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# Machiavelli's Revolution and Koselleck's Sattelzeit

Machiavellio revoliucija ir Kosellecko Sattelzeit

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**Abstract:** This article suggests that human action in Machiavelli is both materialistic and temporalized. It further argues that Reinhart Koselleck's view of Machiavelli's understanding of time as historical circularity is misleading. The author is making the case that Machiavelli drew from Lucretian materialism to strip political concepts of content via an animal-materialist anthropology and ontology holding that man, as any animal, is material reality acting under an atomic arrangement wherein no time, whether linear or circular, can exist. The conclusion is that Koselleck's interpretation of the circularity of time in Machiavelli kept him from seeing his role as an antecedent of the conceptual and temporal revolution underlying the *Sattelzeit*.

**Keywords:** Machiavelli, Koselleck, Lucretius, contingency, materialism, time.

**Summary:** Žmogiškasis veiksmas Machiavellio darbuose apibūdinamas kaip materialistinis ir temporalizuotas. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad Reinharo Kosellecko požiūris į Machiavellio laiko kaip istorinio cikliškumo supratimą yra klaidinantis. Autorius bando pagrįsti tai, kad Machiavellis rėmėsi Lukrecijaus materializmu siekdamas politinius konceptus atskirti nuo turinio. Tai darydamas jis pasitelkė gyvūnišką-materialistinę antropologiją ir ontologiją, teigiančią, kad žmogus, kaip bet kuris kitas gyvūnas, yra materialinė realybė, veikianti pagal savo atominę sąrangą, kurioje negali egzistuoti joks laikas – nei linijinis, nei ciklinis. Išvadose teigiama, kad tai, kaip Koselleckas interpretavo laiko cikliškumą šio filosofo darbuose, neleido jam įžvelgti Machiavellio vaidmens konceptualinėje ir temporalinėje revoliucijoje, davusioje pagrindą Sattelzeit.

**Keywords:** Machiavellis, Koselleckas, Lukrecijus, atsitiktinumas, materializmas, laikas.

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## Introduction

Machiavelli's notion of the temporality and materialistic conditioning of politics entailed a conceptual revolution that proved seminal to the modern understanding of politics. The foremost representative of a Renaissance movement that broke away from the received wisdom of classic and medieval philosophy, in *The Prince* Machiavelli demolished the classical questions of good government, the public weal, or who is to rule. Indeed, Machiavelli helped beget modern political science by substituting a ruthless view of action where what mattered is achieving power efficiently and holding on to it. This new paradigm forswore the ancients' aspirations to wisdom and prudence. A raw description of domination strategies, nothing in it resembled the search for a universal moral standard to tell good from bad types of government. Yet, drawing upon the writings of the ancients in ways that differed radically from Christianity, Machiavelli also helped reconfigure how republicanism was understood. He turned to the republicanism of the ancients as the source

of a new form of politics clearly set apart from Christian tradition (Figgis 1960: 18-27). Bringing back the past provided the basis for the revival and renewal of the Roman Republic, an unprecedented innovation to be translated into the construction of a new Rome. To Machiavelli, the new republics would issue from the experience that social order is contingent and inherently fluid rather than based on natural law; that a new order can come about from collective political design; and that political institutions need to adapt in order to ensure that States will have the flexibility to withstand radical turns in fortune and circumstances.

Koselleck did not regard the conceptual transformation undergone during the Renaissance, with Machiavelli as a leading light, as among the antecedents of the linguistic and conceptual transformation Koselleck identified as a *Sattelzeit* spanning from 1750 to 1850. A *Sattelzeit* presumes an acceleration of motion allowing for new perceptions of temporality that alter the experiential space and the horizons of expectation of the human animal and, through secularization and hypostatization, reconceptualize notions of freedom, democracy, law, and revolution.

To Koselleck, these ideas were freed from the old concept of *anakyklosis* (Podes 1991: 577-587) and temporal circularity through denaturalization. They are structurally altered whenever their contexts radically change and act as catalysts for such changes. Secularization, plus technological, scientific and industrial change, brought about the temporalization of sociopolitical concepts and reshaped the real world through human action. These concepts no longer described reality, but future social transformation.

Extra-linguistic changes that altered reality also catalyzed a more politicized society, with ideologies warring to restructure the economy and the means of production. These dynamics set equality as the core value of modernity and as the foundation of almost all contemporary expectations for greater freedom, equality, and democracy. Equality, interpreted as equal power and freedom for all, became a preeminent component of freedom and democracy.

Koselleck's disregard in respect of the *Sattelzeit* process he described stems from his view of Machiavelli as propounding a circular idea of time and politics itself, going as far as to compare him with Polybius (Koselleck 2004: 21-29, 118-119).

In addressing this oversight, I argue that Machiavelli, by stripping political concepts of content, gave them broader application. Heavily influenced by Lucretius and materialist and temporalized human action, Machiavelli altered Socrates' geometrical idea of concepts. He recognized that history may be used to analyze and even politicize concepts. Good, bad, justice, virtue, etc., are made meaningful by their specific historical context. Koselleck's view that Machiavelli subscribed to historical circularity, seeking only to determine repeating structural conditions, is inadequate. As this article contends, Machiavelli's work is closer to that of Foucault's *Nietzsche*.

In *The Prince*, when examining the nature of the *stato*, Machiavelli shifts the discussion toward a description and theorization of the social process underway in it. To grasp the extent of Machiavelli's radicalism, it should be emphasized that, in the Middle Ages, the concept of state did not yet exist as such (Brunner 1992: 96-100). Medieval thought about politics was about the law. If a state existed at all, it was always centered on what underlies the law and its application. In medieval thought, the state was an instrument of the law and the law was given naturally, not imposed or created by the sovereign. Medieval thinkers assumed the existence of natural law, of universal precepts of morality shared by all rational beings. Machiavelli, per contra, perceived that there was no such thing as natural law (Figgis 1960: 80) and that absent the state, chaos would ensue. As chaos predates order, conflict explains the need for social consensus. Conflict is determined by *humors*: some (the few) wish to rule while others (the many) do not aspire to rule but do not want to be ruled either. These were the fundamental elements of a historical ontology: the societal *humors* always have been the desire to rule (in the *Grandi*) and the desire to be free (in the *popolo*). Adding to this was the uncertain nature of human action. The possibility of *riscontro* between action and randomness was permeated by the principle of the contingency of time, similar to Lucretius' view of swerve. Yet, both the historical ontology and contingency prevent political action from being conditioned or influenced.

Machiavelli argues that man seeks to vanquish the *chorism* of existence and temporality through normative religious and philosophical forms. One of the errors of classical political philosophy, he argues, is that justice and the transcendent common good unsuccessfully attempt to control human chance to force ever-changing reality, the chimeric *εἶδος*, into submission, and are thus politically sterile. For Machiavelli, historically, the Christian *chorism*'s failure, is embodied by Savonarola as an example (Najemy 1996: 119-129). For Machiavelli, historically, an example of the Christian *chorism*'s failure, is embodied by Savonarola (Najemy 1996: 119-129). Contrary to that Christian tradition, Machiavelli seeking to establish the conditions necessary for civic virtues to blossom. These conditions will imply questioned the institutional power of Christianity. In that sense, Machiavelli was among the first thinkers, after Tacitus and Lucretius, to examine religion not for the truth of its postulates but for its social and political position.

Machiavelli thus starts a tradition of inherently ephemeral philosophical thought. The historicization of political action requires that history, not philosophy, provide the concepts that determine the struggles for power. With Nietzsche and Koselleck, Machiavelli may have understood that concepts are polysemic in nature and have no history; as history is distinctive of human action.

Below I briefly examine some interpretations of Machiavelli's idea of time, with contextual reference to his animal materialism.

## Cosmos and Renaissance

In Anthony Parel's classic *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, he argues that citing Machiavelli as having facilitated the emergence of modern political thinking is incomplete as it ignores premodern anthropological elements in his thought that Parel (1992: 31) describes as a cosmological anthropology. As he notes, to Machiavelli both the imitative effect and the possibility of effective political action are under the influence of the stars and related cosmological views. A clear precursor to the importance of extra-human forces, political action not aligned with astrological design is doomed to fail. Parel writes that such thinking is a circular view of history in which human agency, nature – as human environment– and celestial bodies impede the realization of something absolutely new, i.e., modern. Ultimately, Parel's Machiavelli creatively systematized the cosmological ideas of his time into the concepts of *fortuna* and *virtù*.

Ernst Cassirer, on the other hand, read Machiavelli's *fortuna* as stemming from his understanding of the secularization of both divine providence and *fortuna* itself. Machiavelli is seen as insisting on a link between time and human political action. In Cassirer, a central problem of the Renaissance was attempts to “demonstrate the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with the freedom of human will and action” (Cassirer 1996: 75). In contrast to Christian philosophy, *virtù* became a force capable of subduing *fortuna* (which would lose its divine design connotations over time). In Cassirer's opinion, Pomponazzi, Poggio, art, and even Dante's representation of *fortuna* show a shift away from the medieval idea of divine providence as well as a new uncertainty regarding the factors, beyond human forces, that influence fate. Machiavelli, as part of a Renaissance mentality “seeking to formulate the *ragioni* embodied in things and events” releases human action from determination, at least partially (Cassirer 1996: X). Uncertainty about a de-Christianized *fortuna* was also liberating. Wendy Brown alternatively interprets (1988: 71-80) that Machiavelli might have noticed that time accelerates faster than the ability of individuals to modify their behavior. To Machiavelli, she argues, the rigidity of human nature impedes its adaptation by the control and domination of *fortuna*. To Brown, *The Prince's* image of *virtù* as violating *fortuna* symbolizes the end of the distinction between politics and warfare. Wendy Brown (1988: 91) also feels that to Machiavelli, man is ultimately nothing but another animal.

Arguing for the circularity of history, Koselleck notes that Machiavelli conceives both present and past on the same plane due to his acknowledgement of certain permanent structures accounting for historical change. As evidence, he cites Machiavelli's view that the new technologies of warfare had not rendered obsolete the teachings of the ancients. The ancients are imitable, Koselleck stresses, because Machiavelli saw such structures as lasting through time.

Yet, Koselleck's and the above interpretations of Machiavelli's writings as circular and pessimistic too readily relegate them to premodern thought and fail to consider certain elements of his theory. First, that

his ideas on human nature and the cosmos are informed by Lucretian materialism. Second, that such materialism frees human action from cosmological influence and contingency. And third, that his political ontology sees the intractability of the *Grandi's* wish to rule the *many* against their will. Such contingency and agonism are derived from Machiavelli's materialist view, not independent from it.

In Lucretian physics, laws predicting the random action of atoms that produce *clinamen* (the motor for change) are impossible; as are, it follows, those predicting the random human actions that produce human history. Ancient and modern examples are imitable precisely because they understand the contingency of human action. This pure *poiesis* of human history is, however, limited, as it cannot – permanently – erase the tendency of some to dominate. Victoria Kahn (2014: 3) is right to interpret modernity as the reconfiguration of *poiesis* as a means to reproduce immanence and generate symbols of meaning in the secular world. Her *poiesis* replaces religion as the transcendental that determines immanence. The creative act converges comparably in Machiavelli: he alludes to art in *The Prince*, likening political action to a painter's work in his famous dedication to Lorenzo, and also in his letter to Vettori (Machiavelli 1996: 262-265) concerning his habit of dressing appropriately, as if donning vestments, before reading and writing. This *poiesis* of secular art and literature is precisely what makes Machiavelli a proto-modern thinker (Kahn 2014: 93).

Such proto-modernism likely issued from a fresh reading of the ancient philosophers and pagan mysteries that blurred the Christian distinction between the animal and human worlds. Pomponazzi, Machiavelli's contemporary, thought human action more beastly than rational. In art, Lucretian images were combined with new sensualities, theological forms, and techniques – i.e., linear perspectives in Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti – and the humanism newly inherited from Dante.

As Paganini (2016a: 106) notes, 17<sup>th</sup>-century libertinism and the clandestine atheism of *Theophrastus redivivus* emerged from the efforts of materialist authors to account for society, understand human beings as animals among animals, and salvage a form of anti-Christian, materialist Aristotelian thought from the Scholastics. Significantly, their key influences were Machiavelli and contemporaries such as Pomponazzi (Paganini 2016b: 26-27). Notably, 20<sup>th</sup>-century interpretations often forget that aspects of Machiavellianism were once considered radical.

## Lucretian Materialism in Machiavelli

Lucretius' theory of primitivism suggests that man was originally a beast fighting other beasts that vanquished its state through a covenant wherefrom civilization eventually emerged, leading to alpha humans of superior beauty, strength and intelligence whose greater leadership skills guided communities towards social life.

Alison Brown notes that Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli is hard to dispute (Finch 1960: 29-32, Bertelli 1961: 544-553, 1964:

774-779). In turn, Ada Palmer writes (2014: 82-83) that Machiavelli's annotations in his copy of *De Rerum Natura* highlight its physical and atomistic elements. Arguing for the importance of Lucretian materialism to Machiavelli's utilitarian ethics, Palmer cites his marginalia in the section on atomism (Book II) of *De Rerum Natura* concerning the anthropological consequences of Lucretian materialism, where he notes, inter alia, the linkage between motion and free will, that the nature of variability as contingency determines what is extant, and that the gods care little about human problems, i.e., that human animals are the architects of their own destiny.

Lucretius' original materialism, where order should emerge from random *clinamen*, very likely resulted in Machiavelli's belief that all animals, subject as they are to the laws of matter, possess free will. Human animals, in particular, are moved by types of passion. Lucretian primitivism and determinism imply an understanding of human psychology and its determination by passion and of the human capacity to seek satisfaction through the structuring of actions aimed at establishing domain over others. Machiavelli also channels Lucretius in his discussion of political life, which he believes not defined by gods or natural laws. As he notes in his dedication of *The Prince* to Lorenzo, political action is defined by creative capacity – a painter's brush on a canvas of free will and contingent reality.

Brown (2015: 105-127) discusses Lucretius in Machiavelli but sets them apart, recognizing three Epicurean elements central to Machiavelli: first, free will rests on the contingency of the *clinamen*; second, justice and good are only so by human covenant; and third, without the institutions generated by justice, men would return to a primitive state. However, she distinguishes Machiavelli's concept of cycles of political change regarding time as closest to Polybius or Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Her interpretation, similar to Pedulla's (2018), sees Machiavelli's circularity not due to stellar intervention – as Parel assumed – but to the tendency of atoms to shift over time towards different paradigmatic *humors*, i.e., cycles of likely outcomes produced by the constant features of atomic behavior.

I argue, with Kullmann (1980: 419-443), that just as the Aristotelian concept of political animal is a concrete notion of *politisches biologisches* rather than an *Analogiemodell*, so too in Machiavelli's work, under Lucretius' influence, is the human animal a continuum in the universal material order. The notion of continuum and human animality in Lucretius is also a *politisches biologisches*. Second, that materialist anthropology informs Machiavelli's idea of both political order and human action. Third, that it follows that temporality and history in Machiavelli stem from his notion of free actions as characteristic of material contingency in human beings. As such, Machiavelli's philosophical historiography is rooted in freedom, the foundation of social life, as the determinant of politics. The aporia of freedom is that it stands at the genesis of politics and in turn refers back to it. Everyone seeks to remain free. It is, then both the *arché* and *telos* of human history.

These points lead to the conclusion that Machiavelli's view is subordinate to freedom, and ultimately to the political order that allows *vivere libero* through the republic, the *vivere politico*. To Machiavelli, considerations of inequality or restriction of freedom must be weighed on whether they maintain the republican order previously described by Lucretius as a more advanced state of evolution and a space of non-domination. In this reconfiguration of Lucretian theory, Machiavelli sees freedom as the standard against which all forms of power, whether republics or principalities, are to be measured.

Where social and political order is not an expression of a necessary natural order, history trumps philosophy as the paradigmatic means to analyze politics. Acknowledging *chorism*, Machiavelli holds that men, as all animals, strive to be freed from the passage of time. Impermanent history is forged by a given action in a given time and requires motives to prevail over facticity. The notions of justice and the transcendent common good are meant to restrain the randomness of contingency but fail to do so because vanquishing the factual world is impossible. It also follows that *phronesis* is not determined *a priori* by natural or divine rules, but by its ability to be effective according to the will of the painters, be they princes or peoples.

As such, Machiavelli's circularity of history and time is not mere repetition or determinism -on the contrary, it is the inseparable link between artificial order and its certain mortality arising from the free actions of men. Machiavelli sees time accelerated by the actions of different painters while affirming that some human animals are not qualified to act in times of innovation and modernity. This is the creative, destructive acceleration of human action; the revolutionary force conveyed in both *The Prince* and *Discourses*. Machiavelli's works altered Socrates' geometrical understanding of concepts, emptying them of content so as to be refilled anew. From that starting point, Machiavelli changed the way *prudenza* and *virtù* were understood and attempted to end the universalist and moral pretenses of philosophy and pave the way for a contextual analysis of the convenient.

As an illustrative counterpoint, Miguel Vatter (2019), in refuting Epicureanism as the basis of Machiavelli's understanding of politics and religion, argues against Alison Brown's interpretation of the poem *L'Asino*, which she regards as tragic because the main character is tormented by having naïvely believed in justice as a relational principle of social life in an unjust world. Vatter, interpreting Machiavelli's *soft primitivism* (as opposed to Brown's *hard primitivism*), reads the poem as commentary on Plutarch's *Life of Numa*. To show that Machiavelli would have doubtlessly been aware of philosophy passing as poetry, Vatter references the 1469 publication of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, "a compendium of Platonic philosophy." (2019: 107) Vatter cites "a Platonic approach to natural right and theology" connecting Machiavelli's works with ancient theologians for whom "divine providence points to constitutional government based on the

power of the people as the best form of human government” (2019: 107). Vatter expressly states:

“In this article I have shown that Machiavelli’s soft primitivism and adherence to the tenets of ancient theology disallow such a construal [Brown’s], which is far more liberal than republican, more Hobbesian than Spinozist, of his political philosophy.” (Vatter 2019: 120)

As a parry to Brown’s argument, Vatter seeks to restrict interpretations of Epicureanism in Machiavelli from being compared to the proto-liberalism of Hobbes, another Epicurean. As a defender of republicanism, Vatter was right to be concerned about Brown’s thrust of a contractualist proto-theory presented by Lucretian materialism in Machiavelli (not to mention comparisons with Hobbes), an interpretation of Machiavelli in line with liberal tradition (Vatter 2019: 120). For much the same reasons, Vatter also attempts to wholly repudiate the influence of uncompromising Lucretian naturalism at the time when he cites, inter alia, Ernst Gombrich (1945: 7-60) against Aby Warburg’s (1999) interpretation that through Poliziano there might be Lucretian influence in Botticelli’s work. The defense against the deductive blows need not be so vigorous, however; we may reject overreaching conclusions and preserve Machiavelli’s place in republicanism without denying the influence of Epicureanism on his view of politics and religion.

In a more compromising interpretation, Daniel Waley (1970: 91-98) takes well-known parts of Machiavelli’s works as clear evidence of cultural primitivism. The strengths of the German and Swiss peoples – *rough men* – in *Discourses*, the civilized Frenchmen and Spaniards in *Arte della Guerra*, and the above work on the advantages of life deprived of opulence do not in this case imply a linear degeneration from some hypothetical golden age, but rather play key roles in the prevalence of the given social order, including the civil role of religion. Passannante (2011) also shows how Nicholas Bérault’s Platonic interpretation of *Rusticus* is compatible with his own defence of divine providence, stressing Poliziano (Del Lucchese 2010: 11-35) as a source. Finally, while Valentina Prospero (2007) also discusses the influence of Lucretian primitivism in Botticelli, she points out that these authors, including Ficino, present an overlap of certain Platonic ideas that sometimes filter out Lucretianism and vice versa.

## Machiavelli’s Conceptual Revolution

Koselleck holds that semantic transformations are understood through historiography, giving particular importance to horizons of expectations and experience as the constituents of conceptual change (Koselleck 2018: 137-157). Anthropological determinants act as the foundation on which semantic structures are built and as the ultimate condition for both history and its hermeneutics. As such, Koselleck’s theory is one of temporalizing semantics and society, where historical concepts and terms are transformed in social praxis and institutions. Among

sociopolitical language and non-linguistic events, this is a relationship outside consideration of non-human agency.

While Koselleck's *Sattelzeit* borrows from various sources, four key influences may be noted. First, from Heidegger and Gadamer each, an essential approach to his methodology makes use of both diachronic (development of a concept over time) and synchronic (how a concept is used at a specific time) conceptual analyses. From Carl Schmitt (2007: 26-28) he takes a binary friend-foe conceptual structure; e.g., Christianity's original understanding of paganism. Finally, with Otto Brunner (1992: 308-310) – in turn influenced by Schmitt – Koselleck agrees that the emergence of modern concepts is due to a quasi-revolutionary process of rupture with medieval political and social categories.

For Koselleck, then, modernity was not understandable without reference to the Enlightenment. With Schmitt, he considers Hobbes' Leviathan as the quintessential revolutionary event that articulates a new idea of sovereignty, privatizes morality, and separates the public and private domains. Koselleck argues that this event increased protection of the private and, when taken in the context of individual morality's growing criticism of the state, weakened political spaces and their decision-making capacity. In short, that substantive concepts of the good life neutralized the liberal state through individual morality. As to Schmitt's impact, note that from 1952 to 1983 Koselleck wrote him a total of 53 letters and publicly acknowledged his influence on his early work and methodology (Olsen 2011: 6, 197-208).

To Koselleck, the ideologization, politicization and democratization of modern concepts could only occur through the temporalization of concepts, whereby progressively faster semantic change prevented applying past experience to new events – and where the present and future therefore acquired greater degrees of uncertainty. Sufficiently abstracted, only through temporalization may concepts be ideologized to move towards their future materialization and subsequent democratization and politicization.

Koselleck used this framework in his approach to acceleration from Hobbes onwards, as Aristotelian categories lost validity, topological concepts were replaced by temporalized and dynamic concepts, and collective singularities – history, equality, progress, people, freedom – arose. A critical reconstruction reveals, however, that many phenomena in Koselleck's modernity were present before the Enlightenment as well as his neglect of the Renaissance in the rupture between the medieval and modernity.

Two reasons may explain Koselleck's excluding Machiavelli from the origins of modern concepts. First, Koselleck wrote his early work at a time when an influential Schmitt had anointed Hobbes as pivotal to the modern conceptual revolution. Second, Koselleck's identification of the extra-linguistic characteristics of conceptual change we share with animals (above/below), where the human language separating us allows

abstract operations institutionalizing [conceptual change] and bringing political projects to life.

Koselleck, however, failed to see how radical Renaissance reinterpretations of animality and materialism were. The materialist movement reinterpreted animality through a conceptual convergence of common trends in the human-animal (e.g., *humors*) with the notion of a universe not determined by divine forces: free will emerging from matter and its motion.

There are indications that other thinkers, including Arnold Gehlen converged under Koselleck's anthropology (Schacht 2015: 49-65). Gehlen suggests that humans are compensated for their lack of instinct by institutional constructions assessable in functional rather than normative terms – or alternatively, normativity defined by institutional functionality. The latter is in his ontology of the sociopolitical, which clearly draws from Schmitt around a “friend-foe” structure (Schmitt 2007: 26-29). According to Schmitt, social and political concepts take on the structure of “semantic weapons”.

While revolutionary and insightful, Koselleck's anthropological and historical assumptions neglect a factor that Machiavelli does ponder: that a fundamental characteristic of human beings is belonging to an undetermined atomic material reality. Koselleck's contemporary blindness to the human, non-mechanical, materialist aspect of Machiavelli's theory kept him from seeing his modern, revolutionary understanding of time which, had he analyzed it in its *Zeitgeist*, he may have found similar to his own notion of acceleration.

As Victoria Kahn notes (2014: 90-93), *poiesis* was central to Machiavelli's work, in that creation provided order to the human animal. In his historical analysis, Machiavelli employed techniques of both images and language – through rhetorical criticism – to iconoclastic effect in order to generate a myth based on materialistic anthropology. This is doubly critical historiography: ethics and religion are contextually relative narratives, able to move the passions of individuals through fear, which in turn enables horizons of expectation in individuals.

As Koselleck would later understand, Machiavelli had already shown that concepts have no history. Human action, rather, creates multiple possible meanings and thus history. I conclude that Machiavelli anticipated the conceptual revolution described in Koselleck's *Sattelzeit*.

## Conclusion

Animality in the human, a central aspect of Machiavelli's materialism, is present as a continuum with nature, anchored in a Lucretian material universe of human and non-human animals. From the standpoint of temporality, Lucretian materialism exhibits a degree of indeterminacy that issues from the *clinamen's* capacity to randomly swerve atoms from their regular motion. As such, Machiavelli's linking this capacity to free will on his copy of *De Rerum Natura* come as no surprise. I hold that, as reflected in his annotations, Machiavelli's interest in Lucretius, coupled

with the relevance of Lucretian materialism to the cultural milieu of his time, played a crucial role both in his notion of freedom as no-rule and concept of temporality (construed as indeterminacy) as a fundamental factor in evaluating political action and its chances at efficiency. Atomism is similarly evident when Machiavelli writes about the existence of *humors* as determinants of politics from which it follows that some seek to rule and some not to be ruled. Lucretian materialism and its reinterpretations during the Renaissance, with Machiavelli himself a conspicuous actor, will play a key role in the conceptual revolution of the 17th and following centuries. The Renaissance's materialist anthropological foundation will spawn a break from the notion of the circularity of time.

Contrary to Koselleck's claim, Machiavelli does not subscribe to Polybius' circularity. The structural aspects he upholds, as further argued by Koselleck, resemble what Braudel termed *longue durée*: a pre-human setting – environment, biology, the limits of rationality, physiological and psychological conditions, institutions, language, etc. – that conditions human experience. As opposed to Polybius, in Machiavelli (1996: 11) the death of a city does not lead to its regeneration; it is final and unrepeatable. As noted, Koselleck failed to properly assess the form of Lucretian materialism underlying Machiavelli's thought and how it permeated his understanding of temporality and the theory of action. Research on Lucretian materialism in Machiavelli began in Italy in the 1960s and did not significantly reach the Anglo-Saxon world until Alison Brown's recent work. Koselleck's notion of the conceptual revolution embodied in the *Sattelzeit* was always imbued with a Schmittean reading of the Leviathan, which could account for his dismissal of both Machiavelli and the transformation of language in the Renaissance as a crucial antecedent to the *Sattelzeit* Koselleck described.

To Koselleck, modernity cannot be understood without reference to the Enlightenment. What his reconstruction of modern conceptual shifts left unaddressed is that libertinism and clandestine philosophy rest upon the reappraisal of Renaissance materialism that gave concepts new meaning and provided a foundation for a world that was breaking away from classic and Christian tradition. This is the context for Machiavelli's reflections on politics beyond good or evil that amounted to a conceptual revolution. The Enlightenment helped radicalize the Renaissance's initial break from the medieval world. Such radicality, and Machiavelli's importance to the emergence of sovereignty, the state, republicanism, etc., is precisely what Koselleck failed to see, presumably swayed by the Schmittean milieu that nurtured him intellectually.

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