

Messianism without Delay: On the “Post-religious” Political Theology of Walter Benjamin

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1. The interpretive key to Walter Benjamin’s “Theses On the Philosophy of History” which I intend to bring to light, can be deliberately and provocatively expressed in the title: “Messianism without Delay.” This is literally a *para-doxical* title which seemingly contrasts with commonsense or current opinion with regard to those characteristics traditionally attributed to the “messianic.” How is it possible, in a literal sense, to have a messianism without “horizon of delay?” And does not the lack of a ‘wait’ constitute sufficient reason for dissolving the very tension implied in the concept of a “messiah” itself? It is my firm conviction that one finds hidden here the secret cipher of a text – at once translucent and enigmatic – which can only be thoroughly grasped by reconstructing the multi-polar constellations of its conceptual and symbolic referents. That is, one cannot interpret its radical political-theological core simply as a “secularized” version of messianism (as occurs in the philosophies of history criticized by Karl Löwith¹): Benjamin’s brand of messianism is in equal measure post-secular and post-religious. In short, the paradox of Benjamin’s message of redemption lies in its position on the other side of the ambiguous Janus profile of western Futurism. It is symbolized, on the one hand, by the promise of salvation in monotheistic religions and, on the other, by the modern philosophy of history’s faith in progress. Hence, I will try to illustrate how the singular figure of a “messianism without delay” is tied to the proposal of a “concept of history” not after the end of history, but rather, after the end of the *faith* in history.

2. I will begin with a passage from the last letter from Benjamin to Adorno: a precious and intense document from a dialogue that became – despite well-known disagreements – increasingly close (the more intimate “*mein lieber Teddie*” instead of the formal “*Lieber Herr Wiesengrund*” with which their correspondence began on July 2, 1928 is telling in this regard). In this letter dated August 2, 1940 – sent (an irony of fate) from Lourdes – Benjamin seems to apply the political-theological constellation of the “*Grenzfall*” at the extreme hour of his own existence, the *extremus necessitatis casus*: “Total uncertainty about what the next day, the next hour will bring has ruled my existence for many weeks.”² We have here, together, an absolute temporal contraction and a diametrical overturning of the messianic wait into a “state of exception” (*Ausnahmezustand*): in the *Ernstfall* time carries a bi-polar structure in which the extremes of Fear (*Angst*) and of Hope (*Hoffnung*) are hazardously related. This is a motif that appears throughout the radical thought of the twentieth century and which is echoed in Hölderlin’s knotty adage: “Where danger is there is salvation also.”

On the other hand, a recurring theme within the field of Benjaminian criticism argues that Benjamin developed his idea of messianism from reading the Romantics (in particular from *Christenheit oder Europa* by Novalis). This thesis is not completely correct and, on this point, Hermann Cohen provides an invaluable reference for reconstructing the sources and *Urszenen* (the symbolically prototypical scenes) of Benjamin’s intellectual formation. Cohen’s notion that history, properly defined, is a creation of the prophetic is of particular interest. Benjamin certainly draws from Novalis the idea of a ‘plural’ messiah (“with a million

eyes”) but at the same time he recognizes a tension between the neo-Kantian *Unendliche Aufgabe* and the Romantic idea of an infinite qualitative process. He halts in front of this tension and in a certain sense takes a step back, moving backwards in the direction of Leibniz’s monad and thereby raising the question of unification and immanent unity. Above all, he poses the question of an Origin that is constantly unfulfilled and unrealizable (*unerfüllt* and *unerfüllbar*). This question paves the way for a perspective that can relate, in a manner that is as secret as it is resolute, the Benjaminian concept of history with cabbalistic tradition (especially with the cabbala of Yitzchak Luria, principle exponent in the sixteenth century of the Safed Cabbalistic school in Galilee). After all, it is not difficult to retrace in the enigmatic phrasing of thesis IX – “make whole what has been smashed” (*das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen*)³ – a messianic echo from Lurian doctrine of “breaking vases.” A doctrine hinging on the concept of the *Zimzûm* (the idea of creation as an effect of the original withdrawal of God to leave space for the cosmos), of the *shevirath ha-kelîm* (the breaking of vases) which is at the origins of evil, and of the *tiqqûn* understood as the necessary and consequent restoration of broken unity. And yet . . .

And yet the Benjaminian messiah and the cabbala intersect at a specific point: the fulfillment of creation is the task of human action. Thus, if we read Benjamin’s theses against Heidegger’s last appeal we are struck by a paradoxical inversion: while for Heidegger “only a God can save us,” for Benjamin *only man can save God*. A paradox which is intimately Jewish and which sheds light on the meaning that the category of redemption comes to assume within the constellation of ‘postponements’ outlined in the numerous drafts of that radical and extreme text: *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*.

Another theme, which incidentally appears in re-reading some current commentaries of Benjamin, consists of the remembrance/reawakening nexus, a nexus some have seen as evidence of neo-Platonic traces in Benjamin. Despite my own doubts as to the value of this hypothesis as an interpretive key, I find it nonetheless useful and productive: it allows us to think of Benjamin not just from a theological perspective but also *in the strictest sense* from a philosophical one (this seems to me important in light of the old and new prejudices of academic philosophy with regard to Benjamin’s work).

3. We must therefore return to the thesis to re-focus the argument. The first aspect of our re-reading speaks to theme. Here what is decisive is the programmatic character of the title. Benjamin, as I have already noted, speaks of the concept (*Begriff*) of history: that is, a history that, while reduced to a concept, remains as a central (and still problematic) referent of discourse. We are not speaking, therefore, of theses *on the end* of history but rather of theses *on history* as they are thought and expressed in the “end-time.” I will argue that the messianic, instead of capping the “end of time,” coincides with humanity’s return to its *simply historical* role. That is, it coincides with the representation (*Darstellung*) of a humanity that is finally liberated from the naturalized history of Progress (*Fortschritt*) and Domination (*Herrschaft*). Our hermeneutic task consists in escaping the pitfall of misunderstanding produced by tendentious and prejudicial critiques, including the polemical remarks of Adorno himself who, in his *Negative Dialectics*, seems to chide Benjamin (whom he recognizes as having taught him the necessity of crossing the “iron desert of abstraction” (*Eisenwüste der Abstraktion*) to arrive rigorously at concrete philosophizing) on his inability to explode the philosophical devices of *Begriffslogik* (the logic of the concept). In truth, Benjamin’s insistence on the concept must be viewed in direct relation to the decline of a messianic motif in the “mode of exposition” (*Darstellungsweise*) of Marxist dialectics. For this reason, the theses should not be read as an omni-comprehensive key – as a sort of philosophico-

historical summa – but as an incandescent laboratory of experimental concepts and thoughts. They are marked by a clear syncretism, in which the boundaries between what are extremely diverse symbolic registers (those of messianism, eschatology, and the apocalypse, represented by the figure of the Antichrist) disappear. It is through this “syncope” of heterogeneous elements that the theses continue to exercise an extraordinary power of suggestion: they give form to a *withheld pathos*. Up until the very end, Benjamin tried to polish the text, carefully distilling the words, choosing with singular exactness the nouns and adjectives, directing his argument towards a precise conclusion: to perform a symbolic conversion (and not a generically metaphorical or analogical one) between the twin axes of messianism and historical materialism. But – this is the crucial point – the figure of the conversion is provided by a specific criterion that has been transformed from the area of political theology. Without the political theology of the *Ausnahmezustand* – and here an obligatory reference is due to the work of Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben – the possibility of reciprocal convergence and conversion between these two axes would remain a moot point.

At this point we cannot but advance serious doubts on Jacob Taubes’s reading of Benjamin’s political theology. In particular, I am referring to his thesis of a Gnostic Benjamin, a modern Marcionite (*moderner Marcionit*), founded on Benjamin’s anti-immanentism and presented as the criterion of the real and true inversion of the Spinoza-Nietzschean line.⁴ This thesis, it seems to me, is both controversial and problematic. Taubes focuses on a decisive issue: Benjamin read Nietzsche with extreme interest, while his most acute and bitter hostilities were directed at Heidegger (a fact that is difficult to evade or overlook). Taubes certainly provides an illuminating contribution by proposing a tripartite comparison of Benjamin, Schmitt, and Karl Barth (recently revisited by Agamben and Badiou), which he situates against the backdrop of Paul’s messianism. Taubes, however, misses the mark in considering the themes discussed in Benjamin’s work as incompatible with the theme of secularization. This critique is rightly underscored by Michele Ranchetti in his introduction to the Italian edition of *Abendländische Eschatologie*: in any case, the question of secularization makes little sense from Taubes’ viewpoint since he assumes that secularization, as a purely historiographical question, is incapable of capturing the persistence of the sacred and its reappearance in the modern era.⁵ I contend, on the other hand, that for Benjamin secularization is tied to the theme of the persistence of the sacred (and not to its dissolution), but in a specifically polemical sense. The theme of secularization is present in the theses in a similar manner as in Karl Barth, but it sensibly diverges from that of Taubes. For Barth as for the next “theological dialectics,” the condition for reopening the historical process to redemption lies precisely in the fact that world becomes “exclusively world.” Only when the world becomes only world – only when that which can become mundane becomes completely *verweltlicht* – only then will the prospect of true redemption reappear. Benjamin’s problem, from this point of view, would be that of the ‘false idols’ that appear within the general frame of secularization, but certainly not the process of secularization as such. This is the fundamental point, in a certain sense touched upon by Taubes, but without drawing out its more radical conclusions.

4. The decisive theme that emerges at this point is that of nihilism as a method of worldwide policy. In Benjamin this theme is constituted in diametrical opposition not only to the apologetics of Progress but the rhetoric of “future generations” as well. This is an absolutely explosive position with respect to the ethical revival that seemingly characterizes – on both sides of the Atlantic – current academic debates in philosophy. It is precisely in the name of the rights of future generations that the “pyramids of sacrifice” were created in the course of

Western history. It is in the name of the rights of an ill-defined Future that we have sacrificed present lives to fabricate paradise on Earth. One thinks of the epitaph-like sentence that concludes thesis XII: the “Hatred” and “spirit of sacrifice” of the oppressed classes “are nourished by the image (*Bild*) of enslaved ancestors, rather than by the ideal (*Ideal*) of liberated grandchildren.”⁶ The strength of the symbol – the *Bild*, as contrasted with the *Ideal* – is therefore rooted in the past, not in the future of the philosophy of history. I am not maintaining that what is at stake here is *sic et simpliciter* the problem of political messianism, nor is it the relationship between the messianic and the political in the conventional sense of these terms. Rather, at stake is the theme of the Messiah: what the *Bild* of the Messiah could represent in an epoch that is at once post-religious and post-secular. A preliminary note from which to begin, so as to avoid misunderstanding the text, is that (unlike in Taubes’s eschatology) here the Messiah can appear *at any moment*. It is on this point that it is difficult to deny the congruence between Benjamin’s perspective and the Hebrew tradition. The *Mashîah* present in the rabbinical tradition can appear at any moment; his way is not prepared by any *plenitudo temporum*, any eschatological “fullness of time,” or an apocalyptic “end of time.” The Hebrew Messiah is a human figure, very human – “created by men.” Even if the Messiah, as event, is already fixed in the original act of creation, his coming occurs in a human way: “created by men.” Isaiah 60:22 reads: “it will happen in its own time.” In the same verse, however, we also find, as an apparent contrast, the affirmation: “In its time I will speed it up.” But how is it possible to speed up an event that is predetermined *ab originibus*? The key point, on closer inspection, is that only action can fulfill the Origin: thus the delectably Jewish paradox by which the fulfillment of the Origin is always finalized after and never before. In playing with this interwoven paradox – an originary moment in the hands of messianic action and an image of the future in which each and every instant is opportune (and which can be “sped up”) – Benjamin gambles that this acceleration should be properly considered historical and not meta-historical. Not in the sense, therefore, of history as addition, but rather history as a *constellation* open to *Erlösung* (a category imported from the lexicon of Franz Rosenzweig that is implicitly distinct – symbolically and semantically – from the notion of *Rettung*).

The Messiah can come any day. Every generation deposits within itself its own particular terminus: its own peculiar *kairos*, hidden but ready to be revealed at any instant – we just don’t know when. A number of scholars within the Hebrew tradition, such as Sadya Gahôn and others, have tried to compute the date for the *Kêtz*, the expiration of the Messiah. I believe, on the other hand, that Maimonides was right when, in *Principles of Faith*, he affirmed: “I believe with complete faith in the coming of the messiah. Even if he may be late, I await him every day – any day until he will arrive.” The word “any” is very important. This is precisely the Hebrew orientation that we find in Benjamin. We only have to establish: in what form? In what conceptual configuration? In what interweaving of the theoretical and practical?

5. The explanatory key is provided by the thesis numbered XVIII⁷ in the important typeset-version of *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* which has been rediscovered by Giorgio Agamben. This is a crucial thesis whose trajectory outlines a decline in messianism exactly in the direction we have already stressed. “In the idea of classless society,” Benjamin affirms in the opening of the thesis, “Marx secularized the end of messianic time.” And right afterwards he adds: “And that was a good thing.” The degeneration occurs later, at the moment when the ideological vision of the workers’ social democratic movement effects a kind of sublimation of *Vorstellung* into *Ideal*: “It was only when the Social Democrats elevated this idea to an ‘ideal’ that the trouble began.”⁸ The scale tips in the direction of a ‘deactivation’

of the messianic-political charge with the neo-Kantian doctrine of the “infinite task” (which became *Schulphilosophie*, the “scholarship” of the Social Democratic Party, Benjamin specifies, with intellectuals and directors like Robert Schmidt, August Stadler, Paul Natorp, and Karl Vorländer). Once the end of a society without classes was defined as an asymptotic movement oriented towards an ideal scheme, “the empty and homogeneous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with greater or lesser equanimity.”⁹ The passive character of the wait is not therefore a prerogative of the messianic, but rather of a transcendental and undifferentiated concept of historical time incapable of seizing the at once singular and “vertebrate” constellation of the present. Continuing on in the same thesis we find the theme of the “moment” (*Augenblick*). It has by now been clarified, thanks to the scholarly exegesis of the last few years, that the category of *Augenblick* carries, within the theses, a function distinct from that of *Jetztzeit* (of the “now” or the “now-time”). Why, then, in this crucial passage of the theses, does he speak about *Augenblick* and not *Jetztzeit*: about a moment and not about the time of the now? In my opinion, there can be but one plausible reply: only if we act to speed up the coming can revolutionary action be properly defined as messianic. However, and here lies the decisive element, every point, every monad of historical time is susceptible and, if adequately rooted in the concept, can be transformed into the messianic time of the end (*Messianische Endzeit*). But let’s go directly to the text:

In reality, there is not a moment that would not carry with it *its* revolutionary chance-provided only that it is defined in a specific way, namely as the chance for a completely new resolution of a completely new problem [*Aufgabe*]. For the revolutionary thinker, the peculiar revolutionary chance offered by every historical moment gets its warrant from the political situation. But it is equally grounded, for this thinker, in the right of entry which the historical moment enjoys vis-à-vis a quite distinct chamber of the past, one which up to that point has been closed and locked. The entrance into this chamber coincides in a strict sense with political action, and it is by the means of such entry that political action, however destructive, reveals itself as messianic.¹⁰

6. Reinterpreted in light of this crucial passage of the theses, Benjamin’s messianism gains a new and more intense sense. More precisely, it is placed at the intersection between the moment (*Augenblick*) and the past (*Vergangenheit*), outside of the “future-oriented” symbolism of waiting. Every instant carries within it the *enérgeia*, the power (*potenza*) or virtuality of the messianic: on the condition that it be conceptualized – *begriffen*, literally: caught, ensnared – in its singular, unrepeatable specificity. It is only when political action can be recognized as messianic action that *Jetztzeit* is converted into *Augenblick*. But there is more to it. The constellations of the “now-time” are converted into the “moment” not by virtue of a utopian tension in the direction of the future, but because of the fact that the memory (*Erinnerung*) of the past of the oppressed – as indicated in thesis VI – “flashes up at a moment of peril” (“*im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitz*”).¹¹ It is in the image of the past therefore and not in some “projection” of the future that one finds the key to reciprocal conversion of messianism and historical materialism: “Historical Materialism wishes to retain that image of the past [*Bild der Vergangenheit*] which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.” It is in that unpredictable and unexpected “flash” that revolutionary action comes to the fore, and it is precisely in that moment that we find ourselves in the time properly called messianic.¹² Yet if the messianic is not in the proper sense the time of waiting, it is also not mere *Jetztzeit*. The monadic density of *Nunc*, of the present, of the now, is the subject of the “interpreter,” of the historian capable of seizing the

constellation determined by the present in its *Darstellung*. Messianic time is rather a time of action, because only through acting do we become revolutionary subjects, subjects capable of effecting a conversion from the “political” into the “messianic.”

7. At this point, however, things become even more complicated, and it is necessary to reorient the matter. Redemption, which we are able to reactivate through action, is (as we have seen) tied to the flash of the image of the past. And, once again, the bifocal correlation of the twin axes messianism/historical materialism produces, in thesis XIV, a secret symmetry of opposites: at one pole we find the “tiger’s leap into the past” (*Tigersprung ins Vergangene*) represented by fashion (on this subject we know how Benjamin related modernity and fashion through his reading of Georg Simmel); on the other side we find the dialectic leap (*dialektischer Sprung*). One must here observe how between these two “leaps” there is at the same time an analogy and a contrast, a sort of conflicting affinity. Fashion’s leap into the past, with its “flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago,” certainly captures the dimension of the *Jetztzeit*, extracting it from the historicist continuum of “homogeneous and empty time”; and in a sense the French Revolution, in the same person of Robespierre, “evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes the continuum of history.” Yet this leap occurs, inevitably, in a space already predisposed and prefigured by power, “in an area where the ruling class gives the commands.” On the other hand, in spite of any structural analogy, this is radically different from the way in which the continuum of Progress explodes as a result of the dialectical jump in the Marxian concept of revolution. The categorical referent of this leap is no longer the now-time but precisely the Now, an *Augenblick* that thesis XV – in confirmation of what has been argued – intimately fuses with the dimension of action: “The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the evolutionary class at the moment of their action.”¹³

At this crossroads one finds Benjamin’s original re-elaboration of the theme of the “state of exception” (*Ausnahmezustand*), understood – with and against Carl Schmitt – as a theft of the homogenous, empty time which culminated in a continuum of self-referential domination and produced, as a *very modern* phenomenon, the horror of fascism. Despite all the “mythologies of legitimation” of Romantic derivation, the essence of fascism does not reside in a nostalgic recourse to the past, but is inscribed in the technocratic power (*potenza*) that one attributes to the modern concept of progressive history. From this point of view, for Benjamin progress feeds fascism exactly as it feeds the worker’s movement, which in that continuum has passively slackened its pace: “Nothing has corrupted,” one reads in thesis XI, “the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it thought it was moving.”¹⁴

8. But how does one escape this impasse, this entropic derivative of the historical process? One escapes, for Benjamin, not only by exploding this continuum through the steep point of convergence between historical materialism and messianism, but also by detaching oneself from the anthropocentric roots common to all traditional forms of messianism and the ideological variants (whether progressivist or revolutionary) that have “secularized” it. From this point of view, the allusion to Blanqui’s *L’Éternité par les Astres* is decisive. What precisely is the strategic importance of this work for Benjamin? Blanqui provides not only the idea of a “secularized abyss” with his image of the cosmos (as we find written in the material on *Passagenwerk*); he actually illustrates how the messianic idea – coinciding with the syncope, the acceleration of time – is one and the same with the knowledge that the entire history of *homo sapiens* is but a fragment, an infinitesimal segment when viewed

against the whole of cosmic time. The apocalyptic shortening of time is flipped in this way from indicator of centrality and absoluteness into a figure of the finitude and brevity of human history. The theme of accelerating time appears, as is well known, in Luther's *Table Talk* inside a suggestive representation of the immanence of the apocalypse as a vertiginous shortening of time, whereby centuries become years, months become weeks, weeks turn into days, days into hours, hours into minutes, and minutes become seconds: *Dann die Welt eilet davon, quia per hoc decennium vere novum saeculum fuit*.¹⁵ Benjamin's symbolic inversion consists in making this unheard syncopation of time the figure of absolute contingency in human history. Benjamin introduces, therefore, an anti-anthropocentric tendency in all traditional visions of history (be they progressive or revolutionary): none of which is capable of thinking through the "strangeness" and "disorientation" that surrounds, and relativizes, the events of History and Civilization.

9. This theme brings us, moving towards a conclusion, to a further motif: taking this cosmic "disorientation" as a starting point, how does one identify the space or opening produced by the convergence of messianism and historical materialism? We know that such an opening is very narrow, what Benjamin calls a "strait gate" (*kleine Pforte*) through which the Messiah might enter. The strait gate represents the precariousness of a *dangerously minimal margin*. The Messiah does not arrive as the grand representation of Roman Catholicism, as Schmitt thought, but appears in a moment of danger, when a small opening seems to reveal itself: the entryway for the messianic is also the entrance point of contingency, of transience. The entrance point is a contingency that is "kairological" and that coincides with a sort of interlude between being and nothingness, "fullness" and "emptiness," desperation and hope.

Thus Benjamin draws from Auguste Blanqui the ideas of contingency and of nature as an eschatological category. He makes them intersect at the point where the dangerously minimal character of the margin and the opening to redemption are caught in a precarious equilibrium. One finds in this precarious equilibrium the theoretical traces of Marx. But this Marx is not the "halved" Marx of tradition, nor the "scientist" Marx of explanation (seeking to describe the laws of movement of capital); it is not even the "prophet" Marx of historico-dialectical narrative (mytho-poetically intent on inspiring the energies of the revolutionary subject). Rather, it is the Marx of *Darstellung*, capable of fusing, in an explosive synthesis, the "spectroscopic" analysis of a world dominated by commodity fetishism with the latent messianic tension in every authentically revolutionary action. In this way, the Marxist representation is transformed in the Benjaminian laboratory into the essential chemical reagent necessary for a synthesis of science and redemption. And it is in virtue of this fusion that the phantasmagoric analysis of commodities (re-read by Benjamin in almost surrealist terms) is permeated with a pathos that originates in the "experience" (*Erfahrung*) of the oppressed, of the defeated – or, to use a suggestive expression by Primo Levi, the "submerged" of history. Once invested with an appeal to the past, the historical-materialist *Darstellung* is capable of restoring the constellation of a present open to messianic action (diametrically opposed to the apologetic *Vorstellung* of a present sealed by the mythology and jurisprudence of the victor).

10. Here blossoms the truly conclusive aspect of Benjamin's political messianism: it corresponds to the past's appeal rather than an injunction of the future. A radical and symbolic inversion of the notion of the 'messianic wait' departs from this, making the present generation – every present generation – the recipients or "object" of the wait and the "subject" of redemption. In short: *we are the ones the dead are "waiting for."* The extraordinary emphasis of thesis II can have no other meaning: "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it

is referred to redemption. There exists a secret agreement between past generations and the present one . . . Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim."¹⁶ It is we, then, we who live in the present, who are invested by past generations with the responsibility, not to safeguard a utopian hope or wait, but to engage in messianic action. Once transcribed as "the flash in a moment of danger" of a past that has not been redressed for the oppressed, for the victims and those without name, the Benjaminian idea of redemption merges with the feeling that "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy" if that enemy continues to win.¹⁷

The return, in the heart of the text, to the cabbalistic theme of redemption as an unsaturated formula, as with the Jewish paradox for which only we can save God, occurs therefore from the dissolution of a concept of history oriented towards a linear "homogenous and empty time." And still, something of the linearity remains: precisely in the feeling of an irreversibility declined, *à la* Baudelaire, in hyper-modern key: from the moment we find ourselves irreversibly thrust onto an "*Einbahnstrasse*," a one-way street, it is not the beginning but the end that is at stake for the Angel of History. To paraphrase Kafka (another key author for comprehending Benjamin's latent sense of messianism-without-delay): faced with the messianic appeal of a past of which we – we who live in the constellation of the *Jetztzeit* – are the sole destination and heirs, what matters is not the road but the end, the terminal-point. That which we call the road is nothing but our own hesitation.

(Translated by Luca Folli)

NOTES

1. For a "genealogical" reconstruction of the philosophical and political-theological questions implied by "Säkularisierungstheorem," please see my: *Potere e secolarizzazione* (1983), new extended edition, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005); German edition, with updated bibliography *Macht und Säkularisierung. Die Kategorie der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1989); *Cielo e terra. Genealogia della secolarizzazione*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1994); German edition revised and extended, *Die Säkularisierung der westlichen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996).

2. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel. 1928–1940*, ed., Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 442.

3. Cfr. Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, GS, I-2, 697.

4. Cfr. Jacob Taubes, *Walter Benjamin – ein moderner Marcionit? Scholems Benjamin-Interpretation religionsgeschichtlich überprüft*, in *Antike und Moderne. Zu Walter Benjamins "Passagen"*, ed. Norbert Bolz and Richard Faber (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986), 138–147.

5. Cfr. Michele Ranchetti "Preface" to Jacob Taubes, *Escatologia occidentale* ed., Elettta Stimilli (Milano: Garzanti, 1997), 7–15.

6. Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 700.

7. Cfr. Benjamin, *Sul concetto di storia* eds., Gianfranco Bonola and Michele Ranchetti (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 52–55. In this edition the thesis in question has been inserted under the number XVIIa "so as not to disturb the established numbering of GS, which has already been adopted by scholars"[see the editors's note, 19].

8. Ibid., 52 [Das Unheil setzt damit ein, daß die Sozialdemokratie diese Vorstellung zum 'Ideal' erhob].

9. Ibid., 54 [so verwandelte sich die leere und homogene Zeit sozusagen in ein Vorzimmer, in dem man mit mehr oder weniger Gelassenheit auf den Eintritt der revolutionären Situation warten konnte].

10. Ibid., [In Wirklichkeit gibt es nicht einen Augenblick, der *seine* revolutionäre Chance nicht mit sich führt – sie will nur als eine spezifische begriffen sein, nämlich als Chance einer ganz neuen Lösung vorgeschrieben von einer ganz neuen Aufgabe. Dem revolutionären Denker bestätigt sich die eigentümliche revolutionäre Chance aus einer gegebenen politischen Situation heraus. Aber sie bestätigt sich ihm nicht minder durch die Schlüsselgewalt eines Augenblicks über ein ganz bestimmtes, bis dahin verschlossenes Gemach der Vergangenheit. Der Eintritt in dieses Gemach fällt mit der politischen Aktion strikt zusammen; und er ist es, durch den sie sich, wie vernichtend immer, als eine messianische zu erkennen gibt].

11. Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 695.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 701 [Das Bewußtsein, das Kontinuum der Geschichte aufzusprengen, ist den revolutionären Klassen im Augenblick ihrer Aktion eigentümlich].
14. Ibid., 698.
15. Martin Luther, *Tischreden*, in *Werkausgabe*, II, 2756 b. See Giacomo Marramao, *Macht und Säkularisierung*, cit., 92 ff.
16. Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 693–694.
17. Ibid., 695.

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