

**“Different Times are
not Simultaneous,
but Successive”:
Spinoza between
Jacobi and Herder**

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Abstract: With the *Letters to Moses Mendelssohn on the doctrine of Spinoza* Jacobi puts in place an intervention of great importance in the theoretical-political conjuncture of the *Aufklärung*: it lets enter the scene the Spinoza's Ghost by projecting it on Leibniz, Lessing, and Kant. In particular, he will accuse Kant of having proposed, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a theory of space and time in the "Geist des Spinoza". In this article I reconstruct the reasons that have allowed Jacobi to conduct this operation by putting it in tension with the criticisms of the "transcendental aesthetics" that we find in Herder's *Metacritica*, where a theory of plural temporality inspired by Spinoza is explicitly affirmed against Kant.

Keywords: Jacobi, Herder, Kant, space, time, succession, causality

The thesis of the uniqueness of time, or the impossibility of its plurality, has its roots at the origins of western philosophy: both Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Physics*, denying the infinity of worlds against Democritus, also deny the existence of multiple simultaneous times. In *Physics* IV, Aristotle writes:

Some assert that time is the movement of the whole, others that it is the sphere itself. [...] Besides, if there were more heavens [οὐρανοί] than one, the movement of any of them equally would be time, so that there would be many times at the same time [πολλοὶ χρόνοι ἅμα].¹

This is a conclusion which is obviously absurd for Aristotle. Although Spinoza openly takes the side of an ancient materialist tradition including Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius in a famous letter on the question of ghosts, the interpretive tradition has had difficulty identifying this *topos* in Spinoza for several reasons. Spinoza's reference to Lucretius is particularly interesting in this sense, insofar as the Latin poet explicitly references a plurality of times. In book four of *De rerum natura* he writes:

[...] in one time perceived by us, that is, while one word is being uttered, many times are lurking which reason understands to be there.

[...] tempore in uno,
cum sentimus, id est cum vox emittitur una,
tempora multa latent, ratio quae comperit esse².

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1 Aristotle 1984, p. 370.

2 Lucretius 1975, p. 339. Translation modified.

'In one time [...] many times are lurking.' For what reason is a Lucretius-Spinoza tradition on the issue of the multiplicity of times simply unthinkable for us? What has constituted this 'internal darkness' of our gaze is undoubtedly the idealist reading of Spinoza, a reading that made time, and with it everything that pertains to the finite, a mere illusion produced by the imagination. However, what is interesting is that wherever Spinozism was not interpreted in these terms, it was read as a theory of the uniqueness of space and time.

1. Jacobi's denunciation: Kant as Spinozist

Jacobi's text *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* provides the trigger for the Spinoza-Renaissance at the end of the eighteenth century, making Lessing's Spinozism declaration public: *Hen kai pan, ich weiss nicht anders*. This statement caused a great scandal in the German 'official' culture. Published in 1785, four years after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Jacobi proposes a complete summary exposition of Spinoza's philosophy in 44 theses. Theses six and seven present the relation between the infinite and finite as follows:

VI. Hence the finite is in the infinite, so that the sum [*Inbegriff*] of all finite things, equally containing within itself the whole of eternity at every moment [*in jedem Momente*], past, present, and future, is one and the same as the infinite thing itself.

VII. This sum is not an absurd composition [*Zusammensetzung*] of finite things, together constituting an infinite, but a whole [*ein Ganzes*] in the strictest sense, whose parts can only be thought within it and according to it.³

In a note by way of explication, Jacobi cites two passages from the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, claiming that they 'are entirely in the spirit of Spinoza [*die ganz im Geiste des Spinoza sind*]':

One can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition [*Zusammensetzung*] would be impossible), but rather are only thought in it. [Space] is essentially single; the manifold in it, thus also the general concept of spaces in general, rests merely on limitations [*Einschränkungen*].⁴

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3 Jacobi 1994, pp. 217–218. Translation modified.

4 Kant 1998, p. 175. Cited in Jacobi 1994, p. 218. Translation modified.

The infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitations [*Einschränkungen*] of a single time grounding it. The original representation **time** must therefore be given as unlimited. But where the parts themselves and every magnitude of an object can be determinately represented only through limitation, there the entire representation cannot be given through concepts, (<for they contain only partial representations>), but immediate intuition must ground them.⁵

Naturally, Jacobi's use of Kant is anything but naive: using passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to explain the Spinozist theory of space and time means casting a shadow over Kantian theory, after having accused both Leibniz as well as Lessing of Spinozism. In the last analysis it means claiming that every path of reason leads to Spinozism, that is, to fatalism and atheism. Moreover, what Jacobi simply alludes to was explicitly affirmed in an anonymously published review (the author is probably Andrea Pistorius) of the 'Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek', wherein at the heart of the Pantheism controversy, 'the criticism was advanced that at bottom the conception of the ideality of space and time could be nothing but Spinoza's unique substance.'⁶ This attack forced Kant to take a public position in *What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* What is interesting here is not so much the misunderstanding of Kant, a risk from which Jacobi clearly distances himself in the second edition of the *Letters* (1789) by modifying his introduction to the passages as follows:

The following passages from Kant can serve to render this concept more clearly. It must not be said to any person of criteria that Kantian philosophy is therefore accused of Spinozism.⁷

What is interesting is the fact that the misunderstanding of Spinoza was possible by ontologizing the pure forms of Kantian perception in order to attribute a theory of the uniqueness of space and time to Spinoza.

2. How Jacobi traces a conception of unique space in Spinoza

Beyond the references to Spinoza's texts Jacobi provides later in the same note, I think that the key place for attributing a theory of unique space to Spinoza is proposition fifteen and its scholium in part one of the *Ethics*. In the proposition, Spinoza states that 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing

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5 Kant 1998, p. 179. Cited in Jacobi 1994, p. 218. Translation modified.

6 De Flaviis 1986, p. 99. Cf. Philonenko in Kant 1993, pp. 25–26.

7 Jacobi 2000, p. 91.

can be or be conceived without God.⁸ This proposition, after having demonstrated that no other substance can be given beyond God (pr. 14), follows from the definitions of substance and mode and from axiom one, which reads: 'whatever is, is either in itself or in another.'⁹ In the scholium Spinoza focuses on the question of 'extended substance [understood as] one of the infinite attributes of God.'¹⁰ He is particularly focused on refuting those who maintain that extended substance is divisible and composed of parts, and that therefore it cannot belong to the essence of God. Spinoza's main argument is based on the negation of the void:

For if corporeal substance could be so divided that its parts were really distinct, why, then, could one part not be annihilated, the rest remaining connected with one another as before [*inter se connexis*]? And why must they all be so fitted together [*aptari debent*] that there is no void? Truly, of things which are really distinct from one another, one can be, and remain in its condition, without the other. Since, therefore, there is no vacuum in nature [...], but all its parts must so concur [*concurrere debent*] that there is no void, it follows also that they cannot be really distinguished, i.e., that corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, cannot be divided.¹¹

There is thus only one extended substance, whose parts are distinguished modally, but not really. The reason why we are instead inclined to think extended substance as composed of parts resides in the imagination:

If someone should now ask why we are, by nature, so inclined to divide quantity, I shall answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, or superficially, as we imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts [*ex partibus conflata*]; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is substance, which happens with great difficulty, then, as we have already sufficiently demonstrated, it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.¹²

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8 Spinoza 1985, p. 420.

9 Spinoza 1985, p. 410.

10 Spinoza 1985, p. 421.

11 Spinoza 1985, p. 423.

12 Spinoza 1985, pp. 423–424.

It is this conception of extension as infinite, unique, and divisible which authorized Jacobi to maintain that ‘Spinoza’s spirit’ is present in the passage from Kant. However, it is worth briefly noting that while the passage from Kant proposes to think the parts in the whole in the form of a static limitation, (which is in line with the key importance Jacobi attributes to the Spinozian proposition *determinatio est negatio*¹³), the passage from Spinoza instead proposes to think a dynamic involvement of the parts in the whole, in which the argument against the void resides.¹⁴ But we can go further.

3. How Jacobi traces a conception of unique time in Spinoza

The concept of space cannot be immediately superimposed onto the concept of extension, and as Rousset rightly notes, ‘we do not find teachings [in Spinoza] on the specific status of space,’¹⁵ and yet we understand the reasons that led Jacobi to read Spinoza in light of Kant. If we instead shift to the concept of unique time, the question becomes more complicated.

How could Jacobi have been brought to read Spinoza’s theory of time in light of Kant, as a theory of unique time? We can first consider Spinoza’s lengthiest treatment of the concept of time, which is found in Letter XII to Meyer. In this letter, we find an exposition which is apparently symmetrical with that of proposition fifteen:

Let me briefly explain these four concepts: Substance, Mode, Eternity, and Duration. The points I want you to consider about Substance are: 1) that existence pertains to its essence, i.e., that from its essence and definition alone it follows that it exists [...]; 2) which follows from the former, that Substance is not one of many, but that there exists only one of the same nature; and finally, 3) that every Substance cannot be understood except as infinite. I call the Affections of Substance Modes. Their definition, insofar as it is not the very definition of Substance, cannot involve any existence. So even though they exist, we can conceive them as not existing. From this it follows that when we attend only to the essence of

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13 ‘*Determinatio est negatio, seu determinatio ad rem juxta suum esse non pertinet*. Individual things therefore, so far as they exist in a certain determinate mode, are non-entia; the indeterminate infinite being is the one single true *ens reale, hoc est, est omne esse, & præter quod nullum datur esse*.’ Jacobi 1994, pp. 219–220.

14 On this point, and on the way the argument against the void is modified from Descartes to Spinoza and throughout Spinoza’s work, see Morfino 2007. The use of the verb *concurrere* with regard to the parts already suggests the positive use Spinoza will make of them. If he in fact affirms the impossibility of dividing the *res extensa* into parts from a static viewpoint, in this way attributing extension to God, it is because he brings the concept of parts in extension back into play from a dynamic perspective. In other words, it is not possible to identify the part statically, but only dynamically.

15 Rousset 2000, p. 127.

modes, and not to the total order of Nature [*ordo totius Naturæ*], we cannot infer from the fact that they exist now that they will or will not exist later, or that they have or have not existed earlier. From this it is clear that we conceive the existence of Substance to be entirely different from the existence of Modes. The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. By means of duration, in fact, we can explain only the existence of Modes; while the existence of substance is explained by means of eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing, or, in bad Latin, of being [*infinita existendi, sive, invita latinitate, essendi fruitio*].¹⁶

The first level of Spinoza's argument establishes an equivalence between *substantia* and *æternitas* and between *modus* and *duratio*. The fundamental terms of Spinoza's ontology, substance and modes, are therefore integrally translatable into temporal terms through the pair eternity-duration. However, and this breaks the symmetry with proposition fifteen, in the letter there is a third term, *tempus*:

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From the fact that we can determine Duration and Quantity as we please, that is, that we conceive Quantity abstracted from Substance [*hanc a Substantia abstractam concipimus*] and duration outside of the way it which it flows from eternal things [*a rebus æternis fluit*], there arises Time and Measure [*Tempus, & Mensura*]. Time, in other words, is determined in relation to Duration, and Measure in relation to Quantity, because in them we can have as adequate an image as possible. From the fact that we separate Affections of Substance from Substance itself and reduce them to classes [*ad classes redigimus*] so that as far as possible we imagine them easily, there arises number, by which we determine these Affections themselves. You can see clearly from what I have said that Measure, Time, and Number are nothing but Modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining. [...] There are many notions [...] we cannot acquire with the imagination, but only by the intellect, such as Substance, Eternity, and similar; and if someone strives to explain such things by notions of this kind, which are only aids of the imagination, he will accomplish nothing more than if he takes pains to go mad with his imagination. And if the Modes of Substance themselves are confused with beings of reason of this kind, or aids of the imagination [*auxilia imaginationis*], they too cannot be rightly understood'.¹⁷

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16 Spinoza 1985, pp. 201–202.

17 Spinoza 1985, p. 203.

Here the symmetry with proposition fifteen can be re-proposed: in the same way that quantity conceived in an abstract way leads to a conception of extension 'as finite, divisible, and composed of parts,' so also does conceiving duration in an abstract way and confusing it with time, which is a mode of imagining, lead us to fall into similar paradoxes as those formulated by Zeno against the existence of movement. Spinoza writes:

When someone has conceived duration abstractly [*abstracte*], and by confusing it with Time begun to divide it into parts, he will never be able to understand, for example, how an hour can pass. For if an hour is to pass, it will be necessary for half of it to pass first, and then half of the remainder, and then half of the remainder of this. So if you subtract half from the remainder in this way, to infinity, you will never reach the end of the hour. Hence many, who have not been accustomed to distinguish Beings of reason from real beings [*entia rationis a realibus*], have dared to hold that duration is composed of moments. In their desire to avoid Charybdis, they have run into Scylla. For composing Duration of moments is the same as composing Number merely by adding noughts.¹⁸

We can thus suppose that Jacobi read Spinoza's theory of duration in light of the Kantian theory of time, conceiving a unique and indivisible duration, which only the imagination divides into temporal parts, just as it divides extension into spatial parts.

4. Kant's theory of unique time

We can now examine Kant's theory of time. As is well known, in the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant thinks space and time as pure forms of sensible intuition, as *a priori* forms which allow 'the manifold of appearance to be ordered in certain relations.'¹⁹ In the 'Metaphysical exposition of the concept of time' (where by exposition, Kant understands a distinct representation of that which belongs to a concept, and by metaphysical, when the exposition contains that which exhibits the concept as given *a priori*), Kant affirms the *a priori* nature of the concept of time, the fact that it does not derive from experience, but on the contrary grounds it. This *a priori* necessity grounds the 'fundamental apodictic principles of relations of time', or 'the axioms of time in general':

[Time] has only one dimension: different times are not simultaneous, but successive [*verschiedene Zeiten sind nicht zugleich, sondern nach einander*] (just as different spaces are not

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18 Spinoza 1985, pp. 203–204.

19 Kant 1998, pp. 172–173.

successive, but simultaneous). These principles could not be drawn from experience, for this would yield neither rigorous universality nor apodictic certainty. We would only be able to say: This is how matters must stand. These principles are valid as rules under which alone experiences are possible at all, and instruct us prior to them, not through it.²⁰

The proposition which states that different times are not simultaneous, but successive cannot be deduced from a general concept of time, but is rather contained immediately in the intuition of time: 'different times are only parts of one and the same time [...] the infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is only possible through limitations of a single time grounding it [*einer einigen zum Grunde liegenden Zeit*].'²¹

In the transcendental exposition (which means explaining the concept as a principle from which insight into the possibility of other synthetic *a priori* cognitions can be gained), Kant notes that the concept of alteration 'is only possible through and in the representation of time' and that therefore the concept of time explains 'the possibility of as much synthetic *a priori* cognition as is presented by the general theory of motion.'²²

From this, Kant deduces in the concluding section (§6) that time is neither subsistent in itself, nor inherent in things, but rather nothing but the intuition of our internal state. Precisely because this intuition does not provide any figure, we make up for this lack with analogies:

We represent the temporal sequence [*Zeitfolge*] through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series [*Reihe*] that is of only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with the sole difference that the parts of the former are simultaneous [*zugleich*] but those of the latter always exist successively [*nach einander*].²³

This line constituted of successive parts is the *a priori* formal condition of all phenomena: the immediate condition of internal phenomena, and the mediate condition of external phenomena; it is subjective, because outside of the subject time is nothing, and it is objective in terms of all phenomena presented to us in experience. It is in this that the transcendental ideality of time consists.

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20 Kant 1998, p. 179.

21 Kant 1998, p. 179.

22 Kant 1998, p. 180.

23 Kant 1998, p. 180.

If now we move from the Transcendental Aesthetic to the Transcendental Analytic, we encounter the Kantian concept of 'duration.' This concept emerges in the demonstration of the first analogy of experience, the 'principle of the persistence [*Beharrlichkeit*] of substance,' which states:

In all change [*Wechse/*] of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature.²⁴

In the demonstration Kant shows the inseparable link between substance and time:

All appearances are in time, in which, as substratum (as persistent form of inner intuition), both simultaneity [*Zugleichsein*] as well as succession [*die Folge*] can alone be represented. The time [...] lasts [*bleibt*] and does not change; since it is that in which succession can be represented only as determinations of it. Now time cannot be perceived by itself. Consequently it is in the object of perception, i.e., the appearances, that the substratum must be encountered that represents time in general and in which all change or simultaneity can be perceived in apprehension through the relation of the appearances to it. However, the substratum of everything real, i.e., everything that belongs to the existence of things, is substance, of which everything that belongs to existence can be thought only as a determination. [...] [it] is, as substratum of all change, what always remains the same. Since this, therefore, cannot change in existence, its quantum in nature can also be neither increased nor diminished.²⁵

The link between substance and time is circular: permanence is a temporal relation, but at the same time it establishes the possibility of temporal relations, just as substance is a relation while at the same time establishing relations.²⁶ A vicious circle, of course, but one that is foundational for Kantian thought:

Only in that which persists [...] are temporal relations possible [...]; that which persists is the substratum of the empirical

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²⁴ Kant 1998, p. 299.

²⁵ Kant 1998, p. 300.

²⁶ 'Thus this category also stands under the title of relations, but more as their condition than as itself containing a relation.' Kant 1998, p. 303. On this point I fully agree with Enzo Paci: 'on the one hand, Kant tends to resolve substance into relational forms of relative temporal permanence, while on the other hand fails to place himself on the level of relationality, thus returning to the old logic of subject and predicate.' Paci 1959, pp. 195–196.

representation of time itself, by which alone all time-determination is possible (for simultaneity and succession are the only relations in time). [...] Persistence gives general expression to time as the constant correlate of all existence of appearances, all change and all accompaniment [*alles Wechsels und aller Begleitung*].²⁷

On this basis Kant defines the concept of duration:

Change does not affect time itself, but only the appearances in time [...] If one were to ascribe such a succession to time itself, one would have to think yet another time in which this succession would be possible [*wollte man der Zeit selbst eine Folge nach einander beilegen, so müsste man noch eine andere Zeit denken, in welcher diese Folge möglich wäre*]. Only through that which persists does existence in different parts of the temporal series [*das Dasein in verschiedenen Theilen der Zeitreihe*] acquire a magnitude, which one call duration [*Dauer*]. For in mere sequence [*bloßen Folge*] alone existence is always disappearing and beginning, and never has the least magnitude. Without that which persists there is therefore no temporal relation.²⁸

Permanence thus founds the possibility of determining time as well as determining the quantity of existence in time, that is, duration. The concept of duration is closely linked to the category of substance on the one hand, and on the other to the concept of unique time:

Substances (in appearance) are the substrata of all time-determinations. The arising of some of them and the perishing of others would itself remove the sole condition of the empirical unity of time, and the appearances would then be related to two different times [*auf zweierlei Zeiten*], in which existence flowed side by side [*in denen neben einander das Dasein verflösse*], which is absurd. For there is only one time [*Denn es ist nur Eine Zeit*], in which all different times must not be placed simultaneously but only after another.²⁹

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27 Kant 1998, p. 300.

28 Kant 1998, pp. 300–301.

29 Kant 1998, p. 303.

5. The time and space of interiority

Kant's theory of space and time as forms of order for multiplicity is a transcendental translation of Leibniz's theory of space and time. In his correspondence with Clarke, polemicizing against the concepts of absolute space and time, Leibniz writes:

For me, I have observed more than once that I consider space as something purely relative, in the same way as time: it is an order of co-existences, just as time is an order of successions.³⁰

Yet if we look more closely, Kant's theory turns out to be an extension, although original, of that metaphysical tradition which between Descartes and Locke invented the space of interiority. If, however, in Descartes the temporality of the space of interiority, of the *cogito*, is still punctuated by continuous divine creation (although the deepest secret of the instant is actually that of the presence of the *cogitatio*³¹), it is with Locke that the measure of temporality becomes exclusively mental. In chapter fourteen of the second part of the *Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke makes the idea of duration, a complex idea of a simple mode, depend on the reflection of the succession of ideas in our minds:

It is evident to anyone, who will but observe what passes in his own mind, that there is a train of ideas, which constantly succeed one another in his understanding, as long as he is awake. Reflection on these appearances of several ideas, one after another, in our minds, is that which furnishes us with the idea of succession: and the distance between any parts of that succession, or between the appearance of any two ideas in our minds, is what we call duration. For whilst we are thinking, or whilst we receive successively several ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist; and so we call the existence, or the continuation of the existence of ourselves, or anything else, commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds, the duration of ourselves, or any such other thing co-existing with our thinking.³²

Having established the idea of duration on the basis of the reflection on the 'series' or 'chain' of ideas and on the distance that separates two of its parts, Locke defines the idea of the instant and the idea of time: the former is constituted by 'that [part of duration] which takes up the time of

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30 Leibniz 2000, p. 499.

31 'We clearly understand that it is possible for me to exist at this moment, while I am thinking of one thing, and yet not to exist at the very next moment, when, if I do exist, I may think of something quite different.' Descartes 1991, p. 355.

32 Locke 1997, p. 175.

only one idea in our minds,³³ while the latter is obtained ‘by considering any part of infinite duration, as set out by periodical measures.’³⁴

What is interesting throughout Locke’s entire chapter is the insistence on the primacy of reflection over the observation of motion: ‘It is not then motion, but the constant train of ideas in our minds, whilst we are waking, that furnishes us with the idea of duration,’ to the point that ‘were there no sense of motion at all, we should as well [still] have the idea of duration.’³⁵ Locke maintains that this succession can constitute an intersubjective measure by means of a conjecture, namely that the flowing of a series of ideas ‘varies not very much in a waking man.’³⁶ Of course, this conjecture is the outright flaw in Locke’s entire construction, which Kant attempts to remedy by means of his own theory of temporality, although the deep Lockean stamp of time conceived as a form of inner sense remains. As Kant writes in a note to §7 of the Transcendental Aesthetic,

I can, to be sure, say: my representations succeed one another; but that only means that we are conscious of them as in a temporal sequence, i.e., according to the form of inner sense. Time is not on that account something in itself, nor any determination objectively adhering to things.³⁷

6. Herder’s criticism of Kant

A chapter in Herder’s *Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason*, published at the end of the century (1799), is directed against the Kantian theory of unique time as a form of inner sense. The theme of Herder’s entire work, Kant’s lack in considering the ‘fundamental “linguisticity” of reason and human experience,’³⁸ is also at the center of the chapter on the ‘Metacritique of the so-called Transcendental Aesthetic.’ Regarding the question of time in particular, treated in section three (‘Genesis of the concept of time, according to the givens of our nature and language’), Herder proposes a reconstruction of the genesis of its concept on the basis of a historical process described by the sequence practice-language-spatialization-number. *Am Anfang war die Tat* – this is the practical relationship of man with nature:

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33 Locke 1997, p. 177.

34 Locke 1997, p. 187.

35 Locke 1997, p. 179.

36 Locke 1997, p. 177.

37 Kant 1998, p. 182.

38 See Tani in Herder 1993, p. xiv.

The natural calendar was therefore the first rule for men [*das erste Regulativ*]; the rhythms of time [*Zeitenweisen*], which they had to observe if they did not want to succumb to time, became an unwritten norm for them, their rhythms of life [*Lebensweise*], their measure of time [*Zeitenberechnung*].³⁹

It is precisely this relation with the rhythms of nature which gives place in humankind, 'in the course of times and their changing,' to 'an *intuition* of time, but certainly not *a priori* and not even for metaphysical speculation, but rather on the basis of observations and from looking at the external world for practical purposes.'⁴⁰ Man began to perceive himself as a temporal being that 'lives following or preceding time,'⁴¹ and 'little by little, time seized the entire syntax of language.'⁴² Further, 'the analogy of space played a more precise designation with times':

The majority of temporal determinations [*Zeitbestimmungen*], for example, sunrise, midday, sunset, and then before, after, half, or between these, etc., are drawn from determinations of place. The point at which the sun rises and goes down, or the midpoint of its course, was the reason for giving, at the moment [*Zeit*] in which it happens, the precise names of sunrise, sunset, and midday, the past as that which precedes, the future as that which follows; the day and time were that which became fixed, established, and wedded. The month signified a lunar cycle, the week indicated the order of days, the year represented a return, a circle. The latter was for all peoples the sensible image [*Sinnbild*] of time that returns to itself and begins again from itself.⁴³

Yet these visual measurements do not grasp 'the precise character of discrete or numerical quantity.' Herder emphasizes how much effort it took for men 'to learn to count':

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39 Herder 1993, p. 40.

40 Herder 1993, p. 41.

41 Herder 1993, p. 41.

42 Herder 1993, p. 41. Herder writes: 'the time that governs everything also rules men's thoughts. Since doing and suffering occur over time, and it is never indifferent when something happens or has happened or will happen, time has been added to all of the words that indicate acting and suffering (*verba*). Instead of the infinitive, which in primitive languages was valid for all things, at most with the addition of people, the moods appeared for greater clarity, first of all the indicative with determinate distinctions of time. At first these were few; the past and future were roughly indicated, until gradually more precise moods were introduced for both times; and those of the Greek language were very precise. Furthermore, by means of particles, determinations of both time and place were added to the verbs (*verbis*); adverbs and prepositions were mixed, the entire flow was led and guided ashore with the measure of time.' Herder 1993, pp. 41–42.

43 Herder 1993, p. 42.

Not even the clear, repeated external succession of mutations in things for a long time was effective in causing them to count with real numbers. In the long term, the always repeating series of days and nights caused them to attempt to register, with lines and other imitative symbols, a certain quantity recurring in the days; in short, to count. Much later they learned the measurement of hours from dripping water, and the number of fingers suggested their numerical cycle, the decade. This determination of time by number was held sacred by all peoples of antiquity; it was registered by rites and festivities, kept and celebrated; the wise men, it was said, had gone to get the number in heaven. But how difficult it was already to think of numbers and seasons as such is demonstrated by the flood of incidental circumstances that astrology rained down from heaven together with them.⁴⁴

After explaining the genesis of the concept of time by refuting the Kantian conception of time as the *a priori* form of sensible intuition, Herder emphasizes the deep link between time and change⁴⁵:

In truth, each thing that changes has in itself the measure of its own time [*hat jedes verändliche Ding das Maas seiner Zeit in sich*], which is and remains that measure even when nothing else existed; no two things in the world have the same measure of time [*dasselbe Maas der Zeit*]. The beat of my pulse [*Pulsschlag*], the slow or hurried flow [*Schritt oder Flug*] of my thoughts, are not a measure of time that is valid for others; the flowing [*Lauf*] of a river, the growth [*Wachstum*] of a tree, do not serve as the measure of time [*Zeitmesser*] for all rivers, trees, and plants. The life of an elephant and the life of a fly have a very different duration [*Lebenszeiten*], and how unequal is the measure of time [*Zeitenmaas*] of the various planets.⁴⁶

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44 Herder 1993, p. 43.

45 We could say, in a theoretical language, the primacy of change over time: 'Time', Herder writes, 'is by no means a necessary representation that underlies all intuitions. True intuition forgets time. If everything that is changeable disappears, so also does time, the measure of changes, disappear.' Herder 1993, p. 44. And again: 'I subsume changes under the concept of time insofar as I observe their succession: the model of this is given to me by the succession of my thoughts and all natural phenomena. With this calculation I construct for my intellect a series of concepts that follow one another [*Reihen der Begriffe nacheinander*] (series), just as for space I construct a series of adjacent concepts (*situs*). From this derives an order of things; but the changes would still happen even if there was no one to count and order them.' Herder 1993, p. 45. On this point, Verra's position is quite important. Against Haym and Jöns, Verra rejects every subjectivist reading of the idea of time in Herder: 'In the *Metacritique*, where Herder traces the image of time over the course of natural events, and even when he speaks of this image of man, he does not at all allude to his own inner life, but to an age of development.' Verra 2006, p. 45.

46 Herder 1993, p. 43.

This crescendo, which ranges from the personal experience of the beat of a pulse and the coursing of thoughts to the imaginative vision of life on other planets, leads Herder to the point of heresy, to the frontal opposition with the fundamental apodictic proposition that rules relations of time, which states that different times are not simultaneous, but successive:

We can therefore risk saying that there are in the universe, in a determinate time, innumerable times [*im Universum zu einer Zeit unzählbar-viele Zeiten*].⁴⁷

Here we seem to hear an echo of Lucretius's celebrated verse, 'in uno tempore, tempora multa latent.'⁴⁸ Where then does the representation of a unique time arise? Herder writes:

Time, which we figure is the measure of all other [thoughts] is simply a relative measure of our thoughts [*Verhältnißmaas unsrer Gedanken*], just as infinite space was for the set of all the places of singular beings in the universe. In the same way his companion, boundless time [*ungeheure Zeit*], has become the measure and field [*das Maas und der Umfang*] of all times. And just as space was the simple limit of place, such that an infinite continuum could be imagined, so also time – which in itself is nothing other than the measure of duration [*Maas der Dauer*] insofar as it is determinable by means of internal or external changes – by constantly counting to the infinite must become an innumerable number, an unbridgeable ocean of droplets, waves, and currents that flow into it.⁴⁹

7. From Herder to Spinoza

As our point of departure, we took up Jacobi's claim that the Kantian theory of unique time is permeated by 'Spinoza's spirit.' I would like to try to maintain, in terms of the path we have followed, that it is precisely Herder's violation of the Kantian prohibition on the plurality of simultaneous times that is permeated by Spinoza's spirit. From the vantage of historical reconstruction, showing the importance of Spinoza's influence on Herder's thought is an extremely easy task: it is a genuine

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47 Herder 1993, p. 43.

48 It is interesting to note that Herder establishes a privileged link between time and hearing, which is implicitly present in Lucretius's verse: 'The determinations of time properly belong to hearing, since this extracts the succession of things by listening, as it were. Sound is for the ear what the ray of light is for the eye: this is the most precise description of the line, that is, the most precise description of the moment [*des Moments*], of a point of moments that flow. The entire domain of modulation [*Modulation*], the measurement of movement that is more and less slow or rapid, regular or irregular, is the responsibility of the ear.' Herder 1993, p. 52.

49 Herder 1993, p. 44.

historiographical *topos*. Not only are there numerous traces of a reading of Spinoza in the letters of the young Herder,⁵⁰ but also, above all, there is a work completely dedicated to Spinoza's thought, which was published in an explicit polemic with Jacobi during the years of the Spinoza Debate, entitled *God: Some Conversations*. The book was originally published in 1787, but Herder published a second edition in 1800, the year after the publication of the *Metacritique*: in this new edition, on top of several significant variations from a theoretical point of view (the most important of which is the substitution of the concept of substantial force with the concept of organic force), there is also the addition of numerous notes bearing Spinoza's footprints.⁵¹ It is not therefore hazardous to hypothesize that in the years he was writing the *Metacritique*, Herder had Spinoza's texts on his desk.

If we consider Spinoza's Letter XII (which Herder cites in a note to the second edition, describing it as 'curious' [*merkwürdig*]⁵²) – which we have already hypothesized as the place from which Jacobi traced his reading of unique duration, a letter that allowed him to consider the Kantian concept of time as in Spinoza's spirit – what we find is that precisely because of the perfect symmetry Spinoza establishes between the ontological concepts of 'substance' and 'mode' and the temporal concepts of 'eternity' and 'duration,' duration cannot refer to substance.⁵³ Substance does not last: this means that it is not the common temporal place whose modes are limitations. Only modes last: more strictly we could say that these consist of that 'indefinite continuation of existing'⁵⁴ which is duration itself, according to the definition in the *Ethics*. Deprived of substantiality, modes consist exclusively of the duration of the *ratio* that constitutes them as individuals,⁵⁵ or of the combination in the action that produces a unique effect as a *res singulares*.⁵⁶ Each existing thing therefore has a duration, or better, is a duration, and this is either an individual *ratio*

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50 For a bibliography on the Herder-Spinoza relation, see Morfino 2016, pp. 335–336. It is worth citing this passage from Valerio Verra, which puts Herder's theory of space-time in relation to Spinoza: 'The study of Herder's conception of space and time is particularly interesting, because these concepts are closely connected with his internal philosophical experience, deeply rooted in his conception of history and poetry, and allow us to glimpse the important influence exerted by Spinoza for Herder.' Verra 2006, p. 39.

51 Cf. Bd. XVI in Herder 1967–1968, pp. 401–580.

52 See Bd. XVI in Herder 1967–1968, p. 457 (where it is cited as Ep. 29, Opera Posthuma, p. 465). Cf. also p. 465.

53 Cf. Spinoza's definition of eternity: 'By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.' Spinoza 1985, p. 409.

54 Spinoza 1985, p. 447.

55 Spinoza 1985, p. 460.

56 Spinoza 1985, p. 447.

or a singular combination. While Spinoza does not affirm it explicitly, there is no reason to think that his conception of time differs from Descartes', for whom time is nothing other than the measure of multiple durations on the base of a regular duration, the movement of the planets.⁵⁷ Spinoza adds to this his own theory of time as a way of imagining, which is where the spatialization of time, its division into instants and numbering, comes from. Time, therefore, is a way of imagining which absolutizes one duration, making it the measure of others.

With Herder, Spinoza could thus certainly affirm that 'in the universe there are, in a determinate time, innumerable times,' and yet he could not repeat that 'each thing that changes has in itself the measure of its own time, which is and remains even if nothing else existed.' Here an important difference enters the picture, which is due to the monad-like character of the concept of organic force at the root of the concept of duration in Herder's *Metacritique*: duration is conceived starting from the persistence of a being, of a force, of a continuous existence which is given as a succession.⁵⁸ In Spinoza, what constitutes the status of the mode is precisely its relationality, its non-isolatability. It would not make sense to speak of the duration of a mode taken apart from others, or the duration of its individual rhythm, precisely because the duration of a thing is thinkable not as a succession of states in time, but rather as a *cum durare* – to use a Lucretian term that Spinoza loves, as a *concurrere*. The term *continuatio* which is present in the definition of duration must not be understood in the sense that it would have in Descartes, as a series of discrete and contingent instants, sustained and concatenated by the *concursus Dei*. The *continuatio* of Spinoza's duration is not legible through a linear and serial model, since it is an effect of composition and interchange: precisely to avoid risking that *continuatio* is read in terms of continuous creation, in postulate five of the so-called treatise on physics in part two of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes that 'the human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated.'⁵⁹ This is not a regeneration at any moment, too close to divine creation, but a *quasi regeneratio*. In other words, its apparent linearity is the fruit of a deeper complexity, of the *ordo et connexio rerum*. This means that every duration is composed of durations, exists in a weave of durations, and composes durations at a superior level, without these durations being able to be thought as founded on a persistence at their root. Persistence is instead the result.

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57 '[...] in order to measure the duration of all things, we compare their duration with the greatest and most regular motions which give rise to years and days, and we call this duration "time." Yet nothing is thereby added to duration, taken in its general sense, except for a mode of thought.' Descartes 1985, p. 215.

58 Cf. Herder 1993, p. 55.

59 Spinoza 1985, p. 462.

Indeed, weave is the word which not only marks the difference between Spinoza's conception of temporality with Herder, but also Kant: the simple violation of the Kantian prohibition on the plurality of simultaneous times remains insufficient for thinking plural temporality in Spinozist terms. Finally, a question that opens onto the relation between time and causality: what would the transcendental schematism of the categories of relation be if for time as succession, we substituted the concept of time as a weave, as a *connexio*?

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