

## Preface

The studies gathered in this volume deal with the metaphysical concept of potency, considered in the sense that the modern philosophical lexicon since Spinoza (*potentia*) and Nietzsche (*Macht*) has in the main attributed to it. It is a very different concept from the original Greek *dynamis*, which Aristotle elaborated extensively in his *Metaphysics*. Actually, a radical critical reinterpretation of these texts – authentic sources of our Western philosophy – is certainly called for today.

The discussion that follows begins with the idea of the possibility that there exists an autonomous logic intrinsic to the metaphysical concept of potency, entirely immanent to it: a *logos* of potency which invests at the same time the theological dimension and the specifically theoretical dimension. To get to the crux of the matter: is there a *logos* capable of limiting the very power of God? This question places in strict relation an issue (the one about *logos*) that arises from classical Greek philosophy with the theological knowledge which originates from Jewish biblical exegesis. Two completely unrelated universes. Nevertheless, on a historical plane there indeed existed a link between these disparate areas, and it marked the destiny of the West. As Leo Strauss has masterfully shown, Christianity has constituted for millennia, among many contradictions, something like a juncture between two hitherto unrelated worlds: Greek philosophy and biblical revelation. And it has formed on this basis an entire civilisation: ours, which is now ending. It is therefore now even more fitting to consider the question of the «limits of God», specifically

the logical rules which in some manner «limit» God's very action (or, more precisely, of that figure which incessant human mythopoeic activity has come to call 'God'), in the consideration that this question takes its cue from the profound need, before St Paul perhaps conceivable but in practice unworkable, of a relationship between these two extremely different worlds. Our West, with its grandiose but devastating philosophical rationalism, was born from this.

The first chapter of this volume therefore examines the hypothesis of a proto-rationalist Being «permeated by logos», and we immediately note a clash «at several removes» between two giants of modern philosophy, Leibniz and Spinoza. Their solutions to the metaphysical problem are radically divergent, yet equally representative of the highest level to which the issue can be raised. At the end of this chapter we make an explicit interpretive hypothesis – what might be called a 'neo-Spinozan' one – which underpins the entire system of this essay.

In the second chapter the problem is to examine how Spinoza's metaphysical apparatus relates to the philosophical tradition of the past, from Aristotle to the Arabic interpretations (first of all Averroes') of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: namely the specific way in which Spinoza's ontology is opposed both to Greek-Arabic «necessitarianism» and to the naive anthropomorphism of Jewish theology, derived from Revelation. The issue involves the ways in which the philosophy of law of the Western cultural tradition – from Augustine to Aquinas, and from Duns Scotus to Ockham – formulates the concepts of «natural law» and «natural right».

In the third chapter this problem is further investigated in its inner relationships, which concern the opposition between *potentia Dei absoluta* and *potentia Dei ordinata*, and the theoretical result reached is to point out, in direct disaccord with the canonic system of Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, a substantial difference between the «jurisprudential model» of *potentia Dei absoluta* in Duns Scotus and

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the «logical model» of the same *potentia Dei absoluta* in William of Ockham.

This leads, in the fourth chapter, to a re-examination of the inherently problematic concept of a «political theology» mainly regarding the link between «creation (*ab aeterno*)» and «political constitution», the latter being considered in its profound ontological basis. We show how the Spinozan-Nietzschean hypothesis of «potency» cannot but exclude any modern form of «theological-political constitutionalism», namely any modern mode of limitation – largely determined by ethical motivations, or by the primacy of ethics over ontology: ethics of will over ontology of potency – of action exerted by potency itself. Here, we might say, Spinoza and Nietzsche come into play as a team against Kant and against all of Enlightenment natural law, revealing the weaknesses of the latter.

At this point another theorist joins the game: the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt, who from the standpoint of an ultra-mature modernity interprets the array of forms inherited from classical metaphysics, allowing us today to establish an unexpected link between the ontological dimension of potency and the concept, juridical before political – and political in the strong sense – of «constituent power». The ways in which this concept, with its various theoretical issues, is reflected in our contemporary world – and precisely in our present historical period, which preludes the end of the West, understood as a horizon we have inhabited until now – is the subject of the last chapter of this essay, clarified by three illustrative corollaries: the first on the origins of modern conventionalist ethics, the second on the concept of political theology, the third on the rhetoric of ethical universalism in Jürgen Habermas. This is a finale short on hope but anchored in a solid, realistic analysis of what has become our contemporaneity.

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