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SUBVERSIVE SPINOZA
(un)contemporary variations

antonio negri

edited by timothy s. murphy

translated by timothy s. murphy, michael hardt, ted stolze
and charles t. wolfe

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

In addition to his renown (some would say infamy) as a political theorist and activist, Antonio Negri is also one of the world's leading interpreters of the recondite philosophy of Benedictus de Spinoza (1632–77). He came to prominence in that field with the 1981 publication of *L'anomalia selvaggia: Saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* [*The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*],¹ which was written during his first full year in prison, 7 April 1979 to 7 April 1980, awaiting trial on charges stemming from the kidnapping and assassination of former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro. Those charges were soon dropped for lack of evidence, but a succession of other, ever flimsier ones was brought that kept Negri in pre-trial 'preventive detention' until he was elected to the Italian parliament on the Radical Party ticket in 1983. Freed as a consequence of parliamentary immunity, Negri attended the sessions of the legislature for several months until it voted to revoke his immunity and send him back to prison. At that point he fled to France, where he lived in exile until his 1997 return to Italy.

Negri arrived in France an intellectual celebrity, not only because of his situation as a political prisoner but also because of the tremendous impact *The Savage Anomaly* had on the study of modern philosophy. The book was immediately translated into French and published with laudatory prefaces by leading Spinoza scholars Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Macherey and Alexandre Matheron.² Two elements made Negri's interpretation not just influential but truly revolutionary. Firstly, he succeeded in demonstrating that Spinoza's anomalous metaphysical work was directly linked to the historical anomaly of his homeland, the Dutch Republic, in the seventeenth century: it was a nearly mature capitalist market economy with an enlightened oligarchic government surrounded by a decomposing set of

pre-capitalist European monarchies. Secondly, as a consequence of this anomalous historical position, Spinoza's philosophy itself divides (though not in a clear and distinct manner) into two parts or periods, which Negri calls the 'first foundation' and the 'second foundation' of his metaphysics, respectively. The first foundation, manifested in the early works up through the Second Part of the *Ethics* (published posthumously in 1677 but begun considerably earlier), largely conforms to the neo-Platonic idealism that had dominated much of the Renaissance. It gives rise to an ontology of the radical immanence of being, from which human praxis appears to emanate as an epiphenomenon or after-effect; this quasi-emanationist logic has inspired the many mystical interpretations of Spinoza's work. The second foundation, emerging from the tension present in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) between the alienation imposed by the social contract and the direct democratic constitution of the multitude that only the final Parts of the *Ethics* and the unfinished *Political Treatise* could resolve, abandons neo-Platonic emanationism in favour of a radically constructive materialism of bodies and surfaces. Spinoza's refounded ontology remains radically immanent, as it was in its first foundation, but now praxis constructs and constitutes being rather than the reverse: being only 'is' in its perpetual (re)construction by human praxis. This second foundation, according to Negri, represents Spinoza's attempt to extend and intensify the historical and political anomaly of the Dutch Republic in metaphysical terms.

The Savage Anomaly itself can also be read self-reflexively as a kind of 'second foundation' of Negri's own thought. Most of his writings from the 1950s up to that point were focused on the history of the modern capitalist state, with special attention to the forms of its metaphysical and juridical legitimation (as this manifests itself in the philosophical works of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, in the legal writings of Hans Kelsen, Norberto Bobbio and Evgeny Pashukanis, and in the political economy of John Maynard Keynes, among others). This 'first foundation' of Negri's thought was essentially a negative one, in that while it generated extremely aggressive (and effective) theoretical assaults on these hegemonic disciplinary forms of ideology, it was unable to produce similarly powerful models for affirmative, that is revolutionary, alternatives to these forms. Negri himself implicitly acknowledges this in his preface to *The Savage Anomaly*:

It is incontestable that an important stimulus to studying the origins of Modern thought and the Modern history of the State lies in the recognition that the analysis of the genetic crisis can be useful for clarifying the terms of the dissolution of the capitalist and bourgeois State. However, even though this project did form the core of some of my earlier studies (on Descartes, for example), today it holds less interest for me. What interests me, in fact, is not

so much the origins of the bourgeois State and its crisis but, rather, the theoretical alternatives and the suggestive possibilities offered by the revolution in process.³

This renewed interest in the 'revolution in process' finds its point of departure in the work of Spinoza, understood not as a mere source of conceptual topoi in the history of philosophy, but rather as a detour necessary for the effective refoundation of revolutionary theory and praxis: 'This recognition . . . of Spinoza's thought but also of a terrain and a proposition that permits us to construct "beyond" the tradition of bourgeois thought, all this constitutes an operation that is really oriented toward another goal: that of constructing a "beyond" for the equally weary and arthritic tradition of revolutionary thought itself.'⁴ Negri's reading of Spinoza, then, is not only the pivot point of his work as a historian of philosophy, but it is also a crucial enabling element in his political activism.

The most important consequence (and sign) of this shift from a negative first foundation to an affirmative and ontological second foundation lies in the new perspectives it opens up on the problem of time. The first foundation was almost exclusively retrospective in its temporality, while the second foundation is predominantly prospective, oriented toward the distinctive modalities of future time. Thus Negri insists that

the liberation of a cumbersome past [is not] worth anything if it is not carried through to the benefit of the present and to the production of the future [futuro]. This is why I want to . . . introduce time-to-come [l'avvenire] into this discussion, on the basis of the power of Spinoza's discourse . . . Bringing Spinoza before us, I, one poor scholar among many, will interrogate a true master with a method of reading the past that allows me to grasp the elements that today coalesce in a definition of a phenomenology of revolutionary praxis constitutive of time-to-come.⁵

Time-to-come is the time of alternatives, of affirmation, the time in which Spinoza's early modern project of liberation dovetails with Negri's post-modern one to create a new matrix for communism and radical democracy that Negri calls 'anti-modernity' in this book. In explicating the way Spinoza refounds his thought as a constructive materialism, Negri simultaneously refounds his own as constitutive praxis.

From this second foundation spring most of the works by which Negri is known in the Anglophone world: his studies of 'constituent power' via the comparative analysis of successive revolutionary theories and practices from Machiavelli to Lenin, collected in *Insurgencies* (which he acknowledges is 'a sort of extension of the studies done in [*The Savage Anomaly*] on the development of modern political metaphysics⁶); his dense metaphysical investigations of time and collective subjectivity.

assembled in *Time for Revolution*,⁷ and of course his influential collaborations with Michael Hardt on the analysis of globalization, the state-form, and resistance to them in *Labor of Dionysus* and *Empire*.⁸ All of these works draw upon the second foundation in reaching for the 'beyond' of revolutionary thought and in striving to constitute the time-to-come that Negri first glimpsed in his encounter with Spinoza.

Subversive Spinoza is, in a sense, the direct sequel to *The Savage Anomaly* and a further extension of Negri's second foundation: it is composed in large part of reflections and analyses that are subsequent and ancillary to the main argument developed in the earlier book. Thus it examines the historical and conceptual parallels between Spinoza and the Italian Romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi (in essay IV) and the radical alternative that Spinoza offers to the metaphysical and political thought of modernity and postmodernity (in essays V, VI and the postface). It is also, in a different sense, *The Savage Anomaly* version 2.0: a revision of the second foundation by means of a self-criticism and rewriting of some of the central theses of the earlier book, in response to challenges from other scholars and historians of philosophy. In particular, Negri acknowledges at several points in this book that his original assertion of a clear and distinct caesura between the first and second foundations in Spinoza was overstated, even though he insists that his delineation of their respective determining characteristics remains fundamentally correct. He also elaborates much more fully on the later Spinoza's radically constitutive conception of democracy than he did in *The Savage Anomaly* – essays II, III and VII are devoted entirely to this issue. No matter which of these senses we choose to emphasize, however, we readers must constantly bear in mind the inextricable interweaving of *Subversive Spinoza* with its predecessor.

But this is not to imply that *Subversive Spinoza* is merely an appendage to *The Savage Anomaly*. It possesses its own rhythm, its own style, its own passion that should not be dismissed or overlooked. Perhaps the most powerful and affecting manifestation of this appears right at the beginning, in the only essay included here that was written, as the earlier book was, in prison. Here, in the midst of his audacious argument for Spinoza's contemporaneity, Negri offers us what is undoubtedly his own credo:

I continue to live in the wonder wherein I recognize my affirmation as just and lasting, the weight of my existence as an operative reality that I project forward every day, in each moment, displacing it continuously, constructing it each day, in each instant, for collective being. This weightiness is revolution. I must defend it, tear it away from the enemy becoming, I must submit it to a single and continuous choice, that of continuing to be, of enriching being. I have no reason for repentance or nostalgia, outside of the fact of being, and I hold up once again this insistence upon my being, this move-

ment through it – even in its serene weightiness (and also in the moments of internal destruction that nevertheless pass through me – old age like prison . . .) – as material of the collective imagination that establishes scenarios of liberation. What I am living is a movement of extreme determinateness – the expression of what is and what cannot be erased. (below, p. 6)

This stubborn evocation of the wonder of life, emerging from deep within the bowels of a Roman prison, resonates with that feeling or 'affect' that Spinoza called joy: 'Joy . . . is an affect by which the body's power of acting is increased or aided . . . And so . . . joy is directly good' (*E IV P41 Dem*). Joy is the power of life against death; to use a term of Michel Foucault's that Negri has made his own, joy is biopower in action. It is this very same joy that continues to resonate throughout all of Negri's subsequent works, right up to the concluding lines of *Empire*: 'Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves . . . posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control – because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.'⁹ That also means: the lightness and joy of being a subversive Spinozist.

Notes

- 1 Antonio Negri, *L'anomalia selvaggia: Saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981); Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
- 2 Negri, *L'Anomalie sauvage: Puissance et pouvoir chez Spinoza*, trans. François Mathéron (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982).
- 3 Negri, *Savage anomaly*, pp. xx–xxi.
- 4 Negri, *Savage anomaly*, pp. xix–xx.
- 5 Negri, *Savage anomaly*, p. xxi, translation modified (see the Italian edition, pp. 16–17). In his recent writings Negri often (but not always) distinguishes between the future (*futuro*) and time-to-come (*avvenire* or *tempo-avvenire*). The future is a homogeneous continuation of the present, somewhat similar to Walter Benjamin's notion of 'empty time' in 'On the Concept of History' (Benjamin, *Selected Writings vol. 4* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, pp. 394–5), while time-to-come is defined by an eruption of radical or revolutionary novelty that is closer to Benjamin's 'state of emergency' (392) or 'now-time' (395–7). A more direct influence on Negri's distinction can be found in Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's concept of the event; see Matteo Mandarini's translator's note in Negri, *Time for Revolution* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 285.
- 6 Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* trans. Maurizio Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 352 n. 90.
- 7 Trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003). This volume consists of two long essays on time written almost twenty years apart: 'The constitution of time' from

Macchina tempo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982) and *Kairòs Alma Venus Multitudo* (originally published in Rome by Manifestolibri in 2000).

- 8 Negri and Michael Hardt, *Labor of Dionysus: Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- 9 Negri and Hardt, *Empire* p. 413.

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'Spinoza: five reasons for his contemporaneity' was originally published in French in *Cahier 14, La religion of Confrontation* (autumn 1985), pp. 175–81, under the title 'La Théodicée dialectique comme exaltation du vide'. The text bears the notice 'January 1983, from Rebibbia Prison'.

'The *Political Treatise*, or, the foundation of modern democracy' was originally published in French in François Châtelet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des oeuvres politiques* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986), under the title 'Spinoza, Baruch: *Tractatus Politicus*', pp. 765–76.

'*Reliqua desiderantur*: a conjecture for a definition of the concept of democracy in the final Spinoza' was originally published in Italian in *Studia Spinozana* vol. I (1985), *Spinoza's Philosophy of Society*, pp. 151–76. An English translation, by Ted Stolze, was published in Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (eds), *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 219–47. That translation is reprinted here, in revised form, by permission of the translator, the editors and the University of Minnesota Press.

'Between infinity and community: notes on materialism in Spinoza and Leopardi' was originally published in English in *Studia Spinozana* vol. V (1989), pp. 151–76. That translation, by Michael Hardt, is reprinted here in revised form by permission of the translator and of *Studia Spinozana*.

'Spinoza's anti-modernity' was originally presented during a session of the seminar 'Spinoza and the twentieth century' that was held at the Sorbonne on 21 Jan-

uary 1990. It was originally published in French in *Les Temps modernes* vol. 46 no. 539 (June 1991), pp. 43–61. An English translation by Charles T. Wolfe was published in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* vol. 18 no. 2 (1995), pp. 1–15. That translation is reprinted here in revised form by permission of the translator and of *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*.

'Democracy and eternity in Spinoza' was originally published in French under the title 'Démocratie et éternité' in Myriam Revault d'Allonnes and Hadi Rizk (eds), *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie* (Paris: Kimé, 1994), pp. 139–51. In that volume the text included a dedication 'in memory of Félix Guattari'.

'To conclude: Spinoza and the postmoderns' was originally published in French under the title 'Une Philosophie de l'affirmation' in *Magazine littéraire* 370 (November 1998), pp. 53–5.

CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout his interpretation of Spinoza, Negri distinguishes systematically between the Latin terms *potestas* and *potentia*. *Potestas* corresponds to the Italian *potere* and the French *pouvoir*, just as *potentia* corresponds to the Italian *potenza* and the French *puissance*. Unfortunately, both terms may be translated by the one English word 'power', which tends to obscure the difference in meaning on which Negri's reading relies: *potestas* refers to power in its fixed, institutional or 'constituted' form, while *potentia* refers to power in its fluid, dynamic or 'constitutive' form.¹ In order to make this distinction visible without further burdening the translation with bracketed Italian terms, we have chosen to follow the practice established by Michael Hardt in his translation of Negri's *Savage Anomaly*: *potestas* is translated throughout as 'Power', while *potentia* is translated as 'power'.

In this volume, the works of Spinoza are cited parenthetically by the following abbreviations and in the following editions (which we have sometimes silently modified so as better to reflect the specifics of Negri's arguments):

- E* *Ethica: Ethics*, in Edwin Curley (ed. and trans.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); we have adopted a variant of Curley's method of indicating specific passages by means of additional letters as follows:
- E* I, II etc. First, Second, etc. Part of the *Ethics*
- D* Definition
- A* Axiom
- P* Proposition number
- Dem* Demonstration
- C* Corollary
- S* Scholium
- L* *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995); numbers refer to the standard Van Vloten and Land chronological system of numbering the letters.

- TP* *Tractatus Politicus: Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000); roman numerals refer to chapter numbers, while Arabic numbers refer to paragraphs within the chapter.
- TTP* *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus: Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); roman numerals refer to chapter numbers, while Arabic numbers refer to pages of this edition.

Note

- 1 For a more comprehensive discussion of this terminological distinction, see Michael Hardt's foreword to his translation of Negri's *Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. xi–xvi. Negri develops its conceptual implications across a broad range of examples from the history of political philosophy in *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

translated by timothy s. murphy

SPINOZA: FIVE REASONS FOR HIS CONTEMPORANEITY

In the history of collective praxis, there are moments when being is situated beyond becoming. The contemporaneity of Spinoza consists *first of all* in this: being does not want to be subjected to a becoming that does not possess truth. Truth is said of being, truth is revolutionary, being is already revolution. We too are living through the very same historical paradox. Becoming manifests its falsity when faced with the truth of our revolutionary being. It is not by chance that, today, becoming seeks to destroy being and suppress truth. Becoming seeks to annihilate the revolution.

A great crisis precedes Spinoza. And a crisis is always a negative violation of being, set against its power of transformation, against the plenitude of expression accumulated in being by the labour and experience of humanity. Crisis is always reaction. Spinoza grasps the real characteristics of the crisis and the reaction; he responds by affirming the serene power of being, its effortlessness and consequently the irreversibility of the ontological transformation, of desire now fixed as the norm of what exists – yet still within a universe of catastrophes. 'As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false' (*E* II P43 S). The disenchantment of the philosophers of becoming, the cynicism of the apologists for the mediations of Power, and the opportunism of the dialectical thinkers thus turn against being set forth in its purity. Spinoza's thought, the solid genealogical stratum of the first revolution of freedom, is thus described as an anomaly – in the one-sided vision of the enemy, the function of a sophisticated and reactionary becoming.

In opposition to Spinozian truth, which is the truth of a revolution accomplished in consciousnesses, the search for the being-for-itself of ethics through the *multitudo* and the discovery of its effectiveness, there

stands a tendency toward the violation and restoration of being at the heart of dialectical becoming, as the figure of the thousand and one stations of the homology of Power. After Spinoza, the history of philosophy is the history of dialectical ideology. Under a dialectical disguise, the tradition of theological transcendence and alienation raises its head again. The problem of theodicy dominates philosophical thought over the course of the three centuries that follow Spinoza – which is nothing but the miserable transcription of human exploitation constantly renewed, of unhappiness constantly imposed. But Spinoza cannot be eliminated. About every later philosophy, one can say that it tries to break out of the petrified envelope in which being is trapped, and for that brief instant it can necessarily be described as Spinozist; then it is pulled once again toward a necessity of another sort, that of the market and wage-slavery, to present itself once more as subject to the reign of dialectical theodicy. What a feeling of disgust and boredom we feel before this unaltered framework, before this repetition of bourgeois ideology against revolutionary wisdom! Whether it is called sickness or subversion, only madness saves the philosopher. All honour to the mad. If wisdom is still possible, it is to be found on the side of the mad. Thus if the enemies of truth define Spinoza's philosophy as an anomaly, its friends and descendants must on the contrary recognize its savage and irreducible character.

Often, perhaps too often, the sick and the mad get well, become little by little wage-earners of culture and produce their academic theses on theodicy; thus after Spinoza there is Spinozism – but this theodicy has experienced a loss of power [*caduta di potenza*], has resolved itself into a kind of negative acceleration that is the more extreme the more fully the philosophy in question formerly touched on the truth of being, so that, as a result of having once been wise, today it must suffer the pain and humiliation of the dialectical reflux. The history of dialectical ideology, which is the history of European metaphysics in the modern and contemporary era, thus represents the path of a loss of the power of being. Thought is degraded to increasingly subaltern and empty, increasingly deprived and formal levels in order to justify a senseless becoming against the plenitude of being. This is exactly the opposite of the route followed by the person who knows that 'the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, or perfection, we conceive it to contain' (E II P1 S). But when we flee Eden, as Masaccio shows us, we cannot escape the finger of God. Once the ethical foundation has been discarded, being gives way to a logical foundation – an increasingly desperate fall [*caduta*], an ever-deeper uprooting. The dialectic seeks the absolute as the illusory self-reproduction of its own movement. Being, reality, is distant – the logical foundation of being is condemned to levels that are increasingly formal.

Crisis is the one dimension within which the logical foundation of being establishes itself and lays itself open – a useless Prometheus that resolves itself into an idiotic narcissism. The dialectical theodicy has lost all ethical reference. It is the glorification of the void, of empty becoming. The void can then take the place of the boss in philosophy – as in the theatre of the absurd or in certain surrealist games, in which a simple evocation of being proves to be unthinkable. The void of being produces a kind of untouchability of consciousness that bears witness to it or feigns it: such is the necessary result of the crisis of dialectical theodicy, of the science of becoming struggling against the perception of the ontological. The logical void of Power is set against the ethical fullness of ontological power.

This development can be grasped in its totality, like a spectre of an implacable logic, in seventeenth-century philosophy. The bourgeois epoch encompasses in its genesis the whole apparatus [*dispositivo*] of its development and its crisis. Spinoza is the anomaly – a savage negation dear to us, the negation of every figure of this repressive determination. Spinoza is present today for the very same reason that has justifiably made him the enemy of all modern thought. He is the fullness of being against the void of becoming. Spinoza is once again the *Ursprung*, the source, the original awakening, and no longer an anomaly. The current horizon of the crisis actually modifies all the terms of theoretical labour. The sublime inexpressiveness of the dialectical theodicy, now reduced to a state of empty asceticism or stupid mysticism, is today fully deployed. From the *asylum ignorantiae* to the polymorphous and dialectical network of ignorance, everything is now completely unfurled in this history and this new crisis of ours. What is to be done? How do we reaffirm the hope of life and philosophy, if not by being Spinozists? Being Spinozist is not a determination but rather a condition. In order to think, one needs to be Spinozist. We are beginning to become aware of this. In the crisis, even in common consciousness, being is posed beyond becoming. This is why, in today's philosophy, the logic of thought begins to yield to the density of common language, functionalist thought begins to explode out of its own compactness and turn toward a reflection on communication, and harmonious epistemology begins to abdicate its linearity in favour of a logic of catastrophes!

The world is the absolute. We are happily overwhelmed by this plenitude, we cannot help but associate ourselves with this superabundant circularity of sense and existence. 'You spare all things because all things are yours, Lord, lover of life/you whose imperishable spirit is in all.'¹ The surface is our depth. German dialectics and French administration do not succeed in corroding this immediate happiness free of privation, this singularity of ours. The world shows itself to be increasingly marked by an

irreducible singularity, a collective singularity. Such is the content of being and revolution. And it is only by acting that we are able to discriminate within this plenitude, it is only by walking that we open up paths in this dense tropical nature, it is only by navigating that we trace routes on this sea. Ethics is the non-dialectical key that opens our path and determines our discriminations. The falsity of the dialectic is that of a key that would open all doors, while ethics on the other hand is a key adequate to singularity.

This point defines *the second reason for Spinoza's contemporaneity*. He describes the world as absolute necessity, as presence of necessity. But it is this very presence that is contradictory. Indeed, it immediately restores necessity to us as contingency, absolute necessity as absolute contingency – since absolute contingency is the only way to claim the world as ethical horizon. The stability of being is presented as co-extensive with the innovative catastrophes of being, its presence given on the margin of everyday innovation, and its necessity given as co-extensive with revolution: such is the paradox of this necessity. But we cannot understand the full significance of this paradox if it is not translated, or perhaps it would be better to say led back, from the language of metaphysics to that of physics. But the notion that being in its totality should be transformable to this extent can only be understood once we have grasped the breadth of the crisis and the effective possibility of a destruction of being that is rooted therein – which is nothing more than the outcome of the effort at logical control of the world. Here the void is no longer a logical hypothesis, but rather a cynical possibility or condition of logical thought and its absurd ethics. Logic seeks to be an act of domination – it seeks to be the possibility of a negative catastrophe. The world, being, can be destroyed: but if it can be destroyed, it can be constructed in its entirety. The sense of the catastrophe eliminates even the last vestiges of determinism. The necessity of the world, its presence and its givenness, does not in any case preserve determinism. It is absolute contingency. Only today can we understand in physical terms, as materialists, the full significance of the fact that necessity is freedom. The world falls back into our arms as freedom – this is the sense of the catastrophe that has restored it to us, as the possibility of freedom and collective creation.

Spinoza teaches us thus to make a distinction in the ethical world. The world is ethical only to the extent that, and because, we ourselves live it. At this level of development of human reality, the ethical alternative regains its highest significance: an alternative between life and death, between constructing and destroying. When ethical power articulates itself in the absolute contingency of being, this movement is not indeterminate. There is a criterion, a standard: the reasons of life against those of

death. 'A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death' (*E IV P67*). The ethical act will thus be an act of composition, of construction – from the heart of being, in the tension between the singular and the collective. The possibility of a total violation of the world does not lead us to qualify action indifferently. The negation of every form of dualism and every mediation does not suppress the ethical alternative: it displaces it, resituates it on the extreme limit of being, where the alternative is between living and being destroyed. The radicality of the alternative highlights its drama, its intensity and irreversibility. And it is precisely, and justifiably, in this intensity and drama of the choice that ethics becomes political: the productive imagination of a world that is opposed to the world of death. 'For a free people is led more by hope than by fear, while a subjugated people is led more by fear than by hope; the former seeks to engage in living, the latter simply to avoid death' (*TP V, 6*).

The productive imagination is an ethical power. Spinoza describes it as the faculty presiding over the construction and development of freedom, the faculty that sustains the history of liberation. It is the *res gestae*, the construction of collective reason and its internal articulation. And it is a leap forward – imagination as the *Ursprung* of ethics, constitutive power passing through the continuous decentrings and displacements of ethical being. These are not words, they are beings, an ontological reality that develops the productive imagination. And this is *the third reason for the contemporaneity of Spinoza*, who leads us back to the being of revolution and situates us in the radically constitutive determination of the ethical alternative. Therefore science and labour, the world of language and information, are led back to ethics, and studied in the very moment when they are formed, in the genealogy of their production. Their force consists in constituting being. Words and things are installed on an operative horizon, and the imaginary defines this constitutive dynamic. Ethics makes a distinction in being to the extent that it discovers and recognizes the quality of existence, the tendency to exist (whether toward life or toward death) as the fundamental determination. But on this operative margin, which is the limit of given being on which the imaginary operates, we are therefore in the presence of scenarios that are being deployed into the future – a future that we construct as we ethically imagine it.

Spinoza's philosophy excludes time-as-measure. It grasps the time of life. This is why Spinoza avoids the word 'time' – even when establishing its concept between life and imagination. Indeed, for Spinoza, time exists only as liberation. Liberated time becomes the productive imagination, rooted in ethics. Liberated time is neither becoming, nor dialectic, nor mediation, but rather being that constructs itself, dynamic constitution,

realized imagination. Time is not measure but ethics. Imagination also unveils the hidden dimensions of Spinozian being – this ethical being that is the being of revolution, the continuous ethical choice of production.

I believe that one needs to approach the study of the history of thought in the spirit of the ethical constructor of being, thereby eliminating every dialectic, every trace of historicism, every determination that does not attach itself to and closely follow the time of life. This is a radical choice: not *historia rerum gestarum* but *res gestae*, the elimination of every memory that could not be, that is not in fact a fable, that is not a project for a future forged by the imagination. The contemporary tragedy of a being that can be unmade demonstrates and unfolds the concept of its profound and irreversible facticity – the quality of the Spinozian determination of the necessity of being. It thus transforms the point of view of totality into that of contingency. At this limit-point, I understand that necessity is the fruit of my labour and the labour of all those who work toward the goal of bringing this being into existence. This is in no way a recuperation of finalism. The fact that ‘the mind strives to imagine only those things which posit its power of acting’ (*E* III P54) does not re-establish purposiveness. It is only an affirmation of being, of the power of being. Now and always this is a revolutionary demand. I continue to live in the wonder wherein I recognize my affirmation as just and lasting, the weight of my existence as an operative reality that I project forward every day, in each moment, displacing it continuously, constructing it each day, in each instant, for collective being. This weightiness is revolution. I must defend it, tear it away from the enemy becoming, I must submit it to a single and continuous choice, that of continuing to be, of enriching being. I have no reason for repentance or nostalgia, outside of the fact of being, and I hold up once again this insistence upon my being, this movement through it – even in its serene weightiness (and also in the moments of internal destruction that nevertheless pass through me – old age like prison . . .) – as material of the collective imagination that establishes scenarios of liberation. What I am living is a movement of extreme determinateness – the expression of what is and what cannot be erased. Ethics is the persistence of being, its defence and its resistance. Spinoza is the cipher for a revolution that has taken place. This cipher is the impossibility of destroying the revolution without destroying being, the necessity of determining, for freedom’s sake, the historic, decisive choice of being, the choice of a place from which a fully deployed freedom can emerge.

We have arrived at *the fourth reason for Spinoza’s contemporaneity*. It is his concept of love and body. The expression of being is a great sensual act comprehending the body and the multiplicity of bodies. ‘Being’ means participating in multiplicity. Here there is no longer any dialectic but

rather a continuous proliferation of relations and conflicts that enrich being, and that – once again – know no other limit than destruction.

Whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or of affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful. (*E* IV P38)

And further: a permanent and solid construction of collectivity, an involvement in it. And if each of us plays a role in the development of being, this happens because it is only in a society of beings that we are constituted, and here new societies are liberated and constructed with each new displacement of being. In this sense, to speak of a new society is like speaking of new being. Being is, non-being is not – but new being is even more, more singular and more social, more collectively determinate. Imagination is the channel through which beings associate within a new being thus constructed.

Being is the source and principle of emanation. Whether the source comes from on high or low down, from the mountain or the valley, is a totally superfluous question, since everything is surface. In any case no one is more foreign than Spinoza to the emanationist currents of Antiquity and the Renaissance. If we can speak here of being as the source of emanation, it is because we understand this source in terrestrial and corporeal terms, as an emanation or rather a source that is like a fire setting alight a meadow, like the legions of clouds that even in the violence of an enormous storm also make a gift of water and life. From reality emanates a new reality. Collectively, at every moment, this miracle of new being is offered to us through the thousand and one singular actions of each being. The world glitters. Love cements different beings together; it is an act that unites bodies and multiplies them, giving birth to them and collectively reproducing their singular essence. If we were not anchored in this loving community of bodies, of living atoms, we would not exist. Our existence is always in itself collective. No one is alone. On the contrary, it is becoming and the dialectic that isolate, not being and love. Against the disasters of logic, a thought diametrically opposed to solipsism is possible: the thought of Spinoza. This is why love can be defined as an emanative force: a proliferation, a superabundance of serene being that has already accomplished the revolution; that has pushed the level, the content and the force of desires past all measure. Desire is thus the cement of love and being.

But there is *a fifth aspect of Spinoza’s contemporaneity* – and that is the heroism of his philosophy. Neither Giordano Bruno’s heroic fury nor Pas-

cal's vertigo, but the heroism of good sense, of revolution in and through the *multitudo*, of imagination and the desire for freedom: a massive heroism that necessarily involves no fanaticism but rather demands a lucid and simple force of clarification, that does not swim in the troubled waters of becoming but instead asserts a kind of revolutionary natural right. It is the heroism of intellectual discovery and its theoretical irreversibility – based not on the will but on reason. We find it in Machiavelli and Galileo, in Marx and Einstein. It is not arrogance or a sense of honour, but the joy of reason. Spinoza plants this joyous dimension in metaphysics at the very moment when, or perhaps because, he annuls it and leads it back to the surface of the world. Resistance and dignity, refusal of the agitation of a senseless existence, independence of reason – these are not moral precepts but rather a state, an ethical theorem. We would not succeed in explaining our world, the dialectical fervour for control of those who dominate it, their unrestrained attempts to enclose it in the mesh of development by command, to reduce it to the eternal and well-proportioned dimensions of exploitation, if we forgot that this operation is confronted with the solidity of a being that, for its own happiness, proclaims itself definitively disproportionate, revolutionized, other – a being that, in proclaiming its own definitive irreducibility to becoming, expresses the highest heroism. It does so soberly but harshly, as mass behaviour and good sense. Insubordination to the rules of the dialectic and desertion from the field of the war of domination – such is Spinoza's heroism, his dove's ruse, the delicacy of his force of illumination. Never have the tranquil dignity of reason, its infinite world-being and majority of thinking, acting and desire been as necessary as they are today in revealing and neutralizing the destructive poisons of being. We are here, within this being, revolutionized, and we calmly repeat that nothing will make us turn back. We cannot turn back. And we do not know how to distinguish our joy and our freedom from this necessity.

Note

- 1 Book of Wisdom 11:26–12:1, in Alexander Jones (ed.), *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), p. 1021.

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translated by timothy s. murphy

THE POLITICAL TREATISE, OR, THE FOUNDATION OF MODERN DEMOCRACY

Spinoza's *Political Treatise* is the work that founds, in theoretical terms, modern European democratic political thought. This assertion is a rigorous one, one that in the first place rules out the generic reduction of the modern idea of democracy, based on the concept of the *multitudo*, to the idea of democracy proper to ancient, specifically Greco-Latin, thought. In Spinoza, the specific and immediate basis of the idea of democracy, and even more so the concept of the *multitudo*, is human universality. In the democratic thought of the Ancients this is not given, and freedom is the attribute of the citizens of the *polis* only. On this score Spinoza distinguishes himself from the other democratic thinkers of his historical era: in other currents of modern democratic thought, the idea of democracy is not in fact conceived in terms of the immediacy of political expression, but rather it is defined in the form of the abstract transfer of sovereignty and the alienation of natural right. On the contrary, the revolutionary character of Spinoza's political proposal consists in the conjuncture of the concept of democracy and a radical and constructive theory of natural right. The *Political Treatise* is a work rooted in the conditions of modernity. The fabric of the problem is that of a mass society in which individuals are equal from the viewpoint of right and unequal from the viewpoint of power. Distinct alternative possibilities open up within this fabric; Spinoza describes each of them, always careful in his treatment to preserve a democratic sense in the conditions of solution. The theory surveys experience realistically, and the democratic project that crowns the effort, far from being utopian, is totally homogeneous with and adequate to the aporias and alternatives that the historicity of the forms of the State presents. The origins of modern democratic thought are often seen as lying elsewhere than in Spinoza. European humanism's sophisticated reprise of the

ancient tradition, the theoretical positions that accompanied the battles waged by the bourgeois citizenry against the medieval conceptions of power, the council tradition, certain progressive currents of the Reformation, all these things indeed produced elements of democratic theory. Nevertheless, Spinoza's thought goes beyond this transition and the tiresome forms it takes: he elaborates not mere elements but rather democratic thought in its entirety – and at the level, as yet still larval, of mass capitalist society. The *TP* is therefore a work of time-to-come [*avenire*],¹ a manifesto of a political thought turned toward a future that the rest of the seventeenth century could only conceive in terms of the forms and reforms of despotism, a future whose arrival Spinoza, that anomalous figure of the metaphysical and political thinker, hastens in terms of a political proposal of democracy.

However, the *TP* makes its entry into the history of democratic thought in a paradoxical way. In the first place, its importance is obscured, so to speak, by the painful and even (given the use made of it by publishers) pathetic vicissitudes of its publication. The *TP* was drafted between 1675 and 1677, the year Spinoza died leaving it unfinished – unfinished in the sense that the text published in 1677 by the press responsible for the *Opera posthuma* stops at chapter XI, at the beginning of its treatment of democratic government. The preceding chapters can be divided into two parts: chapters I to V, which deal with the general issues of political philosophy and which can be considered complete as a draft; and the second part, chapters VI to XI, which is interrupted at the very moment it reaches the issue of democracy, although the preceding chapters dwell at length on two other forms of government: monarchy and aristocracy. The interruption brought about by death occurs, therefore, at the moment when the analysis reaches the heart of the project, the study of democracy. How then can we assert, as we have, that the *TP* is a fundamental text for the construction of modern democracy, even though it is painfully interrupted precisely at the chapter that speaks of it?

Another paradoxical aspect must now be added to this first one: the editors of the *Opera Posthuma* add, in the guise of a preface, a letter from Spinoza 'to a friend' (L 84) in which the author, on the point of taking up his labours, lays out the plan of the work. He confirms his intention, after writing the general parts and the section on monarchical and aristocratic government, to develop a study of the '*popolare Imperium*'. The editors point out that, having reached the end of his treatment of aristocratic government, Spinoza did not manage to complete his programme. But straight away they add this subtitle: '*Political Treatise, in which it is shown how a community governed as a Monarchy or as an Aristocracy should be organized if it is not to degenerate into a Tyranny, and if the Peace and Free-*

dom of its citizens is to remain inviolate' (*TP* p. 33). Looking at it from the outside, the *TP* would therefore seem to have as its purpose simply the philosophical justification of monarchy and oligarchy, so the problem of democracy would not have been excluded from discussion by accident but rather intentionally eliminated from the logical process of Spinoza's thought. Indeed, in the course of the 1670s and in particular around 1672, a crisis had struck the oligarchic form of government in operation in the Netherlands, and the family of Orange had won a strong hegemony in the country and restored, with some innovations, the traditional forms of monarchical government. The publishers used the unfinished state of Spinoza's text to contribute to the constitutional revolution then in progress. The second paradox thus consists in the use to which the editors put the text, a use that was assuredly not democratic: it was twisted to support the new Dutch monarchy. A third element for reflection arises from the fact that in truth Spinoza had not remained unaware of the substantial modifications of the Dutch political climate and institutional environment.

In 1670 he had published the *Theological-Political Treatise* anonymously to avoid censorship and the Inquisition, and in Latin to limit its circulation to more cultured and liberal circles. Spinoza's correspondence bears witness to his resolute hostility to any Dutch translation of that book. But there is more. Spinoza's preoccupations in the *TTP* had been suspected, even by his close friends, of harbouring an atheist thought, and even of establishing a sort of conjunction of radical republicanism and pure materialism. The polemics, reproaches, perhaps resentments, had strongly affected Spinoza.

The *TTP* appeared immediately as an accursed work. His friends advised Spinoza to correct his position and present himself as a loyalist in terms of politics and a traditionalist in terms of metaphysics. Is it possible that, under these physically and legally dangerous conditions, Spinoza not only refused to adjust his democratic project but instead perfected it in the political work that immediately followed these polemics? Is it possible that his disdainful rejection of criticism and his reassertion of the legitimacy of his own behaviour, positions constantly repeated in his correspondence in that period, leave no space for any operation of correction and clarification? Everything seems to converge, therefore, to make the *TP* a work of retreat, and the suggestion of a republican and democratic configuration of the *TP* is even more paradoxical as a result. Nevertheless, we obstinately persist in our assessment, and we are about to demonstrate it. But before engaging these problems of reading and interpretation to which Spinoza's political thought gives rise, let us recall one episode. On 20 August 1672, the partisans of Orange killed the two DeWitt brothers, the enlightened administrators of the Dutch oligarchy, who were open to republican and

democratic developments of the regime. At the news of this terrible assassination, it is said that Spinoza composed and attempted to post an outraged notice beginning with the words '*Ultimi barbarorum . . .*' ['Worst of barbarians . . .']. This emotion is certainly not at the centre of Spinoza's political thought; it is nevertheless an important symbol or sign of it.

In order to resolve the problem of the political meaning of the *TP*, we must first of all define how it is situated in the totality of Spinoza's work. The *TP* comes last in Spinoza's metaphysical production. It is preceded by at least two great works whose contents refer partially but no less directly to political issues: the aforementioned *TTP*, composed between 1665 and 1670, and the *Ethics*, the work of Spinoza's entire lifetime, the final composition of which definitely took place between 1670 and 1675. Beginning with the *TTP*, and above all in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's system had sought to free itself from certain emanationist elements and a certain neo-Platonic and Renaissance-style deductivism that were present in the early metaphysics and particularly in the *Short Treatise* and the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. It was a matter of developing and transforming the contents of an ethics constructed on pantheist premises and burdened with a certain ascetic enthusiasm into a positive ethics, an ethics of the world, a political ethics.

The early works are characterized by an immediacy of the nature/divinity and man/society relations that prevents the theory from articulating a precise mediation with the concrete, and thus with political activity. That is not all: at the moment when the indifference and immediacy of the pantheist tradition are shattered, a positive dialectic opens up in the *Ethics* and in the *TTP*, one oriented toward the world, toward its surface, toward the sphere of possibility – to the point that causal determinism is pushed toward indeterminism, and physics, based on the drive to the production of the world, is conceived as the basis and source of the expansion of the material and human horizon. At this point the freedom of the individual begins to be defined as constitutive power. *Potentia*, the general figure of Being that underlies the conception of *conatus* as the drive of every individual being to the production of itself and the world, expresses itself as *cupiditas* and constitutively invests the world of historical passions and relations. This process, which unfolds on the plane of metaphysical analysis, is very complex. It brings along with it various traditional residues and systematic alternatives, but nevertheless it always promotes a fundamentally linear, or perhaps it would be better to say progressive, schema, that is to say a tendency toward an increasingly radical world-construction [*mondanizzazione*] and positivity of the human, ethical and political horizon. The formation of the theoretical hypotheses of the *TP* is situated at the conclusion of this metaphysical process. It is on the basis of this inherence

in metaphysics that the *TP* takes on its extraordinary value as a work not only internal to the development of European political thought, but also internal to that of European metaphysics: it is a work that is as innovative in the one tradition as it is in the other. Moreover, it is quite difficult to deny that, in the history of western thought and particularly in the history of the bourgeoisie, metaphysics and politics are constructed together. In the phase that witnesses the genesis and early development of the modern State, undoubtedly it is metaphysics that determines, in an absolutely preponderant way, not only the instruments and categories of political thought but also the sensibility and forms of behaviour, the aspirations and compromises that make up such a large part of political thought. So much so that no strictly disciplinary or specialized reading of the *TP* or other political treatises of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be allowed to avoid the presence of metaphysical thought and the grid, so to speak, that it imposes on political thought. In reality, the true modern politics during the rise of the bourgeoisie is metaphysics – this is the terrain on which the history of political thought must work.

From this point of view Spinoza's *TP* offers the advantage of revealing this methodological undertaking with great clarity – indeed, it does not present itself merely as the product of a determinate metaphysical development, but as an internal (and decisive) element of that very same development. Moreover, this is what the great interpretations that have renewed the study of Spinoza these past thirty years have recognized. From Wolfson to Gueroult, from Deleuze to Matheron, from Kolakowski to Macherey to Hacker, the historical reconstruction of the development and unity of Spinoza's thought has led to the recognition of the *TP* as a work that crowns metaphysics from the inside – that is, one that resolves a number of contradictions and powerfully hints not only at a new politics but also at a metaphysical framework deployed on the terrain of practical being: '*experientia sive praxis*' [experience, that is, praxis].

If it is possible here to add a reflection based on materialist analysis, and remaining within the development of European political thought, we should note that with the *TP* we find ourselves faced with a modality of political thought that on the one hand is founded on the humanist utopia of freedom as the principle of radical constitution, and on the other, and especially at this point, rescues the constitutive principle from the determinacy of the relations of production that asserted their hegemony in the crisis of the seventeenth century. It also rescues that principle from the ideologies that represent these relations of production and the political relations that are derived from them in the direction of absolutist despotism. The *TP* is thus the conclusion of a double philosophical pathway: a specifically metaphysical one that pursues the determinations of the con-

stitutive principle of humanism in order to lead it from utopianism and pantheist mysticism to a definition of constitutive freedom within the horizon of the world; and secondly a more properly political one that arrives at the definition of this freedom as the power of all subjects, thus excluding from this open and constitutive terrain any possibility of the alienation of natural right (that is, the social force of the constitutive principle). The thought of the *TP* thus defines itself, in its entirety, as democratic thought. The fact that the chapters on democracy were not written alters little in the tremendous breath of inspiration that suffuses the text. We might even say, somewhat maliciously, that it invites us to contemplate the enormity of the presupposition: a metaphysics that, to the extent that it thoroughly criticizes the mystification of the constitutive principle, is frankly materialist; a politics that, to the extent that it refuses the alienation of the right to life (and the free expression of this right) inherent in every individual, is frankly anti-dialectical, and thus places itself outside the great lines of bourgeois political thought. The democracy theorized by Spinoza, as the systematic conclusion of his metaphysics in the *TP*, is not a democracy that conceals and mystifies the relations of production, nor one that legitimizes existing political relations; it is a democracy that founds a collective doing [*fare*] in the development of individual powers, that constructs political relations on this basis and immediately frees them from the slavery of the relations of production. In shaping the world, the power of individuals shapes the social and political world as well. There is no need to alienate this power in order to construct the collective – the collective and the State are constituted along with the development of these powers. Democracy is the foundation of the political.

We come now to the text of the *TP*, which as we said begins with five chapters that define the object of politics within the general metaphysical framework. The first chapter constitutes a methodological introduction in which a polemic is developed against the Scholastic philosophers and more generally against all philosophies that fail to consider the fabric of human passions as the sole effective reality upon which political analysis can operate. It includes a sort of conceptual paraphrase of chapter XV of Machiavelli's *Prince*. The polemic next turns against the 'statesmen', against those who have theorized the political starting from experience – not because this should not be the exclusive basis of political thought, but because this condition of the recognition of 'experience as praxis' is not sufficient. Observation and description are not enough: human praxis must be thoroughly examined by a 'sure and conclusive' method that studies 'the effects that follow from determinate causes' and grasps the human condition as a determination of dynamic and constitutive being. The explicit reference to the *Ethics* that this introduction makes is therefore

essential. The reference to the constitutive dynamic of the collectivity described in the *Ethics* allows Spinoza to specify the methodological process of discrimination in operation within political realism. It is a matter, he tells us, of conceiving the relationship between the development of individual *cupiditates* and the constitution of the *multitudo*: such is the object of politics, not morality or religion. But that is also the subject of politics. By way of an autonomous dynamic, the human *conditio* becomes political *constitutio*; from the viewpoint of value this passage implies a consolidation of *libertas* in *securitas* and, from the viewpoint of the dynamics of acting, a mediation between *multitudo* and *prudencia*: that is to say, a form of government. In the *TTP*, Spinoza wrote: '*Finis revera Reipublicae libertas est*' ['The purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom' – *TTP* XX, 232]. He confirms it here, by showing how the freedom of singular individuals must construct collective security and how this passage represents the specificity of the political. The autonomy of the political can only be constituted by the autonomy of a collective subject. Here in chapter I we touch upon a nodal point *par excellence* of metaphysics: the separation between *potentia* and *potestas*, power and Power, that had been at the centre of one of the fundamental logical battles in the system of the *Ethics*. In the first draft of the *Ethics*, there was a difference between *potestas* (the capacity to produce things) and *potentia* (the force that actually produces them). This difference results from the persistence of an emanationist schema that belongs to Spinoza's early metaphysics. And the degree of materialist maturity attained by Spinoza's thought can be measured in relation to the necessity of destroying this relationship of dualist subordination and thus the necessity of conceiving being as radical and active constitution. In the *TP* this development reaches its conclusion. The relationship between Power and power is completely overturned: only power, by constituting itself, only the power of the many, by making itself collective constitution, can found a Power. In this framework, Power is not seen as a substance, but rather as the product of a process aimed at collective constitution, a process that is always reopened by the power of the *multitudo*. Being is presented here as inexhaustible foundation and as total opening. The *Ethics* is completed, so to speak, by the *TP*.

Chapter II of the *TP* takes this metaphysical passage as its point of departure and deploys the metaphysical freedom of power. Spinoza immediately refers to the *TTP* and the *Ethics*, and what was there constructed in relation to the concept of power must now be demonstrated apodictically – taking 'apodictic demonstration' to mean nothing other than the power of being to make itself.

So the fact that the power of natural things by which they exist and act is the very power of God, we can readily understand what is natural right. Since God has right over all things, and God's right is nothing other than God's power insofar as that is considered as absolutely free, it follows that every natural thing has as much right from Nature as it has power to exist and to act. For the power of every natural thing by which it exists and acts is nothing other than the power of God, which is absolutely free. (*TP* II/3)

Natural right is thus identified here as the expression of power and the construction of freedom. Without mediation. If up to this point the metaphysical *potentia* had been physical *conatus* and vital *cupiditas*, it is now reinterpreted and conceived as *jus naturale*. The immediacy and totality of this juridical function excludes all mediation and admits only displacements that proceed from the internal dynamic of the *cupiditates*. The social scenario is thus defined in antagonistic terms, which can in no way be resolved through an abstractly pacifying dynamic or a dialectically operative one: only the constitutive advance of power can resolve it. 'If two men come together and join forces, they have more power over Nature, and consequently more right, than either one alone; and the greater the number who form a union in this way, the more right they will together possess' (*TP* II/13). The natural right of individuals, a universal given, thus constitutes itself into public law [*diritto pubblico*] by traversing the social antagonism, not by denying it in some transcendental manner, but rather by constructing collective displacements. A social physics is being proposed here, and we must not be astonished by the exclusion of the social contract (the essential figure of the bourgeois conception of the market, of civil society and its regulation by means of the transfiguration and guarantee of the State), an exclusion which is fully in keeping with the fundamental line of theoretical construction. Faced with analogous difficulties in the construction of collectivity on the basis of the *cupiditates*, Spinoza had surreptitiously introduced into the *TTP* the idea of the social contract, drawn from the culture of his day. Here, on the contrary, the issue of the contract is excluded. In place of the contract he puts consensus, and in place of the methodology of individuality he puts that of collectivity. The *multitudo* becomes a constitutive power. Public law is the justice of the *multitudo* to the extent that the individuals oversee the scenario of antagonism and collectively organize the necessity of freedom.

In terms of our contemporary science of law, the framework sketched here is that of the constitutional State, and also that of so-called 'juridical positivism': public law thus constituted determines the just and the unjust, which boils down to the legal and the illegal. But it is necessary to pay close attention to the use of these definitions when either attributing the qualifier 'constitutional' to Spinoza's political thought or insisting on the

'positivism' of his definition of justice. Through the use of these qualifiers, the contemporary science of public law in fact presupposes the idea of a form of legitimacy that proceeds through the alienation of natural right and the construction of a transcendence of Power. Juridical positivism thus becomes the apology for an exclusive and transcendent source of the production of right, and constitutionalism becomes the form of the division of Powers and the articulation of control around the very same sovereign attribution. Spinoza's reasoning is totally different in form, if not in fact the opposite. The centrality of the State and the eminence of sovereignty are not presupposed, neither by the law nor by the constitutional system – and above all they are not separate from the process of legitimation. The limits of Power are not derived from values extraneous to power – and above all not from a right that claims to be 'divine'. They are derived from a continuous process of legitimation that traverses the *multitudo*. Legitimation is inalienably rooted in collectivity; only the collectively expressed *potentia*, only the creativity of the *multitudo* determines legitimacy. There is no sort of transcendence of value in Spinoza's philosophy. Here, in chapter II of the *TP*, the impetus toward the horizontality of constitutive processes becomes extreme and exemplary. Spinoza subordinates constitutionalism to the democratic principle.

What was stated positively in the first two chapters is taken up in polemical fashion in chapters III and IV and directed against the two fundamental assumptions of the modern thought of natural rights theory and absolutism: the idea of the transcendental transfer of natural right and the unlimitedness of sovereign Power. Spinoza never ceases to admonish us concerning the need to free ourselves from these illusions that generate despotism. So even if the Power constructed by the formative process of the *multitudo* is absolute, this does not mean (in contrast to the theory of the transcendental foundation and contractarian transfer of sovereignty) that it is not constantly subordinated to the vicissitudes of the community. 'The right of the State is determined by the power of a multitude that is guided as though by a single mind' (*TP* III/7), but no one is deprived of the possibility of preserving his own faculty of judging and seeking to interpret the law in the name of reason. The citizen is subject only in the freedom that has been reorganized into a reasonable State. It follows that the mechanism of legitimation of absolutism is quite simply eliminated here. Sovereignty and Power are flattened onto the *multitudo* and onto the processes that proceed from individuals to the constitution of the State: sovereignty and power go as far as the power of the organized *multitudo* goes. This limit is organic, it participates in the ontological nature of the constitutive dynamic. The critique of the unlimitedness of Power is even more rigorous in chapter IV. Just as in chapter III Spinoza eliminates the

logical function of the contract as the instrument of the transfer of sovereignty and its transcendental consolidation, so in chapter IV, in the demonstration of the functional necessity of the limits to Power, he deprives the consideration of the relationship between the absoluteness and relativity of sovereignty, between stable elements of Power and dynamic elements of power, of important elements. Spinoza succeeds here in stating the revolutionary paradox according to which there is true unlimitedness of Power only if the State is sharply limited and conditioned by the power of consensus. So, inversely, the rupture of the consensual norm immediately triggers war – the absolutist rupture of a constitutional civil law is by itself an act that comes under the right of war. ‘The rules that govern and give rise to fear and respect, which the State is bound to preserve in its own interests, have regard not to civil law but to natural right, since . . . they are enforceable not by civil law but by right of war’ (*TP* IV/5). The principle of legitimacy grounded in natural right can be claimed by the right of war: the subordination of natural right to an unlimited sovereign right, to a civil law promulgated in an absolutist manner, has war as its consequence, whereas peace, security and freedom can only proceed from the continuing unity of the exercise of Power and the process of the formation of legitimacy. There is no juridical genesis of Power, there is only a democratic genealogy of it.

Thus the dynamic of power is recuperated in all its constitutive force. The adage ‘*tantum juris quantum potentiae*’ [‘as much right as there is power’]² begins to be revealed as the key to a process that starts from the ontological level and turns into the motive force of a concrete constitutional construction. Chapter V concludes the first part of the *TP*, the part dedicated to the methodical metaphysical foundation of the theoretical project. Here Spinoza examines another essential concept of the theory of natural rights: the idea of the ‘best State’ – but he does so in order to make this *topos* play a subordinate role, in order to transform it by including it within his conception of power. As we have seen, power has been incarnated through successive displacements, up to the point where it reveals itself in the *multitudo*. On the basis of these movements and the successive developments of *cupiditates* toward a collective organization, a State has been able to constitute itself and to mould the articulations of power toward Power. Therefore, the best State will be none other than the one that can register the maximum expansion of this movement of freedom. Beyond all utopianism, the best of States assuredly cannot emancipate itself from the concrete processes of organization of the *multitudo*. Beyond all illusions that consider the State as a perfect product, the civil law, like the channels of legitimation, is always subordinated to the possibility that the constitutive process will be interrupted and succeeded by the right of

war as the reaffirmation of the conflictual independence of inalienable individual freedoms. It is not by chance that the first part of the *TP* concludes as it began, with praise to Machiavelli, whose extreme political realism allows him to be adopted as the defender of a programme of freedom. ‘*Tantum juris quantum potentiae*’: the first five chapters of the *TP*, and their conclusion in particular, can be described as a commentary on this metaphysical adage. From it one derives: a) a conception of the State that radically denies all transcendence and excludes all theories, present or future (from Hobbes to Rousseau), that make the transcendence of Power their basis; b) a determination of the political as a function subordinated to the social power of the *multitudo*, and therefore constitutionally organized; c) a conception of constitutional organization as necessarily set in motion by the antagonism of subjects. Spinoza, this absolutely singular historical anomaly, thus opposes the hegemonic tendencies of his century in politics as well as in metaphysics. In politics he demands an active presence of subjects against any autonomy of the political, fully restoring the political to constitutive human praxis. In these first five chapters of the *TP*, Spinoza’s critique of absolutism and the juridical foundation of the State shows itself to be ahead of its time and worthy of being associated with the most significant perspectives of democratic thought. The destruction of any autonomy of the political and the affirmation of the autonomy of the collective needs of the masses, beyond all utopianism – such is the extraordinary modernity of Spinoza’s political constitution of reality.

The five chapters that follow are dedicated to the analysis of the monarchical (chapters VI and VII) and aristocratic (chapters VIII to X) forms of government. The *Treatise* breaks off at chapter XI, at the beginning of the treatment of democratic government. It is worth adding that, beyond being unfinished, this second part on the forms of government is also incomplete. While the first five chapters, despite some internal confusion that is unusual in comparison with Spinoza’s other works, are substantially complete, the later chapters VI through X are full of ambiguities and uncertainties. However, these imperfections do not prevent us from recognizing the effort that Spinoza undertook to bring his philosophical meditations into contact with reality and to introduce them into the midst of the political dispute that was taking place, as we have seen, in the Netherlands during the extremely tense 1670s.

But now let us turn to the text. The chapters on the monarchical form of government have an uncertain structure. Chapter VI once again touches upon the structural principles of constitution in order then to move on to a description of the monarchical regime; in chapter VII, Spinoza attempts to demonstrate what he just asserted. Despite the incompleteness of the treatment, the sequence of chapters is important for it

demonstrates a new, realist manner of viewing monarchical government after the anathemas pronounced against it in the *TTP*. We are present once again, therefore, at the constitutive development of the *multitudo* – the specific antagonistic motive that effects the displacement here is the ‘fear of isolation’. In the state of nature, fear and isolation predominate – hence the ‘desire’ for security in the multitude. The passage to society represents not a ceding of rights but rather a step forward, an integration of being: the passage from isolation to the multitude, to a sociality that, in and for itself, eliminates fear. This is the royal road outlined in the more properly metaphysical chapters, which must be followed continuously in this direction, without flagging. ‘Yet . . . experience seems to teach us that peace and harmony are best served if all power [*potestas*] is conferred on one man’ (*TP* VI/4). The contradiction is thus *in re ipsa*. But once the contradiction between the genesis of the monarchical form of Power and the presuppositions of the constitutive process is noted, we can emphasize that Spinoza correctly perceives the historical data to be in contradiction with the ontological foundation. Hence his continual search for systematic coherence, the continual effort to alleviate the contradictory tension, throughout the remainder of the section. So where the *TTP* had firmly excluded the monarchy, here Spinoza adds that its preferred form is the ‘moderate’ one. And by moderation we should understand a certain relationship between monarchical Power and the inalienability of the rights of citizens, between the exercise of Power and the representation of consensus, between the royal will and the fundamental principles of constitution.

Kings are not gods; they are but men, who are often enchanted by the Sirens’ song. So if everything were to depend on the inconstant will of one man, there would be no stability. Thus, if a monarchical state is to be stable, it must be so organized that everything is indeed done only by the king’s decree – that is, that all law is the expression of the will of the king – but not everything willed by the king is law. (*TP* VII/1)

The absolutism of the day is thus firmly rejected, and the monarchical form itself is only accepted by being subordinated dynamically to the confrontation-mediation-encounter between different powers. A realistic acceptance of the historical present is bent to the ontological programme. The monarchy is given as a condition of fact: the analysis takes it as such, but it begins by denying the monarchy absoluteness. The analysis then defines it within the horizon of moderation, then disarticulates it into the constitutional relation of Powers so as to submit it at last to the constitutive movement of the *multitudo*. We must admit that, even if it does not succeed in purging itself of every contradiction, such a line of thought

nevertheless manages to destabilize the category of the monarchy in a profound way.

When in chapters VIII, IX and X Spinoza deals with the aristocratic form of government, his method follows the same pattern. After having reaffirmed that in fact absolute Power, ‘if there is such a thing[,] . . . is really that which is held by the multitude as a whole’ (*TP* VIII/3), and that if the government is not absolute, but rather exercised by a subset of men, by an aristocratic oligarchy, this engenders a continual antagonism between government and society, Spinoza then concludes from this that aristocratic government ‘will be most efficient if it is so constituted as to approach absolute Power’ (*TP* VIII/5). This means that aristocratic government is more constrained than monarchical government to respect the social consensus and to establish ‘council’ forms for the selection of governing agents, for constitution and functioning (the form par excellence of this type of government) that ever more fully approximate the model of absolute government. Spinoza then compiles a survey of the forms of aristocratic government (the incompleteness of the *TP* is particularly obvious here, as the set is quite confused) with the aim of understanding how we assess, with respect to the constitutive dynamics of the *multitudo*, the processes of production (or legitimation) and the criteria of management (or exercise) of Power.

It is pointless to conceal the fact that in these chapters on the forms of government, there is a disproportion between the metaphysical role played by the notion of ‘absolute government’ and the guiding idea of the *multitudo* on the one hand and the analytical and experimental contents of the constitutional analysis on the other. And it is beyond doubt that only the chapter on democracy would have been able to balance the pressure of the metaphysical principle and the reading of political contingency, the ontological and historical determinations. ‘I pass on at length to the third form of government, the completely absolute state which we call democracy’ (*TP* XI/1) – but the text stops right there. It is pointless to make conjectures. We can simply add that the very limits of this second part of the *TP* and the definitive crisis of its exposition are nonetheless significant. They indicate the range of Spinoza’s political thought, which reveals itself positively as a forceful application of his metaphysics. The incompleteness of the *TP* is not structural; structurally speaking, the *TP* completes the Spinozian foundation of a conception of being as product of power and pushes this conception to the point of an implicit and exemplary glorification of the absolute government of the multitude and its expression of freedom organized into security. If nevertheless it remains incomplete, this is only a matter of chance, and the absence of the chapter on democracy in no way prevents us from characterizing the work as strongly democratic.

There remains one other problem to consider, and that is the relationship between the *TP* and the emergence of other moments of political thought in Spinoza's work. Although we have seen how the *TP* is linked to the development of Spinoza's metaphysical thought, we have seen little of how his political thought in the strict sense develops, beyond an acknowledgement of the most obvious differences between the *TP* and the *TTP* (that is, the fact that the first treatise utilizes the pretence of the contract in its treatment of *jus naturale* and excludes every theory of monarchy from among those it designates to be the highest form of government, while the second treatise, in its exclusion of the contract as a rigorous consequence of its metaphysical premises, leads to a contradictory acceptance of monarchical government, in however moderate a form). Thus it is worth repeating that the *TTP*, written between 1665 and 1670, has three purposes: to combat 'the prejudices of theologians' ('for I know that these are the main obstacles which prevent men from giving their minds to philosophy, so I apply myself to exposing such prejudices and removing them from the minds of sensible people'); to correct 'the opinion held of me by the common people, who constantly accuse me of atheism'; and to defend 'the freedom to philosophize and to say what we think [that] is in every way suppressed by the excessive authority and egotism of preachers' (*L* 30). This defence of freedom is organized through the construction of a natural history of the Hebrew people and the critique of the prophetic imagination as well as apostolic revelation, with the aim of establishing the principles and conditions of political society. The bulk of these principles are sketched in chapters XVI to XX of the *TTP*, in which Spinoza, by overturning the entire tradition of political thought, presents the theory of 'absolute Power' as democracy for the first time. This is democracy that presupposes the critique of all forms of *superstitio*, no matter how deeply cherished, and of the mystifying role of every positive religion, the democracy that develops from the natural right that belongs to every individual as expression of her or his own power and that can in no case be alienated; the democracy that is the construction of a community of free men, formed not only to eliminate fear but also to construct a superior form of freedom. From this point of view, then, the *TTP* constitutes not only a premise of the *TP* to the extent that it explicates the method of the phenomenological construction of power, the path from natural subjectivity to civil collectivity, but it also seems to constitute a conclusion to it, to add the missing part – precisely the one on the democratic form of government.

The conclusion of the *TTP* could thus constitute the heart of that missing part of the *TP* on democracy:

It follows quite clearly from my earlier explanation of the basis of the state that its ultimate purpose is not to exercise dominion nor to restrain men by fear and deprive them of independence, but on the contrary to free every individual from fear so that he may live in security as far as is possible, that is, so that he may best preserve his own natural right to exist and to act, without harm to himself and to others. It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their minds and bodies in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom. (*TTP* XX, 231–2)

The contradictory elements that the *TTP* presents with respect to the later elaboration of the *TP* do not preclude the possibility of a reciprocal integration of the two treatises. All the more so if we consider the following point: in the parts of the *Ethics* that were probably written between 1670 and 1675 – between the completion of the *TTP* and the beginning of the composition of the *TP* – the fundamental problem that Spinoza examined in his effort to reformulate the theory of the passions is undoubtedly that of the socialization of the affects. We find there a sort of correction of the excessive rigidity of the *TTP*'s theory of natural rights, a correction of the individualistic bias of its contractarianism and of its ontological aporias; and there is also something like a clear anticipation of the perfection of the constitutive method that would be utilized in the *TP*. Thus we can speak of an overall coherence of Spinoza's theoretical labour. From the utopian immediacy of the youthful philosophy's project that leads up to the great turning point of the *TTP*, through the last revisions of the *Ethics*, and finally to the *TP* – 'from utopianism to science', so to speak – Spinoza constructs a democratic political theory by continually elaborating his metaphysical conditions and instruments.

Because of the radicality of its approach and its capacity to recapitulate (beyond the precautions taken by the editors of the *Opera posthuma*) the whole of metaphysical thought, it was the fortune of the *TP* to be seen as an accursed book of late seventeenth-century political thought from the Enlightenment to early Romanticism. Many scholars have pointed out the hidden influence of the *TP* on works of political theory throughout this period; this influence, involving as it did an accursed author who could not therefore be cited, often appeared, paradoxically, in the form of plagiarism. But what interests us here is not this malicious scholarly influence, but rather the identification of the labour accomplished by Spinoza's metaphysics, in its political figure, during the course of the centuries that witnessed the maturation and triumph of the absolute State of the nascent bourgeoisie. We can see that this labour is essentially one of demystifica-

tion, one that points out a revolutionary alternative. The exceptional conditions of a free productive and political development in the Netherlands allow Spinoza to measure the intensity of the crisis of Reformation and progressive thought that strikes all the great European nations during the first half of the seventeenth century. The passage to absolutism in France and England, the reinforcement of central structures in the Spanish and Austrian states, the destruction of the great fabric of communal freedoms in Italy, and the catastrophic Thirty Years War in Germany: these form the backdrop of the last humanist and democratic battle, a battle that seeks to preserve the freedom of the productive forces from a new hierarchy of exploitation in the relations of production. Spinoza, this anomalous political thinker, writes the *TP* in the 1670s, in a country where the resistance to the absolutist restructuring of the State was more durable and more bitter than anywhere else: he was then able to view this battle as finished, and to note how the great forms of European political thought adapted themselves to the development of the absolutist State. The triumph of natural rights theory and the introduction of an individualism that is adapted to the new exigencies of production and that allow the absolute State to legitimate itself theoretically by means of the mechanism of the contractual transfer of sovereignty are the highest theoretical manifestations of this passage. Spinoza refuses to accept this, and thus he openly stands for the antagonism.

His political thought traverses the theory of natural right in order to deny its two fundamental principles: individualism and the contract. By radically denying any possibility of regulating the market among men by means of transcendental elements, he introduces atheism into politics. Man has no other boss than himself. All alienation is eliminated, be it Hobbes' reactionary conception or, as the apogee of bourgeois revolution approaches, that transcendental utopia of community, the general will. Spinoza writes, '[w]ith regard to political theory, the difference between Hobbes and myself . . . consists in this, that I always preserve the natural right in an integral form, and I hold that the sovereign Power in a State has no right over its subjects greater than its power over those subjects. This is always the case in a state of nature' (*L* 50). This materiality of existence and its right, accompanied by the firm assertion that by means of a common and equal labour, a free society can be constructed, organized and preserved, is a perpetual scandal for the hegemonic Western tradition of political thought, which has never managed to separate the maturation of society from the determination of its hierarchy, the construction of its legitimacy from its normative transcendentalism. Only in Machiavelli and Marx can we rediscover this wholehearted atheism, this operational materialism that we value so highly in Spinoza. Along with Spinoza, they con-

stitute the only current of freedom in political thought that the modern and contemporary era has known.

Recommended reading

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Notes

- 1 [translator's note, hereafter TN] In his recent writings Negri often (but not always) distinguishes between the future ('*futuro*') and time-to-come ('*avvenire*' or '*tempo-avvenire*'). The future is a homogeneous continuation of the present, somewhat similar to Walter Benjamin's notion of 'empty time' in 'On the Concept of History' (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, pp. 394-5), while time-to-come is defined by an eruption of radical or revolutionary novelty that is closer to Benjamin's 'state of emergency' (392) or 'now-time' (395-7). A more direct influence on Negri's distinction can be found in Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's concept of the event; see Matteo Mandarini's translator's note in Negri, *Time for Revolution* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 285.

- 2 [TN] Negri provides no references for this 'adage,' but it echoes certain passages in the *Ethics*, for example E IV P37 S1: 'The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from human nature. We have the same right against them that they have against us. Indeed, because the right of each one is defined by his virtue, or power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men.'

III

translation by ted stolze, revised by timothy s. murphy

RELIQUA DESIDERANTUR: A CONJECTURE FOR A DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY IN THE FINAL SPINOZA

As is well known, Spinoza's *Political Treatise* is interrupted by the unexpected death of the author at paragraph 4 of chapter XI, at the very moment it arrives at the discussion of democracy. In paragraph 1 Spinoza deals with the concept of democracy and how it differs from the concept of aristocratic government; in paragraphs 2 and 3 he defines the conditions of participation in democratic government by rigorously emphasizing the characteristics of its legality; in paragraph 4 he finally begins to investigate thoroughly the rules of exclusion. That is all. The incompleteness of the treatment is such that with regard to these pages one can hardly speak of a 'core' or a vigorous introductory outline. Nevertheless, in these few pages at least two extremely strong concepts emerge: the definition of democracy as *omnino absolutum imperium* at the beginning of paragraph 1 and, in paragraphs 2 and 3, the rigorous legalism of a positivist construction of the conditions of democratic participation. Thus, between the incompleteness of the text and the force of the concepts that nonetheless emerge, a great tension is objectively established, and a certain disquiet on the part of the reader is inevitable. I share this disquiet, and therefore I would like to take the inquiry further in order to try to understand how the concept of democracy could have been expressed in the *TP*.

To this end we can take two routes. The first consists of seeking in Spinoza's other works, in particular in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, a definition of the concept of democracy. On the other hand, regarding the definition of the concept of democracy, one could instead consider any reference to the *TTP* irrelevant, especially if one thinks – as I believe I have shown in my *Savage Anomaly* – that in the history of Spinoza's thought the *TP* represents a philosophical project that is more mature or in any case different.¹ The second route consists, then, in freely conjectur-

ing the concept of democracy starting from the dynamic of Spinoza's metaphysics.

Could the metaphysical hypothesis be truer than philological repetition? Perhaps. In any case, and not only with regard to this Spinozian passage (but almost always when one travels the paths of grand metaphysics), it is legitimate to conjecture that historicity is presented here only as the diffuse and always different emergence of moments of conceptual innovation, of the rupture of dominant ideologies, of transformative difference, within the envelope of the constructive project and the power of the rational structure. The work's vitality perhaps allows for this constitutive hermeneutic.

Nevertheless, the great majority of interpreters have followed what I am calling the first path. This reading consists in considering the last four paragraphs of the *TP* as a simple reference to what the *TTP* relates about democracy. And it matters little that the *TTP* speaks about the democracy of the Hebrews rather than about democracy *tout court*. So in this way certain possible difficulties in the reading of Spinoza can be dissolved, in particular those that arise in the first four paragraphs of chapter XI from the interweaving of the absoluteness of the concept of democracy that is proclaimed with the positivist suggestion that immediately follows. On that horizon of the demystification of sacred history that the *TTP* represents, democracy can in fact be read as an ethico-political concept, a progressive one that is all the denser in morality the more that critique, by eliminating the transcendence of the foundation, highlights as if it were an inverted trace the presence of a very ancient vocation and an always renewed human project. The absoluteness of the concept of democratic government is thus gradually unfurled and ethically justified. Moreover, on this dense horizon, the legalism can also be considered as a legitimate consequence, almost as a progressive and positive accumulation of rules of consent, participation and exclusion. It is in this direction that a second generation of Spinoza's interpreters seems to me to proceed,² a group that is just as attentive to the lay sacredness and the humanist secularization of the concept of democracy as the first generation of political interpreters in the nineteenth century was sensitive to the liberal and positivist dimension of this concept.³ The Straussian interpretation mediates between the first and the second generation of interpreters.⁴

Yet there is a series of general reasons that prevents one from following the first route. The *TTP* and the *TP*, in fact, take part in two different phases of Spinoza's thought. Whereas the *TP* is a kind of constitutive project of reality, the *TTP* represents an intermediary and critical point in the development of Spinoza's metaphysics. Nevertheless, I do not want to insist too much on such a difference, so that I can also avoid once again

being justifiably reproved for building a kind of Chinese wall between them. However, to avoid considering the solution of continuity as radical does not mean to forget that it exists.⁵ We will therefore privilege another series of considerations. From this new point of view, the impossibility of giving to the concept of democracy in the *TP* a definition extrapolated from the *TTP* results from a series of factual elements such as, for example, the different description in the two treatises of the forms of State, the figures of government, their different evaluations – but above all from the disappearance in the *TP* of any reference to the contractarian horizon. If one wants to make some conjectures regarding the concept of democracy in the *TP*, and the way in which it could have been developed, it seems to me that one would have to consider not the homogeneity but the differences between the two treatises. But since other authors have fully and definitively addressed these questions,⁶ I want to insist above all, at the beginning, on the difference in conceptual and semantic horizon that the disappearance of the contractarian theme determines in the *TP*, and I want to grasp the significance of this absence. It is clear that by proceeding in this way it is a matter of accumulating elements that allow one to prove whether it is possible, at the level of the *TP*'s problematic, to give an original definition of democracy that would be historically situated, conceptually conclusive, and metaphysically structured.

The fact that the contractarian theme is present in the *TTP* does not constitute a problem. On the other hand, the fact that the contractarian theme is not present in the *TP* does constitute a problem. I mean that in the seventeenth century social contract theory was so widespread that to assume it was self-evident, whereas to reject it was much less obvious.⁷ Thus, we can pose two questions at the outset. First, what does the contractarian theme mean in the seventeenth century; or better, what are the general meanings, the fundamental variants, the ideological tensions it offers? Second, within the context of natural rights theory and political theory of the classical period, who rejects the contractarian thematic and why, or who assumes it in a weakened form, or who exhausts it in utilizing it? In short, what classes of meaning does the acceptance or rejection of the contractarian thematic involve?

The answer to these questions is not simple. In fact, an ideological thematic of the complexity and extent of the contractarian one was experienced according to different modalities, and only a desperately reductive vision could bring it back to a unilateral development. Yet it is possible to identify some of the major functions, with hegemonic importance, claimed by this theory in the seventeenth century. In this regard it is crucial to recognize that contractarian theory is not sociological in nature, unless it is in a situation that borders on and is open to the innovation or subversion of

the paradigm. It is instead immediately juridical: this means that it is not supposed to explain human association and the constitution of political society but to legitimize the constitution of political society and the transfer of Power from civil society to the State. Social contract theory is an explicit sociological fiction that legitimates the effectiveness of the transfer of Power and thus founds the juridical concept of the State.⁸

Two remarks are in order. In the first place, social contract theory has a character that is certainly transcendental (in other words, it is applicable to every type of State), but it is formally limited. This means, in the second place, that within the class of meanings attributable in that era to the term 'State', the monarchical concept, or rather the concept of the unity, absoluteness, and transcendence of the title of Power (and often equally of its exercise, but without a univocal relation) is fundamental (hegemonic and exclusive of others). I say the monarchical concept in opposition to the republican concept in order to concentrate the transcendence of Power against every constitutive, dynamic, participatory conception. Variants are formed on this basis. The monarchical concept is, in fact, the concept of the State's substance. Thus it cannot be a concept of a form of government. Therefore the theory of contractarian transfer and the formation of sovereignty by means of that transfer contains the possibility of developing different figures of the form of government. Consequently there can exist, in a manner of speaking, a monarchical monarchy, an aristocratic monarchy, and even a democratic monarchy; it is in this regard that, a century later, Rousseau can bring social contract theory to completion.⁹ In addition to having a function of juridical legitimation that I would call foundational and formal, social contract theory has, then, a historically and conceptually specific determination; it is substantially predisposed to the legitimation of the different forms of government in which the absolutist State of modernity is represented.¹⁰

What we have just said is confirmed negatively by the answer to the second question we posed: what are the political currents and currents of ideas that ignore or are opposed to or in any event do not accept these specific political functions of social contract theory? We recognize basically two of these currents in Spinoza's universe: those linked to the tradition of republican radicalism of the culture of humanism and the Renaissance, and those originating from the democratic radicalism of Protestantism, above all Calvinism. On the one hand, Machiavelli; on the other hand, Althusius. And if Machiavelli's position is no doubt more radical, the Althusian acceptance of the contract is explicitly dedicated to the denunciation of every idea of alienation of Power, and the contract is inseparable from the association of subjects: the subject of sovereignty is 'the total people associated in one symbiotic body from many smaller associations'.¹¹ In

both these cases, in short, we witness the triumph of an idea of politics that, without formally excluding the idea of a transfer of Power, subordinates it to the material determinations of the social, of practices, of the multiplicity and specificity of powers.¹² Let us be careful: the political realism that exists in these traditions has nothing to do with those theories of the relativism of values that in this same period constitute and dominate political science. In Machiavelli and Althusius, beyond the enormous differences between the cultural universes of which they are part (and in Spinoza himself, when in the opening pages of the *TP* he flirts with the political philosophy of his time), political realism is in no way a relativism of values but a resolute adherence to the truth of the concrete: it is not the definition of a social negative that only an absolute power can distinguish and bring to meaning, but a theory of the truth of action, of the absoluteness of its horizon. Machiavelli and Althusius have little to do with the juridical subtleties of contractarianism, or with the cynicism of the 'statesmen' that is the latter's condition and complementary theoretical figure.¹³ When Althusius and Machiavelli finally intersect in the Levellers or in Harrington's thought, they express rather the luminous power of a positive conception of being, the strong republican conviction of the originally human character of institutions and the perfectibility of society – in short, they display a pure republican materialism.¹⁴ This is also the case with Spinoza.

To conclude this discussion, we can say, then, that social contract theory is in general a theory of the absolutist State, whereas the rejection of the theory, or its usage in terms that exclude the idea of a transfer of Power, represents republican traditions that are polemical when confronted with any ideology of representative government and any statist praxis of alienation. To the statist absolutism affirmed by social contract theories, as a consequence of the relativity of social values that pre-exist their normative overdetermination by the State, is opposed, in the realist positions that reject the theory of normative transfer, a conception that proposes the social as absoluteness – the very same metaphysical absoluteness that is proper to the horizon of truth. This truth is the truth of fact, the truth of action.

Yet the social contract is present in the *TTP*. However, this does not mean that its presence is important to the point of determining specific developments of Spinoza's political theory, or that it flattens the latter onto the generic framework of the political philosophy of the period. The presence of social contract theory in the *TTP* (in certain ways it is almost unnoticed, its possible effects unrecognized, a tribute to the hegemonic currents of the century) nevertheless limits the possibilities of a radically innovative orientation.¹⁵ In the *TP*, on the other hand, corresponding to

the absence of the contract there is a complete freedom of theoretico-political development. By this we mean that the assertion that right and politics immediately participate in the power of the absolute is of principal importance in the *TP*. Right and politics have nothing to do with the negative and dialectical essence of contractarianism; their absoluteness participates in and reveals the truth of action:

So from the fact that the power of natural things by which they exist and act is the very power of God, we can readily understand what is the right of nature. Since God has right over all things, and God's right is nothing other than God's power in so far as that is considered as completely free, it follows that every natural thing has as much right from Nature as it has power to exist and to act. For the power of every natural thing by which it exists and acts is nothing other than the power of God, which is absolutely free. (*TP* II/3)

To ask ourselves what the *democraticum imperium* in the *TP* can be, beyond the limits of the contractarian horizon, will then mean, not to substitute the lack of indication with the materials treated in the *TTP* but, on the contrary, to conjecture by intensifying our research into the extent to which Spinoza belongs to the republican tradition.

It is thus in the absence of any version whatsoever of contract theory that Spinoza in the *TP* speaks of democracy as the absolute form of state and government. Yet, outside of contractarian transfer, how can a philosophy of freedom be taken up again in an absolute form of government; or, vice-versa, how can an absolute form of Power be compatible with a philosophy of freedom – or better, with the very concept of republican democracy? From this viewpoint it seems that by rejecting the contractarian thematic Spinoza puts himself in a situation fraught with difficulty.

We have seen how the contractarian theme is linked to a certain conception of the State that Spinoza rejects. However, it is not in the expression of the rejection and the protest that Spinoza's difficulties arise – rejection and protest resound with imaginative force and republican ethical flavour, as well as an implicit threat: 'without freedom there is no peace'. The difficulties appear instead in the propositional phase, when one rejects, as Spinoza does, this specific passage of the alienation of freedom that the contractarian conception generally requires: an alienation that, although it constitutes sovereignty through the medium of transfer, restores to subjects a freedom and a series of rights that have been transformed (in the transfer and by sovereignty) from natural rights into juridical rights. But without this movement, how can absoluteness and freedom be made compatible? Better still, how can freedom be raised (from below,

without transfer) to absoluteness? The preservation of natural freedom, contractarians explain, is only possible where it is relativized and redefined juridically. The absoluteness of freedom, of freedoms, is otherwise chaos and a state of war. If, as Spinoza would like, democracy is an ordered system constitutive of absoluteness, how can it simultaneously be a regime of freedom? How can freedom become a political regime without repudiating its own naturalness?

In order to answer these questions and see if it is possible to escape these difficulties, first of all we must clarify the concept of absoluteness, as an attribute of democracy. What does the qualification '*omnino absolutum*' mean insofar as it is an attribute of the '*democraticum imperium*'? The answer must be given on at least two levels: the first is directly metaphysical; the second is the one on which the concept of the absolute is confronted with the usage that Spinoza makes of the term in political theory, thereby distinguishing it from other usages, and in particular from those that refer to contractarian theory.

On the level and from the perspective of general metaphysics, Spinoza's concept of the absolute can be conceived only as a general horizon of power, as the latter's development and actuality. The absolute is constitution, a reality formed by a constitutive tension, a reality whose complexity and openness increase as the power that constitutes it increases: 'If two men come together and join forces, they have more power over Nature, and consequently more right, than either one alone; and the greater the number who form a union in this way, the more right they will together possess.' (TP II/13) With this we come to the centre of Spinoza's metaphysical conception – the logically open determination of the fundamental ontology constitutes its most important qualification. 'Absolute' and 'power' are tautological terms. Power, as an open determination, in movement toward the absolute that, on the other hand, it actually constitutes, is already shown in the *TTP*, beyond the biblical legend, as the history of the Hebrew people. In the recognition of the development of this human power, the fundamental passage of Spinoza's thought, from the first to the second foundation of the system, is verified.¹⁶ This human power next appears in the first chapters of the *TP* as the basis of collective existence, of its movements – in other words, of society and civilization. The absolute, then, has power as its very essence and becomes existence by virtue and to the extent of the realization of power. This is the definition of the absolute from the metaphysical point of view. At this point, in the context of this problematic, it is superfluous to insist on the implications of the definition: it is enough to recall, always in very general terms, that if the concept of absoluteness is brought back to that of power, it is obviously brought back to that of freedom. The terms 'power' and 'freedom' are

superimposed onto one another, and the extension of the first is equivalent to the intensity of the second. Always in very general terms.

These considerations turn out to be very useful as soon as we consider the term 'absoluteness' within the specificity of Spinoza's political thought. From this perspective the '*absolutum imperium*', in fact, will become a term that, in signifying the unity of power, will have to assume it as the projection of the '*potentiae*' of subjects and to define its totality as life, as the always open, internal, dynamic articulation of an organic whole. Let us consider, then, this '*absolutum imperium*' that is Spinozian democracy from the perspective of a series of political problems that are as traditional as they are typical of the political science of his time. We shall see with what tremendous originality this definition is situated in the given problematic context and how it succeeds, within its own movement, in adequately proposing the problem of freedom anew.

The first point of view is that of the '*absolutum imperium*' from the perspective of the legitimacy of Power: the categories '*titulum*' and '*exercitium*'. It is under these two categories that the legitimacy of Power is traditionally identifiable, and it is in relation to these two categories that legitimacy can be evaluated, in its extension, in its articulations, in its forms of existence – legitimacy and legality as well as their contraries, illegitimacy and tyranny. Yet the absoluteness of democratic government in Spinoza is so realistic and so urgent that it does not permit this distinction. Moreover, it is extremely equivocal, for it is based not on the determinations of freedom but on the form of its state organization. Generally, the exercise of Power in Spinoza is closely connected to its title [*titolarità*], so there are no possible distinctions or articulations of this relationship. Democracy in particular is the absolute form of government because title and exercise are originally associated with it. The power of being thus manifests itself in all its unifying force. In modern terms we could say that such an absolute conception of democratic Power realizes the unity of the formal legality and material efficacy of the legal system [*ordinamento giuridico*], and demonstrates its autonomous productive force.¹⁷

The second point of view is that of the '*absolutum imperium*' in the casuistic tradition of the forms of Power. A certain ancient and classical tradition, as we know, presents every form of government in two figures, one positive, the other negative. The absoluteness of Spinoza's definition of democracy denies this possibility. Not that Spinoza does not envisage the possibility of a corruption of every form of government, and in particular of democracy; but the process of corruption is not separable from the unity of the life of a form of government. It is not the product of an alterity, but rather the life or death of the very same organism. For example, in *TP* II/1 Spinoza considers the Roman institution of dictatorship, which, arising as

a result of the rebuilding of the republic, has a tendency to develop into an independent figure. He observes that this is an abstract and dangerous tendency. To the extent that dictatorship tends toward absoluteness, its development not only achieves its goal of rebuilding the republic but also sets up conditions that are antagonistic to the absolute power of the democratic demand and thus establishes a state of war. On the contrary, the management of a state of emergency and the need for renewal must be conceived within the framework of the normal conditions of life of the republican absolute. The power of the absolute form of government in this case can transform the possible state of war into an organic movement of refoundation and thereby restore vigour to the State. Just as, in reconsidering the issue of *titulum/exercitium*, the figure of the absoluteness of the State is given to us synchronically, faced here with this dynamic of development, of corruption and refoundation, so too is the power of the absolute form of government given to us in a diachronic schema that is dynamic and temporally constitutive: 'It is therefore clear that this [aristocratic] kind of state will be most efficient if it is so organized as to approach absolute sovereignty' (*TP VIII/5*).

The third point of view is that of the *absolutum imperium* from the internal perspective of the administration of the State, or rather the concept of magistracy and the magistrate. In this case absoluteness also derives directly from the definition of the State. This means that Spinozian democracy, in whatever forms of organization of responsibilities, controls and functions it is configured, can in no way be defined as a constitutional democracy, that is, as a form of government based on the division and balance of Powers and on their reciprocal dialectic. In Spinoza the conception of the magistrate and the magistracy is instead absolutely unitary. Certain functions of control and balance are not excluded, but they do not derive from a fragmented or dialectical constitutional condition of Power. These functions, on the other hand, can be figures of expression of constitutive power, fragments or versions of the unitary tension of the system. Within that system, just as every subject is a citizen, so too is every citizen a magistrate – and the magistracy is the moment of revelation of the highest potential of unity and freedom.¹⁵

We could proceed to show many other points of view from which Spinozian absoluteness conceptually and actually sums up the concept of Power and its functions. But we would not add much to what we have already said. Whatever the point of view, the very same event is repeated. Absoluteness is the power that develops and maintains itself, unitarily and productively. Democracy is the highest form in which society is expressed, because it is the most expansive form in which natural society is expressed as political society: 'For if there is such a thing as absolute sovereignty, it is

really that which is held integrally by the multitude' (*TP VIII/3*). And in this expansiveness of dimensions, by traversing the *multitudo* of subjects, democracy becomes absoluteness, for it sets all social powers in motion from below, and from the equality of a natural condition. Democracy as an *omnino absoluta* form of government means, then, that there is no alienation of power – neither in relation to its exercise, nor in relation to its formation or the specificity of executive action, that is, the specificity of the figure of the magistracy. The absolute is non-alienation, or better, it is in positive terms the liberation of all social energies in a general *conatus* of the organization of the freedom of all. Continual and permanent. Every political formation is familiar with such mechanisms as organizational phases, functions of control, representative mediations and so on. But from the perspective of absoluteness these mechanisms do not form dialectical interruptions, nor do they organize passages of alienation. Instead, power unfolds on an open horizon, and these mechanisms participate in the articulations of this horizon – they do not interpret anything other than the givenness [*datità*] of this horizon. This is a collective doing [*fare*] that reveals the nature of power and defines the relationship between natural society and political society.

Nevertheless, we have not yet responded to the question about the compatibility between absoluteness and freedom. In fact we could still be asked: do we not perhaps find ourselves in the presence of a totalitarian utopia? Does not the refusal of the contract end up producing purely and simply an absolutist projection of freedom into fully developed power in such a way that every distinction and determination vanishes? I do not think that these objections are tenable any more. Nevertheless it remains true that until now the answer has only been sketched and that it looks forward to a further passage. This means that, having shown (as we have) the characteristics of absoluteness and how the only possible foundation of value is consolidated in it, without being able to escape it, having shown the impossibility of any alienation and how servitude arises from alienation – having reached this point, Spinoza's discourse traverses a second foundational passage. This discourse poses, in other words, the problem of the subject of this collective doing [*fare*] that constitutes democratic absoluteness. This subject is the *multitudo*. It is therefore around the issue of the *multitudo* that the problem of the relationship between freedom and absoluteness should be reconsidered.

In 1802, during the same period in which he was preoccupied with Spinoza, and more particularly with his political thought, Hegel wrote a *System der Sittlichkeit*.¹⁹ In this system the idea of 'absolute government' is developed in terms of an exaltation of the internal unity of power. This movement determines certain effects contrary to those that we have

observed in Spinoza: the refusal of alienation in Spinoza is absolute, while in Hegel every recognition of the singularity of needs and of subjects is absorbed into the metaphysics of the absolute by means of an exemplary exercise of dialectical movement. The absolute is given as a result, as enjoyment. Consequently, Hegel ceaselessly repeats, absolute government is beyond singularities; it must reject their negative determinations. Otherwise, the *absolutum imperium* would dissolve into the vulgarity and ignorance of the mass, and to the transcendental unity of subjects would be opposed a mere 'heap' of individuals. Absolute government is thus the idea of an absolute movement that becomes absolute tranquility, absolute identity of the living, absolute power that surpasses every singular power. Absolute government is infinite and indivisible totality. The transfer to the alienated generic that in contractarianism was the result of the transcending of the negativity of the social process is here the presupposition of social movement. It is not by chance that monarchy is the form of absolute government.

This path does not concern Spinoza. The relationship between power and the absolute in the *TP* is expressed according to two movements. Certainly, as we have seen, one movement presses with great force toward absoluteness in the strict sense, toward the unity and indivisibility of government, toward its representation as one soul and one mind:

The first thing to be considered is this, that just as in a state of Nature the man who is guided by reason is most powerful and most in control of his own right; similarly the commonwealth that is based on reason and directed by reason is most powerful and most in control of its own right. For the right of a commonwealth is determined by the power of the multitude guided as though by a single mind. (*TP* III/7)

But the other movement of power is plural; it is the reflection on (and the recovery of) the powers of the *multitudo*. The life of absolute government is endowed in Spinoza with a systole and diastole, with a movement toward unity and a movement of expansion.

After having followed the path of unity, Spinoza thus says that if absoluteness is not confronted with the singularity of real powers, it closes back onto itself. It is only by starting from this closure, only by traversing and being marked by substance, only by seeking in this interrupted flow a normative source, that it will be possible to rediscover social subjects [*soggetti sociali*]. Its effects will be disastrous: the latter will no longer be citizens but individuals subjected to Power [*sudditi*]. Thus it is for Hegel and all authors who accept, whatever the philosophical figure proposed, the idea of transfer and alienation as the foundation of sovereignty. From this point of view and in regard to substance, the refinement of the dialectical

passage is not something much different from the vulgar sham of the theory of contractarian transfer. In both cases we find ourselves faced with the assumption of the mystery of the transfer – mysterious because one does not communicate through it but ideally transforms the fact of association, which is presented as a normative source and as the basis of a hierarchical order – as the surreptitious foundation of science. The union of the one and the many, of totality and the infinite, of the absolute and the multitude is given as a synthesis, as a presupposition. (No, the Hegelian path does not concern Spinoza, and paradoxically, at the very moment that he recuperates Spinoza's terminology, Hegel is more 'Spinozist' than Spinozian – and why not? He is also a little 'acosmic'.²⁰) In fact, here the very idea (and praxis) of the market emerges as a hegemonic idea. By traversing contract theory or dialectical theory, in different phases, the idea of the market approaches the idea of the State. In both cases the productive cooperation of subjects and their mutual vital association are mystified into an order of value, of the norm, of command; and human association is thereby subordinated to the capitalist function of exploitation.²¹

In Spinoza all this is denied in principle. Just as the metaphysical relationship between totality and infinity is submitted to analyses and is ceaselessly reformulated as a problem, just as the relationship between unity and multiplicity in physics is understood and developed on an open horizon, a horizon of confrontation, of wars, of violent associations – so too, in politics, the relationship between absoluteness and *multitudo* is posed in extreme terms, which are paradoxical but no less decisive for that: it is an open relationship, and we shall see that it is a relationship of hope and love. 'The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater' (*E* IV P37). In the *TTP* the term *multitudo* appears only six times and has not yet acquired a political significance: it is a sociological, non-political concept.²² At any rate, it does not represent a political subject. Here, in fact, its problematic is less important, for the concept of democracy, the *praestantia* (*TTP* XVII/Title) of which is glorified, lives on a displaced, perhaps even degraded, terrain with respect to the political purity of the *TP* and the issue of absoluteness. In the first treatise the democracy of the *multitudo* is a kind of originary essence. It declines, develops, increases, is degraded in the history of the Hebrew people and articulated in theocracy, but in substance it remains as a model, as a political prototype, as a fundamental regime. The contractarian definition accentuates the static quality of the model. Moreover, in the *TTP* Spinoza does not speak about forms of government other than democracy (*TTP* XVI), except incidentally; and so he does not need to distinguish the figure of political subjects. In the *TP*, on the other hand, the point of view is completely dif-

ferent: it is a constitutive, dynamic, democratic point of view. Here the *multitudo* constitutes first of all the limit toward which political reason tends – from the isolation of the monarch to aristocratic selection to democratic absoluteness – a limit that is given precisely insofar as Power is adapted to the power of the *multitudo*. *Omnino absolutum* is the Power that is adapted to the *multitudo* – at the risk of employing a pleonastic turn of phrase, we could say to ‘all’ of the *multitudo*, which thereby becomes subject, but a subject that is elusive, like every concept of the indefinite, yet still ontologically necessary.

The critics who have denied the importance of the *multitudo* as subject and as the central metaphysical attribution of Spinoza’s doctrine of the State have justifiably insisted on the elusiveness of the concept. On the other hand, no doubt apologists for the *multitudo* have sometimes exaggerated it by considering it almost as an essence or as a schema of reason.²³ But the material elusiveness of the subject-*multitudo* does not prevent effects of subjectivity from being expressed in Spinoza. Thus, the *multitudinis potentia* founds the *imperium* and preserves it by means of the direct creation of right (*TP* II/27). And the whole of civil right, in the expression of which the state’s constitution finds its origin, is produced and legitimated by the *multitudo* (*TP* II/23) – and so forth (*TP* III/9, 18, etc.). Even if it is elusive, the *multitudo* is thus a juridical subject, a necessary attribution of the social, a hypothesis of political unity and constructiveness (*TP* III/7). But at the same time the *multitudo* remains an elusive set of singularities. This is the crucial paradox – the one formed between the physical, multiple, elusive nature of the *multitudo* and its subjective, juridical nature that creates right and constitution. This relationship is unresolvable. Here one can prove the radical impossibility of leading this image from the *multitudo*, and the juridical effects it determines, to Rousseau’s general will (Spinoza carries out this proof in *TP* IV and V).²⁴ No, the relationship between the absolute and the *multitudo*, between the two versions of power is not closed: the one concentrates toward the unity of the political, and the other spreads out toward the multiplicity of subjects.

The concept of the *multitudo* logically concludes Spinoza’s politics to the extent that it closes down neither its dynamic nor its idea. In other words, it conclusively shows the absolute of Spinoza’s politics as opening, as the inability to slow down or mystify the process of reality. Spinoza’s politics participates in a true Copernican revolution: the *multitudo* is an infinity, its power is a continuous movement – an infinite movement that constitutes a totality but is identified in it only as the actuality of a passage; it is not closed but open; it produces and reproduces. It is the opposite of a Ptolemaic and theological conception, which sees a principle (necessar-

ily an alienation) opportunistically unifying the world. It is thus the opposite of the Hegelian conception of the relationship conceived as a resolved relationship between totality and the infinite. It is precisely on the basis of the non-conclusiveness [*non conclusività*] of the relationship, as it is posed in Spinoza, against every theology and against every idealism, that the politics of the *TP* is a true disutopia, a Machiavellian conjecture of freedom, a radically democratic proposition of the subversion of the social. Every value, every choice, every political act must extend over the unconcluded relationship between the absoluteness of Power and the multiplicity of propositions, needs, and experiences. The rational tendency exists among the folds and within the complexity of this necessary non-conclusiveness, but it exists in it fully. An extraordinary optimism of the intellect [*ragione*] dominates the framework. This philosophy of Spinoza’s in the *TP* is Enlightenment philosophy pure and simple; it is Voltaire and Diderot expressed in high metaphysics.

But alongside this extreme tension of the rational tendency and its optimistic direction, there is the pessimism of the consideration of the concrete – not a preconceived pessimism, but a realist conception of the always different and always variable effects of the will and its relationship to reality. The circle does not close: such is politics – the continuous confrontation of an absoluteness that reason requires and of unresolved multiplicity that experience obliges us to consider. Optimism of the intellect and pessimism of the will.

In the *Ethics* the term *multitudo* appears only once, in the scholium to proposition 20 of the Fifth Part: ‘*in multitudine causarum*’. The term therefore appears outside of any direct reference to political thought, yet within the framework of a demonstration that can be connected to political thought: the demonstration of the power of the mind over the affects in the construction of the intellectual love of God, a demonstration that this power is all the stronger as the number of people that we imagine engaged in this process of knowledge [*conoscenza*] is increased. Beyond the strict semantic reference – ‘the multitude of causes’ – the appearance of the term *multitudo* here is thus not insignificant. Rather, it indicates a typical movement of Spinoza’s thought: within this infinite context of fluctuations and affections, what arises for the mind is the necessity of regulating them, of organizing them within the perspective of power; and finally, wherever we may have expected the development of an ascetic tension, there is instead the construction of a collective horizon. This theoretical move, by which the spiritual tension shifts to the collective, is essential and produces effects of displacement that are extremely characteristic (and seldom emphasized) in Spinoza’s philosophy.²⁵ Anyway, what is important to emphasize here, above all, is how this oscillation, this contradictoriness,

this paradox are typical of the concept of the *multitudo*. Let us look more closely at this question.

The concept of the *multitudo* is first of all a physical power. If we consider its very definition, it is situated in the physical context of the *Ethics*, and above all on that pivot point between the Second and Third Parts, where we have tried (in another text) to identify the central moment of the 'second foundation' of Spinoza's metaphysics.²⁶ In this framework, the horizon on which the concept of the *multitudo* is formed and presented is therefore very precise. It is a horizon of bare physicality and savage multiplicity. A world of physical interconnections and combinations, of associations and dissociations, fluctuations and concretizations, according to a perfectly horizontal logic, realizing the paradox of the intersection of causality and chance, of tendency and possibility: here is the originary dimension of the *multitudo*. It is clear that this physical horizon cannot support mediations of any kind. To its force alone is entrusted the possibility/capacity of refining the level of associations, of developing the multiplier of intersections of composition, of attaining ever higher degrees of complexity. The social level (and therefore the level of political combinations) is nothing other than this continuity; thus it is the development of the physical dynamic of the world.²⁷ The sociopolitical concept of the *multitudo* therefore contains in filigree the entire series of these movements, of these previous progressive constructions. It suffices to recall that in order to understand how the artificiality of the contractarian proposition is disjointed in the face of the material inexhaustibility of the social flux – in Spinoza's social physics the contractarian thematic can only ensue completely incidentally.²⁸

At this point a simple deduction can lead us to other considerations. If what we have said is true, then the tendency of Spinoza's political philosophy – which consists in riding the flux of the multitude and establishing in this flux a series of increasingly complex distinctions, all the way to those that concern the forms of government – becomes an extremely violent confrontation. I mean that each rupture of the flux and every establishment of a rigid form is an act of violence with respect to the tendencies of Spinoza's physics. However, this horizon of contradictoriness and these theoretical moves of displacement are productive. Here, in fact, we can summarize another series of the elements that are typical of Spinoza's conception of the *multitudo*; after having considered it as a physical power, we can consider it now as a natural, or better, an animal power. What it represents here is the reign of fear, of violence, of war – and in fact it is only these passions, these acts and these situations that can permit us to follow the entire progression of the movement of the *multitudo*, a movement that is never pacified but always open: 'For the human body is composed of a

great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things at once' (*E IV P45 S*). And even if we assume that in passing from the simple *conatus* to the *cupiditas*, from the physical realm to the animal realm, a certain corrective to dispersion, on the edge of displacement, is introduced,²⁹ nonetheless it is extremely difficult for us to grasp the possibility of bringing these contradictory and complex mechanisms and processes to an internal unity. The result again, in particular, is the difficulty of defining the concept of the *multitudo* as a political subject. So it seems that the *multitudo* can be a political subject only as an idea of reason or as a product of the imagination.³⁰ By contrast, concretely, the *multitudo* is a jumble, a continuous and contradictory intermingling of passions and situations – and then, through a new displacement, an accumulation of will and reason that as such constitutes institutions (*E IV P37 S1* and *2*). But this process only imperfectly allows for the power of subjects to be deployed from the perspective of concrete constitutional situations and constitutes here a definitive element of juridical and political attribution. In short, the formation of the political subject is postulated as a tendency in an indefinite interweaving of subjective intersections. From this point of view, plurality has an advantage over unity. Reason, thought, would like the *multitudo* to be presented as a single mind: this demand of reason traverses the natural field on which social life unfolds but does not manage to overcome its violence and dispersion once and for all: 'From this it is clear that just and unjust, sin and merit, are extrinsic notions, not attributes which explain the nature of mind' (*E IV P37 S2*).

Having considered the *multitudo* from the physical and animal point of view, there is a third level of possible consideration, which allows the final consequences of the previous developments to be measured: the *multitudo* from the point of view of reason. We have already seen how the demand of reason – which we can henceforth characterize as a proposition of the absoluteness of the urgency of democracy – does not succeed in becoming real. This is determined by physical and animal limits. In Spinoza the 'will of all', even if it were given, could never become a 'general will' – and this anti-Rousseauian conclusion is a premise of his thought. This does not mean, however, that the concept of the *multitudo* does not itself contain a certain rationality, and therefore a certain power. *Multitudo* is neither *vulgus* nor *plebs*.³¹ On the other hand, becoming real, in Spinoza's politics, has the power and limit of fact, neither more nor less. If therefore the absoluteness of the democratic claim does not manage to comprehend in itself the whole development of freedom, it must nonethe-

less permit the coexistence of singularities, reciprocal tolerance, the power of solidarity. This passage is fundamental. It poses the effectiveness of the non-solution of the relationship between absoluteness and freedom as the foundation of one of the highest values of the republican tradition: tolerance. The non-solution of the problem of the political subject becomes the foundation of tolerance, of respect for consciences, of freedom to philosophize. The *multitudo*, in the paradoxical nature that it exhibits, is the foundation of democracy insofar as it allows individuals to introduce into society as a whole their own values of freedom. Each singularity is a foundation. Tolerance for Spinoza does not take shape as a negative virtue, as a residual morality.³² If in the *TTP* tolerance was intellectual freedom above all, here it becomes universal right. This aristocratism, which, in the motto *libertas philosophandi*, stands out in the very subtitle of the *TTP*, is dissolved here into the concept of the *multitudo*. What is claimed here is a republican right and what is proposed is the very condition of democratic politics – an equal right for all. Once again, each singularity stands out as a foundation. It is possible, says Spinoza (*TP* XI/2), that in a city in an aristocratic regime the number of members chosen for government may be greater than that of a city in a democratic regime. But even if all the inhabitants of the city participated in the aristocratic form of management, the city would remain aristocratic, and this totality of participation would not restore it to absolute government. This is because absolute government is founded not on a ‘choice’ (even if it were the choice of everyone) but on the *multitudo*, on the foundation of the freedom of the individuals who compose this *multitudo*, hence on the mutual respect for the freedom of every individual. The *multitudo*, considered from the point of view of reason, is thus the foundation of universal tolerance and freedom.

These conclusions, relative to the concept of the *multitudo*, do not therefore eliminate its aporetic nature; rather, they accentuate it. The *multitudo*, placed between absoluteness and freedom, between civil right and natural right, between reason and the contradictory physicality of the constitutive movement of being, has an ambiguous definition; its concept cannot be closed off. Each of the defining elements exists – if it is considered through the prism of the *multitudo* – at the same time as all the other elements. The democratic regime, whose absoluteness consists first of all in the fact of being founded in an integral and exclusive form on the *multitudo*, is thus absorbed into this aporia. But this aporetic form is all the more productive – and it is precisely this imbalance between absoluteness and freedom that allows the democratic regime to be the best. And it also allows Spinoza’s political theory to move in a balanced way within the oscillation between the *multitudo* and the idea of the absolute:

Yet perhaps our suggestions will be received with ridicule by those who restrict to the common people the faults that are inherent in all humankind, saying, ‘There is no moderation in the mob; they terrorize unless they are frightened,’ and ‘the common people are either a humble servant or an arrogant master,’ ‘there is no truth or judgment in it,’ and the like. But all people share in one and the same nature: it is power and culture that mislead us, with the result that when two men do the same thing we often say that it is permissible for the one to do it and not the other, not because of any difference in the thing done, but in the doer. Pride is appropriate to rulers. Men are made proud by election to office for a year; so what about nobles who hold their distinction without end? (*TP* VII/27)

Here, for once, Spinoza allows himself a sarcastic remark.

The political universe is a universe of action. The fact that democracy appears as the objective aporia of the absolute and freedom, and that this aporia is posited as the dynamic condition of the political process, certainly does not resolve the problem and the difficulties of the definition of democracy, but rather aggravates it. When the absoluteness of this form of government is reflected onto the necessity of action, hence onto subjects, it seems to become its limit. For if it is necessary to act, it is necessary to do so knowing that the aporia is always present in the action: the aporia is thereby transferred from objectivity to subjectivity. The subject must act while acknowledging the non-conclusiveness of the universe in which it acts. It must act nevertheless. But how? According to what lines of orientation, what perspectives and what projects? To conjecture regarding democracy so as to cover the space now merely indicated in the *TP*, from the *reliqua desiderantur* on, means to give an answer to these questions. My conjecture is that Spinozian democracy, the *omnino absolutum democraticum imperium*, must be conceived as a social praxis of singularities that intersect in a mass process – or better, as a *pietas* that forms and constitutes the reciprocal individual relations that stretch between the multiplicity of subjects constituting the *multitudo*.

I arrive at this conjecture by considering, as we have seen up to this point, that Spinozian democracy has no contractarian structure, that it therefore constitutes a process that remains as open as the nature of the subject (*multitudo*) governing it is unconcluded. The absoluteness of government is a concept that is equivalent to an indivisible figure of Power. If this is the logical presupposition, then it follows that absoluteness is the indivisibility of the process, an indivisibility that is applied to the complexity of the power of subjects, since the process of Power is founded, articulated, and developed on the powers of the *multitudo*. If the concept of the *multitudo* is therefore presented to us objectively as an ambiguous concept, perhaps even as a schema of the imagination, certainly in an inad-

equate manner from the point of view of the definition of a solid political subject, it is on the other hand articulated subjectively and is a project and a convergence of *cupiditates*, to the extent that under the guidance of reason, the latter are materially shifted from the individual good to the collective good. In short, Spinoza's reinvention of republican democracy is not given only because the definition is abstractly open to the ontological power of the *multitudo*. Concretely, the drama of the concept of the *multitudo* is completely appreciated and dissolved into its components. Consequently, the definition of democracy is brought back to the constitutive power of subjects. And this constitutive power of subjects is ethical.

In the *Ethics* (IV P37 S1) the subject, by pursuing its own virtue and by understanding that it will enjoy this virtue all the more by desiring it for others as well, lives out – backward from the point of view of singularity – the objective and constitutive tendency of politics, of the absolute, thus of democratic politics.³³ Here the subject explicitly assumes *pietas* as an instrument of ethical reason from this perspective. What is *pietas*? It is the 'desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason' (E IV P37 S1). Acting ethically according to reason, which *pietas* represents here, is therefore extended in honesty, that is, in acting humanely and benevolently and consistently with itself and others. One acts thus by loving the universal, but this universality is the common name of many subjects, and thus the desire that no subject be excluded from universality, as would be the case if one loved the particular. Moreover, by loving universality and by constituting it as a project of reason across subjects, one becomes powerful. If instead one loves the particular and moves only out of interest, one is not powerful but rather completely powerless, because one is acted upon by external things. The tendency toward the universal is a passage through the universal: a passage so human that it comprehends all human beings, a development of the *cupiditas* that articulates subject and subjects into a dynamic and tendential form:

To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason – that is, men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage – want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honorable. (E IV P18 S)

In the Fourth Part of the *Ethics* this conviction of the usefulness of man for man and of the ontological multiplication of virtue in the human commu-

nity is continually expressed (see especially E IV P35 and its C). It doubtless represents one of the highest points of Spinoza's thought. Anyway, if it were not so (as certain interpreters in fact maintain), it is certain that this conviction constitutes the filigree of Spinoza's political thought. The *multitudo* is thus nothing but the interconnection of subjects that has made itself an ontological project of collective power. But at the same time, the concept of the *multitudo* is wrenched away from the ambiguity of the imagination and translated into the theory of political action. This, then, is the theoretical genesis of Spinozian democracy.³⁴

Nor is this indication generic. The same passages of the *Ethics* (especially IV P37) that introduce the ontologically multiplicative function of *pietas* and honesty into the tendency toward the collective in fact lead simultaneously and directly to the definition of the State. On the other hand, it is not worth the trouble to insist on the insufficiency of formalist definitions of the State, nor to emphasize the still transitional character of the political approach of the *Ethics* (see especially E IV P36 S2; P40; P45 C2; P54 S; P58 S; P63 S; P69 S; P70 S; P72 S; P73 S). What is especially important to note in both points of view is that the insufficiency of solutions corresponds to the emergence of an extreme tension against the metaphysical background. The relation *pietas/respublica/democraticum imperium* is here obviously unresolvable, whatever efforts may have been taken to solve the problem. Thus, in the final propositions (71, 72, 73) of the Fourth Part of the *Ethics* we find ourselves faced with a series of incessant, pointless reformulations of proposition 37: the repetition does not eliminate its inconclusiveness. The continual referral of political virtue to generosity, to the rejection of hate, anger, and contempt, in short, to love for the universal (a referral we encounter several times – E IV P45, 46) does not help to resolve the problem; in other words, the reference to a series of passions that, if they are valuable as indications of a path, certainly do not correspond to the necessity of its conclusion. They appear, on purpose, as particular, unilateral, and abstract functions. Finally, at this point of complexity, one can no longer claim to confront the problem from the viewpoint of individuality and consequently to resolve it ascetically. In this respect, the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us. It seems, however, that one sometimes finds oneself before an operation that eliminates the collective filigree of the development toward society – a kind of lapse in argumentation. Yet the problem was posed. Of course, one could object that it had already been posed in the *TTP*, in the very preface of which (to grasp only the most extrinsic of the elements that reveal the spirit of the work), *pietas* is mentioned along with the *libertas philosophandi* and *pax* among the fundamental values that are drawn together in the preservation and reproduction of the republican enterprise. But *pietas* is still a form of

devotion rather than a foundation of political action. By contrast, at the end of the *Ethics* and thus at the beginning of the *TP* project, the problem arises in all its import.³⁵

But in the part that we have, even the *TP* does not succeed in resolving the problem of the relationship between the ontological power of the collective and the freedom of individuals. The concept of the *multitudo*, as we have seen, poses the problem again by leaving it open. But all the conditions for a solution are given. In fact, there is missing only a final passage that consists in a specific description of the function of *pietas* in this situation. Let us imagine that description. In the first place, in order to be adequate to the premises and density of the problem, it is clear that the description of *pietas* cannot exist, so to speak, at the level of the actual aporetic consistency of the problem itself. Instead, it should be displaced, taken hold of again so as to situate it within the perspective of constitution. Therein it will finally offer us the problem of democracy as an operational horizon, one that demonstrates the possibility that *pietas* may be made a social praxis, a constitutive determination. Thus it suffices for us to add a few words concerning *pietas*, for most of its defining characteristics are given, and henceforth the fundamental thematization is the one that brings them together from the constitutive point of view, in dynamic displacement. One could say that the initial exclusion of the social contract is recuperated and that an originary, dynamic, and open situation is now proposed, a situation in which the construction or the building [*edificazione*] of a kind of social contract is underway. Not the social contract as myth, but rather social constitution, the association and collective self-making [*farsi*] of the ethical instance. A few words specifically concerning *pietas*. Precisely as a passion and a very strong, ontologically constructive moral behaviour, *pietas* is the opposite of *superstitio* and *metus*: *pietas* eliminates them. *Pietas* forms part of the positive series that *potentia* expresses through reasonable *cupiditas*, in order to transform *cupiditas* itself into *virtus*; and *pietas* carries this multiplier of friendship and love into *virtus*, the route for realizing this ontological surplus that the collective determines. From this point of view, *pietas* is the soul of the *multitudo*. In it there is an inverted but complementary ambiguity. If the *multitudo* is a collective term that, in order to become absolute, needs to reconstruct itself through the singularities that compose it, then *pietas* is a singular concept, open in an ontologically constitutive way to the *multitudo*. The plot repeats itself: 'the more we understand singular things, the more we understand God'; 'nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity' (*E V P24, 22*). It is possible to think that democracy can be represented in *reliquis* as the limit toward which tend the absoluteness of the

mass and the constitutive singularity of *potentiae*, that is, the *multitudo* and *pietas*.

That this limit can be determined, that the natural process of the *cupiditates* can have a termination, fixed in a positivist manner, and that – in the absoluteness of the democratic process – the activity *de jure contendo* can have a status *de jure condito* – this is what Spinoza seems incidentally to deny in *TP XI/3*, when he affirms: 'We can conceive different kinds of democracy. However, my purpose is not to discuss every one, but only one kind'. It seems to me that the negation of an exclusive figure of democracy as absolute regime is consistent with the ontological anchorage of Spinoza's thought, and that consequently the metaphysical bases of that strong legalism that we have highlighted in the second and third paragraphs of this chapter are missing here. This legalism serves here to establish the conditions of participation and/or of exclusion from the democratic management of government and from the active and passive exercise of the electorate, and constitutes the framework of this unique and particular form of democracy that Spinoza believed he could analyse: a legalism that hence is very effective, for it constitutes precisely (in the strict sense) the very object of scientific consideration, but not, for all that, an object of exclusive, definitive, sufficient, well-founded consideration. It is interesting to observe the further development of Spinoza's argument, in other words, paragraph 4 of chapter XI, and to grasp how the argument that has up to this point appeared to be legalist contradicts itself: 'Perhaps someone will ask whether it is by nature or by convention that women are subject to the authority of men. For if this has come about simply by convention, there is no reason compelling us to exclude women from government. But if we look simply to experience, we shall see that this situation arises from their weakness.' In other words, Spinoza will explain what follows in terms of the nature of woman. The institution is thus, in the present case, the extrinsic figure of an uncontainable natural process, one that is founding and not founded. Therefore, it is not interesting to follow the argument further here.³⁶ It is much more important to signal that the legalism, the purely institutional reasoning, does not constitute an argument.

This appears all the more clearly when we pass from the uncertainty and incompleteness of these final paragraphs to the consideration of the metaphysical weave of the concept of democracy. We have seen how the absoluteness of the political process is incapable of coming to a close. But it is clear that the unstable equilibrium of a concept of democracy filtered through the *multitudo* and *pietas* does not constitute a bizarre emergence in the life of Spinoza's thought. On the other hand, in Spinoza's philosophy we always find ourselves faced with moments of great imbalance: the red thread that ties together *conatus* and *potentia*, *cupiditas* and *virtus* does

not manage to conceal the veritable catastrophes that are determined on these pivot points. The relationship between the objective disposition of the *multitudo* and the subjective determinations of *pietas* can now seem just as disproportionate. And the space that extends between the two of them can seem too great. The non-conclusiveness of the relationship can then be represented as simply antinomian. But why oppose the tendency of the freedom, powers and absoluteness of the form of government? Why not consider the non-conclusiveness of the relationship between social praxis and the juridical subject of Power as a metaphysical condition of absoluteness? Why can't the *absolutum* be the presence of the political process in its complexity? I do not believe that it is necessary for enquiry to be paralysed by these difficulties. Instead, I believe that it is precisely the repetition of this situation of theoretical contradictoriness, this succession of moments of logical struggle in Spinoza's system, that constitutes the motive element of his thought and a fundamental motif of his propositional force. For, in fact, this disproportion and this extreme tension of concepts are torn from the heavens and forced to live in the world. The operation of the secularization of Power – which so effectively extends from the *TTP* (as Strauss and now Tosel have clearly shown) – accomplishes here a qualitative leap; or better, to use a terminology that seems more appropriate to me, it is displaced. In the *TP*, in fact, the absolute does not repeat the theological significance of the traditional concept of Power, not even in the form of the highest secularization.³⁷ Here there exists instead the substantial difference that in subjective terms we postulate between the concepts of emancipation and liberation – here, objectively, power is not only emancipated from its theological image and form but is freed from them. This is why, when it is presence and deed [*fare*], the absolute can present itself as a limit, as the very powerful brink of a contradiction in action, a free constitution. Spinoza's political discourse does not thereby become at all banal, as if it consisted in mere recording and the missing solution of real difficulties. Better: faced with the hysteria of the contractarianism that thinks it can escape, by means of a fiction, the dystonia of the real constitutive experience of politics, Spinoza pushes the description of the imbalance and the definition of the resulting tension to the limit. On the one hand, then, the form of a maximum objectivity, of a metaphysical framework that composes itself through an enormous movement, and its imbalances, its disproportions, the quite violent relationships that pass between physics and ethics, between individuality and sociality, and the syntheses that constitute it, in short, the absolute. On the other hand, a subjectivity that does not stop at the desire for the preservation and perfecting of its own being, which is not flattened onto, nor ends up in, individualist figures, but rather poses the problem of the good and

salvation within composition and recomposition, by extending itself among all the world's powers – in short, freedom. We know that the perfection of this relationship will always be impossible. The concept of the *multitudo* is an example of imperfection. But we will always continue to test it. The possible democracy is the most integral image of the disutopia of the absolute relationship. Democracy is a 'prolix method'.

To conclude: Spinoza's religiosity is often mentioned with respect to the *TTP* and *TP*. Indeed, a genuine atheist religiosity runs throughout Spinoza's conjecture of democracy: 'No one can hate God' (*E V P18*). This conjecture is felt to exist in the relationship between absoluteness and freedom, in the contradiction that constitutes it, in the constructive struggle that democracy therefore requires. One feels that it is endured, as the disproportion, the metaphysical abyss, the theology without theology are endured – but above all it is perceived as the tension of a true hope. If there is a biblical spirit here, it is certainly not that of the secularized version of the *TTP* but instead that of the extremely profound materialist *pietas* of the Book of Job:

But human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of Nature, whose order we follow. If we understand this clearly and distinctly, that part of us which is defined by understanding, that is, the better part of us, will be entirely satisfied with this, and will strive to persevere in that satisfaction. For insofar as we understand, we can want nothing except what is necessary, nor absolutely be satisfied with anything except what is true. Hence, insofar as we understand these things rightly, the striving of the better part of us agrees with the order of the whole of Nature. (*E IV App32*)

Notes

- 1 Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, translated by Michael Hardt (1981; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 183–9.
- 2 Etienne Balibar, 'Spinoza et la crainte des masses', in Emilia Giacotti (ed.), *Spinoza nel 350 anniversario della Nascita* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1985), pp. 293–320 [TN: A revised version of this text, published under the title 'Spinoza, the anti-Orwell: The fear of the masses' is available in Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), trans. James Swenson]; André Tosel, *Spinoza ou le crépuscule de la servitude* (Paris: Aubier, 1984).

- 3 Giorgio Solari, *Studi storici di filosofia del diritto* (Turin: Giappischelli, 1949); Adolfo Ravà, *Studi su Spinoza e Fichte* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1958); Walther Eckstein, 'Zur Lehre vom Staatsvertrag bei Spinoza', *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 13 (1933), pp. 356–68.
- 4 Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1930; New York: Schocken, 1965) and 'How to Study Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*', in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1948; Glencoe: Free Press, 1952). While the first generation of interpreters in the twentieth century essentially considered Spinoza to be the father of liberalism, the second generation focused its analysis on the process of the genesis of freedom in Spinoza's thought. The attention of the second generation of interpreters is especially concerned with the passage from the *TTP* to the *TP*. Midway, during the 1930s, is the critical work of Leo Strauss, who shows how Spinozian democracy is at the same time the product and the image of the development of a specific form of religious alliance and civic association, between Hebrew theocracy and militancy. It is pointless to recall here the importance of Strauss's interpretative contribution – he was as intelligent as a reader as he was reactionary as a teacher, able to continually overturn all the materialist ideas in the history of political thought. It is more worthwhile to dwell on the analyses of the second generation, who saw a genuine process of secularization unfold between the *TTP* and the *TP*. Giacomo Marramao, in *Potere e secolarizzazione* (Rome: Riuniti, 1983) has recently shown how the processes of secularization are to be understood as processes linked to the unfolding into worldliness of a preexisting theological nucleus. Marramao sees in the political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the central moment of such a process. This seems particularly obvious when one finds oneself faced with the political theories of Protestant origin in which the secularization of the religious theme often constitutes an explicit programme. But can one rightfully transform this indubitable historical recognition into a hermeneutical function? I do not think so, and I regard operations like Marramao's to be profoundly equivocal – since there exists no continuity of ideological thematics, especially if they are religious, which must not be subordinated to overall reality and, in addition to innovative events, to the totality of the political relation and in general the totality of the relations of force that are determined in historical time, since nothing guarantees, in the process of secularization, the semantic continuity of the concepts considered. The insistence that can be observed in contemporary philosophical literature regarding this continuity seems instead to have an ideological content: secularization is considered less a 'laicization' of the religious theme than as a natural-rights persistence of the religious thematic. This remark seems particularly well-founded if we consider the overall vicissitudes of Leo Strauss's thought. But then it is even more obvious how little of Spinoza's thought can be dealt with under Strauss's interpretative categories. André Tosi's recent work, despite the strong influence of Strauss, seems to me to be free from this ideology and to grasp, in the radicality of Spinoza's approach, not a confirmation of the continuity of religious thought from the perspective of secularization, but an atheist and materialist rupture against every laicization and theological persistence.
- 5 In my *Savage Anomaly* I undoubtedly insisted, and with a certain force, on this double 'foundation' of Spinoza's system, and thus on the solution of continuity existing between a first and second phase of his thought. I have the impression that beyond the inadequate and sometimes risky philosophical demonstration, beyond the difficulties that arise from the confrontation with an interpretative tradition that is strictly continuistic and systematic, my intervention has had a certain impact, and has perhaps even acquired a following. I want to thank warmly those who have

emphasized in a critical way the crudity of my approach, while considering it nonetheless to be relevant and to have a certain heuristic efficacy. I think that it is necessary to carry the research further on this terrain, and this essay is also a contribution to such an effort. As much as I thank those who, despite their criticisms, have welcomed the thesis of the internal discontinuity of Spinoza's metaphysics, so too do I reject the criticisms, often acerbic, that have been made of my reading of the 'second foundation' of Spinoza's thought and against the formation, between the *Ethics* and the *TP*, of a constitutive perspective of being, founded on collective subjectivity. In this regard, see most recently Giuseppa Saccaro Battisti, 'Spinoza, l'utopia e le masse: analisi di "plebs," "multitudo," "populus" e "vulgus"', in *Rivista di storia di filosofia* 1 (1984). I will return to this theme later.

- 6 Antonio Droetto, 'La formazione del pensiero politico di Spinoza e il suo contributo allo sviluppo della dottrina moderna dello Stato', in Spinoza, *Trattato politico* trans. Droetto (Turin: Giappichelli, 1958); Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1969).
- 7 On the spread of social contract theory, see Otto von Guericke, *Johannes Althusius und die Entwicklung der naturrechtlichen Staatstheorien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rechtssystematik* (1880; Aalen: Scientia, 1958); J.W. Gough, *The Social Contract: A Critical Study of its Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); and Strauss (1952). On this argument I refer to these now classic texts only in order to emphasize the univocity of the interpretation of the contractarian thematic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which we also find in almost every author – from Georg Jellinek to Léon Duguit, from Paul Janet to Giorgio Del Vecchio, from Carl Friedrich to Robert Derathé, from Norberto Bobbio to Hans Welzel. By the univocity of interpretation I mean not only the fact that during these centuries the contract is considered a hegemonic figure of political theory, but also that its content is reduced to a substantial unity, in juridical terms.
- 8 The entire tradition and finally (but with their own authority) Hans Kelsen and Norberto Bobbio, Niklas Luhmann and John Rawls have insisted and continue to insist with great efficacy on the immediately juridical character of the contractarian hypothesis. This insistence is generally motivated by reference to the highest justification that the contractarian thematic has found in the history of thought, namely, the Kantian definition. Here the hypothetical character and the juridical function of ordinary agreement are immediately apparent. See Georges Vlachos, *La Pensée politique de Kant: Métaphysique de l'ordre et dialectique du progrès* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 236ff. The transcendental character of the contractarian hypothesis is thus fundamental, and the transcendentality is immediately juridical. One could add that in this case philosophical juridical thought has made of Kantianism simultaneously an exclusive method and a kind of idea of reason, which discriminates among historical concepts (Negri, *Alle origini del formalismo giuridico* (Padua: Cedam, 1962)). So the position of anyone who has explicitly grasped the sociological function of contractarianism and has turned it into a portrayal of the class struggle – as has Harrington or the Levellers – is truly marginal. See in this regard, in addition to C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (New York: Humanities Press, 1966), and Charles Blitzer, *An Immortal Commonwealth: The Political Thought of James Harrington* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). The development of political thought as well as the contractarian function in the seventeenth century can be considered differently if, instead of the directly contractarian thematic, one considers the spread and fortunes of Machiavel-

- lism. It is well known how Machiavelli's thought was misunderstood in a programmatic direction by the interpretation of the 'statesmen' (on this point see especially Giuliano Procacci, *Studi sulla fortuna del Machiavelli* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1965)). Machiavelli's thought, however, was read and applied in political science from another viewpoint, that is, from the republican viewpoint; regarding this, see especially the unfinished but very rich interpretation of Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500–1700* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).
- 9 Robert Derathé, *Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).
 - 10 In my *Descartes politico o della ragionevole ideologia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970), the research aims to establish some historiographical criteria that would allow the variants of the absolutist model of the modern State to be considered. It is pointless to refer here to the vast bibliography that it is useful to consult in this regard. It suffices to recall that a correct methodology must continually compare the ideological alternatives – which are often numerous – with the urgencies and determinations that emerge from concrete praxis. The thesis defended in the essay cited is that the history of modernity and the ideological variants of the absolutist State must be read as so many expressions of the profound crisis that characterizes the century. The humanist Renaissance had expressed a radical revolution of values, but this 'rise' of modern man, this emergence of his productive singularity and the first image of his collective essence, quickly fell back into crisis with the development of the class struggle and the impossibility of the nascent bourgeoisie fighting on two fronts. A series of alternatives was therefore determined in relation to this point and around this problem. The fundamental thing to recall is that the primary organization of capitalism and of the modern State is not so much the capacity to structure this new productive energy as it is its crisis, a purely negative dialectic (in every alternative that is not a rupture and an anomaly, as is the case, on the contrary, in Spinoza) of this ordinary *Aufklärung*.
 - 11 Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, trans. Frederick Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1964), Preface.
 - 12 See Gierke, *Johannes Althusius*, as well as Carl J. Friedrich's 'Introduction' to Althusius, *Politica methodice digesta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).
 - 13 Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen, 1964); J. Stephenson Spink, *French Free Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire* (London: Athlone Press, 1964).
 - 14 See Macpherson, *Political Theory*.
 - 15 Alexandre Matheron, in 'Spinoza et la problematique juridique de Grotius' (*Philosophie* 4 (1984), pp. 69–89) considers the assumption of the contractarian thematic by Spinoza in the *TTP* as an adherence to the juridical terminology of the age and as an instrument adapted to the position of the problem of the conditions of validity of right. According to Tosel (*Spinoza*), on the other hand, the contract and its assumption by Spinoza are instruments he uses to subordinate the religious alliance to the properly political pact – thus revealing the practico-political nature of the religious. It is clear, in any case, that the assumption of the contract blocks the metaphysical process: for Matheron by suggesting that the analysis of conditions of validity can be different from the analysis of the determinations of the efficacy of right; for Tosel by preventing religion from being set aside once and for all and divinity from being grasped only in doing, in the ethical unveiling of the divine, and not in the liberation of ancient truths.
 - 16 Here it is not possible for me to push the demonstration from the political level to a properly metaphysical one, as I have already done (Negri, *Savage Anomaly*). On a general plane it is at any rate extremely important to refer to what Deleuze affirms (1990) – that is, that Spinoza's path aims at an absolute presentness [*prezenzialità*] of being – in order to understand how this process of redefinition of being necessarily carries with it a mechanism of transformation of political categories. If I may be permitted an image, it seems to me that one can say that Spinoza's path aims at an ever greater bareness of being. I am not alluding here only to the disappearance of the functions of the attribute in the second phase of Spinoza's thought, nor am I insisting only on the increasingly determinate pragmatic definition, which is constitutive of being; I am speaking above all of the conception of substance and its progressive emptying of profound contents as the surface is enriched. Traditional metaphysical thought, in which we were trained, only absorbs with great difficulty the tremendous effects of the simple presence of the divine substance.
 - 17 It is strange that Hans Kelsen, the most important and most coherent theorist of the problems of validity and efficacy in the unity of legal systems, did not (to my knowledge) see a precursor in Spinoza. This is probably due to the weight exerted by neo-Kantian reductionism (of phenomenism and formalism) in the evaluation of Spinoza's thought. Kelsen's philosophico-juridical thought is, however, much richer than his neo-Kantian matrix. In the final phase of his thought in particular, Kelsen adheres to a juridical realism that is quite fascinating in the absolute 'superficiality' of its anchorage. Here the unity of validity and juridical efficacy, the formative force of executive acts, refers back to a metaphysics of constitution – possible Spinozian references that it would be interesting to study. See in this regard Negri, *La forma stato* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977).
 - 18 The concept of the magistrate as an immediate formulator of right, as *defensor pacis* rather than as a mere executor of right and simple operator of legality, is typical of every conception of non-monarchical right and State (in the sense mentioned above, that is, non-absolutist) in the seventeenth century. During these same years we see this same concept of the magistrate, which we consider to be internal to Spinoza's political thought, come out quite laboriously as a difficult and essential problem in the liberal Locke; on the other hand, we see it unfold in the republican Harrington. On Locke, see C.A. Viano, *John Locke* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960); on Harrington, see John Toland, 'Introduction' to James Harrington, *The Oceana, and Other Works* (London: Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1770). In these latter positions it remains to be seen to what point the problematic of the magistrate represents the continuity of the premodern figure or rather shapes a new foundation of its function as an expression of the will of the people – as certainly happens in Spinozian democracy.
 - 19 Georg Hegel, *System der Sittlichkeit in Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie 2* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1923), pp. 415–99. See Spinoza, *Opera quae supersunt omnia* ed. H.E.G. Paulus (Jena: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1802–3), p. xxxvi: *eadem de causa, ne in nostra hac editione jure aliquid desideretur, sequitur, quam Vir Cl. mihiq. amicissimus Hegel mecum communicare voluit. Notarum Spinozae marginalium ad tractatum theologpolit. gallica versio* (I, 429) *collate cum iisdem latine ex originali a Cel. de Murr publicatis*. But also see *Briefe von und an Hegel* vol. I: 1785–1812 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952), pp. 65, 74ff., and *passim*; and Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: F. Fromann, 1928), p. 371.
 - 20 Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero, 1979); Negri, *Savage Anomaly*.
 - 21 'For what is most useful to man is what most agrees with his nature ... that is, ... man'

(*Nam, id homini utilissimum est, quod cum sua natura maxime convenit ... hoc est ... homo*) (E IV P35 C1). It is beyond doubt that this Spinoza proposition could, quite literally, be attributed to Marx. But the problem here is not philological, nor is there much that could be added to the philology of the Spinoza/Marx relation already fully developed by Maximilien Rubel in 'Marx à la rencontre de Spinoza', *Cahiers Spinoza* 1 (1977), pp. 7–28. The problem is totally philosophical, and it could be posed in the following terms: if we consider the referral of Marx's thought to natural rights theory to be totally unacceptable, the question that presents itself is that of the quality and the figure of radically constitutive natural rights theory, a natural rights theory of power, of productive force, and of political realism. Henceforth a vast literature, whose highest expressions are the writings of Deleuze and Matheron – and recently also Tosel – leads us to these conclusions. In the treatment of the Spinoza–Marx relationship, a further step forward would then consist in grasping the materialist reversal of Spinozist natural rights theory at the level of and in relation to our current political problematic. But if the forms of research that seek to discover in Spinozian materialism hints of the critique of political economy are revealed to be apologetic and pointless, the Spinozian reading of the eminently sociopolitical organization of exploitation is, by contrast, undoubtedly adequate. In other words, in the postindustrial era the Spinozian critique of the shaping of capitalist Power corresponds more to the truth than does the analysis of the afferent critique of political economy. Without forgetting, in fact, the importance of Marxian economic analysis, today the tension toward liberation represented by Spinoza's philosophy has an extraordinary capacity for demystification and demonstration. At the apex of capitalist development, it seems to me important to rediscover intact the critical force of its origins.

- 22 Balibar, 'Spinoza et la crainte des masses'; Saccaro Battisti, 'Spinoza, l'utopia e le masse'; Tosel, *Spinoza*.
- 23 I do not hesitate to situate myself (Negri, *Savage Anomaly*) among the apologists for the *multitudo* – and to make at this point a necessary self-criticism, but, as will be seen in the rest of my argument, in a sense contrary to the one demanded of me. This means that it does not seem to me that I have insisted too much on the foundational power of the *multitudo*. On the contrary, and I accept Balibar's critique ('Spinoza et la crainte des masses') of this point, I have too little brought to light the dynamic of this ontologically constitutive subjectivity. In my reading I have not insisted excessively on the mechanisms that lead the *multitudo* to subjectivity; I have only insisted too little on the processes that are opened up by this subjectivity. It is now a matter of proceeding in this direction. A first line, as we shall see further on, is the one that, in the pluralist dynamic of the *multitudo*, leads to the concept of tolerance, as the condition of existence of this same political subjectivity of the *multitudo*. The second line of research is the one that, from a still more elementary and ontologically significant formative stratum, leads to the ethical dialectic of singularities in the form of the collective and to the expression of *pietas*. On these issues, and more generally on the way in which the ethics and politics are interwoven with the problem of salvation, see Matheron's fundamental work in *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier, 1971).
- 24 Here I am referring above all to that French interpretative current headed by Madeleine Francès, an interpretative current that, despite some significant contributions, has in my opinion flattened the Spinoza–Rousseau relation into utterly unacceptable terms. As a caricatural expression of this interpretative current, see the translation of the Spinozian *civitas* by 'nation' in Spinoza, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. and

trans. Roland Callois, Madeleine Francès and Robert Misrahi (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

- 25 Negri, *Savage Anomaly* pp. 175–6. This proposition (E V P20), which appears at the centre of the ascetic construction of the cognitive process, inverts the sense of it: knowledge [*conoscenza*] rises to divinity, to a higher degree of being only to the extent that it traverses the imaginary and the social and lets itself be constructed by them. Love toward God, at the moment when it is proposed anew as a vertical tension above worldliness, is held back and flattened onto the horizontal dimension of imagination and sociality that alone nourish it (173). This is the mechanism of displacement of meaning that dominates Spinoza's metaphysics: one can never insist enough on this point.
- 26 Negri, *Savage Anomaly*, pp. 86ff., 144ff.
- 27 The construction of the concept of the *multitudo* in Spinoza will obviously arise from within his physics. See E II P13, in particular the corollary to Lemma 3 and the definition and scholium to Lemma 7. This means that at the basis of the concept of the *multitudo* is the entire dialectic of the multiple and dynamic construction of the individual. The constructive path naturally does not stop at the physics: the same method is then applied, through successive displacements, on the terrain of the construction of the passions, and is then extended across the entire *Ethics*. In the Fourth Part, finally, from proposition 19 up to proposition 73, the social passage from *cupiditas* is determined. Here the overall conditions of the concept of the *multitudo* are finally given.
- 28 In short, Spinoza's political conception is consistent with his associationist and mechanistic physics; the passages of displacement enrich it without weakening the method. This method and development consequently exclude any possibility of insertion of the social contract, or at least of that specific form of contract that results in normative transcendence. On this point the maximum difference between Spinoza's thought and Hobbes's is measured. In Hobbes, a contractarian and absolutist politics (Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis*, trans. E.M. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936); Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957)) is forcibly and perversely superimposed on a rigorously mechanistic physics (Fritjof Brandt, *Thomas Hobbes' Mechanical Conception of Nature* (London: Hachette, 1928)). It is obvious that the problem of the consistency, at least, of a political philosophy and a natural philosophy cannot in any case be posed abstractly, especially if one considers the philosophy of mechanism in the seventeenth century (on this see Negri, *Descartes politico*, pp. 149ff.). Concretely, however, the options vary, and Spinoza's love of consistency leads to freedom, whereas Hobbes's rupture leads to the theory of necessary servitude.
- 29 See in this regard the interesting hypotheses and remarks recently proposed by G. Bocco in 'L'enigma della sfera in Baruch Spinoza: Saggio sulla genealogia dell'adequazione', *Aut Aut* 202–3 (1984), pp. 173ff.
- 30 On the theory of the imagination in Spinoza we now have the contributions of Filippo Mignini, *Ars imaginandi: Apparenza e rappresentazione in Spinoza* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1981) and Michèle Bertrand, *Spinoza et l'imaginaire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), contributions whose consistency and orientation are uneven but nonetheless interesting. On the basis of these studies and the extremely important role they accord to the theory of the imagination in Spinoza's metaphysics, I believe I can quite adequately fend off the accusations directed at my *Savage Anomaly* of having exaggerated the role played by the imagination in my analyses of Spinoza's political thought.

- 31 See Saccaro Battisti, 'Spinoza, l'utopia e le masse'.
- 32 I have dealt at length with the variants of the conception of tolerance in the seventeenth century (Negri, *Descartes politico*). I also refer to this volume for its bibliography. A single remark, which is perhaps not as misplaced as it might seem: in 1970 the literature on tolerance was quite rich and always current. In 1985, practically no important writing on tolerance balances the enormous bulk of writings on and against totalitarianism. Here on the point of showing that tolerance represents one of the contents of Spinozian absolute government and that this attribution is totally correct. I must conclude that the recent bibliography on totalitarianism, by avoiding the theme of tolerance, risks belonging to totalitarianism itself.
- 33 [TN] By 'virtue', Negri does not mean chastity or moral righteousness; he is instead borrowing the Machiavellian notion of *virtus*, which along with the correlative notion of 'fortune' designates an apparatus through which time becomes constitutive of subjectivity and politics. In the second chapter of *Insurgencies* he argues that these apparatuses allow 'the political [to be] configured as a grammar of time' (Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) p. 42). See also the final lesson of *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo* in Negri's *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003), as well as translator's note 2 on p. 285.
- 34 Matheron in his *Individu et communauté* (pp. 249ff.) and Balibar ('Spinoza et la crainte des masses', pp. 55–7, 46–7) arrive with great clarity at an awareness of this genealogy. The intimate relationship between Spinoza's metaphysics and politics allows the ethical relationship of the *multitudo* to be developed in these very modern forms of genealogy. On the other hand, Saccaro Battisti ('Spinoza, l'utopia e le masse'), by isolating Spinoza's politics, repeats the ambiguity of objective definitions. The astounding aspect of Spinoza's theory of politics is his insistence on the subjectivity of actors. It is for this reason that, rigorously speaking, in Spinoza there can only be a democratic politics.
- 35 In laying out these theses I am only completing what I had shown in my *Savage Anomaly*. These pages should be placed specifically at the beginning of chapter 8 of my work, in order to refine the argument. In that context of discussion I had strained to identify how a series of contradictory pairs of political realism (*prudential/multitudo, libertas/secunitas, conditio/constitutio*) could be split up on the basis of the concept of 'free necessity' attributed to the subject during this phase of Spinoza's thought. This argument, which is absolutely correct, is nevertheless rather abstract: it must be completed on the moral side, on the side of ethical analysis. But here it is the *pietas* that shows the richness and completeness of the concept of 'free necessity'.
- 36 Matheron has fully analysed Spinoza's passages relating to the question of women in 'Femmes et serviteurs dans la démocratie spinoziste', in Siegfried Hessing (ed.), *Speculum Spinozanum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 368–86.
- 37 This is the moment of extreme opposition between Spinoza's thought and Hobbes's: never as in this moment, before the problem of divinity, do we find expressed the radical opposition that, beginning with them, characterizes the two fundamental trends of European political thought. But in the face of this problem, Hobbes affirms and Spinoza erases even the memory of the existence of God. The two tendencies are radically opposed: in Spinoza the secularization of the idea of Power effaces the most remote theological reminiscence, while in Hobbes, to the lack of physical and metaphysical reasons there corresponds the necessity of divinity, calling itself *prosopopea*, and in him, the reactionary, an order of reasons of the heart is opposed to the arguments of reason when he cries: long live God!

IV

translation by michael hardt, revised by timothy s. murphy

BETWEEN INFINITY AND COMMUNITY: NOTES ON MATERIALISM IN SPINOZA AND LEOPARDI

In the works of Giacomo Leopardi – which include, in addition to the collection of poems, the *Canti*, an enormous collection of studies on literature, philology, philosophy, archival topics, politics, etc.¹ – Spinoza's name is almost completely absent. It appears twice in an 1812 text in which the very young (then 14 years old) scholar cites 'Spinosa': once together with other 'fatalists' (Hobbes, Bayle, Helvetius . . .), and a second time to assert that in his system justice could not be founded on the personal responsibility of the criminal, but rather only on the social utility of the punishment (*TO*, vol. 1, pp. 574 and 577). At another point – in the final pages of the *Zibaldone*, 7 April 1827 (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 1143 (*Zibaldone*, 4274–5)) – the term '*spinosisti*' appears, in terms that are much more problematic than polemical: Leopardi sceptically wonders why the universe must be infinite, and why infinity must be a sign of perfection as the '*panteisti e spinosisti*' claim. It seems therefore that Leopardi is not only unfamiliar with Spinoza's thought, but beyond this ignorance he contributes to the derogatory meaning that the word '*spinosista*' bore for several centuries in Italy.² This absence or perversion of reference does not close down the problem of the Spinoza–Leopardi relationship, but instead opens it up. In fact, it is strange, very strange, that Leopardi, a connoisseur of the Enlightenment who was indeed raised on it, would ignore the importance of the historical impact of Spinoza's thought. Leopardi learns sensism from Condillac: to be sure, this is a sensism that comes to him in a spurious way, through an equivocal Italian tradition that combines the polemical constructions of Catholic critique and the positive elaborations of Enlightenment thinkers such as the Verri brothers or Beccaria; but the sensism that Leopardi develops – through his direct study of materialism in authors such as Helvetius, LaMettrie, Maupertuis³ – is certainly no less rigorous than that of

Condillac. In addition, Leopardi is very familiar with Bayle, whose work is practically a *vademecum* for him, from his youthful scholarly experience all the way up to his maturity.⁴ How, then, could he ignore both the importance of Spinoza's refoundation of Scriptural critique and the Spinozian impulse in Enlightenment materialism – how could Leopardi do this after having been brought up in the discipline of antiquarian historical critique and with a philosophical openness to the issues of materialism? More specifically, how could he overlook the comparison that Diderot made in the article on Spinoza in the *Encyclopedia* (which must have forcefully reminded him of Bayle's *Dictionary*) between Spinoza's theory and that of Strato of Lampsacus⁵ when, as we shall see, reference to Strato is one of Leopardi's preferred examples for demonstrating the quality of his own materialism? These questions have no answer, nor do several others that occur to us here. In the first place, Spinoza is present in post-Renaissance Italian culture in an active way, both as a continuation of a tradition that goes back to Leo Hebraeus (Levi ben Gershon) and Giordano Bruno, and as an element in the theoretical confrontation that periodically re-opens, with alternating developments, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ In a central position among these traditions and these polemics, we find Giovanbattista Vico, a declared anti-Spinozist; and yet, Vico is an equivocal critic because he rejects everything about Spinoza that seems to him to be Cartesian while he accepts the monism of the order of reasons and the order of things, and the productive centrality of the divine.⁷ Now whatever the ambiguities of Leopardi's relationship to Vico may be, it is quite obvious that Leopardi would have been in complete agreement with this interpretation of Spinozism.⁸ In the second place, then, we should consider the continuous attention that Leopardi pays to contemporary German thought; we have various testimonies to this fact. This attention is not limited to his robust literary polemics over Romanticism (which are themselves full of philosophical ideas), but is open to the metaphysical motive force that animates that country ('in Germany, whence learning has not yet been hunted out' (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 182)).⁹ This is charged with such importance for Leopardi that the shift of the centre of civilization from the south to the north of Europe seems to be determined in it. But what could that German metaphysics be without Spinoza?¹⁰ Finally, and in the third place, we should remember that interest in and discussion about Spinoza is rekindled in Italy in the first third of the nineteenth century. During the period when he has contact with Leopardi, Gioberti is accused of Spinozism, and Leopardi considers him the only Italian philosopher of his own era (and reciprocally, Gioberti recognizes Leopardi as the only poet and 'great Italian' since Vico's era);¹¹ this accusation, while it does offend him, does not prevent Gioberti from

reopening the debate on Spinoza and from representing it for the first time free from its century-long defamation. Can we imagine, further, that Terenzio Mamiani, Leopardi's cousin with whom he was involved in the *Risorgimento* upheavals of 1831, would have communicated to Leopardi that passion for Spinoza which led him, some years after the poet's death, to publish an apology for Spinoza in the preface of the Italian translation of Schelling's *Bruno*?¹² In any case, these questions have no answers. It is clear then that, as we propose once again the problem of the relationship between Spinoza and Leopardi, ours will not be a contribution to the fortunes that Spinoza suffered in the centuries subsequent to his teaching, and particularly in nineteenth-century Italy. Our problem cannot be that of documenting how Spinoza reached Leopardi, but simply that of asking ourselves if and in what ways there emerge in Leopardi's thought and poetry, not traces of Spinozism, but effects of the same materialist apparatus [*dispositivo*].

But right away a pertinent philological problem, or better, a problem of philosophical exposition arises: how is it possible to compare the thought of two philosophers who are so distant, temporally and culturally? In addition, is it permissible to try to bring together the reflection of a philosopher and the imagination of a poet when there is no continuity of influence? In general, we should answer these questions in the negative if we want to stay on the terrain of a philosophical historiography that does not spill over into fantasy, or at least one that does not slip into those extremely vague experiences that, justified by a stylistic elegance and an enormous accumulation of knowledge [*conoscenze*], were propagated by certain currents of German philosophical historiography in the late nineteenth century, in which historico-philosophical reconstruction became the game of the individual and privileged *Erlebnisse*.¹³ Today, at completely different levels of critical awareness, analogous experiences are being proposed once again, by means of dubious amalgams of historiography, aesthetics and psychoanalysis:¹⁴ but this terrain is not acceptable. And in fact this is not what we are proposing (and neither are we proposing to construct a sort of detective-story or symptomatic historiography, which is so fashionable today, one that could reveal a Leopardi who knows Spinoza's thought perfectly, but nonetheless, prudently, does not betray this knowledge [*conoscenza*] . . .). It seems to us, instead, that a comparison could be possible on the basis of a continuity of philosophical structures, well rooted in the historical and cultural development of a civilization, of a definite time period, of an adequate problematic. We think that there is such a continuity between Spinoza and Leopardi, even in the absence of a documentable relationship of influence. This common structure is that of the philosophy of materialism, from its joyous proposition as revolutionary thought at the beginning

of the bourgeois world to its nineteenth-century decline, after which new and other revolutionary values were affirmed. In this context, the structures of philosophical thought are articulated strictly around common problems, which are from time to time re-actualized by the crisis, by the obstacles and limits of historical development. In this context, philosophical reflection and poetic imagination interact – and poetry, above all in the crisis, seems better equipped to devise constructive apparatuses or lines of flight for thought.¹⁵ Leopardi constructs his personality, his philosophy and his poetry in the moment of the definitive crisis of Enlightenment philosophy, in the catastrophe of the French Revolution. He experiences this historical cataclysm in a distant and lost Italian province: miraculously, he understands the totality of the catastrophe, the equivalence between the revolutionary crisis and the philosophy of the reaction, the implacable drift, to the point of the absolute void of every meaning of humanity, brought about by this development. Leopardi's pessimism is, first of all, this awareness. But it is also and above all the refusal of the catastrophe, and of the mystified, dialectical conditions that are proposed for its surpassing. Against the dialectic, against the nihilism that constitutes its endpoint, Leopardi liberates reason in the only direction that could allow it to rediscover a sense of truth in life – the ethical terrain, where the imagination can block every compromise resulting from the defeat and construct a way out of the crisis. Leopardi's poetry deepens to the point of constituting an ontology: Spinoza constructs this ontological horizon in savage isolation in the midst of the first crisis of the constitutive process of the modern world, while Leopardi tries to rediscover this same horizon poetically as a backdrop for fidelity and the renewal of values, as the persistence of hope. The crisis, implacable, repeats itself. Every time that freedom is affirmed, it is opposed, crushed, pushed toward abhorrent conclusions. To accept with dignity and strength the desolate horizon of the crisis that brought an end to the modernity of the West, knowing nevertheless that through desperate suffering it is still possible to revolutionize the world – this is the consciousness constructed by materialist metaphysics and incarnated by Giacomo Leopardi's disutopia. But is not this ethics without compromise or dialectics, this hope rooted only in freedom, also the keystone of the historical dimensions of Spinoza's thought? Is this not precisely Spinoza's perception of the Renaissance crisis and the reformed revolutionary praxis – is this not, therefore, an affirmation of an irreducible and unstoppable ethics, which bears divinity within itself and constructs a new world beyond the crisis? Does not freedom become, in Spinoza as in Leopardi, the constitution of a new horizon of value? Are they not beyond the crisis (of the Renaissance in one case and of the age of Enlightenment in the other), against the dialectical involution of the

founding values of modernity?¹⁶ This, then, is our hypothesis. Now we must attempt to verify it.

It is perhaps possible to bring Leopardi together with Spinoza, then, in the context of an homogeneous structure of thought: in this context, Leopardi would have to represent the final link in a chain that Spinoza anticipated. Or better still: Leopardi repeats the Spinozian exception with respect to his own times – in both thinkers, there exists a critique of the present that opens toward the future.¹⁷ Materialism, the productive conception of being, the theory of the imagination, the ethical establishment of ontology: this is what Spinoza and Leopardi seem to have in common. And they also share the same concept of power. Undoubtedly, we are dealing with a set of very consistent concepts: are they enough to determine a situation of profound homology between the two systems? We will have to prove it. The terms of Spinoza's atomistic physics and those of Leopardi's materialist physics, in the first place, are certainly reconcilable. 'Our mind not only cannot know, but cannot even conceive any thing outside the limits of matter' (*TO*, vol. 2, pp. 195–6 (*Zibaldone* 601–6)). This 'systematic principle,' Leopardi explains, is based on the presupposition that nature is 'an extremely vast machine composed of an infinite number of parts' (*TO*, vol. 2, pp. 313–14 (*Zibaldone* 1079–82)). There is no teleology here: 'Nothing is pre-existent to things. Neither forms, nor ideas, nor necessity, nor reason for being or for being in such and such a way, etc., etc. *Everything* is posterior to *existence*.'¹⁸ The order and the connection of things are the same as those of ideas: 'The limits of matter are the limits of human ideas' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 835 (*Zibaldone* 3341)). In conclusion, and avoiding the great quantity of documentation that could be offered here: 'The infinite possibility that constitutes the essence of God is necessity' (*TO*, vol. 2, pp. 449–56 (*Zibaldone* 1597–1623)).¹⁹ To be sure, the simplicity of Spinoza's propositions is much more intense and their concatenation is entirely necessary, but Leopardi's poetry will help us make our way along Spinoza's very steep path. Spinoza dwells on this very same nucleus of problems. 'The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else' (*E* II P13). 'All bodies either move or are at rest . . . ; a body in motion moves until it is determined by another body to rest . . . ; when a number of bodies . . . are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another . . . we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual . . .' (*E* II P13 A1', II P13 L3C, II P13 D). Consequently, when beginning to address the passions, Spinoza says, 'I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, surfaces and bodies' (*E* III Praef). Let us turn back now to Leopardi, on the terrain to which Spinoza has transported us. The ter-

minological differences do not detract from the common aspects of the project. Leopardi, who sets out from a cold conception of sensism inherited from Condillac, proceeds from this to a dynamic conception of the passions. He too travels from the senses to the passions, reasoning as if it were a matter of lines, surfaces and bodies. But, as in Spinoza, the framework is transcended, and the processes that Leopardi describes, from within a phenomenology of sense, are directed by a 'force' that has the value of a 'general law.'²⁰ Therefore, 'man can do and feel as much as he is accustomed to do and feel, nothing more and nothing less' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 870 (*Zibaldone* 3525)) – but this perfection of the singularity, this dimension of power does not stop there; it is quickly transformed into *cupiditas*, which constructs other spaces of desire between the body and the mind, and therefore in the imagination. Let us examine this passage. First of all,

my system [while it does begin with atoms and the senses – AN] does not destroy the absolute but multiplies it; that is, it destroys what was considered the absolute, and makes absolute what is called relative. It destroys the abstract and *antecedent* idea of good and evil, of truth and falsity, of perfection and imperfection, independent from everything that is; but it makes all possible beings absolutely perfect, that is, perfect in themselves, having the reason for their perfection in themselves and in the fact that they exist so and are made in such a way; it is a perfection independent of any extrinsic reason or necessity, and of any pre-existence. Thus, all relative perfections become absolute, and absolutes, instead of disappearing, multiply in such a way that they can be different from and contrary to each other. (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 494 (*Zibaldone*, 1791–92))²¹

Now, this perfection is desire, it is the power to go forward, in knowledge [*conoscenza*] as in life. And this desire is the imagination:

The system and order of the human machine in nature is very simple: the springs and mechanical devices and principles that compose it are very few, but in discussing the effects, which are infinite and infinitely variable, [we] subdivide the faculties and the principles that are really single and indivisible, even though they produce and can always produce not only new and different, but directly contrary effects. Consequently, the imagination is the source of reason, as it is of feeling, passions, poetry; and this faculty that we suppose to be a principle, a distinct and determinate quality of the human soul, either does not exist or it is the same thing, the same disposition along with a hundred others that we distinguish absolutely, and the same as what we call reflection, or the faculty of reflecting, as what we call intellect, etc. Imagination and intellect are all one. (*TO*, vol. 2, pp. 563–4 (*Zibaldone*, 2133–4))²²

In this process, human power increases: as Leopardi describes the process of singularity it becomes a process of virtue, exemplified in the image of

the ancient hero who has passed through the tragic and exciting vicissitudes of life: 'At last life in his eyes has a new aspect, it has already changed from something heard into something seen, and from something imagined into something real; and he feels himself to be in the midst of this, perhaps no longer happy, but more powerful than before, so to speak, that is to say more able to make use of himself and others' (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 239). Please pardon the enormous simplification of Leopardi's journey that we are performing here – elsewhere, as we have mentioned, our reading was much wider in scope and much more attentive to the articulations internal to Leopardi's thought.²³ Here, we will proceed through the amazement generated by each point of the comparison with Spinoza, by the homology of inspiration and the analogy of writing. Spinoza, then, once again. 'By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is, virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone' (*E* IV D8). '[A]ppetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation' (*E* III DefAffl Ex). 'The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing' (*E* III P7). 'The Mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body's power of acting' (*E* III P12). And so on. And then, later in the *Ethics*, when power, imagination, intellect and virtue are already all involved in a movement of liberation: 'The more each one strives, and is able, to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue; conversely, insofar as each one neglects his own advantage, that is, neglects to preserve his being, he lacks power' (*E* IV P20). 'No virtue can be conceived prior to this [virtue] (viz. the striving to preserve oneself)' (*E* IV P22). Consequently, if 'he who has a Body capable of a great many things has a Mind whose greatest part is eternal' (*E* V P39) – then, 'the more perfection each thing has, the more it acts and the less it is acted on; and conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is' (*E* V P40). What more could be said about the resonances between Spinoza and Leopardi? Perhaps the materialist apologue that concludes the *Ethics* could serve as an emblem of the common journey of our two authors: 'Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them' (*E* V P42). But let us leave the last word to Nietzsche who, above all in *The Gay Science*, weaves together the visible and powerful threads that stretch from Spinoza to Leopardi. When he speaks of Spinoza as the philosopher of the 'innocence of the utmost selfishness [and of] the faith in great passion as the good in itself',²⁴ he fully grasps the enchantment of Spinoza and detaches him from Schopenhauer's pes-

simism; this also occurs when he interprets Spinoza's '*intelligere*' as a synthesis of the passions and conscious thought,²⁵ and at the same time sees in Leopardi one of the very few modern authors who filters prose through poetry to achieve the very same result – that of charging the intelligence with all the passional determinations of being and, consequently, of conceiving ethics as the most human path that constructs virtue in the war between egoisms, as an expansion of power.²⁶ Therefore, implicitly, Nietzsche could have repeated about Leopardi what he said of Spinoza: 'I have a precursor, and *what* a precursor!²⁷

Having said that, and having emphasized the points of contact between Spinoza's and Leopardi's thought, we must now move on to show the no less substantial differences. Let us look at the first and most important of these: the time periods that give rise to their philosophies are different – Spinoza's is constitutive of modernity, tied to the realization of the Renaissance project, while Leopardi's buckles under the definitive crisis of that project and that hope. Spinoza is pre-critical, Leopardi is post-critical – this means that the power of being is tied linearly into the constitutive project in Spinoza, while in Leopardi it recognizes its own anchorage in the crisis and in the irresolvability of the limit. Hence the constructiveness of being in Leopardi is that which springs from the design and the motive force of the transcendental imagination, while in Spinoza the constitutive process is progressive and wholly installed within a monistic horizon. Spinozian power is *for*, Leopardian power is *against*; Spinozian power is posited in nature, Leopardian in a 'second' nature that the imagination has constructed; the time of Spinozian power is indefinite, that of Leopardi is the infinite.²⁸ The 'supreme joy' in Leopardi is posited, then, as an impossible project, while in Spinoza, as we have seen, this is the element that founds ethical action. But in Leopardi this metaphysical condition does not eliminate the possibility of ethical action: only that – and here the pessimism becomes heavy – while the subject of evil is real, that of good is only imaginary – 'and since joy would be that which surpasses the capacity of our spirit, it would require what only children and primitives have: a force and a freshness of persuasive imagination and illusion that is no longer compatible with the life of today' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 219 (*Zibaldone* 716–17; but also see 2435 and 3976)). The present time does not permit joy – this time that has destroyed every revolutionary hope and project, and left us only indifference, 'this horrible passion, or rather dispassion' (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 1132). While placing itself at the limit of his time, however, Leopardi's pessimism is never the crisis of the concept, of power, but always the extreme tension of this crisis.²⁹ It is a materialism that – keeping itself intact, and even glorifying its own constructive power – has lost its hope. Leopardi's pessimism represents the extreme, fierce reflection that is

unleashed on the solidity of the crisis that confronts his power and on its epochal intensity. When referring to Leopardi's materialism, one speaks of 'Stratonism' to indicate the radical naturalistic bent of his pessimism. The reference to the master of the third generation of Peripatetics and his extremely cold (even though fire became the fundamental element of his cosmology) reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Physics* is suggestive but inappropriate. In fact, even when Leopardi refers directly to Strato, as he does in the *Moral Essays* (*TO*, vol. 1, pp. 158–60),³⁰ the glorification of his thought – all the way to its nihilistic limits – is careful not to call into question the materialist basis of a possible ethics: 'nothingness does not prevent a thing from being, existing, beforehand' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 1122 (*Zibaldone*, 4233)). On the contrary: 'that matter thinks, is a fact. A fact, because we think; and we do not know [*sappiamo*], do not know how to be [*conosciamo di essere*], cannot know or conceive other than matter' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 1149 (*Zibaldone*, 4288)). It is through this awareness – of matter and of the lengthening of its shadow up to the limit of nothingness, of the crisis and of the impossible linearity of the moral project – it is therefore through this awareness that the positive *epoché* and the rupture are proposed ahead of the imagination and the intellect: only in this way can we win back ethical hope. Actually, 'not only does my philosophy not lead to misanthropy' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 1199 (*Zibaldone*, 4428))³¹ – no, 'I live, therefore I hope' (*TO*, vol. 2, p. 1084 (*Zibaldone*, 4145–6)).³² And even if it is true that 'these times . . . are certainly not the heroic age' (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 167),³³ still the ethical task of encouraging men to want to live is entrusted to the intellect and the imagination, to philosophy and poetry. By means of illusion? But who can show that this illusion is less real than reality? Leopardi's Copernicus expresses it in this way:

in substance I wish to say, that this business of ours will not be so purely material, as it appears to be at first sight; and that its effects will not pertain solely to physics: for it will upset the degrees of dignity of things, and the order of beings; it will alter the purposes of the creatures; and so doing it will cause a vast upheaval in metaphysics, indeed in everything that touches the speculative part of knowing [*sapere*]. And it will come about that men, even while knowing and wanting to proceed in a healthy way, will discover themselves to be quite another thing, from what they have been so far, or have imagined themselves to be. (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 170)³⁴

In the crisis of the movement of ethical spirit, he is not satisfied with the present; the crisis admits the time of ethical consideration: 'however fortunate it may be, the present is always sad and disagreeable: only the future can bring joy' (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 178).³⁵ Leopardian materialism, far from being cold and mechanistic, is an act of defiance that reason and poetry

bring against history and nature. It is backed up by a very strong will to demystification:

It is no longer possible to deceive or dissimulate. Philosophy has taught us so much that forgetting ourselves, which was once so easy, is now impossible. Oh, that the imagination would return in all its strength, and that the illusions would take shape and substance again in an energetic and active life, and that life would become again something living not dead, and that the grandeur and beauty of things would return to seem substance, and that religion would regain its credit; oh, this world would become a seraglio of desperate men, and perhaps also a desert. (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 199)

We could cite innumerable passages in demonstration of this central point, that is, that Leopardi's pessimism, no matter how profound it may be, nonetheless interprets the inexhaustible tension of materialism with the aim of making itself a philosophy of hope, of recuperating continually the projectivity of power. But perhaps it is pointless. Yet it would be interesting to note, on the other hand, how this persistence of the metaphysical thought of power has been perceived as an insuperable affront, in its irreducibility to dialectical thought – that is, to that thought that deals with and manipulates the crisis in the dialectic and flattens it, reduces it to supersession and the absolute synthesis. Just as Hegel attacked Spinoza the 'consumptive', charging him with 'acosmism',³⁶ Benedetto Croce attacked Leopardi and his 'strangled life', characterizing his thought with the epithet 'atemporal'.³⁷ This is how Croce attacked Leopardi's refusal to accept the crisis as effective reality and bow down to it, his consequent denunciation of every transcendental pacification and his reassertion of the indomitable power to re-invent reality continually. With their mockery, Hegel and Croce on the contrary merely demonstrate the irrepressible force of that living materialism that runs through the philosophy of our two great authors.³⁸

But let us return to Leopardi's pessimism and its nihilist excesses. Our prudence notwithstanding, the mere fact of bringing Spinoza and Leopardi together seems to involve an extreme reduction of their differences: we could well be criticized for this illusory effect. Therefore, we should explain ourselves better. Now, it is possible to grasp, without programmatic reductions, both the unity and the difference without obliterating either of them only if once again we dwell and insist on the unity and differences of the historico-philosophical structure in which both our authors are situated. The Spinozian anomaly is born within the Dutch anomaly. In the crisis of normalization following the Renaissance revolution, Spinoza grasps in Holland, right in the centre of the 'world-economy' represented by that civilization, the lines of continuity of the revolutionary process. His

powerful materialism is born in this situation – and it survives in the centuries that lead up to the great revolution, marginal and persecuted but charged with the splendour of the past event. In contrast, Leopardi experiences the crisis of the French Revolution, the negative dialectic of the *Aufklärung* and the heteronomy of its purposiveness. His materialism is once again anomalous because, opposed to the new synthesis of order proposed and imposed by the transcendental philosophies and critique, it proposes once again the continuity of the process of transformation, the urgency of emancipation, the freedom of imagining a new humanity. But Leopardi is not sheltered by an homogeneous and powerful civilization. Rather, he is inextricably inserted into the crisis. His personal situation and the socio-political condition, which were quite miserable, made the crisis fall more heavily on him. From this nothingness arises Leopardi's protest, from this desperation emerge his imagination and his hope. Therefore, while the materialist system is sheltered in Spinoza's case by a reality and a society that are homogeneous and powerful, in Leopardi's case the system itself is overwhelmed in the general crisis. Leopardi stirs up his times and the limits of his condition by playing a card of reconstruction that only theoretical and poetical madness could allow. His challenge is aimed at heaven. 'My feelings about destiny were and are still those I expressed in 'Bruto Minore', he writes to a French correspondent in the last years of his life, vindicating one of his first, and one of his most heroic and Jacobinist, poems (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 1382). Isolation, then, is Leopardi's difference. The solid establishment in his world is Spinoza's difference. Both are anomalies, but on the basis of profound differences: differences that cannot be erased or overlooked. On the other hand, the unity of the two systems lies in the theoretical tension that sustains and moves them, in the force that animates them and situates them in different dimensions of the historical vicissitudes of modernity. Modernity is the discovery of the human capacity to transform the world, to appropriate the powers of the divine. At the same time it is the crisis and the expropriation of this project, it is the construction of domination over and within the development of freedom. Against this destructive hegemony, against this fate of ignorance and servitude, one part of modern thought casts its light: Spinoza represents the first, and Leopardi one of the most recent resistances against this fate of expropriation. The differences, great as they may be, cannot erase the unity of the metaphysical design of freedom that is sketched by Spinoza and Leopardi. This constitutes, then, a first element of profound unity.

But this is not all. The unity of the structural project (and therefore of a series of conceptual paradigms that, as we have already seen, homogeneously traverses their works) is also the unity of the dynamic of the

system. The most recent developments in Spinoza criticism – which, aside from Cassirer's analysis, has been developed above all in France on the basis of the works of Gueroult and Matheron – have shown the progressive unfolding of Spinoza's system from an initial adherence to a strong pantheism all the way to the construction of the horizon of the human community, by means of the analysis of the productive function of the passions.³⁹ From the *Short Treatise* to the indissociable interweaving⁴⁰ of the *Ethics*, and from the *Theological-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*, a metaphysical process unfurls, one that describes both an ontological structure and a path of liberation. Spinoza overturns Hegelianism before it is born with the recognition of his own logical supremacy ('without being Spinozian it is impossible to philosophize'⁴¹) and, in the productivity of reason, he anticipates the development of history – overturning, therefore, the Hegelian affirmation of philosophy as a recording of a dissected and selected event, and therefore truly posing freedom at the basis of the event and history, rooting human power absolutely on the lower, productive border of existence.⁴² There is no distinction in Spinoza between phenomenological *Erklärung* and metaphysical *Darstellung*. This distinction likewise collapses in all modern theories of dynamic and liberatory materialism. It survives instead in all those philosophical positions that identify metaphysics with mediation. One final and tremendous episode in this struggle has its beginnings in the idealist crisis of nineteenth-century thought, in the Tübingen of 1796, when the nth dialectical project comes to be posited together with a materialist design of ethical reconstruction as a programme for the rereading of the relationship between nature and history.⁴³ As we know, of the three authors it was Hölderlin who held firm to the ethical programme, tragically opposing it to the dialectical idealism of Schelling and Hegel, and dying of heroic separation. Hölderlin, a poet. Perhaps the era had become so savage that only poetry could save ethics, hope, singularity? Perhaps only poetry could bear that structural design that Spinoza instituted in the real process of liberation? In fact, Leopardi is the poet who, in the years that followed, prepared himself for this work, proposing to travel the path of liberation in a decisive rupture with every dialectical proposition. 1819: '*L'infinito*' ['The Infinite'] (*TO*, vol. 1, p. 17).⁴⁴ This famous idyll is nothing other than a dialectical experiment pushed to the point of the crisis of every possibility of presupposing the infinite – which is still our nature and constitutes our fate – to the point of the comprehension of the determinations of reality. The dialectical experiment shows the impossibility of every dialectic. '*L'infinito*' is both Leopardi's *Short Treatise* and his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* – it is the discovery of the unresolvable tension that is established between a true idea of the infinite and an absolute experience of determination, between

the idea of a path toward the eternal and the affirmation of our absolute power.

I always did value this lonely hill,
 And this hedgerow also, where so wide a stretch
 Of the extreme horizon's out of sight.
 But sitting here and gazing, I find that endless
 Spaces beyond that hedge, and more-than-human
 Silences, and the deepest peace and quiet
 Are fashioned in my thought; so much that almost
 My heart fills up with fear. And as I hear
 The wind rustle among the leaves, I set
 That infinite silence up against this voice,
 Comparing them; and I recall the eternal,
 And the dead seasons, and the present one
 Alive, and all the sound of it. And so
 In this immensity my thought it drowned:
 And I enjoy my sinking in this sea.

[Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
 E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
 Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.
 Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
 Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani
 Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
 Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
 Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
 Odo sormir tra queste piante, io queo
 Infinito silenzio a questa voce
 Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
 E le morte stagioni, e la presente
 E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
 Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
 E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.]

From this point the structural trajectory of Leopardi's materialism unfolds, through a long phase of his poetic experience that articulates and experiments with this insoluble contradiction, from the horizon of the infinite to that of nature and history – to the point when, toward the middle of the 1820s, the crisis seems to have reached its highest level, Leopardi performs a resolving operation that theorizes the imagination, beyond contradiction, as the key to the reconstruction of reality and second nature as the only possible context for a reconstructive materialism. On this basis, Leopardi takes his philological, linguistic and political studies even deeper, proposing and carrying out a radical deconstruction of the traditional languages, and then an equally radical reconstruction of the senses and mean-

ings. The *Moral Essays* are the masterpiece of this period. They are a sort of Leopardian *Theological-Political Treatise*, a passage through historical physics (language, passions, powers) that allows him to use these invariants as elements of the transformation of reality, and to understand these determinations as functions of the sense of the infinite. A few poetical cantos, with extraordinary, shattering metaphysical meaning, accompany this passage. Among these, we find *'Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'asia'* [*Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd of Asia*] (*TO*, vol. 1, pp. 29–30).⁴⁵ In this poem the metaphysical question about the reconstruction of the sense of the determination comes together in a dizzying way, to the point of forming the independence of the imaginative and critical function against the indifferent infinity of reality. The initial question of the Canto leads us inside the Leopardian will to knowledge [*conoscenza*]:

What are you there for, in the sky? What do
 You do there, silent moon?
 You rise in the evening, and go
 Searching the desert places; then you set.
 Have you not had your fill
 Of travelling those everlasting ways?
 Are you not bored with this, but curious still
 To look upon these vales?
 To me that life of yours
 Recalls the shepherd's life.
 He rises at first light;
 He moves his flocks across the fields; he sees
 The flocks, the wells, the grasses;
 Then tired he takes his rest as evening falls,
 Hoping for nothing else.
 Tell me, O moon, the worth
 Of the shepherd's life to him,
 Of your life there to you. What is the goal
 Of my brief wandering,
 Of your immortal course?⁴⁶

[Che fai tu, luna, in ciel? dimmi, che fai,
 Silenziosa luna?
 Sorgi la sera, e vai,
 Contemplando i deserti; indi ti posi.
 Ancor non sei tu paga
 Di riandare i sempiterni calli?
 Ancor non prendi a schivo, ancor sei vaga
 Di mirar queste valli?
 Somiglia alla tua vita
 La vita del pastore.]

Sorge in sul primo albore;
 Move la greggia oltre pel campo, e vede
 Grego, fontane ed erbe;
 Poi stanco si riposa in su la sera:
 Altro mai non ispera.
 Dimmi, o luna: a che vale
 Al pastor la sua vita,
 La vostra vita a voi? dimmi: ove tende
 Questo vagar mio breve,
 Il tuo corso immortale?]

And this question finds an answer:

Perhaps if I had wings
 To fly up in the clouds,
 And number all the stars there one by one,
 Or stray, as thunder strays, from peak to peak,
 I would be happier than I am, my flock,
 I would be happier than I am, white moon.⁴⁷

[Forse s'avess'io l'ale
 Da volar su le nubi,
 E noverar le stelle ad una ad una,
 O come il tuono errar di giogo in giogo,
 Più felice sarei, dolce mia greggia,
 Più felice sarei, candida luna.]

It is a response that, still rooted in the tragedy of being (and the subsequent verses violently declare this), nevertheless offers the hope of breaking free of and transcending this tragedy, of rediscovering happiness. Still, in this tension, within this incertitude, there appears a ray of hope, that the passions will begin to shine over historical determinations and that subjectivity will begin to seek the support for ethical hope in collectivity. Leopardi's final works⁴⁸ poetically develop the maturity of Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Political Treatise*. Little by little, ethics becomes the foundation of existence, solidarity becomes the fate of humanity and love as the basis of the passions unfolds in the necessity and joy of the community. The infinite can only be determined in multiplicity; the infinite can only be realized in community. There is no dialectic here, but there is freedom that is confronted by the historical crisis, by the tragedy of being – yet only freedom can produce happiness. In *'La ginestra, o il fiore del deserto'* [*The Broom, or The Flower of the Desert*], Leopardi perfects and concludes the philosophical vicissitudes of his existence in the highest poetry (*TO*, vol. 1, pp. 42–5).⁴⁹

It is a noble nature
 That lifts – he is so bold –
 His mortal eyes against
 The common doom, and with an honest tongue,
 Not sparing of the truth,
 Admits the evil of our destiny,
 Our feeble lowly state;
 Who shows himself to be
 So strong in suffering he does not add
 A brother's angry hate,
 Worse than all other ills,
 To his own misery, by blaming man,
 But fixes guilt where it belongs, on her that
 We call mother because she bears us all,
 Stepmother, though, by virtue of her will.
 She is his enemy; and since he thinks,
 What is the simple truth,
 Mankind has been united, organized
 Against her from the first,
 He sees all men as allies of each other,
 And he accepts them all
 With true affection, giving
 The prompt assistance he expects from them
 In all the varying danger and the troubles
 Their common war gives rise to.⁵⁰

[Nobil natura è quella
 Che a sollevar s'ardisce
 Gli occhi mortali incontra
 Al comun fato, e che con franca lingua,
 Nulla al ver detraendo,
 Confessa il mal che ci fu dato in sorte,
 E il basso stato e frale;
 Quella che grande e forte
 Mostra se nel soffrir, né gli odii e l'ire
 Fraterne, ancor più gravi
 D'ogni altro danno, accresce
 Alle miserie sue, l'uomo incolpando
 Del suo dolor, ma dà la colpa a quella
 Che veramente é rea, che de' mortali
 Madre è di parto e di voler matrigna.
 Costei chiama inimica; e incontro a questa
 Congiunta esser pensando,
 Siccome è il vero, ed ordinata in pria
 L'umana compagnia,
 Tutti fra se confederati estima

Gli uomini, e tutti abbraccia
 Con vero amor, porgendo
 Valida e pronta ed aspettando aita
 Negli atemi perigli e nelle angosce
 Della guerra comune.]

Let us ask ourselves now, to conclude: have we verified our point of departure, the hypothesis of the homology of the two systems? In part. Having identified some Spinozian conceptual paradigms that reappear in Leopardi, it actually seems possible to establish a certain structural and dynamic homology between the two systems. What remains, however, is the profound difference in the historical situations of the two authors. And there is another difference: even if it is true that the philosophical method is not insensitive and neutral with regard to its contents, Leopardi expresses his system in the form of poetry. The singularity of Leopardi's poetic expression does not pose an insuperable problem, however: Leopardi's poetry seems in fact to be a Spinozian knowledge [*conoscenza*] of the third kind that explicitly puts itself on the front lines, thus not merely implicitly anticipating every other kind of knowledge (as happens in the *Ethics*) but explaining or explicating them. In Spinoza himself, on the other hand, the geometrical language gradually reaches poetic intensity as the intellectual love of God is constituted.⁵¹ What raises a more serious problem is the relationship between Leopardi's poetry and post-critical philosophy: that is, on this terrain the difference between the two authors appears profound. Even if it is surely not 'Stratonism' that separates Leopardi from Spinoza, it is nonetheless obvious that the conception of a 'second' nature and the translation of the imagination and the intellect, of intuition and love into organs of history constitute an extremely relevant difference. Leopardi's thought gains from poetry a 'poietical', creative dimension, so as to extend itself toward the domain of human action in history. When it conflicts with the world, in the tragedy of life, poetry can create new being. The ontological power of poetry becomes historically effective, and thus illusion can become truth. Is this difference profound enough to call into question the very hypothesis of homology that we have developed to this point? We do not believe so, because Spinoza's thought is also projected toward salvation, beyond death, and his system extends into the project of transforming the infinite into human community. The *Ethics* makes the eternal and the infinite exist in time. In any case, this hope constitutes the fate of Spinozism.

Notes

- 1 We cite from *Tutte le opere di Giacomo Leopardi* volumes 1 and 2, ed. Walter Binni and Enrico Ghidetti (Florence: Sansoni, 1976). Henceforth, we will cite this work parenthetically as *TO*. [TN: Whenever possible, we also cite available English translations of Leopardi's writings, often modifying them to better reflect Negri's argument. In many cases, however, the translations of Leopardi are our own since no published ones exist.]
- 2 See C. Santinelli, *Spinoza in Italia: Bibliografia degli scritti su Spinoza dal 1675 al 1982* (Urbino: Pubblicazioni dell'Università di Urbino, 1983), p. 15.
- 3 See M. de Poli, 'L'illuminismo nella formazione di Leopardi', *Belfagor* 5 (30 September 1974), pp. 511–46.
- 4 A. Prete, *Il pensiero poetante* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980), pp. 28–9, 42 and 53.
- 5 E. Giancotti Boscherini, *Baruch Spinoza* (Rome: Editore Riuniti, 1985), pp. 117–18. [TN: Strato of Lampsacus (died c. 287 BC) was a fundamentally Aristotelian philosopher who succeeded Theophrastus as head of the Peripatetic school. His materialism was perhaps the most thorough-going in Greek antiquity, in that he insisted upon the eternity of matter, denied any intervention of the gods within the world and considered Democritus' better-known materialism too fanciful.]
- 6 Giovanni Gentile, 'Spinoza e la filosofia italiana', in *Chronicum Spinozanum* vol. V (1927), pp. 104–10; A. Ravà, 'Descartes, Spinoza et la pensée italienne' (1927), now in *Studi su Spinoza e Fichte* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1958), pp. 155–79; E. Giancotti Boscherini, 'Nota sulla diffusione della filosofia di Spinoza in Italia', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 3 (1963), pp. 339–62; C. Santinelli, 'B. Spinoza ne "La filosofia delle scuole italiane": Contributo alla storia dello spinozismo in Italia', *Studi urbanati* B2 (1985), pp. 87–117; C. Santinelli, 'Spinoza in Italia fra hegelismo e spiritualismo: La polemica Aciri-Fiorentino', *Studi urbanati* B2 (1986), pp. 49–81; F. Biasutti, 'Aspects du Spinozisme dans la culture italienne du XVIII siècle', in *Spinoza entre Lumières et Romantisme (Les cahiers du Fontenay 36–38)* (1985), pp. 253–66.
- 7 Ravà, 'Descartes, Spinoza et la pensée italienne', pp. 169ff; Giancotti Boscherini, 'Nota sulla diffusione della filosofia', pp. 349ff.
- 8 On the relationship between Leopardi and Vico, see S. Gensini, *Linguistica leopardiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984), pp. 27 and 251–68.
- 9 [TN] English translation in Leopardi, *The Moral Essays*, trans. Patrick Creagh (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 221.
- 10 Negri, *Lenta ginestra: Saggio sull'ontologia di Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: SugarCo, 1987), chapter I: 'La catastrofe della memoria'.
- 11 Gentile, 'Spinoza e la filosofia italiana', p. 104; Ravà, 'Descartes, Spinoza et la pensée italienne', p. 176. There are several letters to Gioberti in Leopardi's correspondence (*TO*, vol. 1, passim).
- 12 Santinelli, 'Spinoza in Italia', pp. 16 and 18.
- 13 I am referring above all to Wilhelm Dilthey's *Erlebnis und Dichtung* (Leipzig, 1905), and to the work of his students.
- 14 For example, Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- 15 I strongly emphasized these arguments in Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 109ff., 257ff.
- 16 This hypothesis arises from the relationship that I establish between what I have maintained about Leopardi in *Lenta ginestra* and what I have said about Spinoza in *The Savage Anomaly (The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and*

- Politics*, translated by Michael Hardt (1981; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)).
- 17 See above all chapters I and IX of *The Savage Anomaly*.
- 18 *TO*, vol. 2, pp. 449–56 (*Zibaldone 1597–1623*); English translation Martha King and Daniela Bini, in Leopardi, *Zibaldone: A Selection* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 120.
- 19 [TN] English translation in King and Bini, p. 123.
- 20 See my treatment of these problems in Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 86–9, 91.
- 21 [TN] English translation in King and Bini, p. 135.
- 22 [TN] English translation in King and Bini, p. 149.
- 23 In *Lenta ginestra*, I attempted a five-part periodization of Leopardi's work. In the first period Leopardi confronts the dialectical culture of the beginning of the nineteenth century; in the second he shifts his focus toward a radical sensualist theory, with points of extreme pessimism; in the third and fourth periods Leopardi attempts, with various different motivations, to develop an approach to history and strives to reconstruct an ethical perspective; finally, in the fifth period, he theorizes human community and the urgency of liberation. This historical pattern of the development of Leopardi's thought and poetry agrees with the broad lines traced by the best Italian interpreters of Leopardi, above all Cesare Luporini and Walter Binni.
- 24 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), section 99, p. 154. See also section 37, pp. 105–6, section 349, pp. 291–2, and section 372, pp. 332–3. On Nietzsche's reading of Leopardi, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, *La filologia di Leopardi* (Bari: Laterza, 1977), pp. 187–9.
- 25 Nietzsche, section 333, pp. 261–2.
- 26 Nietzsche, sections 92–95, pp. 145–9.
- 27 Letter to Overbeck, July 1881, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters* ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), no. 89, p. 177.
- 28 I have already commented on the unity and difference of Spinoza's and Leopardi's thought in Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 222ff.
- 29 On the nature of Leopardi's pessimism and on its radical difference from that of Schopenhauer, despite the various attempts to bring them together (F. de Santis, B. Croce, etc.), see Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 268ff.
- 30 [TN] English translation in Creagh, pp. 175–8.
- 31 [TN] English translation in King and Bini, p. 196.
- 32 [TN] English translation in King and Bini, p. 169.
- 33 [TN] English translation in Creagh, p. 195.
- 34 [TN] English translation in Creagh, pp. 196–7.
- 35 [TN] English translation in Creagh, p. 210.
- 36 See Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. III, trans. E.S. Haldane (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 252–290, especially 254 and 280–2.
- 37 Benedetto Croce has left us two works on Leopardi: 'De Sanctis e Schopenhauer' (1902) in *Saggi filosofici III (Saggio sullo Hegel ed altri scritti)* revised IVth edition (Bari: Laterza, 1948), pp. 354–68; and *Poesia e non poesia* (Bari: Laterza, 1935).
- 38 On the conception of history in Spinoza's thought, see Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1971).
- 39 The work of Ernst Cassirer (*Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (Berlin, 1906)) is as foundational for the new Spinoza criticism as the works of Martial Gueroult (*Spinoza: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1968) and *Spinoza: L'Âme* (Paris: Aubier, 1974)) and Alexandre Matheron (*Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: 1969)) are conclusive.

- 40 Allow me here to accept the criticism often raised by valid interpreters against the overly clear caesura that I emphasized in the process of the composition of Spinoza's *Ethics in The Savage Anomaly*. I am convinced that, as it is expressed there, the thesis of the caesura and the second foundation cannot but appear to be too rigid and insufficiently demonstrated. I am nonetheless convinced, as are many of my critics, that there is a development in the *Ethics* and a (perhaps indissoluble) interweaving of different lines of elaboration. The difficulty (and perhaps the impossibility) of philologically proving this development does not eliminate the unevenness of the text.
- 41 [TN] Paraphrase of Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* vol. III, p. 257.
- 42 See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1990).
- 43 See C. von Jamme and H. Schneider (eds), *Mythologie der Vernunft: Hegels 'ältestes Systemprogramm' des deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984).
- 44 [TN] English translation: "The Infinite" in Leopardi, *The Canti*, trans. J.G. Nichols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p. 53.] For a commentary and a bibliography, see Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 37ff.
- 45 [TN] English translation in Nichols, pp. 94–7.] See Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 190ff.
- 46 [TN] Lines 1–20 are cited (English translation p. 94).
- 47 [TN] Lines 133–37 are cited (English translation p. 97).
- 48 I am referring to the period between the end of the 1820s and 1836, the year of the poet's death. On this period, see Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 230ff.
- 49 [TN] English translation in Nichols, pp. 141–8.] For a commentary, see Negri, *Lenta ginestra*, pp. 276ff.
- 50 [TN] Lines 111–35 are cited (English translation pp. 143–4).
- 51 I am referring to the scholia from *E V P31* to the end.

V

translation by charles t. wolfe, revised by timothy s. murphy

SPINOZA'S ANTI-MODERNITY

Spinoza, the Romantic

The paradox that presides over Spinoza's reappearance in modernity is well known. If Mendelssohn wished to 'give him new credence by bringing him closer to the philosophical orthodoxy of Leibniz and Wolff', and Jacobi, 'by presenting him as a heterodox figure in the literal sense of the term, wanted to do away with him definitively for modern Christianity' – well, 'both failed in their goal, and it was the heterodox Spinoza who was rehabilitated'.¹ The Mendelssohn–Jacobi debate intervenes in the crisis of a philosophical paradigm and produces a figure of Spinoza capable of alleviating the extremely strong spiritual tension of that era, and of constituting the systematic preconditions of the relation between power and substance and between subject and nature. Spinoza, the accursed Spinoza, re-enters modernity as a Romantic philosopher. Lessing won out by recognizing in Spinoza an idea of nature that was able to balance the relation between feeling and intellect, freedom and necessity, and history and reason. Herder and Goethe, against the subjective and revolutionary impatience of the *Sturm und Drang*, grounded themselves on this robust image of synthesis and recomposed objectivity: Spinoza is not merely a Romantic; he constitutes its foundation and fulfilment. The omnipotence of nature no longer needed to gape at the tragedy of feeling, but triumphed over it and opposed to it a kingdom of completed forms. Spinoza's early reception within Romanticism was thus an aesthetic reception, a perception of movement and perfection, of dynamism and form. And it remained such, even when the general framework and the particular components of Romanticism were subjected to the labour of philosophical critique. Fichte, the true philosophical hero of Romanticism, considered Spinoza's

and Kant's systems to be 'perfectly coherent',² within the incessant ontological movement of the I. For the Schelling of the 1790s, the assertion of a radical opposition between critical philosophy and dogmatic philosophy – that is, between a philosophy of the absolute I that founds itself on the critical philosophy and a dogmatic philosophy of the absolute object and Spinozism – was quickly resolved into an analysis of action that dialectically took on (as Hegel immediately recognizes) the weight of the objective.³ Far from becoming antinomian, the absolute position of the I is composed in a necessary process that, beyond tragedy, glorifies the 'spiritual automatism'⁴ of the relation between subject and substance. The aesthetic side of this synthesis consists in ceaselessly and tirelessly leading power and substance, the productive element and the form of production, back to perfection. The Romantic, according to Hegel, is characterized by a capacity to surpass the bare objectivity of the ideal and the natural as a true idea of beauty and truth, initially to destroy the union of the idea and its reality, and to situate it in difference, so as then to make manifest the inner world of absolute subjectivity and reconstruct its objectivity where, going beyond it, sensibility is appeased in the absoluteness of the result.⁵ The cutting die of this process is still Lessingian, but the new dialectic expresses and articulates its motivations, while insisting on the propaedeutic of the beautiful along the path leading to the absolute. Spinoza, a certain Spinoza, is the central figure in this process.

The modern against the Romantic

Are there dissonances in this concert? To be sure – and it is the very same Hegel who carries out the high-level absorption of Spinozism into Romanticism who expresses these dissonances. For Romanticism and aesthetics are only a part of the world, and cannot in themselves exhaust its absoluteness – the absoluteness of efficacy, history, and modernity. Implicit in Romanticism and aesthetics is a deficit of truth, which is revealed by the absence of reflection. But the absence of reflection is the absence of determinations. The incommensurability of Spinozian being is the sign of a lack of determination; it is a deficit of truth. Against his extreme ordinary recuperation of Spinozist ontology, beyond the envious and pathetic story that Hegel told about Spinoza, it is in the *Logic's* chapter on measure that the confrontation and detachment are realized.⁶ The issue here is not to trace this episode in detail: others have done so brilliantly.⁷ It will suffice to identify the negative concept of being that Hegel attributes to Spinoza, for it is around this definition (or, in the event, around its refusal) that some of the central movements in the twentieth-century debate on the ontology of the modern will develop. Hegel's attack here develops along two lines.

The first is, so to speak, phenomenological: it concerns the interpretation of the Spinozian 'mode'. The latter is defined as the affection of the substance that posits the determinate determination, which is in something other than itself, and must be conceived of by another. But, Hegel objects, this mode that is immediately given is not recognized as *Nichtigkeit*, as nothingness, and therefore as the necessity of dialectical reflection. Spinozian phenomenology is flat, it rests on absoluteness. But in this case, the world of modes is nothing other than the world of abstract indeterminations, from which difference is absent, precisely because it wants to maintain itself as absolute. The mode vanishes in disproportion.⁸ But – and here we pass from phenomenology to ontology *tout court* – this indifference and this disproportion, which are revealed by the world of modes, also belong to Spinoza's definition of being in general. Being cannot redeem itself from the indeterminacy of modes. The indifference of the world of modes is, if only implicitly, the whole of the constitutive determinations of being, which is dissolved in that reality. Being in Spinoza presents itself as *Dasein*, and can never be resolved. 'Absolute indifference is the fundamental constitutive determination of Spinoza's substance',⁹ and in this indifference, what is lacking is the reason of dialectical inversion. Spinoza's substance is the absolute closure of determinations on themselves, in the empty totality that differentiates them. Spinoza's substance is

the cause, which in its being for itself resists all invasion, [that] is already subjected to necessity or to destiny, and this subjection is the hardest. The thinking of necessity, however, is the dissolution of that hardness . . . The great intuition of substance in Spinoza is in itself the liberation from finite being for itself; but the concept itself is for itself the power of necessity and substantial freedom.¹⁰

In conclusion, in Spinoza's substance Hegel (1) recognizes the capacity to be represented as the boundless horizon of reality, as the presence of being in general; (2) confirms the immediate and unresolvable aesthetic power of Spinoza's substance by insisting on its 'in itself' character; (3) attributes to Spinoza's substance a fundamental incapacity to fulfill itself in *Wirklichkeit*, that is, to resolve itself in the dialectical dimension of the reconciliation of reality. This means that for Hegel the Spinozian conception of being is Romantic, but for that very reason it is not modern. Without Spinoza it is impossible to philosophize, but outside of the dialectic it is impossible to be modern. Modernity is the peace of the real, it is the fulfilment of history. Spinozian being and its power are incapable of providing us with this result.

The time of the modern

However, there exists another moment in which, around the issue of modernity, we can evaluate Hegel's positions in the face of Spinoza's. This is with regard to the problem of time. We know that time for Spinoza is, in the first place, the time of presence, and in the second place, that of indefinite duration. The time of indefinite duration is 'the effort by which every thing strives to persevere in its being'. It would indeed be absurd for that force to 'involve a limited time, which determines the duration of the thing', for its destruction cannot derive from the essence of the thing, but can only be posited by an external cause (*E III P8 Dem*). As for time as presence – that is, as singularity, as determination – it presents itself as the residue of the deduction of the insignificance of duration for essence (*E IV Pref*) but, at the same time and above all, as a positive foundation and ontological transformation of that residuality: the body, its actual existence, and the mind insofar as it is linked to the body are gathered together in an idea 'which expresses the essence of the body under a certain species of eternity' (*E V P23 S*). Now, if it is not surprising that Hegel is opposed to Spinoza's definition of time as indefinite duration, his position with respect to the definition of time-as-presence [*tempo-presenza*] is extremely ambiguous. The Hegelian polemic against indefinite duration is nothing other than a new articulation of the polemic against the indifference of the modes of substance. According to Hegel, indeed, the indefinite does not avoid, but rather radicalizes the difficulties of establishing a relation between the infinite and the finite: its concept must therefore be overcome. Duration must transform itself into measure, and therefore the mediation of quantity towards quality, and unlimitedness must unfold itself along the full length of its path, in the realization of its own necessity.¹¹ The reduction of duration to temporality and of abstract temporality to concrete and historical temporality is therefore the route that Hegel points out so as to deprive Spinozian being of its theoretical destiny of converting itself into pure nothingness. In this case too, dialectics would give being back to reality and contribute, through this concretization of time, to constructing the definition of modernity. That said, what remains is Spinoza's second definition of time, that sees time as presence and the disclosedness [*apertura*]¹² of power, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Now, how might one be opposed to that Spinozian definition of *Dasein*, or rather of the determinate being of the mode, which in its singularity is irreducible to *Gewordensein*, and which radically opposes determinate being to any dialectical synthesis? Hegel is particularly aware of this objection when he claims that the dialectical concept of temporality does not annul concrete determination – in other words, that the event, the determination (as act,

Bestimmung, as well as result, *Bestimmtheit*) persists in its concreteness. If the time of the modern is that of fulfilment [*compiutezza*], this fulfilment of reality could not mystify or conceal the splendour of the event. The Hegelian dialectic could not in any case renounce the plenitude of singularity. But here the ambiguity hides an insurmountable difficulty. Spinozian presence is that of a being full of power, of an indestructible horizon of singularity. Hegel may very well attempt the inversion of power, but this process has the appearance of a sophism, since the goal sought is the reassertion of the very same power. Hegel may indeed denounce the violence of an irreducible presence in Spinozian being and push it toward indifference and nothingness. Nevertheless, each and every time that this singular presentness [*presenzialità*] reappears, the reality that Hegel claims to be void reveals itself on the contrary to be charged with all the positivity, all the disclosedness of every possible singular potentiality. Hegel may indeed attack the inconclusive perspective of a time defined as indefinite duration, but he can only oppose a repetitive and sterile transcendental movement to a theoretical praxis of time that reveals it to be full of present determinations. It is at this point that the Hegelian system goes into crisis, at the point where the time of the modern as fulfilment of historical development opposes itself to the emergence of singularity, of the positive time of *Dasein*, of Spinozian presence.

What then becomes of the Hegelian time of the modern? Hegel is constrained to reveal the substantial ambiguity of his conceptual construction. For the rhythm of the transcendental mediation superimposes itself heavily onto the emergence of singularity, and even if the transcendental wishes to suck up the energy of the singular, nevertheless it does not succeed in doing it justice. The 'acosmic', 'atemporal' Spinoza has a conception of time as presence and as singularity that the great dialectical machine would like to expropriate, but cannot. The modern reveals itself to be not only the adversary of the Romantic, but also a frustrated will to recuperate the productive force of singularity. This frustration does not, however, eliminate the efficacy of repetition: it posits parameters of domination. With Hegel, the modern becomes the sign of the domination of the transcendental over power, the continual attempt to organize power functionally – in the instrumental rationality of Power. Thus a double relation connects and separates Hegel and Spinoza at the same time. For both, being is full and productive, but where Spinoza sets power in immediacy and singularity, Hegel privileges mediation and the transcendental dialectic of Power. In this sense, and in this sense only, Spinozian presence is opposed to Hegelian becoming. Spinoza's anti-modernity is not a negation of *Wirklichkeit* but a reduction of the latter to *Dasein* – Hegel's modernity consists in the opposite option.

The fate of the modern

The real, that is, the modern, is 'the immediate unity of essence and existence, in other words, of the inner and the outer, in the form of the dialectic'. Such is the Hegelian brunt of the storm around which philosophical critique has been stirred up for almost two centuries.¹³ During the silver age, and even more during the bronze age of contemporary German philosophy (that is, in the nineteenth century of the 'critique of critique', and the great *fin-de-siècle* academic philosophy), substance and power, *Wirklichkeit* and *Dasein* became increasingly separated. Power was at first felt to be antagonism, then defined as irrationality. Philosophy transformed itself bit by bit into a sublime effort to exorcise the irrational, that is, into a violation of power. Hegel's furious will to fix the dialectical hegemony of the absolute substance was first opposed to the crisis and the tragic horizon, and then to the ceaselessly repeated vocation to renew transcendental teleology in more or less dialectical forms, in an alternation of horizons which – and this did not escape the irony of the greatest figures, such as Marx and Nietzsche – continually offered up pale but nevertheless efficacious images of the modern. The hegemony of the relations of production over the productive forces detaches itself from the figure of the Hegelian utopia of the absolute and dons the garb of reformist teleology. The schemas of indefinite duration, running counter to those of the dialectical infinite, are renewed as projects of the progressive rationality of domination. The modern changes sheets without changing beds. And this drags on, exhausting any capacity of renewal, inventing a thousand ways of bypassing the dry, domineering and utopian Hegelian intimation of modernity, which it attempts to substitute by means of misused forms of the schematism of reason and transcendentalism. This goes on until that exhaustion consumes itself and turns its reflection back upon itself.¹⁴

Heidegger is the extreme limit of this process, a process in which he is well integrated if it is true that one of the goals of *Being and Time* is to rethink the Kantian theory of transcendental schematism,¹⁵ but also a process which, at the very moment when it sets off again along the usual tracks, is completely contorted. 'Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being.'¹⁶ But:

If to Interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, *Dasein* is not only the primary entity to be interrogated: it is also that entity which already comport itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question. But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the

radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to *Dasein* itself – the pre-ontological understanding of Being.¹⁷

The issue of presence becomes central once again. *Dasein* is temporality that is ruptured and rediscovered at each point as presence, a presence which is autonomous stability and rootedness against any dispersive mobility of the 'they' and to any form of cultural disorientation. Becoming and history are henceforth left to the fate of commerce and dejection. Effectiveness is no longer Hegelian *Wirklichkeit* but a crude *Faktizität*. The modern is fate. In the last pages of *Being and Time*, against Hegel's mediation and Absolute Spirit, Heidegger asserts that

Our existential analytic of *Dasein*, on the contrary, starts with the 'concretion' of factually thrown existence itself in order to unveil temporality as that which primordially makes such existence possible. 'Spirit' does not first fall into time, but it *exists* as the primordial *temporalizing* of temporality . . . 'Spirit' does not fall *into* time; but factual existence 'falls' as falling *from* primordial, authentic temporality.¹⁸

Here, in this falling, in being this 'care', temporality constitutes itself as possibility and self-projection into time-to-come. Here, without ever exposing itself to the snares of teleology and the dialectic, temporality reveals possibility as the most originary ontological determination of *Dasein*. Thus it is only in presence that fate opens up onto possibility and time to come once again. But how is it possible to authenticate *Dasein*? In this tragically tangled skein death is the ownmost and most authentic possibility of *Dasein*. But the latter is also an impossibility of presence: the 'possibility of an impossibility' therefore becomes the ownmost and most authentic possibility of *Dasein*. This is the way the Hegelian theme of modernity comes to conclusion: in nothingness, in death, the immediate unity of existence and essence is given. The nostalgic Hegelian claim of *Bestimmung* has become a desperate *Entschlossenheit* in Heidegger – a deliberation and a resolution of the disclosedness of *Dasein* to its own truth, which is nothingness. The music to which the dance of determination and the transcendental was set has come to an end.

Tempus potentiae

Heidegger is not only the prophet of the fate of modernity. At the very moment when he divides, he is also a hinge opening onto anti-modernity, that is, opening onto a conception of time as an ontologically constitutive relation that breaks the hegemony of substance or the transcendental, and therefore opens onto power. Resolution does not just consist in the fact of removing the closure (*Entschlossenheit*) – it is a belonging to anticipation

and disclosedness, which is truth itself as it unveils itself in *Dasein*. The discovery of being does not consist merely in the fact of opening up (*Entdecken*) that which preexists, but in positing the established autonomy of *Dasein* through and against the dispersive mobility of the 'They'. By giving itself as finite, being-there is disclosed [*aperto*], and this disclosedness is sight (*Sicht*): but more than sight, it is *Umsicht*, forecasting circumspection. Being-there is possibility, but it is more than that: it is the Power-to-be.

'We' presuppose truth because 'we', being in the kind of Being which *Dasein* possesses, are 'in the truth' . . . But *Dasein* is already ahead of itself in each case; this is implied in its constitution as care. It is an entity for which, in its Being, its ownmost Power-to-be is an issue. To *Dasein*'s Being and its Power-to-be as Being-in-the-world, disclosedness and uncovering belong essentially. To *Dasein* Power-to-be-in-the-world is an issue, and this includes concerning itself with entities within-the-world and uncovering them circumspectly. In *Dasein*'s constitution as care, in Being-ahead-of-itself, constitutes the most primordial 'presupposing'.¹⁹

Presence therefore is not simply being present in truth, in the unveiling of being, but rather the projection of the present, authenticity, the new rootedness in being. Time aspires to power, alludes to its productivity, brushes against its energy. And, when it reverts back to nothingness, it does not forget that power. Spinoza surges back on this pivot. *Tempus potentiae*. Spinoza's insistence on presence fills out what Heidegger leaves us as mere possibility. The hegemony of presence with respect to the becoming that distinguishes Spinozian from Hegelian metaphysics reasserts itself as the hegemony of the plenitude of the present faced with empty Heideggerian presence. Without ever having entered into the modern, Spinoza exits from it here, by overturning the conception of time – which others wanted to fulfill in becoming or nothingness – into a positively open and constitutive time. Under the very same ontological conditions, love takes the place of 'care'. Spinoza systematically overturns Heidegger: to *Angst* (anxiety) he opposes *Amor*, to *Umsicht* (circumspection) he opposes *Mens*, to *Entschlossenheit* (resolution) he opposes *Cupiditas*, to *Anwesenheit* (being-present) he opposes the *Conatus*, to *Besorgen* (concern) he opposes *Appetitus*, to *Möglichkeit* (possibility) he opposes *Potentia*. In this confrontation, an anti-purposive presence and possibility unite that which different meanings of ontology divide. At the same time, the indifferent meanings of being are precisely divided – Heidegger aims at nothingness, and Spinoza at plenitude. The Heideggerian ambiguity that vacillates in the direction of the void is resolved in the Spinozian tension that conceives the present as plenitude. If in Spinoza, as in Heidegger, modal presence,

or rather phenomenological entities, have their freedom restored to them, Spinoza, unlike Heidegger, recognizes the entity as productive force. The reduction of time to presence opens onto opposite directions: the constitution of a presence that aims at nothingness, or the creative insistence of presence. On the very same horizon, by means of the reduction to presence, two constitutive directions open up: if Heidegger settles his accounts with the modern, Spinoza (who never entered into the modern) shows the indomitable force of an anti-modernity which is completely projected into the future. Love in Spinoza expresses the time of power, a time that is presence insofar as it is action that is constitutive of eternity. Even in the difficult and problematic genesis of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*²⁰ we clearly see this conceptual process being determined. The formal condition of the identity of presence and eternity is given first of all. 'Whatever the Mind understands under a species of eternity, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the Body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity' (*E V P29*). Proposition 30 confirms this: 'Insofar as our Mind knows itself and the Body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God' (*E V P30*). This is explained most fully in the Corollary to Proposition 32:

From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual Love of God. For from this kind of knowledge there arises (by P32) Joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, that is (by Def Aff. VI), Love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present (by P29), but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God. (*E V P32 C*)

Eternity is therefore a formal dimension of presence. But now here is the overturning and the explanation: 'Although this Love toward God has had no beginning (by P33), it still has all the perfections of Love, just as if it had come to be' (*E V P33 S*). Beware, then, of falling into the deception of duration: 'If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their Mind, but that they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, or memory, which they believe remains after death' (*E V P34 S*). On the other hand:

This Love the Mind has must be related to its actions (by P32C and H1P3); it is, then, an action by which the Mind contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause (by P32 and P32C) . . . so (by P35), this Love the Mind has is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself. (*E V P36 Dem*)

From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation, or blessedness, or Freedom, consists, namely in a constant and eternal Love of God, or in

God's Love for men ... For insofar as [this Love] is related to God (by P35), it is Joy. (E V P36 S)

And the argument concludes, without any further possible equivocation, with Proposition 40: 'The more perfection each thing has, the more it acts and the less it is acted on; and conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is' (E V P40). The time of power is therefore constitutive of eternity, inasmuch as constitutive action resides in presence. The eternity that is presupposed here is shown as the product, as the horizon of the affirmation of action. Time is a fullness of love. To Heideggerian nothingness corresponds Spinozist fullness – or rather the paradox of eternity, of the plenitude of the present world, the splendour of singularity. The concept of the modern is ablaze with love.

Spinoza's anti-modernity

'This Love toward God cannot be tainted by an affect of Envy or Jealousy: instead, the more men we imagine to be joined to God by the same bond of Love, the more it is encouraged' (E V P20). Thus a further element is added to the definition of Spinoza's anti-modernity. According to the dynamic of his own system, which takes shape essentially in the Third and Fourth Parts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza constructs the collective dimension of productive force, and therefore the collective figure of love for divinity. Just as the modern is individualistic, and thereby constrained to search for the apparatus [*dispositivo*] of mediation and recomposition in the transcendental, so Spinoza radically negates any dimension external to the constitutive process of the human community, to its absolute immanence. This becomes completely explicit in the *Political Treatise*, and already partially in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, although probably only the *TP* allows us to clarify the line of thought governing Proposition 20 of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*, or better, allows us clearly to read the whole apparatus of the constitutive motions of intellectual Love as a collective essence. I mean that intellectual Love is the formal condition of socialization, and that the communitarian process is the ontological condition of intellectual Love. Consequently, the light of intellectual Love clarifies the paradox of the multitude and its making of itself a community, since intellectual Love alone describes the real mechanisms that lead *potentia* from the *multitudo* to determining itself as the unity of an absolute political order: the democratic *potestas*.²¹ On the other hand, the modern does not know how to justify democracy. The modern always gives democracy as a limit and therefore transfigures it into the perspective of the transcendental. The Hegelian Absolute only gives an account of collective productive force, or

of the *potestas* emanating from it, once all singularities have been reduced to negativity. The result is a concept of democracy that is always necessarily formal.²² And the true result of this operation is merely to subject the productive forces to the domination of the relations of production. But how can the irrepressible instances of singularity, the longing for community, and the material determinations of collective production be confined to such paradigms? In the most sophisticated conception of the modern, this relation of domination is brought back within the category of the 'incomplete', by means of an operation which again, as always, reduces and reproduces presence through duration.²³ No, the triumph of singularities, their self-positing as the multitude, their self-constitution in an increasingly numerous bond of love, are not something incomplete. Spinoza does not know this word. These processes, on the contrary, are always complete and always open, and the space that is given between completion and opening is that of absolute power, total freedom, the path of liberation. Spinoza's disutopia consists in the total recuperation of the power of liberation on a horizon of presence: presence imposes realism as against utopianism, and utopianism opens presence within constitutive projecting. Contrary to what Hegel wanted, disproportion and presence coexist on a terrain of absolute determination and absolute freedom. There is no ideal, no transcendental, no incomplete project that could fill the opening, make up the disproportion, satisfy freedom. Disclosedness [or openness], disproportion, and the Absolute are complete, closed in a presence beyond which only a new presence can be given. Love renders presence eternal, the collectivity renders singularity absolute. When Heidegger develops his social phenomenology of singularity, between the inauthenticity of inter-worldliness and the authenticity of being-in-the-world, he develops a polemic against the transcendental that is analogous to that undertaken by Spinoza, but once again the circle of the crisis of the modern closes on him and productive power convulses in nothingness. Instead, in determination and in joy, Spinozian love glorifies that which it finds in the horizon of temporality and constitutes it collectively. Spinoza's anti-modernity explodes here in an irresistible manner, as analysis and exposition of productive force ontologically constituted into collectivity.

Spinoza redivivus

The cycle of definition of modernity inaugurated by Hegel – in other words, the cycle in which the reduction of power to the absolute transcendental form reaches its apogee, and consequently in which the crisis of relation is dominated by the exorcism of power and its reduction to irrationality and nothingness – thus reaches its end. And it is here that Spin-

ozism conquers a place in contemporary philosophy, no longer simply as an historical index of reference but as an operative paradigm. This occurs because Spinozism always represents a full stop in the critique of modernity, for it opposes a conception of the collective subject, of love and the body as powers of presence to the conception of the subject-individual, of mediation and the transcendental, which inform the concept of the modern from Descartes to Hegel and Heidegger. Spinozism is a theory of time torn away from purposiveness, the foundation of an ontology conceived as a process of constitution. It is on this basis that Spinozism acts as the catalyst of an alternative in the definition of the modern. But why should one deprecate a centuries-old position of radical refusal of the forms of modernity by calling it by the feeble name of 'alternative'? On the terrain of the alternative, we find compromise positions well-versed in the art of mediation – such as those of Habermas, who over the course of the long development of his theory of modernity²⁴ has never succeeded in going beyond an enfeebled and insipid repetition of the pages where Hegel constructs the modern phenomenologically as absoluteness that takes shape in interaction and incompleteness. No, that is not what interests us. *Spinoza redivivus* is elsewhere – he is wherever the division at the origin of the modern is taken up again, the division between productive force and relations of production, between power and mediation, between singularity and the Absolute. Not an alternative to the modern, then, but anti-modernity, powerful and progressive. Certain contemporary authors have felicitously anticipated our definition of Spinoza's anti-modernity. Thus Althusser: 'Spinoza's philosophy introduced an unprecedented theoretical revolution into the history of philosophy, probably the greatest philosophical revolution of all time, to the point that we can regard Spinoza as Marx's only direct ancestor, from the philosophical standpoint.'²⁵ Why? Because Spinoza is the founder of an absolutely original conception of praxis without teleology, because he thought the presence of the cause in its effects and the very existence of structure in its effects and in presence. '*The whole existence of the structure consists of its effects ... the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects.*'²⁶ For Foucault, Spinoza transforms this foundationless structural originality into a mechanism of the production of norms, which rests on a collective present:

And thereby one sees that, for the philosopher, to pose the question of belonging to this present will no longer be the question of belonging to a doctrine or a tradition, it will no longer be simply the question of belonging to a community in general, but that of belonging to a certain 'we', to a 'we' that relates to a cultural whole that is characteristic of its own actuality. It is this 'we' that is in the process of becoming the object of the philosopher's

own reflection; and thereby the impossibility of doing without the philosopher's interrogation of his singular belonging to this 'we' asserts itself. All of this, philosophy as problematization of an actuality, and interrogation by the philosopher of this actuality of which he is a part and in relation to which he has to situate himself, could well characterize philosophy as the discourse of modernity and on modernity.²⁷

It is from this position that Foucault can propose a 'political history of truth' or a 'political economy of a will to knowledge'²⁸ – from a position that overturns the concept of modernity as fate in order to show it as presence and belonging. For Deleuze, lastly, Spinoza pushes the immanence of praxis in the present to the limit of the triumph of the untimely and the counter-factual – and here the subject rediscovers itself as collective subject, displayed in Spinozian fashion as the result of a reciprocal movement of the internal and the external, on the flattened presence of a world that is always reopened to absolute possibility.²⁹ Anti-modernity is therefore the concept of present history, recast as the concept of collective liberation, as limit and surpassing of the limit, as body and its eternity and presence, as the infinite reopening of possibility. *Res gestae*, the historical praxis of theory.

Notes

- 1 Manfred Walther, 'Spinoza en Allemagne: histoire des problèmes et de la recherche', in *Spinoza entre Lumière et romantisme* (Les Cahiers de Fontenay 36–8 (March 1985)), p. 25.
- 2 Peter Szondi, *Poésie et poétique de l'idéalisme allemand* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1975), p. 10.
- 3 Antonio Negri, *Stato e diritto nel giovane Hegel* (Padua: Cedam, 1958), p. 158.
- 4 Martial Guéroult, 'La philosophie schellingienne de la liberté', *Studia philosophica: Schellingsheft* 14 (1954), pp. 152, 157.
- 5 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Part II, section III.
- 6 G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989), I, iii, pp. 327–85.
- 7 Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspéro, 1979).
- 8 Hegel, *Logic*, p. 329; Martial Guéroult, *Spinoza I: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1968), p. 462; Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnis-Problem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1952).
- 9 Hegel, *Logic*, p. 382.
- 10 G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, ed. E. Behler, trans. S.A. Taubeneck (New York: Continuum, 1990), 11, C, No. 108, p. 101. On this passage, see Cassirer's *Das Erkenntnis-Problem*.
- 11 On what follows, see Hegel, *Logic*, I, iii, and Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnis-Problem*.
- 12 [TN] The Italian word '*apertura*' generally means 'opening' or 'openness', and it is so translated throughout the rest of this volume. In this essay, however, we have sometimes translated it as 'disclosedness' in conformity with the English translation of the

- German term 'Erschliessung' in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)), which is rendered 'apertura' in the Italian translation that Negri cites.
- 13 Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. D. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
 - 14 Antonio Negri, chapters VIII ('L'irrazionalismo') and IX ('Fenomenologia e esistenzialismo'), in *La filosofia contemporanea*, ed. Mario Dal Pra (Como-Milan: Vallardi, 1978), pp. 151–73 and 175–207. An attempt at a reevaluation of neo-Kantianism, on the contrary, is to be found in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).
 - 15 The project is announced at the end of the introduction to *Being and Time*. But see also Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. R. Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
 - 16 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 19. [TN: We have modified this translation to better reflect Negri's reading of the Italian version.]
 - 17 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 35.
 - 18 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 486.
 - 19 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 270–1.
 - 20 In *The Savage Anomaly* [Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, translated by Michael Hardt (1981; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)], I argued that Book V of the *Ethics* presented profound contradictions, and that two different lines coexisted in it. Today, after having evaluated the numerous criticisms that have been raised against my interpretation, I consider it useful to accept those that insist on the excessive linearity of the separation. In particular, I agree, as I will emphasize later, that the conception of intellectual love (*amor intellectualis*) as elaborated in the Fifth Part can be re-read on the basis of the *Political Treatise* – and hence re-evaluated in light of the whole of Spinoza's system.
 - 21 I would like to emphasize here again how the relative ambiguity of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* may be resolved by means of a reading that strictly integrates the conception of intellectual love and the process of constitution of democracy, as it is described in the *Political Treatise*. Against this position, see C. Vinti, *Spinoza. La conoscenza come liberazione* (Rome: Studium, 1984), chapter IV, which uses the interpretive proposition I developed in *The Savage Anomaly* and radicalizes it so as to find a persistence of transcendence in Spinoza's system.
 - 22 I am referring here to the liberal-democratic interpretation of Hegel, as developed by Rudolf Haym, Franz Rosenzweig and Eric Weil.
 - 23 Jürgen Habermas, *Kleine politischen Schriften I–IV* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 444–64.
 - 24 From 'Labor and Interaction' [1968], in *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), to 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project' [1980], trans. Seyla Benhabib in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [1985], trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).
 - 25 Louis Althusser *et al.*, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon, 1970), p. 102 (translation modified).
 - 26 Althusser *et al.*, *Reading Capital*, p. 189.
 - 27 Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce que les Lumières? (extrait du cours au Collège de France du 5 janvier 1983)', in *Dits et écrits* vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), texte 351. Originally published in *Magazine littéraire* 207 (May 1984), pp. 35–9.
 - 28 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 60 and 73.
 - 29 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 129–32.

VI

translated by timothy s. murphy

THE 'RETURN TO SPINOZA' AND THE RETURN OF COMMUNISM

It is pointless to conceal the fact that the 'return to Spinoza' – which encompasses so much of European philosophical culture, at least that of those who refuse to lose themselves, complacent in their own passivity, in the shifting sands of the thought of the *Krisis* – shows itself to be an event linked to the crisis of Marxism. This is an aspect that is often regarded with derision, sometimes with annoyance, in any case as just one aspect among so many others; it seems to me nevertheless to deserve more attention. In fact it pertains to a moment of *critical* reflection on Marxism and its efficacy – on orthodox Marxism, the historically hegemonic one – that refuses (and here the singular, positive motive behind this reprise of the Spinozist theme emerges) to withdraw into a negative consciousness, but rather finds an ontological anchorage through which it proposes a philosophy of time-to-come and the imagination of communism. And it does so, once again, with the greatest confidence in reason and in collective human praxis.

Spinoza is ontology. He is the being that founds knowledge [*sapere*] – not because knowledge is based on being in his philosophy, but because being and knowledge are formed by collective ethics, by the set of physical and moral forces that shape the human horizon. Here, the discovery that ethical action can found being, that morally oriented action constitutes being, is a life-saver for the revolutionary who has lived through the crisis of Marxism and who at the same time refuses to yield to the dimensions of a modernity, debased by the absence of any reference to being or to the fate of modernity, that overflows toward the fortuitousness and vacuity of the event, toward the intoxication of Power and becoming. But this 'return to Spinoza' is not merely an anchoring point – it is also a proposal, a positive production. And it cannot be otherwise. Indeed, within this

horizon in which Marxism, like the other ideologies of modernity, no longer knows how to discriminate or orient itself – and consequently is flattened onto a dimension of indifference (that of the alienating efficacy of capitalist production and postmodern stupefaction) – Spinoza, or rather the ontological anchorage and the productivity of ethics, proposes the possibility of reshaping and defining human action once again. Within this passage, the historicist and cynical perversions of orthodox Marxist thought are submitted to the dice-throw of critique – and Spinoza is certainly not a 'new philosopher' (despite the numerous interpreters who want to draw him toward a renewed terrain of prophecy, asceticism, religiosity): on the contrary, his claim that *being* is material, *revolutionary*, ethically constructive being is immediate and ineffaceable. By anchoring itself in such an ontology, thought and, what matters most, the will to revolution survive the crisis of Marxism – and quite rightly break away from it.

In the history of ontology and the idea of being in general, Spinoza's position is unique. The theist and pantheist visions of being dissolve in the face of his declaration of the materiality of being. Spinoza's thought is characterized by a continuity between physics and ethics, between phenomenology and genealogy, between ethics and politics: this indissoluble continuity of manifestations of being, this circularity of surfaces, vigorously and irreducibly opposes Spinoza's system to every preceding and (in large part) every successive version of ontology. One could say that Spinoza's ontology is an absolute *violation* of the ontological tradition. Certainly Spinoza speaks of being as foundation – which allows us to use the *word* 'ontology' to define where his thought belongs – but the foundation is conceived as *surface*, and this situates Spinoza's thought beyond every other conception of being we know of. Here surface appears as determinate being, but the determination is practical, it is the consolidation of the crossings and displacements of forces that we test out on the physical and historical terrain. This ontology is truly unique – at least until the modern philosophy of collective praxis intervenes to enrich the framework of our ethical comprehension of the world. But what voluntarist exaggerations, what perverse historical effects have followed from this last suggestion! Because once again the subversion of being followed the rhythm of rationalism, it put itself in the service of instrumental reason – thus the transformation presented itself as *utopia* and utopia was a *hypostasis* of being. This route has shown itself to be impassable. It left us with, and indeed it only increased, our formidable desire for being. This is why we must return to Spinoza, because his conception of being excludes every utopia, or rather it teaches of a profound, continuous, stable *disutopia* within whose framework the hope for revolutionary transformation is present as

a dimension of reality, as the surface of life. No hypostasis. Spinoza's ontology proposes subversion as a process of transformation within disutopia – this is its uniqueness. An analogous feeling for being is perhaps to be found in the history of ancient materialism and more particularly in Epicureanism – but Spinoza reinvents this materialism for modernity, confronting it with the new conditions of nascent capitalist development; he alone in his time elaborates it and offers it up as an alternative to the senselessness of the ideological and political developments of the future.

So here we are in the situation defined by a rigorously materialist ontology. We saw, in the first essay of this small volume, the reasons for Spinoza's contemporaneity. Here, it is a matter of insisting only on one point: Spinozian being presents itself as an idea of revolution, as an idea of a radical transformation – which does not deny but rather integrates objectivity, which gives an ethical freedom to the necessity for transformation that we experience ever more deeply. We said above that Spinozian being presents itself as a necessary surface and at the same time as a horizon of contingency; that it shows in this relationship its own roots in freedom and that this freedom is a hypothesis of knowledge [*conoscere*], a foundation of knowledge [*sapere*] which, in conformity with Spinoza's ontology and within the mechanisms of the continuous production of being, unites communication and liberation. We said that being is collective, and finally that Spinoza's idea of being is a heroic and serene idea, an idea of an extraordinary superabundance and an extraordinary overflowing of being. These concepts, assembled and led back to subjectivity, define the concept of revolution. Spinozian being is the being of revolution, the ontology of revolution. I do not want to return here to the historical analysis of the events that produce this Spinozian situation and at the same time determine the anomaly of its historical position. This is not the issue. It is simply a matter of grasping the open richness of this conception of being and of emphasizing its inexhaustible virtuality.

Starting from these premises, the desolated territories of being subsumed by capital in the latest and most terrible phase of its destructive development are opened anew to the ethical hope and adventure of intelligence. To conceive being as necessary revolution, as integration of a freedom that, responding to the necessity of the subject, invents a new history: such is our task. With the crisis of Marxism and the concomitant indestructible awareness of the failure of the most bountiful utopias of real socialism, our generation carries within itself the knowledge [*conoscenza*] of the inhuman fate that capitalism reserves for us and the certainty that the political, ethical and civic system in which we live cannot be recuperated. *Sixty-eight* was, from this point of view, a central moment in a universal coming to consciousness. At that moment, the fertile conception of

an uncontainable power of being, a power opposed to Power and to all the established Powers and systems, convinced us of the imminence of revolution. That was false: we were living through the revolution, it was not imminent, it was not an expectation arising from ideology – the revolution was present. Now, Spinoza's thought arrives to confirm us in this coming to consciousness. It shows us the superabundance of being as a *new* continent that opens up before us. We know [*conosciamo*] the whole physical world: but Spinoza teaches that we have the possibility of experiencing the savage discovery of ever-new territories of being – territories constructed by intelligence and ethical will. The pleasure of innovation, the spread of desire, life as subversion – such is the sense of Spinozism in the present epoch. Revolution is a presupposition – not an abstract project but a practical task, not a choice but a necessity. We are living through the era of revolution taking place [*rivoluzione avvenuta*]: our determination is merely to realize it. Revolution is the sign that makes the ethical work [*operare*].

Thus, indeed, no matter how we make contact with being, with the theoretical discourse on being, we are immediately admitted to the terrain of ethics. Ethics founds the deployment of thought, guaranteeing the possibility of free and innovative being. Outside of this ethical foundation, thought is an effect of alienation, the motive force of a senseless projection, the element of an indifferent and stultified universe. On the other hand, the ethical foundation is the form of the superabundance of being, of its/our freedom. Here the discourse on ethical being turns into the discourse of politics. Whoever has known crisis and the false necessity that is praised by Power as the possibility of its own new legitimation now hears the call of Spinozian subversion – Spinozism is political thought, the claim of collective freedom against every kind of alienation, the acute and 'prolix' intelligence against every attempt – even the most subtle, even the most formal – to set the externality of command, of legitimation, over the organization of social production. Spinozism is a scalpel that lays bare every survival, no matter how parasitic, of the exploitation of man by man; it is both consciousness and weapon. It is power against Power [*potenza contro potere*]. That is, power against, or *counter-Power* [*contropotere*]. It is not irrelevant to note here that Spinozism offers us the possibility of elaborating a new conception of right and the State, a conception adequate to the development of individual and collective freedoms in an era in which the *problem of war and peace* is again becoming a crucial political consideration (and thus reviving a situation inherited from the notion of natural right). A revolutionary conception of right and of the foundation of the State within the freedom of the *multitudo* (foundation, or rather *extinction*? Destruction or surpassing? The point of view of a progressive and liberatory mass democracy is necessarily being debated in these comple-

mentary directions) – an extremely radical democratic conception that is concentrated, forcefully, joyfully or despairingly, around the values of life and peace, with the intensity that only the movement between the *alternating extremes of natural right* can arouse. Political Spinozism remains ethical – an ethics of power, a politics of counter-Power [*contropotere*], a design for juridical and constitutional construction that seeks the destruction of all negativity and the positive construction of the freedom of all. Democracy from start to finish – subversive democracy – progressive democracy and mass freedom – as I believe I have shown in the second essay published here.

Now the paradox of the current 'return to Spinoza' consists essentially in this: Spinoza's ontology reveals itself to be an anthropology – and what an anthropology! It is a theory of production, a theory of communication, but above all an open anthropology. Etienne Balibar,¹ Emilia Giancotti,² and Alexandre Matheron³ have insisted on this theoretical dimension and have strongly emphasized this passage. All that remains for me to do is to add my own contribution to those of these scholars and comrades. I did this in the third essay in this volume, where I insist that in Spinoza the mass revolutionary tension must be dissolved and confronted point by point with the multiplicity of individual trajectories, then reconstructed in the concept of the '*multitudo*', and finally articulated in the figure of the political subject of democratic constitution. The intersection of the individual and the totality, of singularity and the absolute is enthralling: specific determinations represent it from different points of view – *pietas* as ethical behaviour prescribed for individuality in the formation of collective power; tolerance as the juridical and political dimension, as the normative framework of the intersection of wills, etc. But the privileged moment of the analysis resides neither in these terms nor in the problematics that they arouse. On the contrary, it is precisely the paradox of an ontology that turns itself into an *anthropology*, of a being that lives only on the surface of multiplicity, of a plural subject, that is central. This paradox does not resolve itself [*si chiude*]. It is ontological irony in action, a paradoxical foundation of being. In this situation, ontology is an open horizon. The paradox does not resolve itself in time – neither in the present nor in the future. It is structurally open, continually re-opened by the numerous freedoms of the subjects who are always constructing being anew. The absolute is this absolute opening. Democracy is this perennial risk. Such is its richness. The hypocrisy of capitalist democracy that combines the production of inequality with the formal proclamation of equal rights, submitting the freedom of all to the violence of the capitalist mode of production and to the blackmail of the command of a few (which goes as far as the threat of destruction) – all this is unveiled and denounced – but the same

is done to every other form of the organization of Power that enslaves the irrepressible desire for freedom within bureaucratic rigidity and ideological captivity, within the hypostasis of a totality.

Spinozian democracy is therefore a founding power. Certainly, all that it is telling us is: *be power [essere potenza]*. In certain respects that is not much – but it marks out limits, outlines a territory which is that of a truth and a task: the truth, which is the possibility of being free and equal; the task is that of ethically, in reality, constructing this truth. This reveals a formidable, heroic *optimism of the intellect [ragione]*. In its movement, ethical being shows itself to be absolute – it is a presupposition, that ontological presupposition that we call revolution, because it is constructed as presupposition. Subversive democracy is the continuous source of itself, of its own surpassing and its own affirmation. Spinoza's philosophy is a strange one, one that seems to invite mockery – in this form it seems to have been intentionally created to allow the positing, in metaphysical form, of this framework of theoretical assumptions, practical needs and political desires that resist the decline of ideologies ... But this suspicion of singular functionality is totally inappropriate – for here nothing leads us toward sanctimoniousness or toward the nostalgia for old myths, and under no circumstances does the revival of Spinozian discourse put specific contents, ideas or determinations on the table. No, here we merely propose a method, with neither a model nor an instrument – perhaps not even a method, or rather a method embedded in a state of mind [*spirito*]. Spinozism is a state of mind: it allows existence to be considered as the possibility of subversion – it is the ontological transcendental of revolution. On this terrain, in this spirit, people continue to test themselves, one by one and collectively. The ideologies that they serve are born and die, but only Spinozism remains: in the form of initial metaphysics, of natural right, as the situation in which it is necessary to immerse ourselves, not only if we want to be philosophers, but above all if we want to be revolutionaries.

The claims I have advanced to this point can be further confirmed in the confrontation of Spinoza's thought with the critique of modernity that, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has become the task of philosophy (I attempt to stage this confrontation in the fourth and fifth essays published here). For Spinoza shows how the ontological imagination and constitutive power (or we could say constituent Power) can effectively pose the problem of shattering the dialectical fate of the West and its desperate crisis. In his physics, Spinoza grasps the crisis as the principal characteristic of superficial being; this is precisely why he does not lament the crisis but rather considers it an essential aspect of the phenomenology of the existent. To work on this terrain, in the temporality that is proper to

it, means to consider the crisis not as the banal but rather as the consistent horizon of the existent. The philosophical problem, therefore, is and will remain that of *going beyond the crisis, and assuming it as a founding materiality*. Without this 'going beyond', philosophy and ethics could not even be defined. Metaphysics consists in this going beyond. The crisis is not the outcome of fate but the presupposition of existence. Only asses can think of the crisis as result. Only visionaries claim to be able to avoid it. The crisis is always a condition. This is precisely why imagination and ethics, by going deeper into being, are not stuck in the crisis but instead are able to rebuild beyond the crisis. They rebuild upon themselves, in the collective relation that constitutes the subject and in the power that incarnates the collective relation. To do away with the crisis is to do away with being, but to live the crisis is to go beyond it.

If, therefore, an event linked to the crisis of Marxism manifests itself in the 'return to Spinoza', it must be added that this event is not superficial; or rather it is, but in a Spinozian sense. It does not sweep away the imagination of communism but rather makes it come true. Spinoza's innovation is actually a philosophy of communism, and Spinoza's ontology is nothing other than a genealogy of communism. That is why Benedictus will continue to be accursed.¹

Notes

- 1 Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (1985; New York: Verso, 1998).
- 2 Emilia Giancotti, *Spinoza* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985).
- 3 Alexandre Matheron, 'La fonction théorique de le démocratie chez Spinoza', *Studia Spinozana* 1 (1985).
- 4 [TN] Slightly obscured by translation here is the clearest case of Negri's favourite bit of wordplay in this volume: his regular characterization of Spinoza, whose first name in Italian is 'Benedetto', or 'blessed', as 'accursed', which is 'maledetto' in Italian.

VII

translated by timothy s. murphy

DEMOCRACY AND ETERNITY IN SPINOZA

1. I am here to undertake a self-criticism, one that, though only partial, is no less profound for all that and concerns some of the interpretive positions that I adopted during my earlier reading of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* in *The Savage Anomaly*. In order to recall and specify what is involved, I will proceed with an outline of those former positions and the corrections that I am proposing today.

At that time I maintained that two incompatible and essentially contradictory theoretical lines coexisted in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* – first a mystical line, resulting from a first foundation of Spinoza's thought, that proved to be inadequate to the strongly materialist orientation of the second foundation (constituted and developed between the *TTP* and the composition of the Third and Fourth Parts of the *Ethics*). I saw the second line of thought (in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*), which I called ascetic, grow and consolidate itself above all in the *TP*; in other words I saw it present itself in a fully deployed form as a philosophy of the constitution of reality and as a theory of the democratic expression of the '*multitudo*'.

Today I remain convinced that two different structures of thought coexist in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*, and I still believe that they can be referred to a probable caesura in the development of Spinoza's thought and therefore to a different temporality in the elaboration of the *Ethics*. My re-reading has nonetheless convinced me that, far from opposing one another frontally, these two lines tend to nourish one another reciprocally, and that the passage to the *TP* shows us precisely this convergence. In the constitution of reality, in the transformation of morality into politics, these two foundations and two structures do not diverge but rather become sutured together. The ideas of democracy and eternity come into contact, measure themselves against one another, at any rate they intersect in the

metamorphosis of bodies and the *'multitudo'*. Materialism tests itself around an incongruous issue: 'becoming-eternal'.

Such will be the focus of my intervention.

To conclude this preamble I would like to add that, by proceeding in this direction, it seemed possible for me to corroborate certain interpretations from which I have sometimes distanced myself – like for example those in chapter fourteen of Alexandre Matheron's *Individu et communauté* or various points in Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza. Once again those readings reveal themselves to be unsurpassable and it is only in complicity with them that we can build up a knowledge [*conoscenza*] of Spinoza.

2. Let us begin, therefore, with the Spinozist definition of democracy as *omnino absolutum imperium* ['the totally absolute state'] (*TP XI/1*) before turning back to the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*. As we know, this definition of *'democraticum imperium'* ['the democratic state'] is preceded, in the *TTP* as well as the *TP*, by analogous definitions that serve to specify the meaning of the concept's qualifier 'absolute'. Upon first examination, this meaning appears to be double.

In the first place it has a quantitative value: this means that it draws the multitude, the totality of citizens, into the definition of the political linkage. 'If these functions [of sovereign power] belong to a council composed of the multitude as a whole, then the state is called a democracy' (*TP II/17*). *'Democratia'* means *'integra multitudo'*, 'the multitude as a whole'. *'Omnino absolutum'*: *'omnino'* here serves forcefully to emphasize the quantity, or rather the totality. *'Omnino'* gives us *'omnes'* or 'total'.

In the second place, the definition of democracy as *'omnino absolutum imperium'* is qualitative, ontologically characterized. We know the conclusion drawn from the discussion of the basis of the State in the *TTP*:

It follows quite clearly from my earlier explanation of the basis of the state that its ultimate purpose is not to dominate men or restrain them by fear and deprive them of independence, but on the contrary to free every man from fear so that he may live in security as far as is possible, that is, so that he may best preserve his own natural right to exist and to act, without harm to himself and to others. It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their minds and bodies in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom. (*TTP XX*, 231–2)

We can deduce from this that democracy is the very structure of the Republic. The other forms of the State are not only weakened [*depotenzi-*

ate] in comparison with the democratic form, but in order to exist, in order to assert the criterion of legitimation, they must in some way hide democracy in their own breasts. From this point of view, *'omnino absolutum'* means *absolute absolutum imperium*.

This path of investigation is central in the *TP*. Here are a few examples among the many possible. In the first chapters of the *TP* Spinoza insists on the concept of a 'multitude which is guided as if by one mind' (*TP III/2*). In chapter V the political Power created by a 'free multitude' is consistently considered as the best of states. In *TP* chapter VI paragraph 4, peace and harmony, the objectives of every Republic, are conceived as the expression of the unity of minds: when on the contrary peace is given in the form of servitude, and thus outside of democracy, it is not a beneficial good. In chapter VII paragraph 5, the superiority of the democratic regime is demonstrated from the fact that 'its virtue is greater in times of peace', which means as a tension of socialization and civilization. In chapter VIII paragraph 1, the right to democracy is considered to be 'a kind of innate right'. In chapter VIII paragraph 12 (as in paragraph 14), finally, the structural and primordial radicality of democracy is affirmed, against every development and prevarication (whether aristocratic or monarchical), as the key to the definition of the political itself.

Thus we have two senses of *omnino absolutum*. However, as soon as we turn back to the metaphysical dynamic that governs the preceding definitions of the term, we can uncover a third that comprehends and develops the first two. In this framework *'absolutum'* is defined as something that refuses to be separated, as *'imperium in imperio'* ['a state within a state'] (in the polemic against the Stoics in chapter VI of *TP*), or rather it is defined as something that refuses to be the product of an 'absolute and free will unrestricted by any law' (in the polemic against oligarchy in *TP XI/2*).

Neither separate nor unrestricted, the *'absolutum'* is on the contrary a dynamic totality, a free becoming – and therefore the enlargement of the power of being through existence. Here the definition of *'absolutum'* (and the stress on *'omnino'*) becomes positive because it develops and interprets, within the collective, the relationship of *potentia-cupiditas, voluntas-mens*, necessity-freedom. 'Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage' (*E IV P24*). 'Virtue' is therefore 'absolute'. *'Omnino absolutum'* is collective virtue, democracy.¹

Thus we have an extraordinary image of democracy as the supreme form of government, capable of expressing power and virtue. When politics is conducted in accordance with the dynamic of *potentia* and *virtus*, and political regimes are interpreted on the basis of the metaphysical rad-

icality that these elements determine, then democracy is the most perfect form of political socialization, the product and figure of collective virtue.

3. But whatever is absolute is eternal. To assume the absolute character of the concept of democracy, in the terms we have presented, inevitably means, in the Spinozian context, to ask if it is possible to think democracy, this absolute, '*sub quadam aeternitatis specie*' ['under a certain species of eternity'].

Spinoza does not disdain to introduce this into the discussion. In chapter VI of the *TTP*, for example, he tells us that 'the laws of nature [the very same ones that democracy interprets so amply and abundantly – AN] are conceived by us under a certain species of eternity, and ... give us some indication of the infinity, eternity and immutability of God' (77). But this is a rather meagre introduction, one that could push us towards the pallid Spinoza of the Hegelian polemic. And even when we turn to the principal text in which the insertion of the concept of eternity is elaborated, this is no more satisfactory. 'It is the nature of reason to conceive things under a certain species of eternity' (*E* II P44 CII) – that is to say, in light of the eternal nature of God and its necessity, and without any relation to time. Here the eternal is an epistemological guarantee of the concept. But our democratic absolute, as we have seen, is a praxis of the absolute – how do we grasp it adequately '*sub quadam aeternitatis specie*'? Is it possible to follow a route of enquiry that would provide us with another conclusion, another perspective? Is it possible to identify a terrain on which eternity would not be the transcendental reflection that guarantees the concept by means of divine *potestas*, but the very sphere in which the power of democracy affirms itself?

In order to answer these questions, we must follow a particular path and take several detours as well: these will not be useless, for in addition to receiving answers to our questions, we will in all probability have the opportunity to enrich our comprehension of the concept of democracy in Spinoza.

4. Let us pick up the trail of the concluding Propositions of the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*. There Spinoza constructs the concept of a *Cupiditas* that 'cannot be excessive' (*E* IV P61). In the Demonstration of Proposition 62, this desire is situated in a certain specific dimension of eternity. In the crescendo of the following Propositions, right up to the conclusion of the Fourth Part, this '*Cupiditas* which has no excess' is pushed to the point of founding anew the common life in the State. The concept of the State (*Civitas*) is reconceived as the refusal of isolation and the establishment of a life '*ex communi decreto*' ['outside of common decision', *E* IV P73]. The defin-

ition of democracy as free collective life under the command of reason is thus posited *sub quadam aeternitatis specie*. Eternity appears in a different form from the one in which it had appeared earlier, no longer as an epistemological guarantee of the concept but as the horizon that defines the search for, or rather the praxis of, the absolute. But why? What has happened to grant this passage?

It is granted by the recognition of a new terrain of investigation. Indeed, in this group of Propositions, at the very moment that it opens itself to eternity, *Cupiditas* encounters death. This encounter shifts the terms of the debate. Eternity is no longer merely the horizon of validation of the common notions. It is implicit in the terrain of praxis. The experience of death is decisive in bringing about a displacement of an ontological order to the argument. When eternity is opposed to death, freedom is revealed as 'becoming-eternal'. *Ethics* IV P67: 'A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death.' *Ethics* IV P68: 'If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free.' There is an opposition between eternity and death that becomes a process, a tension, a desire that develops. The experience of death displaces existence beyond the antagonistic rule that had heretofore innervated the mechanism of the passions. The movement announced by Proposition 41 of the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*, where joy is defined as directly good and sadness as directly evil in an argument that (as we will see below) already includes the issue of death (*E* IV P39) and society (*E* IV P40), here finds its definitive assertion. The metaphysical conditions are thus given for 'becoming-eternal'. It is within the perspective of eternity that we surpass the resistances and obstacles (represented by death) that power and virtue, and therefore desire, find before them.

Here, therefore, let us take note – and it is worth insisting on it – of this singular intersection of elements and motifs. Three motifs organize the ontological machine and displace its level of production: the critical experience of death; *Cupiditas* that introduces, without any excess, a certain species of eternity; and the idea of political socialization (or rather democracy). The three motifs are tightly intertwined: the experience of death as the experience of an absolute negative limit, raising to eternity the movement of desire; and this light of eternity is reflected in the movement of political socialization, in democracy as the horizon of the *multitudo*, against the whole set of resistances and obstacles that isolation, war and Power put in the way of the desire of the community. This is how it is in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*. In the Fifth Part the same ontological movement is repeated and strengthened [*si potentia*]. From Proposition 38 to Proposition 41, we can follow the intersection of the same three motifs and

the progression of ontological effects that result from them. In the Scholium of Proposition 38 death is claimed to be 'less harmful to us, the greater the mind's clear and distinct knowledge, and hence, the more the mind loves God'. On to Proposition 39: 'He who has a body capable of a great many actions has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.' The Corollary and Scholium of Proposition 40 insist on the fact that the activity and perfection of the mind wrest it from death and render it eternal. In Proposition 41 the adequacy of cognitive activity and physical capacity to eternity is projected onto the socio-political terrain – according to Spinoza's characteristic argument that makes the activity and perfection of the existent (body and/or mind) multiply when they are developed in plurality, in society. 'Even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance piety, religion, and absolutely all the things we have shown (in Part IV) to be related to courage and generosity' (E V P41). Here piety and religion are nothing other than the social nexus of practical rational conduct, and courage and generosity are virtues that unfold love within the social.

5. But all this is not enough. So far we have grasped the formal cause of the 'becoming-eternal' in democracy, but not yet its material cause. In order to approach this passage, we must therefore turn from Propositions 38 to 41 in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* to Proposition 39 in the Fourth Part. The experience of death, Spinoza tells us, is presented as an extremely contradictory sign with respect to the formation of the *Cupiditas* that has no excess, to the directly good Joy, and to the democratic constitution of the political. But this contradiction brings about ontological effects. The contradiction brings about a mutation, a metamorphosis. (This is in perfect agreement with what he said in the sections of the *Ethics* related to 'mutatio': see in particular I P33, SII; II Lemmas 4, 5, 6 and 7; III Postulate 2; III P11 S; IV P4 and Dem; IV P39 S; IV Appendix VII; Axiom V A1.) Death consists in a metamorphosis that leads to the destruction of the proportion that composes the different movements that constitute the Body. But death is an evil metamorphosis: it destroys the harmony of the parts of the Body, it inscribes itself on the movements in an evil way, it is negativity – the limit of negativity.

But there is something else in reality as well: in the Scholium to IV P39 it is asked if there are good metamorphoses, mutations as radical as those that death brings about but destined to establish superior states of relation between movements, metamorphoses of the conservation of the Body and the maturation of the *Cupiditas*. The answer is not given. Spinoza leaves the argument against encouraging superstitions half finished. He promises that he will come back to it in the Fifth Part.

The reference to the Fifth Part does not alter the fact that the problematic is fleshed out around an alternative between a metamorphosis/destruction and a metamorphosis/constitution. Immediately, in the following proposition (E IV P40) for example, the concept of the Body is reconsidered in a political projection: the social body, like the individual one, knows the life of harmony and the death of discord, the positive and the negative of mutation.

In the proposition that follows (E IV P41), the rupture of the naturalistic dialectic of the passions finally explodes. 'Joy is not directly evil, but good; sadness, on the other hand, is directly evil.' Human servitude is formally surpassed. The perspective of liberation is opened up at this point, without having to settle accounts with a dialectic of passions that has become bad. The *Cupiditas* that has no excess (from Proposition 61 of the Fourth Part) is here constituted in advance, as are the conditions of its social development. The Scholium of Corollary II of Proposition 45 ('Hate can never be good') posits a 'common praxis' that is in agreement with the principles contained in the definition of life as affirmation, as joy without excess, as generous construction, while in the same corollary individual life and social life are once again tightly connected: 'Whatever we want because we have been affected with hate is dishonourable, and [if we live in a state] it is unjust.' The nexus between individual life and social life, dominated by the desire that has no excess, is once again firmly reasserted.

Now from Proposition 61 to the end of the Fourth Part, the theme of the positive, constitutive metamorphosis is taken up again and expanded. It is still simply a matter of an introduction, of a discourse limited by the necessity of not giving the superstitious an opportunity for denunciation ... but with what power! It is a discourse that is henceforth materially within the positive metamorphosis, within the constitutive process. Therein the *Cupiditas* becomes an absolutely affirmative power (E IV P61), of which eternity is the qualification (E IV P62), and Fear (E IV P63) and Death (E IV P67) are assumed as the enemy, as opposing limits irreducible to reason, as absolute negativities. The idea of a positive metamorphosis, uniquely expressed by the joy that has no excess, takes shape in the definitive brushstrokes of IV P68 (despite the fact that the demonstration had been referred to the Fifth Part). Man is not born free but becomes so. He becomes so by means of a metamorphosis in which his body and his mind, acting in unison, recognize love in reason. The eternal is thus lived in constitutive praxis, and constitutive praxis makes us become eternal.

So let us pause and take stock. Thus far we have advanced the following interpretations:

- The naturalistic and antagonistic constitution of reality is shattered in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*, in Propositions 41 to 61. On the other hand an affirmative process is established there, one that consider itself a tendency of reality.
- Linked to this absolute positivity of the *Cupiditas* that has no excess and that therefore shows evil to be an inadequate idea (*E IV P64*) is the idea of death as its absolute opposite, and therefore the idea of eternity as the contour of possible positive metamorphoses.
- The social nexus experiences the same dynamics, the same ruptures and alternatives as individual existence: it is simply more powerful.
- The rupture of the dialectic of the passions is coextensive with (although genetically anterior to) the dialectic of the metamorphoses. When the experience of death is posited as the limiting figure of evil metamorphoses, then the problem of good, positive, constitutive metamorphoses expands to its full size. Spinoza refers the discussion of the problem (implicitly in Propositions 41 and 61 of *Ethics IV*) to the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*.

We must therefore follow the developments of the constitutive analyses of the good metamorphosis in the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* as well.

6. However, before we proceed along this new route, the following observation is in order. In the Scholium of Proposition 54 of the Fourth Part, in other words in the innermost part of the argumentative process over the *Cupiditas* that has no excess, we find an argument that seems to call the whole of our reasoning into question: 'The mob is terrifying, if unafraid.' According to some interpretations, this means that the idea of death could have socially useful effects. Furthermore, it means that the possibility of pushing the idea of a *Cupiditas* without excess from the individual to the *multitudo* may be undermined by the difficulty of realistically considering and conceptually mastering the relationship of individuals and the multitude.

But this interpretation is at once false and bizarre, for the sentence in question must be interpreted in its context, and above all it must be positioned in reference to and analogy with Proposition 68 of the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*.

Now in context the assertion regarding the mob is not a coarsely Machiavellian exclamation – on the contrary, in context (*E IV P54*) it is submitted to the critique of the imagination and the tendency of reason. The prophets, here called upon to oversee and interpret the common utility, are witnesses to the possibility of a positive metamorphosis. Like the individual of Proposition 68 in the Fourth Part, the *multitudo* is born coarse

and behaves like a herd of beasts, but nevertheless it is always invested by the metamorphosis of being, or rather by a metamorphosis that man undertakes in the collective plenitude of his kind. Spinoza will never more forcefully contest the Hobbesian state of nature than in this case when it seeks to programme a civil situation in order to dominate it, when it seeks to set itself up as the preconstitution of domination. The power of the community, the knowledge [*conoscenza*] of God, the force of desire and its amorous tendency leap beyond all the limits of political wretchedness.

Faced with the assertion that we are currently examining ('The mob is terrifying, if unafraid'), recognizing its provocative and didactic efficacy, we realize that not only we singular individuals, but also the *multitudo* must enter into the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*.

7. Turning back now to the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*, we can tackle anew the three problems that we have heretofore considered as connected: the ontological status of the *Cupiditas* that knows no excess, henceforth displaced and reconstructed within the *Mens–Amor* nexus; the physical problem of death and the metamorphosis of bodies; and lastly the political principle of the social linkage and of democracy as the structure of the political.

Mutation here plays an absolutely positive role. We are faced with a metaphysics of affirmation. The hegemony of the *Mens* is posited as the result of a natural process and at the same time it is determined as a result of the end of the naturalistic dialectic of the passions. We are able to become eternal. In this *mutatio* the mystical (or 'idealist') aspects of the concept of eternity cancel each other out in the ascetic (or materialist) opening of constitutive praxis. Constitutive praxis reaches the eternal, which draws it into its own existence.

Here the interpretation of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* that I offered in *The Savage Anomaly* is incorrect, in that it fails to assert that eternity is internal to constitutive praxis.

But let us follow the argument that starts in *Ethics V P22*.

Here and in Proposition 23, the Body and the Mind are positioned in eternity: 'we feel and know by experience that we are eternal.' But this eternal being is at the same time a becoming-eternal. We are beginning to be eternal (*E V P31 S*). In this becoming-eternal, power expresses itself. We become more powerful when *Mens* and *Amor* are united in the supreme act of this experience. Here the dynamic of experience is ruled by a positive progression that is expressed by means of the repetition of 'the more', to which corresponds 'the less': '*Quo plus ... eo minus. Eo minus ... quo major.*' '[T]he more the mind understands things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the less it is acted on by affects which

are evil, and the less it fears death' (E V P38). And in the Scholium of the same proposition: 'From this we understand what I touched on in IV P39 Scholium, and what I promised to explain in this part, namely, that death is less harmful to us, the greater the mind's clear and distinct knowledge, and hence, the more the mind loves God.' Therefore, 'He who has a body capable of a great many actions has a mind whose greatest part is eternal' (E V P39). In the Scholium to this Proposition the concept of '*mutatio in aliud*' ['continuous change'], the progression toward eternity or becoming-eternal, is illustrated (as in the Scholium of Proposition 39 of the Fourth Part) by reference to the metamorphosis of the Body from childhood to maturity: this is the intuition of an ontological labour of power that invests the era of humanity and history, a development of power in which constitutive praxis is the material of singularity and the premise of the eternal. Finally, in *Ethics* V P40, 'The more perfection each thing has, the more it acts and the less it is acted on; and conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is.'

The extraordinary thing in Part Five is the new process of the materialization of constitutive praxis that opens up the intellectual love of God, the consequent intuitive knowledge [*conoscenza*] of bodies, and the metamorphosis of power. Certainly the Fifth Part of the *Ethics* contains important contradictions. The most serious limitation seems to me to consist in the separation between the first two degrees of knowledge [*conoscenza*] and the third, a separation in which the imagination is formally excluded from the highest creativity of power and time is reduced to duration. Consequently, a certain ambiguity persists in the concept of eternity that cannot be disentangled from the arguments related to immortality. But these contradictions do not preclude the possibility of understanding the process of positive metamorphosis that bears the materiality of the body toward eternity and installs the *Mens*, in the relationship to the body, as the motive force of the progressive power of existence. The conquest of eternity outside of duration (E V P34 and P38, but prepared by P21, P22 and P23) is overdetermined by the constitution of eternity within bodies (E V P39 and P41). This passage may be contradictory, but its allusion to an eternal metamorphosis of existential materiality is irresistible.

8. All that remains now is to take up once again the definition of *omnino absolutum imperium* in order to propose the definition of democracy *sub specie aeternitatis*.

We began by giving this *omnino absolutum imperium* two senses: one quantitative, democracy as the totality of citizens assembled together; and one qualitative, the process of socialization itself, the metamorphosis of individuals into a community, a metamorphosis that is all the more power-

ful because it is perfectly natural. We have similarly emphasized how this second determination placed us outside of the traditional theory of forms of government, since here democracy is no longer defined merely as one of the possible forms of government, but much more radically as the schema of legitimation of all possible forms of the political organization of the social ...

Now this rupture of an ideological dictatorship that has lasted for millennia and still lasts, a dictatorship that considers democracy as one form of government among other analogous forms, is already something exceptional.

We can conclude that, compared to the traditional classification of forms of government, the Spinozian definition of democracy is the definition of 'non-government'.

In this regard, we can add several other characteristics to this third qualification of the *omnino absolutum democraticum imperium* that we had already identified in the creative mechanism of power. I mean that, in the wake of the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*, democracy must henceforth be determined *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, as a metamorphosis that does not stop, that has no end – it increasingly affirms the power of the '*absolutum*' collective body, at the very moment in which it denies the presence of fear, terror, death. Not only are harmony and *pietas* affirmed in this metamorphosis that draws the Body toward the *Mens*, but the order of power and the inexhaustible productivity of constitutive praxis also manifest themselves here. Therefore the *imperium democraticum*, because it is *omnino absolutum*, because it lives on eternity, is not limited to any Constitution (I mean any positive political Constitution), but rather it constantly transcends them all dynamically since it is ever more capable of perfection.

The *imperium democraticum* is a 'constituent Power'. It is all the more perfect the more active it is and, on the contrary, the more active it is, the more perfect it is.

It is not an ideal but rather the real force which abolishes the present state of things, when that state is characterized by fear, terror and death.² Spinozian democracy, therefore, is not a form of government but rather a social activity of transformation, a 'becoming-eternal'.

And here it would be necessary to add a new chapter on joy.

Notes

- 1 [TN] By 'virtue'. Negri does not mean chastity or moral righteousness; he is instead borrowing the Machiavellian notion of *virtus*, which along with the correlative notion of 'fortune' designates an apparatus through which time becomes constitutive of subjectivity and politics. In the second chapter of *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (trans. Maurizia Boscagli, Minneapolis: University of Min-

nesota Press, 1999) he argues that these apparatuses allow 'the political [to be] configured as a grammar of time' (p. 42). See also the final lesson of *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo* in Negri's *Time for Revolution* (New York: Continuum, 2003), as well as translator's note 2 on p. 285.

- 2 [TN] See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Development of the Productive Forces as a Material Premise of Communism', in *The German Ideology*, vol. I, section II.5 (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 57: 'Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.'

POSTFACE

translated by timothy s. murphy

TO CONCLUDE: SPINOZA AND THE POSTMODERNS

Twenty-some years ago, when at the age of forty I returned to the study of the *Ethics*, which had been 'my book' during adolescence, the theoretical climate in which I found myself immersed had changed to such an extent that it was difficult to tell if the Spinoza standing before me then was the same one who had accompanied me in my earliest studies. Wolfson and above all Gueroult had taken up and perfected the philological readings – particularly German ones – that had been developed in the era preceding the accession to power of Nazism. And on the basis of this philological renewal, a new ontological interpretation appeared: Gilles Deleuze and Alexandre Matheron were the first and most powerful representatives of it. Each of them published his Spinoza around 1968, and each of their books made Spinoza breathe in the air of those times. Ever since, Spinozist works and schools have multiplied, not only in France but also in Italy, in Spain, in Latin America and the United States, always in the wake of this interpretive innovation. Today, the philosophy of the *Ethics*, as reread by Deleuze and Matheron, has never been so alive. It constitutes one of the rare refuges from the intrusion of postmodernism; indeed, it confronts that thought and puts it into crisis on its own terrain. That is the thesis that will be developed in this essay.

To begin, let us ask ourselves: what comprised the rereading of Spinoza at the end of the Sixties? It was comprised of five revisions of the traditional interpretation – a traditional interpretation that was essentially anchored in the reading of Spinoza undertaken by German Romanticism, and in the acosmic metaphysics definitively provided by Hegel.

The first of these revisions concerned the idea, or more precisely the experience, of immanence. The new interpretation destroyed the idea of immanence conceived as depth; on the contrary, it offered a superficial or

surface reading of immanence. Thus human destiny confronted a 'superficial' god, a god who constituted the immanent horizon of possibility. The idea that necessity and freedom can coincide could then be understood, so long as one is placed in a situation in which that necessity is identified with the freedom-to-come [*libertà dell'a-venire*]. The deduction of the world that Spinoza developed was the same thing as its construction.

Consequently, the second revision touched upon the conception of purposiveness that we call rational as well as the telos that we call ethical. In the first case, it was a matter of freeing the concept from all metaphysical presuppositions, thus of making it a common name or notion whose real content was on a par with the faculty that the 'superficial' man possessed to strive and/or to construct in common. Every order pre-constituted by rationality was eliminated, and the concept became a function of the human need for knowledge [*conoscenza*] and for the organization of the universe. In the same way, the ethical telos was led back to the development of desiring life. Passion moved in a context of causality that no longer knew any exteriority: the act was in power, just as power was in the act, because each identified the absolute position of the existent on the horizon of immanence.

The third revision was political. The political transcendentals, laid out according to the Aristotelian theory of the transcendence of archetypes of government (the one, the few, the many) or according to the Hobbesian presumption of the necessary transcendental hypostasis of authority (sovereignty), were also now dissolved once they were regarded from the point of view of absolute immanence. If one could still speak of sovereign Power, this could only be in the form of the democracy of the multitude, that is, as the absolute self-government of the set of individuals who, in the unfolding of their desire, worked toward the constitution of the common.

The fourth revision was metaphysical and theological. A sort of integral humanism or, better, a sort of cosmic ecosophy restored the sense of the eternal to the horizon of the world. In the infinite richness of the constitutive articulations of the world, there was no longer a place for a before or an after, for a transcendent divinity or for a kingdom of transcendental purposes that could be placed beyond the creative experience of the existent. This intramundane path of creative experience was eternal, an experience of freedom. In this perspective, genealogy asserted itself against every teleology.

From this arose a fifth and final revision, one that concerned the idea of materialism. Matter ceased to be the concept of a context, the envelope of the movement of the universe. It was, rather, the constitutive process of desire itself, the consistency of movement of a changing and always open tonality. Matter was seen from below, within the creative movement that

constituted the world, and thus as the very tissue of the transformations of the world. Classical mechanism was thus transformed, taken up as it was into the Spinozist materialist genealogy, into a metamorphic conception of the universe. And in this way the Spinozian ontology of experience arrived at its point of completion.

Thus Spinoza, by way Deleuze's and Matheron's new readings, proposed a new ontology. These readings reconstructed an ontology that attributed to Spinoza, philosopher of the modern, the surpassing – within the limits of the metaphysical sequence of modernity – of all the essential characteristics that distinguished the modern: an ontology of immanence that destroyed even the faintest shadow of transcendentalism, an ontology of experience that refused every phenomenism, an ontology of the multitude that undermined the immemorial theory of forms of government that was rooted in the sacredness of an *arché* (principle and command), a genealogical ontology that related the ethical and cognitive responsibility for the world to human doing [*fare*].

When I found myself, in the second half of the 1970s, reading those foundational works of the reinterpretation of Spinoza (and developing their hypotheses, above all on the terrain of politics), I sincerely believed that I was doing the work of a historian of philosophy. And this is the reason that I thought the Spinozist anomaly could teach us to dig a trench between the philosophies of Power and those of subversion throughout the centuries of the modern era. Thus I saw condense around Spinoza an 'other tradition' in philosophical thought: a tradition that ran from Machiavelli to Marx, and opposed itself to the sovereign line Hobbes–Rousseau–Hegel. All of this was – and remains – correct: this working hypothesis has been corroborated by other studies in the years that followed. But what I never imagined was how useful and important this new reading of Spinoza that we undertook would be today in posing a positive ontology (of experience and existence), a philosophy of affirmation, against the new 'weak' phenomenologies of the postmodern era.

By that I mean that if one dons the spectacles of this new Spinoza, one is immediately able to erect a barrier against the documenting of the existent and the ontological inferences that characterize the philosophies of postmodernity.

These philosophies are indeed superficial and make of the world a stage on which forms dance with shadowy lightness. The postmodern de-ontologization of the surface attempts to empty the field of experience of all its consistency and intensity. These philosophies thus introduce us to a reality that is as spectral as it is senseless, as spectacular as it is empty. It is therefore a perception of the surface that apes Spinoza's critique of transcendence, the rough assertion of the absolute character of the

horizon of experience, and seeks to eliminate the harshness [*durezza*] of immanence.

Or else they are philosophies that, in accepting the radical Spinozian critique of teleology and declaring thereby the end of every ideology, exchange this critique for a refusal of every truth that human praxis constitutes, and deny to the common the possibility of pragmatically constructing itself as such. The so-called 'end of history' is installed here as the boss.

Or else they are pragmatic philosophies that accept Spinoza's critique of the transcendental absolutism of authority, but nevertheless surreptitiously reintroduce an image that is as devalored as it is fierce (in its indistinctness), to the extent that – at least this is what is argued – it is not possible to grant the multitude's praxis a constitutive efficacy, just as it is not possible to grant desire a common effectiveness of liberation. From this follows a sort of sceptical 'libertinage' in the evaluation of the political forms in which the movements of the multitude take shape, and an ironic conception of democracy ('which is nevertheless better than philosophy').

Or else they are philosophies that push the Spinozian immanentization of the true and the crude predestination of the common constitution of being toward a negative determination: a being or an existence that is consistent, but only in the sense of a radical ontological negativity. Here, passion is not conjugated with desire but implodes – a sign of the corruption of present times. And the resistance of the singular is worn down to the point that it ends up taking the shape of a negative myth, on the verge of a deposition that is merely a larva of subjectivity.

Or else it is a materialism that, far from thinking metamorphosis as tissue of the technological transformation of the world and the basis of a new singularization, grants the consistent persistence of the existent only in the chaos of new forms and in the shadows of the margins. Thus the new networks of knowledge [*sapere*] and praxis seem to have cut away every anthropological feature.

It certainly cannot be said that these philosophies of the postmodern (from Lyotard to Baudrillard, from Rorty to Vattimo, from Virilio to Bruno Latour, to name only some of the best known) do not perceive the essential qualities of the phenomenology of our time. But all these versions, without exception, present to us, along with the sacrosanct narrative of the end of transcendentalism, a senseless spectacle of what remains after its death. It is a sort of apology for resignation, for a half-amused and half-pitiful disengagement that settles down at the edge of cynicism. A cynical ontology? Perhaps. And wherever there is resistance, this cynical ontology is imposed, the new mask of a triumphant conception of Power and its arrogance.

But this mortification is easy to resist if we oppose our Spinoza to it. Here, immanent being expresses the irrepressible joy and creativity of existence. The affirmative conception of being unfurls no illusory horizons but rather offers a tranquil confidence in the time-to-come [*a-venire*] that rests on eternity. Spinoza's spectacles contemplate the world with the serenity to which the desire for the eternal gives rise in the soul of every living thing. The power of desire against a Power that fixes life in the shape of a spectacular semblance.

In conclusion, I want to say that the rediscovery of Spinoza that we owe to Deleuze and Matheron allows us to experience 'this' world, that is to say precisely the world of the 'end of ideologies' and the 'end of history', as a world to be rebuilt. It shows us that the ontological consistency of individuals and the multitude allows us to look forward to every singular emergence of life as an act of resistance and creation. And even if the philosophers do not like the word 'love', even if the postmoderns marry it to the withering of desire, we who have reread the *Ethics*, we the party of Spinozists, dare to speak without false modesty of love as the strongest passion, the passion that creates common existence and destroys the world of Power.

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