ibid.*, I, VI 10.

4 *Ibid.*, I,XLIX, 111; II, \_V, 13-14.

processes is tied to his firm conviction that the citizens of the *polis* are able to improve the fate of their society. In consequence, Aristotle and his successors formulated a science of politics that allowed for prognostication without divination, or, to put it more precisely, a prognostication that undercuts the omnipresent divinatory practices in politics and society without uprooting them. The practical science of ethics and politics moves in the sphere of mutability, thus marginalizing the role of fate and divination in favor of a human ethics of responsibility governing human existence, mediating between the transcendental and worldly order, within a symbolically-determined comprehensive whole of the cosmos.

It is the tentatively formulated argument of these reflections that, *cum grano salis*, “there can be no doubt that China has, like Hellas, developed the symbolism of an historical course in retrospect”.<sup>5</sup> As the post-axial emergence of the philosopher’s science of politics in Hellas centered on the ordering force of the ‘sage’ and allowed for a prognostic understanding of the societal processes, so the post-axial sages of the Confucian and Taoist movements offered interpretations of a Chinese historical course that dispensed with the institutionally established practices of divination when describing the interplay of heaven and earth in terms of human agency. There was no Cicero surveying the intricate world of mantic and prognostic procedures but, within the Confucian horizon of historical hermeneutics, the interaction of the macro- and microcosmical forces results in a meaningful, cause-effect related sequence of human action,

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5 Eric Voegelin., *The Ecumenic Age*, Baton Rouge 1974, p. 296.

that allowed prognoses of the probable success or failure of political agency. Thus, Tung Chung-shu's interpretation of the *Ch'un-ch'iu* referred less to auspicious omens than to calamities and prodigies "induced by failures of government", stressing the "methods of redressing those". Not the diviner, but the sage, articulates heaven's intent. "Heaven does not speak, but causes men to express its intent; it does not act, but causes men to carry out its principles. Names thus are that by which the sages expressed heaven's intent, and therefore must be profoundly scrutinized."<sup>6</sup>

The crucial point is that we are dealing, here as well as in the West, with an intellectual position that, first of all, functions as a means of orientation for the thinker and does not delegitimize the dominant practices of divinatory prognostication.

## II.

Three characteristics determine this historiographical manner of dealing with the liberty of action, mastering social fate, and prognosticating domestic processes. First, there is a historio-genetic, that is mytho-speculative, extrapolation of pragmatic history towards its cosmic-divine origins. It defines a primeval state of excellence in terms of a founding era or founding personality; in short: a founding myth, encompassing the Homeric image of the Mycenaean monarchy in Hellas; the sages of antiquity, the legendary primeval emperors, the legendary

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<sup>6</sup> Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought I*, Princeton 1979, 497, 500; cf. Peter Weber-Schäfer, *Oikumene und Imperium*, München 1968, 265ff.

Yao, Shun and Yü in China; Remus and Romulus in Rome; the divine genesis of heaven and earth in Judaism; the birth and death of Christ in the Christian empire; the Heijira of Mohammed in Islam; and last, but not least, the founding myth of the fathers in the United States.

Second, there is a reconstruction of the patterns of the societal processes, involving the cyclic and linear narratives of historical development. The cyclic variety is the major type of historical self-understanding in the post-axial world. Their respective origins must be traced to deeply-felt crisis experiences.

The Hellenic *anakyklesis politeion*, the cyclic course of political constitutions, determined the Hellenic-Roman culture in competition with dynastic cycles or the specific post-axial construct of a sequence of empires moving from Iran to Rome that was to become a key element of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic thought. The precarious situation of the *polis* culminated in the Platonic-Aristotelian construction of political forms. It ran its course through the stages of growth, climax and failure, and decomposition measured against the standards of the just, model *polis*. By the time of Polybios the philosophical version was considered too intellectually demanding. It has become more pragmatic, an instrument of applied political divination that is the prognostication of an *anakyklosis politeion*: “that is the course of events appointed by nature in which political forms change, disappear and finally return to the point from which they started”. Whoever speaks out on the *mellon* (future) of a *polis* may err in respect to the time the process will take, but he will rarely be mistaken as to the course of events



themselves.<sup>7</sup> “In the case of those Greek *poleis* which have often risen to greatness and have often experienced complete changes, it is an easy matter both to describe their past and to pronounce about future things (*to mellon*). For there is no difficulty in reporting the known facts, and it is not hard to foretell future things by inference from the past.”<sup>8</sup> Polybios himself claims to apply this approach successfully to the phenomenon of the Roman polity. “It enables us to arrive at a knowledge of its formation, growth, and greatest perfection, and likewise of the change for the worse which is sure to follow someday.”<sup>9</sup> In China, the roots of this reflected cyclic view of events dates back to Mencius. Reflecting on the transfer of the heavenly mandate to a new dynasty, he stated: “The three dynasties ... could dominate the world because they all practiced politics of humanity, and they lost their empires because they all discarded policies of humanity. The prosperity and decay of political regimes also follow this rule.”<sup>10</sup> History is a dynamic, continuing process. It changes, however, and not due to sporadic events, but in accord with a fixed and therefore knowable pattern. Ho Hsiu, a commentator on the *Ch'un Ch'iu*, knew three divisions constituting the three ages of disorder, approaching peace and universal peace. This is the decisive reason for the construction of historical cycles: the course of events can be known and this makes forecasts possible.<sup>11</sup> In all schools,

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7 Polybios, *The Histories*, Loeb Classical Library, VI, London 1968, VI, 9, 289.

8 *Ibid.*, VI, 2, 271.

9 *Ibid.*, VI, 9, 287.

10 Mencius, Beijing 1999, S. 214 f.

11 Derk Bodde, “Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy”, in: A. F. Wright, ed., *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago 1967, 20-80, 32.

there figures prominently “the belief that the universe is in a constant state of flux but that this flux follows a fixed and therefore predictable pattern consisting either of eternal oscillation between two poles or of cyclical movement within a closed circuit...”<sup>12</sup> As in the Hellenic case, the Chinese *Ch'un Ch'iu* does not consider the *res gestae* as a meaningless series of events, but explores the causes and consequences of occurrences in order to make prognoses concerning the expected success or failure of the political agency.

Third, in the light of the critical standards of order implied in the historical narrative of the cycles, cyclic disorder is also implied, but, in understanding the logic of the cyclic process, political agency may act presciently and forestall catastrophe in that events can be understood according to their actual causes and remedial action may be actuated. In the last analysis, however, there is a moment of inevitability, of fatefulness, inherent in the cyclical process. The freedom of agency is limited by the necessity of marking the nature of the course of the cycles. Why is this so? The notion of cyclical time and, in consequence, the cycle of *res gestae*, has been extrapolated from and modeled upon the experience of the cycles of the heavenly bodies in the cosmic order. These are mirrored in the seasonal cycles of vegetation, whose rhythms can be traced back to the mythical repertoire of the cosmological predecessor-societies. Therefore, the processes of genesis and decay, valid for all perishable beings, can apply to longevous civilizations and overlap the sub-cycles of the growth, revolutionary change and downfall of a specific society. It may be subordinated to a law of eternal recurrences

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

as well to an iron law of the continuing downturn in terms of a lapse from the primary state of order and wellbeing. This explains the crucial fact that all cyclic models are intertwined with astronomic/astrological and calendarian modes of prognostications, as well as with the whole repertoire of ritualistic practices of divination that interpret signs that the gods or heavens have conveyed to human beings in order to reveal future events to them.

### III.

Within this intellectual context, though, an insight evolved that spelled trouble not only for divination but for prognostication in general, as Cicero well knew: contingency. “Can there...be any foreknowledge of things for whose happening no reason exists? For we do not apply the words ‘chance’ (*fors*), ‘fortune’ (*fortuna*), ‘accident’ (*casus*) or ‘casualty’ (*eventus*) except to an event which has so occurred or happened that it either might not have occurred at all or might have occurred in any other way. How, then, it is possible to foresee and predict an event that happens at random as the result of a blind accident or instable ‘fortuna’?”<sup>13</sup> Cicero acknowledges the expert’s capability to make predictions on the basis of cause-effect-relations, but he doubts the diviner’s claim to predict things that happen by ‘*fortuna*’. If nothing comes to pass except what has been determined by fate or god, through all eternity, as bound to happen at a fixed time, then the purpose of divination, that is preparing human beings for action, comes to naught. “The ignorance of future ills is more profitable than the knowledge of them.” Cicero does not

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<sup>13</sup> Cicero, *Divinatione*, II, 7, 19.

simply deny the practical benefits of divination; he sketches out the limits of any prognostication in view of a fundamental contingency of human life. It appears to him that, in the last analysis, “it is not in the power even of god himself to know what event is going to happen accidentally and by chance (*casu et fortuito futurum*)”.<sup>14</sup>

Cicero’s skeptical view of divination mirrors the emergence of the natural rationality that came to the fore in Aristotle and Polybios’ theory of the cyclic processes in politics. In addition, however, the contingency of events should be noted, because the critical observer of the transformation of a regime was confronted with the volatility of occurrences: he knows what may happen for a particular reason but he does not know how and when certain events will take place. The problem of contingency was first treated by Aristotle in his ‘Hermeneutics’, where, in logical matters, he differentiated between things that are contingent (i.e. that could be otherwise than they are) and things that, of necessity, are as they are. Here is the problem of prediction exemplarily presented: *de futuribus contingentibus*. How it is possible that something that will take place in time can be merely contingent? That is to say, how is it possible that it could both be or not be, when the truth of being is that everything ‘will be’ or ‘will not be’ (for example, the maritime battle of Salamis)?<sup>15</sup> Logically, prediction must be concerned with what is contingent. The discovery of a realm of contingency imposes a restriction on all prognostication

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 7, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, Loeb Classical Library I, Cambridge 1996, XIII.

that human beings, both ancient and modern, vainly attempt to overcome: '*fortuna imperatrix mundi*'. This challenge of the unforeseeable could only be mastered by taking prudent, responsible action at the moment of decision.

The evolving notion of contingency remained more or less the privilege of intellectual discourse in the West before it was tak-en up by the Christians' belief in the providence of a personal God. In the East, the Chinese speculations on the interaction of heaven and humans seemed less articulate on the question of the fortuitousness of events that are unforeseen and unfore-tellable, but a certain awareness of contingency governing the human realm informs by example the Lun Heng of Wang Ch'ung. He demolishes the doctrines about heaven and human interaction, disposing of ominous prodigies and auspicious signs. "Wang Ch'ung accepted the idea that every thing and event that emerged within the cosmos was the product of purely fortuitous conjunctions. He called such fortuitous conjunctions 'fate' (*ming*); in consequence, he said: 'Fate presides over good luck and bad! [...] In as much as they [all cosmic movements] occur without intent, so all the less are they purposeful. Consequently, they can be designated fortuitous, [...] and once they have become real they are beyond altering. The fortuitous thus acquires the force of necessity.'"<sup>16</sup> Wang Ch'ung did not raise the issue of contingency, but the emphasis on fate controlling governmental and individual destiny is – in a way – comparable to the notion of *fortuna* as explained by Cicero. It signifies the Chinese traditions that privilege “a way of thinking in their reflection on fate and even beyond the

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<sup>16</sup> Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Chinese Political Thought*, 591.

bounds of this reflection, which places the incipient elements (*ji*) of change with their 'subtle and germlike' (*miao*) elements in the foreground".<sup>17</sup>

I have hitherto focused on the ancient origins of the cyclical type of political speculation. It should be noted that, conceptualized in terms of an ideal type, it survived not only in the East but also in the West, but has become historically effective and permeates Western speculation in continuity into the high Middle Ages and right down to the present day.

One caveat may be added. The foregoing comparative glance at the idea of the relationship between the concept of circular processes and prognostication is intended merely to sketch out a paradigmatic area of comparison; it certainly does not offer a thorough, detailed comparative analysis of the matter in question.

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Lackner, Klaus Herbers, Thomas Fröhlich: Fate, Freedom, and Prognostication. Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe. Project description german p. 6. PDF available at: <http://www.ikgf.uni-erlangen.de/content/static/IKGF-project-description-deutsch.pdf>, accessed March 6, 2012.

IV.

When Christianity delegitimized the legacy of the cyclic doctrine through the new, linear narrative of human history in terms of the story of redemption initiated by Christ and moving towards the ultimate *telos* of a transcendent beyond, the whole complex of freedom, fate and prognostication underwent a fundamental change, as demonstrated by Augustin's *Heavenly City*. Augustin states the counter-position to Cicero whom, he states, argues against the Stoic doctrines of divination in order to deny "that there is any knowledge of future things (*scientia futurorum*)", maintaining "with all might that there is no such knowledge either in God or man and that there is no prediction of events." Augustin is uninterested in those varieties of foreknowledge that make use of human reason. His concern is with Cicero's confession "that God exists and at the same time to deny that He has foreknowledge of future things (*preaescientia futurorum*)".<sup>18</sup> "What is it, then, that Cicero feared in the prescience of future things? Doubtless it was this – that if all future things have been foreknown, they will happen in the order in which they have been foreknown; and, if they come to pass in this order, there is a certain order of causes of things foreknown by God; and if a certain order of things, then a certain order of causes, for nothing can happen which is not preceded by some efficient cause. But, if there is a certain order of causes according to which everything happens which does happen, then by fate, says he, all things happen which do happen. But if this be so, then there is nothing in our own power, and

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<sup>18</sup> Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei* V, 9 – Augustin, *The City of God*, New York 2000, 152f.

there is no such thing as freedom of will; and, if we grant that, says he, the whole economy of human life is subverted...”<sup>19</sup> Cicero claims that there is either a foreknowledge of future things or the freedom of human will. But, Augustin argues, that “we are by no means compelled, either, retaining the prescience of God, to take away the freedom of the will, or, retaining the freedom of the will, to deny that He is prescient of future things, which is impious. But we embrace both.”<sup>20</sup> And he explains: “though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also the causes of human actions; and He who foreknows all the causes of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our wills.”<sup>21</sup> Augustin bound human action rigidly to the universal providence of God, and carried the day against the Christian alternative of Pelagius. Augustin’s opponent had God “bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice, by implanting in man the possibility of choosing either alternative, that he made it his particular right to be what he wanted to be, so that, with his capacity for good and evil, he could do either quite naturally and then bend his will in the other direction too.”<sup>22</sup> Pelagius insists that God’s foreknowledge correlates with the

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19 *Ibid.*, 153.

20 *Ibid.*, 157.

21 *Ibid.*, 154.

22 Pelagius, ‘Letter to Demetrius’, in: Pelagius: Life and Letters, Woodbridge, 1998, 38.



freedom and independence of human will in the process of salvation. How ever the scope of human freedom is defined, the notion of divine providence repudiates any independent operation of '*fortuna*' in terms of chance – what is called fortuitous refers only to events the reasons and causes of which are concealed from our view, as Augustin remarked. In the same vein, any cyclical interpretation of the world is held to be incompatible with the creator-god, since God's unchangeable counsel and will refute "the reasonings of those who hold that the works of God are eternally repeated in revolving circles that restore all things as they were ... And, if the same things be not thus repeated in cycles, then they cannot, by any science (*scientia*) or prescience (*praescientia*) be comprehended in their endless diversity".<sup>23</sup>

In the Augustinian version of Christian theology of a personal God, His foreknowledge (*providentia*) meant that all that now and in the future would take place would occur by necessity since even God cannot change things. With this premise, there is, in view of God's omnipotence, nothing contingent in the future; all that takes place must necessarily take place. This brought the individual into an unresolvable conflict between a divine predestination to salvation or damnation, and the role of the freedom of action and the will. But it should be noted that, in spite of the Church's doctrinal insistence on predestination, this by no means ruled out a widespread belief in free human agency and the rule of *fortuna* and accident in human affairs. The 9<sup>th</sup> century historiography of Regino of Pruem is woven from accounts of events engendered by the

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<sup>23</sup> Augustinus, *Civitate Dei*, XII, Augustin, City of God, 398f.

triad of '*providentia Dei*', '*virtus*', and '*fortuna*'.<sup>24</sup> The tension between a fatalistic trust in God and a self-determining active life could be eased, theologico-politically, by the doctrine of limbo, socially through "good works", and outside the Church through the predictions of mantic practices, astrology or astronomy.

On the other hand, from the standpoint of the theology of creation, the principle of contingency is generalized insofar as the created world is composed of contingent things because what was created is, by its nature, changeable. However, this view is subject to the fundamental reservation that God has permitted human beings in their present condition to participate, through Revelation, in a foreknowledge of the end of the created world.

### V.

The revelation of the 'last things' (*eschata*), the 'apocalypse', is the Western world's 'form of meaning' (*Sinnformation*).<sup>25</sup> The concept is a paraphrase of the prophetic Revelation concerning the end of time and the beginning of a new aeon (a new heaven and a new earth), the worldly judgement day and the transcendent *status futuri* of the resurrection – all of these theological terms express the doctrine of last things,

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<sup>24</sup> Heinz Loewe, "Regino von Prüm und das historische Weltbild der Karolingerzeit", in: W. Lammers ed., *Geschichtedenken und Geschichtsbild im Mittelalter*, 91-134, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang – Apokalyptisches Denken und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaft im Mittelalter*, München 2001, 9.

that are implicitly contained in a divinely guaranteed knowledge of the future. The first generation of Christians expected the immediate return of Christ. The fact that this did not occur presented a challenge to them, out of which the West's peculiar historical thought emerged. The point of perspective on this historical canvas is symbolized by "the future" (*status futuris*). The Augustinian mainstream of a Christ-centred linear teleology of history viewed the present as the end of time, the *saeculum senescens*, but minimized the prognostic meaning of the apocalyptic Jewish-Johannine end-time prophecies. These prophecies had provided the omens of the inner-worldly begin of the end of time, announced by the coming of the Anti-Christ, Christ's return, and his millennial reign. This literalist reading of the revelation of John in terms of a historical forecasting of Christ ruling with his saints for a period of a thousand years is dismissed by Augustin as the construction of 'ridiculous fancies' (*ridiculae fabulae*) of the so-called 'millenarians' (*miliarii*). Notwithstanding this, the Church sanctioned an authoritative interpretation of Augustin. However, once canonized, these texts revealed their potential for prognostic interpretation, expressed in terms of astrology and astronomy, in natural philosophy, in politico-theology, sometimes in precise mathematical calculations of the end of the world. Newton and Kepler engaged in such mathematical speculation, and Mede a century later. "The rise of the mathematical natural sciences was shrouded in eschatology."<sup>26</sup>

The consolidation of European civilization undermined the idea of a *saeculum senescens* waiting for the world to

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

end and the complementary salvational-historical interpretation of the *status futuris*. This change is expressed in the meaning of words. In European languages, 'future', ('*avenir*', '*Zukunft*'), originally meant the arrival of someone or something, especially the arrival or return of Christ (this was the meaning for Luther); thus the word was always used with a direct reference to eternity, the anticipated *status futuris*. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the concept was drawn into time and took on the modern meaning of 'a future time' (see Grimm's Dictionary: '*zukünftige Zeit*').<sup>27</sup> "The term 'future' ... designated the whole of future things. More exactly, future defined the direction of the changes that mark human life respectively and the world in general, moving towards a specific end or ultimate goal."

This and other semantic breaks that took place in the transition from the 'early modern' to the 'modern period' (ca 1750-1850), signaled a new (the 'modern') transformation of the thinking about history. Indeed, the term 'new age' itself is a concept taken from the vocabulary of the apocalypse.

The apocalyptic predictions of the end of time (from the chiliastic sects to the intellectual discourse of astrology and physics) gain plausibility due to a general expectation that an inner-worldly millennial realm will succeed the current age. With the accentuation of the inner-worldly and historical, the apocalyptic change is expected to take place at a future time. With the emphasis on post-millenarianism, the accent is placed on the *avantgarde*, those elected few, who will bring about the realm of salvation before Christ returns. Although increasingly drawn into time and profaned, the idea of an

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<sup>27</sup> Luciam Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*, Frankfurt 1999, 42.

inner-worldly imminent teleological structured concept of history is developed in analogy with an apocalyptic salvational history. The profane analogy envisions a progressive perfection of the world in the direction of a future state of an inner-worldly civilizational paradise, in which human beings will become perfect. The eschatologically enshrouded 'science' takes the place of revelation as the instance that guarantees future salvation. Science is the basis for predictions that the new 'Last Age' will be historically realized. The conceptual basis is found in the 'Philosophy of History' (Voltaire 1750). The intellectual patriarchs of this modern historical thought reach from Condorcet, Saint-Simon, and Comte to Marx and Spencer. Predictions are made on the basis of a scientific knowledge of the future, and these provide the motivating power for intellectual movements – as well as political and social ones. The Marxist vision of the 'realm of freedom' and the 'new man' epitomized this phenomenon, engulfing the West and East for a time.

### VI.

The social success of this model fed on the prestige and success that resulted from the mathematical and physical sciences, as well as the technology built upon them. It was this prestige that led to the notion that those sciences concerned with human action must discover the laws of the historico-political world, laws conceived to function like those of the exact natural sciences (*science sociale*, 1779; *sociologie*). Once the concept of a closed historical process, moving progressively towards a known future fulfillment, loses this reference point, the term 'future' functions as the

open, temporal horizon of evolving historical and cosmic processes to be described by imagined pictures of an anticipated world to come, prognostically extrapolated from the characteristics of the present.<sup>28</sup>

Without the ballast of 'historical prophecy', the now so-called 'rigorous' social sciences claimed their own power of prediction. In the 20th century, this political-prognosticating function became the criterion for science *per se* insofar as "for the elements grasped by theory, [science] was able predict future events". A distinction was drawn between "scientific" prediction and secular modes of apocalyptically motivated 'historical prophecy', but the effects on the actions of human beings were the same as those of the old prophecy.<sup>29</sup>

Today, scientific prognosis is everywhere, and relatively well-established. In Western civilization, it helps to minimize the role of *fortuna*, accident, and contingency. The court astrologer has been replaced by the economic expert, but both historical prophecy and scientific prediction imaginatively conceive a knowledge of what the future will hold.

The 'old' idea of the freedom of a Christian was defined as a life following in the steps of Christ, and of having faith in God's grace; the modern idea of freedom, found in historical prophecy, is that of insight into necessity. The freedom of scientific prediction is confined to utilitarian insight into the imperative of objective processes. Today, this holds true for modern societies in the West and in the East, irrespective of their particular political order.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 174 squ.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Albert, Probleme der Wissenschaftslehre in der Sozialforschung, in: R. König ed., Handbuch der empirischen Sozialforschung I, Stuttgart 1973, 80-82.