Vanity and Faith

Ideas on the future of History

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I. Cassiopeia, or the incapacity to become

In the human being there exist tendencies toward certain kinds of acts: tendencies that issue from his own nature. Nature is what settles itself through practice, through doing across time. Nature is, fundamentally, repetition. The tendency to perform certain kinds of acts is experienced by every member of the species, and has been so since consciousness first welled up out of us. These tendencies are likewise experienced, and therefore observable, in great human collectivities. What happens on a small or minimal scale also happens on greater dimensions.

These tendencies seem to want to tell us that what has been will continue to be, always with the footnote that of course this will not occur in the same form: the modes will vary while the content endures. It is in the development of peoples that these tendencies are transmuted into the myths and burdens that torment or fortify those who live and proliferate beneath their yoke. What is generally passed over, whether by experience itself or by the theoretical elaborations that come after, is that tendencies are the product of a weight

which almost by definition impregnates processes in such a manner that the mobility supposed by every moment, for one reason or another, never comes to unfold.

There are tendencies in what we call history, and these threaten in permanent fashion the idea of progress, for the suspicion always lingers that things, sooner or later, return to their channel. There is a great direction in history, and that direction expresses itself through the tendencies. Part of what is problematic in all of this lies in the fact that these tendencies tend to be seasoned with a certain *tragic* atmosphere, a sort of sentiment that everything in the end leads to ruin and extinction. There is much self-love in such tendencies, because such versions of them are too much under the influence of those who first gave them being; in them abound the genius and the miseries of the beings who brought them into the world.

The human itinerary is climatized by the aesthetic fragrance of those who forge the real, of those who, with their acts or with their lack of them, lead the masses down the sinister alleys of a destiny that to the vulgar always shows itself as indefinite. It is clear that perfection is not one of the traits with which power has managed to impregnate itself throughout this whole journey, but that is no more than a minor detail. Here we speak of enormous visions, ones that encompass territories and worlds that either have never been thought, or, if they have, have been so only very peripherally and fragmentarily, thanks to the intervention of beings of a superior sensibility, beings who, owing to the immeasurable weight of the task, tended to be destroyed in the carrying it out.

The tendencies are important because they show us that what is, *is*. From this it becomes clear that the idea of an inexistent center makes no sense, and that everything that advances is trapped in its own dream.

II. Opening to the marginal idea

What, then, is it about? Perhaps the only way of answering this (or rather, the only way of bringing forth some kind of *clue* as to how these forces operate) lies in accepting two ideas: first, that the arbitrary constitutes us as humans; second, that the arbitrary is not synonymous with will but with obedience.

Is it possible to obey if the origin of the domination is unknown? The answer demands that we assert that the question is badly posed, because it presupposes that we *do not know* the origin of the domination, that we *do not know* that which imposes its will upon our existences. But this is not so: we know very well what guides our existences, the tendencies. Nevertheless, having an idea that what happens in the worlds is the result of a great movement does not necessarily imply knowledge, and even less a commitment with such dynamics. How could it? What the twentieth century showed us was the logical outcome of the accumulation of convictions, and none of them converged; in fact they contradicted one another.

The key here is to take note that such contradiction was not really contradiction at all, that it was only a matter of perspectives. As humans we are extremely vulnerable to the idea that our subjectivity, and the pain it carries implicit within it, is the irreducible sign of a more or less defined moral order. But that is evidently something of great danger. It is very difficult to conceive of processes that are alien to us, that dispense with us, and that in fact conceive of us as elements that structurally muddy or hinder the tendency. That way of observing, of understanding things, is proper only to one who has positioned himself at too small an altitude.

What matters here is being capable of observing the tendencies (that is very important), but more important still is being capable of observing the *great tendency*: that one to which all other tendencies, in the manner of the tributaries of a river, end up converging; the one which integrates them all and is capable of making of all of them something not merely quantitatively distinct but qualitatively distinct.

One must also accept the limits of our concepts, full of words and imperfections, ferocious examples of what it means to inhabit a *small tendency*. We do not yet possess the tools to be able to operate at a different level, but that is only a matter of time; science has that as its ultimate objective, even if part of the scientific world believes itself to enjoy a certain freedom of action, or holds the certainly infantile idea of being guided solely by the chaotic emergence of phenomena.

This is a moment that tells us, fundamentally, one thing: one must position oneself, take sides, leave aside any idea relating to possible communions between opposing camps. We are in a moment in which what matters most is not to show one's arms, to hide oneself, to take advantage of the fact that there is still something resembling a dark forest, to wait crouched until the moment to attack arrives.

III. Life is a lie

Filled with myths, filled with heroes, filled with the disasters of those who preceded us, completely drowned in the atmosphere imposed upon us by force of education and silence. Now, in the manner of beheaded princes who wander old castles frightening the new guests, we try to recover something of that humanity they so insisted on defining for us, and which until now only a few have managed to theorize in any decent fashion. Was all this flesh not enough?

We are now in the age of science, instrument of the fanatic and of the ascetic, who from a spectral language control the world little by little, for the good of the majority, in spite of the fact that the latter, due to a stupidity vainly denounceable, believes the contrary. It is through all this culture, the amniotic fluid that nourishes us and at the same time threatens to put an end to our lives, that the best answers to the titanic muddle in which we find ourselves caught are offered.

It is through a more advanced mathematics, capable of embracing all that is and, most importantly, all that has been, that the human being will be able to touch this great cage called the *great tendency*. The historical discipline is the one called to organize this great reconstruction. We speak here of reconstruction because what is at stake is putting an end to the forms of destruction that have existed throughout the human passage.

It is historians who will have, in good measure, to unite the worlds of the humanities and of the exact sciences, being experts in neither in particular, but with one foot in each, in order to guide (if such a word can still be uttered without embarrassment). That, in any case, is the fundamental idea: to guide. This is necessary because the task is gigantic, of such a size that

a good part of what we are today capable of theorizing about it will surely be called into question very soon, not so much in its general lines as in its technical details.

A good part of what we will be will depend in good measure on the development of advanced technology, and especially on artificial intelligences: machines capable of many things, but (and this is what interests us most as historians) fundamentally capable of designing ways of *encompassing what is* that are radically distinct from those we ourselves could provide. The forms matter little so long as they do not impede the content; it is the latter that must remain unaltered, assuming we will still know how to recognize it.

It is historians of the present and the future, then, who are called to throw light, with all the tools that technique places at their disposal, upon the tendencies of human development, and to see whether it is possible to find anything more than tendencies: perhaps some clue as to the sense of history. We are, of course, in a moment of transition, undergoing technological changes of great potency, which can in a moment radically alter our perspectives. We do not find ourselves in any linear development, for several orientations mingle and easily confuse the careless observer.

It is in the tendencies that we must track down the sign that betrays or constructs that which we call the human being. While awaiting a better prognosis, we shut ourselves up with our instruments and begin the reception of any minimally viable signal. It is one idea among others, with a center as black as a black sun.

IV. To cease being born

The task of the historians, then (if the task is theirs and not something we are only naming as theirs out of habit), will be that of constructing the map from which the great reconstruction may be carried out. This will lead us to the destruction of the idea of *world*, and will open existence to the acceptance that all realities exist simultaneously, though this will not entail accepting any sort of stillness or notion of perpetual salvation. Everything will be delimited, constrained within our literal *world-system*, with its own strengths but also

with its defenselessnesses, which will generally manifest themselves in matters relating to the dimensionality of existential possibilities.

The idea of memory will likewise be resignified, insofar as it will no longer be a phenomenon proper to those who in one way or another experience the world and who, through that same experience, store away patterns which they may afterwards, to a greater or lesser extent, reuse or simply re-experience. All of this expands the traditional field or notion of what history is and is not.

This is especially telling: if the historical discipline is to be about anything, it will be about giving the most faithful possible account of the events of the past, and about ever better ways of preparing the present to assume the arrival of the past. In a certain way an inversion of the notion of time will take place: one always speaks of the past as something that lies behind and of the future as something that lies ahead.

The tasks of human and non-human historians will certainly not be limited to the construction of the *great map*, even if this is undoubtedly, at least in the first instance, their most important task. They will also be fundamental as regards the future practices of law, considering that notions of the latter founded essentially on the criterion of judges will be massively replaced by systems that seek to make possible the precise visualization of what has occurred in any conflict or judiciable situation, a prospect at which one should perhaps not rush to rejoice.

It is therefore a scenario at the very least confused that history will experience in the time to come, finding itself forced to leave behind, slowly but systematically, the notions which comprehend it as a practice essentially devoted to the precarious collection of data and to interpretation. All the humanities will undergo similar changes. All will, little by little, modify the perspectives that ground them solely upon the idea of certain *mysteries* or questions supposedly unencompassable by logic and mathematics.

We will live through a true *disenchantment of the world*, but with results very different from those a conservative mentality might foresee. The veil that covers many of the phenomena still held captive by a certain aura, a certain darkness, will be exposed in all its minutiae,

without this implying, as the vulgar mentality believes, any loss of these phenomena, but rather the opportunity of experiencing through them enjoyments much more profound and, if the word still applies on the other side of this passage, ultimately much more human.

In good measure, then, what is at stake is setting fire to the brazier of becoming and making the whole animal boil, leaving no possible room for speculation.