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Distance and Perspective: Reflections on Two Metaphors*

One of the most stimulating aspects of this intellectual environment is the presence of both natural scientists and social scientists, *Naturwissenschaftler* and *Geistes- or Sozialwissenschaftler*. The topic of my talk tonight is in some way a response to this challenge. On the one hand, the metaphors I will explore have already been touched indirectly, on a literal level, in a series of impressive presentations focusing on perception. On the other hand, perspective, if used as a metaphor, can be regarded as a major stumbling block in the uneasy relationship between scientists and social scientists. Somebody in this audience will probably recall the hoax perpetrated by Alan Sokal, a theoretical physicist from New York University. In 1994 Sokal published in an academic journal a long essay entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" which was in fact, as he later revealed, a cruel parody of the extreme relativistic approach so widespread today among philosophers, anthropologists, literary critics, and historians (including historians of science). In an article that appeared in the TLS some months ago under the title "What the Sokal hoax ought to teach us", Paul Boghossian, a professor of philosophy also from New York University, argued that, according to the postmodernists who were Sokal's target, both the archaeologists' account of the origins of Native American populations and the account offered by some Native American myths, like the Zuni, can be regarded as true. "This is impossible," Boghossian commented, "since they contradict each other. One says, or implies, that the first humans in the Americas came from Asia; the other says, or implies, that they did not, that they came from somewhere else, a subterranean world of spirits. How could a claim and its denial both be true? If I say that the earth is flat, and you say that it's round, how could we be both right?"

"Postmodernists," Boghossian went on, "like to respond to this sort of point by saying that both claims can be true because both are true relative to some perspective or other, and there can be no question of truth outside of perspectives. Thus, according to the Zuni perspective, the

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first humans in the Americas came from a subterranean world; and according to the Western scientific perspective, the first humans came from Asia. Since both are true according to some perspective or other, both are true."

Let me immediately say that I share Sokal's and Boghossian's dislike of postmodernist skeptical conclusions. But Boghossian's presentation is in my view too simplistic. The argument connecting truth to perspective deserves a more serious approach, which should take into account both its history and its often overlooked metaphorical dimension. The argument is, of course, much older than postmodernism; its implications are, as I hope to show, far-reaching. My talk will focus on two crucial episodes in the history of this metaphor, one in late antiquity and one in early modern times. In the third and last part, I will comment on some implications of my topic.

1

In recent decades, the relationship between history, memory and oblivion has been scrutinized with unprecedented intensity. This widespread concern arose, we have been told, from multiple challenges: the imminent physical disappearance of the last generation of witnesses to the extermination of European Jews; the upsurge of old and new nationalisms in Africa, Asia and Europe; the growing uneasiness towards a dry, "scientific" approach to history, and so forth. There have been attempts to integrate memory within a more comprehensive vision of history. This is a valuable intellectual endeavour; but I would like to focus on the other side of the coin — the irreducibility of memory to history.

In his book *Zakhor*, Yosef Yerushalmi analyzed a double paradox: on the one hand, "although Judaism throughout the ages was absorbed with the meaning of history, historiography itself played at best an ancillary role among the Jews, and often no role at all"; on the other, "while memory of the past was always a central component of Jewish experience, the historian was not its primary custodian." Jews entered into a vital relationship with the past through the prophets, who explored the meaning of history, and through a collective memory transmitted by rituals, which conveyed "not a series of facts to be contemplated at a distance, but a series of situations into which one could somehow be existentially drawn." This is especially evident, Yerushalmi wrote, "in that quintessential exercise in Jewish group memory which is the Passover Seder... a symbolic enactment of an historical scenario whose three great acts structure the Haggadah that is read aloud: slavery — deliver-

ance — ultimate redemption." Therefore, Yerushalmi argued, the ahistorical, if not antihistorical attitude that is so prominent in the biblical and rabbinical tradition, "did not inhibit the transmission of a vital Jewish past from one generation to the next, and Judaism neither lost its link to history nor its fundamentally historical orientation.

"History" means here *res gestae*, not *historia rerum gestarum*: that is, a living experience *of* the past, not a scientific, detached approach *to* the past. In the Seder ceremony, Yerushalmi significantly wrote, "memory... is no longer recollection, which still preserves a sense of distance, but reactualization." This conclusion goes of course beyond Judaism. In all known cultures, collective memory, conveyed by rituals, ceremonies and other communal occasions, reinforces a link with the past which does not imply an explicit reflection on the distance from it. We are accustomed to associating this latter possibility with the emergence of history: a literary genre devoted also, but not only, to the record and storage of memorable events. It is not coincidental that history comes from *istoria* — the Greek word for enquiry. For a long time, Thucydides has been regarded as the prototype of the inquiring, scientific historian, and his account of the Peloponnesian wars as the highest example of a neutral, objective approach. More recently, the role played by Thucydides as an observer has come to the forefront. A well-known article on "Thucydides' Historical Perspective" argues that the perspective from which Thucydides wrote large sections of his work — a perspective based on the defeat of Athens in 404 — inspired his famous passage (1. 10. 2) in which the destruction of both Athens and Sparta was projected into a distant future. Political defeat taught Thucydides that cities and civilizations do indeed perish.

In ancient Greece there was neither a word corresponding to perspective nor a practice equivalent to the one invented and theorized in XVth century Florence. One can certainly apply the word "perspective" to the passages in which Thucydides suggested, usually in a disguised form, his subjective involvement in his apparently detached narrative. But even these passages are far removed from the postmodernist idea, rejected by Professor Boghossian, that "Since both [accounts of the origins of Native Americans] are true according to some perspective or other, both are true". The distant origins of this idea come from a tradition which is neither Jewish nor Greek. Let's go back again to memory and ritual — in fact, to a case in which their connection was made particularly explicit.

In celebrating Passover, just before his death, Jesus said: "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22: 19). As it has been remarked, these words were certainly consonant with

the Jewish tradition. But Paul's momentous interpretation of the same words, which he quoted with some additions in I Cor. 11: 23ff., transformed Jesus's body into a *corpus mysticum*, as it was later called — a mystical body in which all believers were incorporated:

"When we bless 'the cup of blessing' is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake" (1 *Corinthians*. 10: 16ff.).

"All", as one reads in *Galatians* 3, 28, implied the disappearance of every specificity — ethnic, social, or sexual: "there is no such a thing as Jew and Greek, slave and free-man, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus." In this universal perspective, the connection with the past — and especially with the Jewish past — took a new form.

The issue was addressed in general terms by Augustine, in a passage of his treatise *On Trinity* (14. 8.11). In discussing the seeds of the image of God in the human soul he wrote:

"Things that are past do not themselves exist, but only certain signs of them as past, the sight or hearing of which makes it known that they have been and passed away. And these signs are either situated in the places themselves, as for example monuments of the dead or the like; or exist in written books worthy of credit, as is all history that is of weight and approved authority; or are in the minds of those who already know them."

The power which masters the signs in our mind is *memoria*, on which Augustine wrote so profoundly in the tenth book of his *Confessions*. But, as Victor Saxer showed in his remarkable work *Morts martyrs reliques en Afrique chrétienne aux premiers siècles*, in Augustine's writings *memoria* also had a range of other (and for us less predictable) meanings. It referred to funerary monuments of martyrs, the *monumenta mortuorum* mentioned in the passage I just quoted; to relics; to reliquaries; to liturgical commemorations. All these signs were related to the *Ecclesia sanctorum*, which Augustine defined in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (149. 3) in the following terms:

"The church of the saints is that which God first prefigured (praesig-native) before it was seen, and then set forth that it might be seen. The church of the saints was heretofore in writing, now it is in nations. Heretofore the church of the saints was only read of, now it is both read of and seen. When it was only read of, it was believed; now it is seen, and is spoken against."

Ecclesia sanctorum erat antea in codicibus, modo in gentibus. A contemporary of Augustine, Nicetas of Aquileia (ca. 340-414) stressed the

continuity between the Old and the New Testament, between what could be read in the sacred books and what could be seen in reality, in even stronger terms:

"What else is the Church but the congregation of all saints? From the beginning of the world, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the prophets; the apostles; the martyrs; and the other just who were and are and will be, are one Church, because sanctified by one faith and one conversation, signed by one Spirit, they are made into one body; the head of which is Christ, as it is written."

In Augustine's thought, the Jewish and the Christian past were usually connected through the notion of *figura*. In this treatise *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine relied on this criterion in order to clarify some difficult passages in the New Testament. For instance, the seemingly monstrous injunction in John 6:53 — "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" — must be understood *figuraliter*:

"It is therefore a *figura*, enjoining that we should have a share in the sufferings of our Lord, and that we should retain a sweet and profitable memory of the fact that his flesh was wounded and crucified for us."

But in another passage of *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine pointed to the excesses of a figurative interpretation of the Bible. We must refrain, he insisted, from projecting into the Bible the customs of the time and place in which we readers live (III. 10. 15):

"But since humanity is inclined to estimate sins, not on the basis of importance of the passion involved in them, but rather on the basis of their own customs, so that they consider something to be culpable in accordance with the way it is reprimanded and condemned ordinarily in their own place and time, and, at the same time, consider it to be virtuous and praiseworthy in so far as the customs of those among whom they live would so incline them, it so happens that if the Bible commends something despised by the customs of the listeners, or condemns what those customs do not condemn, they take the biblical locution as figurative if they accept it as an authority. However, the Bible teaches nothing but charity..."

This principle implied that "careful attention is... to be paid to what is proper to places, times, and persons lest we condemn the shameful too hastily." In some cases, Augustine says, we must read the Bible both on a literal and a figurative level — once again, because customs since then have changed (III. 12. 19):

"The just men of the past imagined and foretold the heavenly Kingdom in terms of an earthly kingdom. The necessity for a sufficient number of children was responsible for the blameless custom by which one

man had several wives at the same time... And whatever is so narrated is to be taken not only historically and literally, but also figuratively and prophetically (*non solum historice ac proprie, sed etiam figurate ac prophetice acceptum interpretandum est*) so that it is to be interpreted for the end of charity, either as it applies to God, to one's neighbor, or both."

In the light of the divine accommodation to the history of mankind, which explained the existence of ancient customs like the patriarchs' polygamy, the Bible had to be read both prophetically and historically. Augustine's attitude towards Jewish sacrifices was inspired by the need to evaluate customs according to "the condition of their times". The Roman senator Volusianus once raised a provocative question: How could God welcome the new Christian sacrifices and reject the old ones? Did He ever change His mind? In his reply, addressed to the imperial commissioner Flavius Marcellinus, Augustine relied upon the notion of accommodation.

Let us first hear Augustine's voice:

"The wide range opened up by this question may be seen by anyone who is competent and careful to observe the contrast between the beautiful and the suitable, examples of which are scattered, we may say, throughout the universe. For the beautiful, to which the ugly and deformed is opposed, is estimated and praised according to what it is in itself. But the suitable, to which the incongruous is opposed, depends on something else to which it is bound, and is estimated not according to what it is in itself, but according to that with which it is connected: the contrast, also, between becoming and unbecoming is either the same, or at least regarded as the same. Now apply what we have said to the subject in hand. The divine institution of sacrifice was suitable in the former dispensation, but is not suitable now. For the change suitable to the present age has been enjoined by God, who knows infinitely better than man what is fitting for every age..."

In order to understand this crucial passage one has to recall that Augustine's first literary work was a treatise on *De pulchro et apto* (On the beautiful and the suitable) dedicated to a Roman orator born in Syria and educated in Greece (*Conf.* IV, xiii, 20). In his *Confessions*, Augustine gave a hint of the content of this treatise, which was at that time already unavailable to him and has been lost ever since; he also retrospectively criticized its Manichean perspective (IV, xv, 4). As both the title and Augustine's succinct recollection suggests, the treatise dealt with the distinction between beautiful and suitable, "pulchrum" and "aptum" (or "accommodatum"). The distinction had been discussed by Plato in his *Hippias Major*, and had clearly become part of the Platonic

legacy. But Augustine, who had little Greek, must have had an indirect access to these topics through Cicero's writings, which he had read passionately in his youth. In the aforementioned passage, Augustine echoed a long argument made by Cicero in his *De oratore* (55 B. C. E.), which, notwithstanding a deferential allusion to Plato, had a definitely unplatonic ring. Cicero started from an apparently obvious remark: there is in nature "a multiplicity of things that are different from one another and yet are esteemed as having a similar nature." This seemingly innocuous principle was then projected first into the arts, both visual and verbal, then into rhetoric, transforming the notion of literary and rhetorical genre into something close to our notion of individual style. Within a single art, like sculpture, Cicero wrote, we have excellent artists like Myro, Polyclitus, Lysippus, whose extreme diversity is appreciated by everybody. The same can be said about painting or poetry. Latin poets like Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius are as different from one from the other as the Greek poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides: all of them are nearly equally praised "in their various genre of writing". Their excellence is incomparable; perfection, as Cicero showed by giving succinct definitions of the characteristics of various orators, is reached by every artist in his own way. But ultimately, Cicero said; "if we could scrutinize all the orators from every place and every time, would we not conclude that there are as many genres as there are orators"?

We are far away from Plato's search for a universal idea of Beauty. Cicero explicitly rejected the notion of an all-embracing genre of oratory that would be appropriate for all causes, all audiences, all orators and all circumstances. The only advice he gave to his readers was to choose a style — high, low or middle — that would be appropriate to the legal case they would be dealing with (III, 54, 210-212).

Augustine had learned, first as a student, then as a teacher of rhetoric, to use technical words like *aptum* and *accommodatum*, the Latin equivalents of the Greek word *prepon*. His Christian theology was strongly affected by his early rhetorical training; more specifically, I would argue, his notion of divine accommodation had a definite rhetorical origin, which he made explicit in addressing himself, albeit indirectly, to Volusianus, the Roman senator. In approaching the relationship between Christians and Jews, Augustine relied upon a conceptual framework provided by his youthful reflections on the relationship between *pulchrum* and *aptum*, between universal beauty and appropriateness to specific conditions. Cicero had stressed that in the realms of the visual and verbal arts excellence and diversity were not incompatible. But his argument, notwithstanding an allusion to orators "of any time", was basically achronic. Augustine took the same model but projected it into

a temporal dimension. The seasons of the year and the ages of human life show, Augustine wrote, that both nature and human activities "change according to the needs of times by following a certain rhythm, but this does not affect the rhythm of their change". Then he shifted to historical time, describing God as both "the unchangeable Governor" and "the unchangeable Creator of mutable things, ordering all events in His providence until the beauty of the completed course of time, the component parts of which are the dispensations adapted to each successive age, shall be finished, like the grand melody of some ineffably wise master of song..." Cicero's reflections on the nature of art and poetry paved the way to Augustine's praise of the beauty of history (*universi saeculi pulchritudo*) as a melodious song, which justified divine immutability and historical change, the truth of the Jewish sacrifices in their own time as well as of the Christian sacraments that had superseded them.

Ancient historians, from Thucydides to Polybius, notwithstanding their stress on the immutability of human nature, had understood that institutions and customs change. Augustine was also aware of this. In his *De doctrina christiana* (III. 12. 19) he noticed: "Although the ancient Romans considered it shameful to wear tunics stretching to the ankles and with long sleeves, now it is shameful for a well-born man not to wear a tunic of that type when he puts one on": a remark which was far from trivial, since it provided an example of historical change to be compared with the patriarchs' polygamy. But usually Augustine regarded the Jewish past as a special case, connected to the Christian present through a typological, not an analogical relationship. In order to articulate the notion that the Old Testament was at the same time true and superseded, Augustine looked for an approach which involved a less "jealous" (*Ex.* 3: 14; *Deut.*, 4: 24) attitude towards truth. He found the seeds of such an approach in Cicero's argument that artistic excellence is intrinsically beyond comparison.

"If Herodotus was the father of history, the fathers of meaning in history were the Jews," Yerushalmi recalled. But neither the Greeks nor the Jews ever thought of something comparable to our notion of historical perspective. Only a Christian like Augustine, reflecting on the fateful relationship between Christians and Jews, between the Old and the New Testament, could have come to the idea that — eventually reinforced by Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* — became a crucial element of historical consciousness: that the past must be understood both in its own terms and as a link in a chain which ultimately leads to us. I would like to suggest that this ambivalence is a secularized projection of the Christian ambivalence towards the Jews.

II

Augustine compared the beauty of history, *universi saeculi pulchritudo*, to a melody based on a harmonious variety of sounds. The succession of centuries, he wrote in his *De vera religione*, is like a song which nobody can hear in its entirety. Readers familiar with Augustine's *Confessions* and with the role played by music in its profound reflections on time will not be surprised by these comparisons. Since faith is based on hearing (*fides ex auditu*), Augustine could oppose human history, the time of faith and hearing, to eternity, the timeless contemplation of God.

We, on the contrary, are irresistibly drawn to translate Augustine's acoustic metaphors into visual ones, involving distance and perspective. In a sense, this sensorial shift is far from surprising. The printing press made images and books enormously cheaper, contributing to what has been called either the triumph of sight, or — more recently — the "scopic regime of modernity". But I wonder whether such a vague category can explain our propensity for visual metaphors. Much more intriguing is the parallel, repeatedly stressed by Erwin Panofsky, between the invention of linear perspective made in the Italian Renaissance and the simultaneous emergence of a critical attitude towards the past. A concrete link to Panofsky's arresting convergence is provided, as Gisela Bock suggested in a very perceptive essay, by a famous (although often overlooked) text: the dedication to Machiavelli's *Il Principe*.

Written in 1513-1514, *Il Principe* (The Prince) was published posthumously in 1532, five years after Machiavelli's death; it immediately became a *succès de scandale*. The little book — *opusculo*, as Machiavelli called it — originally addressed to Giuliano de Medici had been later dedicated to Lorenzo di Piero de Medici Duke of Urbino, a nephew of Pope Leo X and a grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The publication of *The Prince*, which originated in a Medicean milieu, still bore the dedication to the Duke of Urbino, who had died in 1519. In this short, dense address, Machiavelli admitted his boldness in making rules to princely power, notwithstanding his humble birth. Then, in order to counteract for possible criticism, Machiavelli made a comparison:

"For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places, and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people."

This passage has been convincingly interpreted as an allusion to a painter who had become famous all over Italy for many things, including his landscapes: Leonardo da Vinci. At the end of 1502, between

October and December, Machiavelli spent a few months in Imola as an official ambassador of the Florentine Republic at the court of Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI and the much dreaded Duke of Romagna. During his stay at Imola, Machiavelli must have met Leonardo, who had been hired by Cesare Borgia as a military engineer. A few months later, Leonardo gave a stunning example of his craftsmanship in sketching "the nature of low places from atop", in his famous map of Imola.

In May 1504, Machiavelli signed an advance payment to Leonardo for a fresco on a wall of Palazzo della Signoria, representing an episode of Florentine history: the *Battle of Anghiari*. The fresco was left unfinished and is now lost. A short description of the same battle, in the handwriting of Machiavelli's secretary, Agostino Vespucci, was found among Leonardo's papers, in the so-called *Codice Atlantico*. In the light of this tantalizing but scanty evidence, the conversations that presumably took place between those two men are only a matter of speculation. But Machiavelli's passionate concern for "la verità effettuale della cosa", "the truth of the thing as it is", as well as his scornful dismissal of those who wrote about ideal, purely imaginary states (Principe, ch. XV) may well have been, if not inspired, at least reinforced by Leonardo's detached, analytic approach to reality.

The aforementioned quotation from *The Prince* is followed by the famous, or infamous, remark about the nature of power: a man who tries to be good in all circumstances, Machiavelli writes, will be ruined, since he must live among so many people who are not good. Machiavelli's alleged cynicism — more appropriately, his tragic awareness that reality is as it is — was in a sense the outcome of his passionate plea for theoretical detachment. The lessons he drew from the craft of perspective, in comparing himself to "those who sketch landscapes", can be spelled out as follows: 1) different points of view lead to different representations of political reality; 2) the prince's and the people's representations of their own respective position is equally limited; 3) the only way to achieve objectivity is to be, in a metaphorical sense, a distant observer: an outsider — as Machiavelli himself was in 1513-1514.

We are far from the Augustinian model: not so much because Machiavelli's cognitive metaphor was based on sight, rather than on hearing, but, more importantly, because instead of a model based on divine accommodation, leading from truth (Judaism) to superior truth (Christianity), Machiavelli sketched a secular model based on conflict. Representations of political reality are conflictual, Machiavelli tells us, because political reality, rooted in human nature, is inevitably conflictual. Knowledge of human reality *as it is* can indeed be achieved, but only

through a specific point of view. Machiavelli's emphasis on conflict was based on his "long experience of modern things and continuous reading of the ancient" (*una lunga esperienza delle cose moderne et una continua lezione delle antiche*), as he wrote in his dedication to the *Prince*. Both his political activity and his study of Roman history helped Machiavelli to develop the strikingly original view put forward in a famous chapter of his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (I, 4): "Discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both free and powerful" — a view reworked but not abandoned in his later *Storie Fiorentine*.

Since its publication, Machiavelli's *Prince* had been the target of debates, praise and refutations that went on for centuries (and in a sense still do). An attempt to trace the specific impact of the passage in which Machiavelli compared himself to "those who sketch landscapes" might seem a waste of time. The "scopic regime of modernity" would provide a quicker explanation. But a slower, more analytic approach may lead to some unexpected results.

In 1646, more than one hundred years after its posthumous publication, Machiavelli's *Prince* was the center of an exchange of letters between Descartes and his affectionate pupil, Elisabeth, Princess of Palatinate. After having read and commented on a draft of Descartes's *Traité des passions de l'âme* (Treatise of Soul's Passions), Elisabeth asked Descartes about his opinions concerning social and political life (*la vie civile*). They decided to read Machiavelli's *Prince* together. Either in August or in September 1646, Descartes, then in Holland, addressed to Elisabeth in Berlin a detailed comment on several passages of the *Prince*, albeit neither Machiavelli's name nor the title of his book were mentioned. This is not surprising: the *Prince*, which had been included in the Index of Prohibited Books, was regarded as an impious and heretical work by Catholic and Protestants alike — and certainly unfit for a royal Princess. In order to hide their exchange of letters on such a dangerous subject, Elisabeth asked Descartes to send his correspondence to her younger sister, Sophie, then in her teens. Descartes complied and at the end of his letter prudently suggested that Elisabeth use a cipher in her further letters (which she didn't).

The relevance of these details will appear soon. For the moment I will limit myself to noting that Machiavelli's comparison with "those who sketch landscapes" is among the passages that Descartes quoted (in French) and commented upon. In some cases, as in this one, he expressed his disagreement. "A pencil can only represent things from afar," he wrote, "but the actions of Princes are often inspired by circumstances that are so private that they can be guessed only by the Princes

themselves, or by somebody who for a long time has shared their secrets."

By stressing the special role of the princes, Descartes reestablished the hierarchy (both social and cognitive) that Machiavelli had subverted with his egalitarian metaphor.

The letters exchanged between Descartes and Elisabeth remained with Sophie, who later became Electress of Hannover. A few decades later, Leibniz, Sophie's *protégé*, then a passionate hunter of Descartes's manuscripts and letters, must have found them. Leibniz was obviously familiar with Machiavelli's *Prince*: but the comment made by Descartes on the comparison with "those who sketch landscapes" must have attracted his attention. The double reference to Descartes, and to Machiavelli, must have inspired a famous passage in the *Monadologie*:

"Just as the same city viewed from different sides appears to be different and to be, as it were, multiplied in perspectives, so the infinite multitude of simple substances, which seem to be so many different universes, are nevertheless only the perspectives of a single universe according to the different points of view of every Monad."

Perspective, for both Machiavelli and Leibniz, was a cognitive metaphor that allowed the construction of a model based on a plurality of viewpoints. But Machiavelli's model was based on conflict, Leibniz's on the harmonious coexistence of an infinite multiplicity of substances, which ultimately implied the nonexistence of evil. In his *Théodicée*, Leibniz spoke of "the inventions of perspective", the anamorphic images whose confused aspect vanishes as soon as they are seen either from a specific point of view or through a mirror, and compared them to the inadequacies and imperfections of the little worlds which are overcome by the perfection of the Great World, that is God. Echoes of these theological concerns can be found in the later varieties of *Historismus*. At the very beginning of this tradition we find the theologian and philosopher Johann Martin Chladenius, whose highly original developments of Leibniz's thought have been brilliantly analyzed by Reinhart Koselleck, among others. Chladenius argued that both the historians' evidence, whenever it is the result of human intention, and the historians' writings are connected to distinct *Sehe-Punckte*, or "view-points" — an expression which, he remarked, Leibniz had used, probably for the first time, in a general, not strictly optical sense. But the emphasis on the divergence, more than on the ultimate harmony, between the accounts of any historical event shows that Chladenius had read Leibniz through Machiavelli. "A rebellion will be perceived in different ways by a faithful subject, a rebel, a foreigner, a courtier, a citizen, a peasant": this remark by Chladenius, which seems obvious today (but for a long time wasn't

obvious at all), rephrased Machiavelli's opposition between the prince, as viewed by the people, and the people as viewed by the prince. This example shows that the cognitive models I am talking about can be fully appreciated only in a *longue durée* perspective — a word which I use deliberately, not in order to make a silly pun, but for reasons I will explain soon.

The three models that had been sketched by Augustine in the Vth century, by Machiavelli in the XVIth century, and by Leibniz in the XVIIth century, can be associated, for the sake of simplicity, with accommodation, conflict, and multiplicity. A few examples will suffice to stress their long-term impact. Hegel's philosophy of history combined Machiavelli's conflictual model with a secularized version of Augustinian accommodation. The reworking of the conflictual model in the work of Karl Marx, that great admirer of Machiavelli, is also obvious. And there is no need to recall the crucial role played by perspectivism in Nietzsche's intellectual fight against positivist objectivity. Metaphors related to distance and perspective played and still play an important role in our intellectual tradition.

III

In the first part of my talk I mentioned the Christian ambivalence towards the Jews. This was of course an intrinsic feature of the Christian religion since its very beginnings. In his letter to the Romans (11: 16ff.), Paul, the Jewish "apostle to the Gentiles", had expressed his deeply ambivalent feelings through a comparison: the Gentiles converted to Christianity were a wild olive tree, which had been grafted upon a good olive tree (the Jews), whose branches had been broken as a punishment for their infidelity. Later, distance and continuity were conveyed through the claim that Christians were "the true Israel", *verus Israel*: a highly polemical self-definition, addressed on the one hand against the Jews, on the other against those Christians who, like Markion in the 2nd century, thought that Jesus, the benevolent God, had nothing to do with the Evil God of the Old Testament. Markion's ideas never did completely disappear from Christian culture or subculture, but nor did they prevail: otherwise we would not be here, I guess (a safe guess, since it cannot be tested) discussing distance and perspective. Markion's defeat is embodied by the Christian Bible, displaying the physical contiguity of the two Testaments within a single volume or *codex*. The consequences of that defeat cannot be overrated. Continuity and distance, closeness and hostility, continued to shape the relationship — probably unique in the

history of world religions — between Christians and Jews. A far from obvious consequence of this obvious fact was Augustine's argument that Jewish rituals were at the same time true and superseded: a claim that a cultivated pagan like Volusianus, the Roman senator who had triggered it with his questions, must have regarded as a sheer absurdity.

As Augustine stressed in his *De civitate Dei* (XII, 4, 1) we know that Plato's teaching took place once, and only once, in Athens, just as we know that Jesus Christ died once, and only once, for our sins. The emphasis on the uniqueness of the Incarnation led to a different perception of human history. The core of the current historiographical paradigm is, I would argue, a secularized version of the accommodation model, combined with conflict and/or multiplicity, in various proportions. Metaphors like perspective, points of view, and so forth, graphically embody this approach to the past. As you have seen, I could not refrain from using these metaphors in my talk: a proof, albeit minuscule, of their pervasiveness in current historiographical discourse. But their secular garb should not conceal their origin, which is Augustinian. Our cognitive approach to the past has been affected by a Christian attitude of superiority towards the Jews. To put it differently: the words *verus Israel*, "the true Israel", as a self-definition of Christianity, were the birthplace of a conception of historical truth that is still — to use a deliberately comprehensive expression — our own.

I found this finding rather disturbing — a feeling which others, both Jews and non-Jews, might also share. But after all, the context in which an idea originates does not imply an iron constraint on its later uses. Augustine interpreted the plunder of Egyptian silver and gold jewelry by the children of Israel (*Exodus*, XII, 35-36) as a model for the Christian attitude towards the cultural legacy of the pagans. As we know, all cultural legacies are constantly appropriated and reworked. Who will plunder and appropriate our notion of history, possibly rejecting its conceptual core, embodied in the metaphor of perspective?

I have no answer to this question. But there is no doubt that two of three models I identified in my talk have been recently challenged, either directly or indirectly, and with different degrees of relevance. The accommodation model is directly threatened by fundamentalists of all kinds; the conflictual model has been scornfully rejected as a piece of antic by those who believe that history has come (as they pompously say) to an end. The multiplicity model, by contrast, has become more and more fashionable, although in a skeptical version that assumes that each group in society — whether based on gender, or on ethnicity, or on religion and so forth — is committed to its own set of values, and ultimately enclosed within it. Perspective, we are told, is good because it

emphasizes subjectivity; it is also bad because it emphasizes intellectual distance instead of emotional closeness. The aforementioned argument that memory, being closer to lived experience, is more effective than history in establishing a vital relationship with the past, also comes from this anti-intellectual mood.

An adequate comment on these attitudes would require another talk. I will limit myself to one remark. Fundamentalist and neoskeptics either reject or ignore what made perspective a powerful cognitive metaphor in the past: the tension between subjective standpoints and objective testable truths, guaranteed either by reality (as in Machiavelli) or by God (as in Leibniz). If this tension is kept alive, perspective, far from being a stumbling block, becomes a bridge where both scientists and social scientists can meet, engaging themselves in fruitful exchanges and even more fruitful disagreements.