

# Reason's Rebellion, or Anarchism Out of the Sources of Spinozism

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# **Reason's Rebellion, or Anarchism Out of the Sources of Spinozism**

Hayyim Rothman

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*Abstract:* In my dissertation, I aim (1) to render, from Spinoza's philosophical system, a critique of the State form or, more broadly, of political coercion and (2) to supply, on the basis of the same, a positive account of the alternative. It is, in essence, my goal to derive anarchism out of the sources of Spinozism. My claim is that, in Spinoza's work, there obtains a tension between force and freedom as models for political organization. While other interpreters have tended to synthesize these opposing tendencies in one manner or another, I endeavor to highlight their incompatibility and to show that, for Spinoza, they produce two distinct forms of political life. One, the passive foundation of political union, which grounds the State. Two, the active foundation of political union, which grounds the rational community. Having identified this theoretical breach, I proceed to examine the affective structure of each foundation as conceived by Spinoza. I find an inescapable contradiction in the first, which — contrary to the best intentions of the founders of State — tends not only to maintain citizens in a condition of perpetual minority, but progressively erodes their capacity for autonomy, thus inviting a parallel and equally progressive enhancement of coercive intervention. This result implies the moral necessity of revolution, the spinozian contours of which I examine in detail. In the second, which I consider in both affective and ontological terms, I discover the opposite movement. That is, a progressive escalation of reason together with its affective modalities that enhances the human capacity for political and social harmony, rendering political coercion obsolete.

# **Reason's Rebellion, or Anarchism out of the Sources of Spinozism**

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## List of Abbreviations

### Works of Spinoza

CM	Metaphysical Thoughts ( <i>Cogitata Metaphysica</i> ) (CM.I.2 is Part I, Chapter 2)
E	Ethics (followed by roman numeral for part and internal references)
Ep.	Letters ( <i>Epistolae</i> ) (followed by arabic numeral)
HG	Hebrew Grammar (followed by arabic numeral)
KV	Short Treatise ( <i>Korte Verhandeling</i> ) (KV.I.2.3 is Part I, Chapter 2, Paragraph 3)
PPC	Principles of Cartesian Philosophy ( <i>Principia Philosophiae Cartesiana</i> ) (followed by roman numeral for part and internal references)
TIE	Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect ( <i>Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione</i> ) (followed by arabic numeral for paragraph)
TP	Political Treatise ( <i>Tractatus Politicus</i> ) (TP.1.2 is Chapter 1, Paragraph 2)
TTP	Theological-Political Treatise ( <i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i> ) (followed by chapter number in arabic numerals)

### Internal References

App.	Appendix
Ax.	Axiom
Cor.	Corollary
Def.	Definition
Dem.	Demonstration
Exp.	Explanation
Intro.	Introduction
Lem.	Lemma
Prop.	Proposition
Post.	Postulate
Pref.	Preface
Schol.	Scholium

## **Reason's Rebellion, or Anarchism out of the Sources of Spinozism**

מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אַתָּה אֵל וּמַבְלַעְדִּיךָ אֵין לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ

# Introduction

For centuries, if not for millennia, the immanence of God has served as the ideological pretext for the uprising of the downtrodden and oppressed against their oppressors, for the ruled to throw off the yolk of their rulers. As Gerard Winstanley — a contemporary of Spinoza whose influence was felt in the circles he moved in — put it most famously in his *The True Levellers Standard Advanced, or the State of Community Opened and Presented to the Sons of Men*, God gave man dominion over other creatures, but not over other men, for in each man His spirit dwells. Though “selfish imaginations... did set up one man to teach and rule over another,” the dawn of reason and the rising “spirit of universal community and freedom” to which it gives birth overflows the “banks of bondage, curse and slavery... [so as] to make the earth a common treasury.”<sup>1</sup> The immanence of God, in other words, has been taken to imply the destruction of sovereignty and the emergence of community.

However, the true radicalism of this insight was slowly expunged or purged from the revolutionary tradition that began with the dawn of modernity. The struggle against sovereignty, the rule of man over man as such, was displaced by a far less ambitious goal: the effort to sweep away the ruins of feudalism so as to make way for the modern commonwealth generally and the republic in particular. In other words, the question was no longer “ought men rule over one another?” but “how ought the rule of men over one another be structured?” Domination is taken for granted; what matters *then* is simply the manufacture of consent.

This tension between the spirit of freedom and liberty on the one hand and the spirit of domination on the other is at play, too, in the work of Benedict Spinoza — the premier theorist of immanence. Sometimes he leans in the one direction, sometimes in the other. This ambiguity has inspired vastly divergent interpretations of his political doctrine. Some have placed Spinoza

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<sup>1</sup> Winstanley, G. 1649. “The True Levellers Standard Advanced: Or, The State of Community Opened, and Presented to the Sons of Men.” Retrieved 08/24/2016 from <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/winstanley/1649/levellers-standard.htm>

among the advocates of totalitarian, or absolutist, government. Others have read him as an advocate of liberal republican democracy.<sup>2</sup> Other, more recently popular, readers have regarded him as an arch revolutionary, the theorist of popular uprising and absolute government in its democratic form. All such interpretations, however, take the tension toward which I have gestured and produce from it some synthesis of liberty and dominion. The result is always an account of Spinoza's political doctrine that is more or less authoritarian — sometimes more, sometimes less — but never anti-authoritarian. The inevitability (or desirability) of sovereign authority is assumed as a given. The result of the spinozist intervention always seems to be another State that is more or less free.

The general thrust of this study is to avoid this pitfall by allowing the aforementioned tension to come to the fore *as tension*. No attempt is made to synthesize freedom and dominion; rather, their incompatibility is highlighted. In the disjunction between them, I endeavor to trace Spinoza's thought to its most radical conclusions. Coercive force is allied with and productive of ignorance and passivity; freedom is allied with and productive of knowledge and activity. These trajectories neither intersect nor overlap; indeed, the one precludes the other. The advocate of freedom, of knowledge, and activity or true human productivity is not indifferent to coercive force, much less is he its advocate in any form; rather he or she is necessarily opposed to it. This advocate is against all authority.

This is to say — if I may draw on the title I have given to this study — that it is my aim to derive anarchism from the sources of Spinozism. Like Hermann Cohen — from whose masterpiece I derive the turn of phrase — who endeavored *not* to prove that Judaism *is the* “religion of reason,” but that this religion arises or can arise from Jewish sources, I wish to make

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<sup>2</sup> Feuer, L.S. 1958. Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism. Boston: Beacon Press.



a similar point. It is not my aim to suggest that Spinoza's work can sustain no interpretation but my own. Rather, it is my aim to suggest (a) that a plausible and consistent critique of the State form, or political coercion, takes shape from the theoretical resources which Spinoza supplies and (b) that the same sources provide us with a coherent picture of the non-authoritarian alternative, which I identify with the rational community.

Before proceeding to make my case, however, I found it necessary — in the first chapter of this study, entitled “Radical Readings of Spinoza Heretofore” — to briefly review late twentieth century radical interpretations of Spinoza's work and, more extensively, the various ways in which Spinoza has been received within the anarchist tradition. The former, I trace through the diverse works of Louis Althusser, Pierre Machery, Gilles Deleuze, Alexander Matheron, Antonio Negri, and Etienne Balibar. The latter, through the more fragmentary contributions of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Moses Hess, Gustav Landauer, the anarcho-primitivists, and, finally, Peter Kropotkin. By examining these readings of Spinoza, I endeavor to supply myself with a basic theoretical frame for my own research. That is, cognizance of both precise points for critique — primarily, the supposition made by some of these authors that Spinoza is the ally of the State — as well as pregnant, if inadequately articulated insights as to the anti-authoritarian tendency of Spinoza's thinking.

Having conducted this review, I proceed to pose the State as a problem. Does the political, for Spinoza, exceed statecraft or not? Can we conceive of political relation without the state from an authentic spinozist perspective? Evidently, the general question is something which the anarchists we read considered within the framework of their broader intellectual and practical efforts; it is not something, however, that they addressed within the context of their various analyses of Spinoza. Either they took it for granted that Spinoza was an advocate of the more

fearsome sort of state (Proudhon and Bakunin), or that, if anarchistic insights could be derived from his work (Hess, Landauer, the anarcho-primitivists, Kropotkin), he himself would not have entertained such thoughts — presumably this is why they neglected his political writings altogether.

In *this* respect, such authors adopt a position vis-a-vis the meaning of Spinoza's text in itself that is not all that distant from the one assumed by the marxist readers of Spinoza whom we examined at the beginning of this introduction. Considered in terms of that body of literature, the question at hand can be formulated as follows:

1. Is it the case, as Balibar and Negri hold (albeit in different ways, as I shall explain) that the State, for Spinoza, is the absolute field for human life in common outside of which we can imagine only the apolitical condition of the human animal — for lack of a better word, of the barbarian?
2. If not, if the State is not, for Spinoza, the only and final horizon of human life in common, is it the case that the State functions, for him, as a point of political mediation facilitating the transition between two stages of human intellectual development, the one pre-political and the other post-political, as Matheron would have us believe? Is there a post-political condition? Can the state get us there?

My answer to this whole ensemble of questions is simple: no. For Spinoza, the state is neither the final horizon of human life in common, nor does it constitute a transitional stage between pre-political condition and post-political conditions. The State does not, on careful reading, facilitate the growth of reason (which, for Matheron, characterizes the post-political condition). On the contrary, it inhibits it. It is toward this conclusion that I dedicate my analyses over the course of the first two chapters of the present study.

I begin the second chapter of this study, entitled “The Dual Foundation of State,” with a discussion of the problem of reading. Drawing, in part, on Leo Strauss’ esoteric approach to textual study, I point out that there is an unfortunate tendency to read, first of all, from the vantage of what is most familiar, what we *expect* to see. There is, second of all, a tendency to read with the grain of the text rather than against it; ignoring fine differences, we follow the current of arguments to certain conclusions and lose track of others that make have presented themselves in passing. Thus, in connection with the ensemble of questions at hand, do we tend to take for granted Spinoza’s frequent insistence on the State form; that is, the assumption that the masses must be controlled by moral and physical violence. We have far more difficulty discerning the cracks in this theoretical edifice. I propose, therefore, to resist this tendency and read with an eye toward exacerbating tensions in the text rather than letting them subside so that, in doing so, the more subversive of Spinoza’s insights might become more clear.

I go on to identify a strange shift in the text of the fourth part of the *Ethics*. Though it is dedicated, on the whole, to describing the life ways of enslaved men — roughly, men under the sway of heteronomous force which compels them to reaction as opposed to action — Spinoza declares, after elaborating the nature of bondage, that it is upon him to demonstrate what *reason* prescribes. After summarizing the basic components of Spinoza’s account of rational self-interest and what it implies vis-a-vis the constitution of human community, I emphasize that he concludes this section of the text with the claim that the *foundation of the state* lies in the development of *active emotions*; namely, religion, piety, honor, and nobility.

As I indicate, this result is not all that astonishing in itself. However, considered in relation to the claim which immediately follows it, one begins to discern precisely the sort of fracture of which I spoke earlier. Spinoza proceeds to elaborate as to the apparently inescapable

incongruity — when men live *otherwise* that as reason prescribes — between competing personal interests on the one hand and the necessity of mutual aid on the other, an incongruity that results in mutual fear and distrust. The remedy for this social and political malady, Spinoza says, is the State which, constituted by the transfer of natural right on the part of its citizens, arrogates to itself their fear of one another, thus facilitating security and mutual confidence. As I go on to explain, this condition of shared fear and share confidence opens up to a complex amalgam of other passive emotions. These, in sum, Spinoza *also* holds, *constitute the foundation of the state*.

We are thus confronted by an incongruity. On the one hand, the State is said to be founded on reason and, as such, on active emotions. On the other hand, the State is said to be founded on passion and, as such, on passive emotions. These two foundations, I argue, cannot cohere. Neither, I argue, can we suppose that Spinoza either inadvertently contradicted himself or that one foundation can be reduced to and interpreted in light of the other. Rather, I conclude, we must attend to the fracture itself and allow that Spinoza treats of two mutually exclusive foundations which refer to two distinct modes of socio-political organization — the State and the rational community. In other words, we must read the *Ethics* not as a monolithic text, but as one that exists in tension with itself so that, through this tension, Spinoza's truly subversive message can be discerned.

Having identified the fracture between the two foundations of the state, I proceed, in the third chapter of this study, entitled “The Structural Contradiction of Political Passivity,” to examine the passive foundation of the State. Here, in essence, I demonstrate that a careful reading of the *Ethics* shows that, for Spinoza, the coercive character of the State makes for a vicious cycle which renders men progressively worse and not progressively better, makes them

less and less capable of self-governance. It does not serve to moderate passive or reactive affects destructive of freedom and conducive to slavery or bondage. This amounts, on the one hand, to a case against Balibar's claim to the effect that the state mediates the passions of the multitude by setting it against itself in a way that tends toward (but does not reach) absolute democracy. On the other hand, it refutes Matheron's contention that the State supplies the political mediation he supposes is required for the transition from pre-political to post-political conditions of human reason — that is (as he conceives it) reason in its embryonic, intra-human, form and reason as expressed in its developed or inter-human form. Neither estimation is plausible if we find that the State is not progressive, but regressive.

I begin the chapter by emphasizing the distinction between social and civil conditions or statecraft generally. Spinoza's position as to the rational necessity of the social condition transfers to the civil condition only insofar as the latter is a modality of the former. As such, approbation of sociality is not equivalent to approbation of the State. In considering the doctrine of the State in itself, it is therefore necessary to bracket what Spinoza has to say about the social in general and to consider only those elements of his reasoning that uniquely justify or legitimate it.

As I construe the matter, there are three such elements that intersect with, or perhaps better put, are nested within, one another. One, that reason and harmony go hand in hand. Two, that reason accords with the negation of liberty if the alternative is disharmony. Three, that coerced harmony serves a pedagogical function, leading passionate men to reason. Having introduced these elements, I proceed to examine them critically.

On the basis of an extensive analysis of E.IV.Prop.35 in comparison with its restatement in the demonstration to E.IV.Prop.40, I contend that, from the theoretical resources Spinoza

actually supplies, Reason and harmony *do not* go hand in hand; what conduces to the former conduces always to the latter, but what conduces to the latter does not always conduce to the former. If, therefore, it is the case that what conduces to harmony is advantageous *only insofar as it conduces to reason*, it follows that not all that conduces to harmony is advantageous.

I then go on to consider the proposal that the negation of liberty is legitimate if the alternative is disharmony. In essence, I find that the proposition considered in itself is valid. However, analysis of the manner in which Spinoza justifies it reveals that he constructs what amounts to a straw-man argument by posing coerced and, therefore, irrational harmony against utter chaos. Between these two options, the former is evidently the rational choice and, in this respect, the State constitutes the lesser of these two evils. I argue, however, that this conclusion does not rule out a mode of socio-political organization other than the State which generates harmony without coercion, a rational form of harmony; this is the community. Pitted against the community, therefore, the State is no longer the rational choice for it is the lesser of two goods.

I proceed to critique the pedagogical function of coerced harmony and, to that extent, of the State. In the first place, through a sequence of arguments, I arrive at two parallel conclusions: that adequate ideas or active states of mind arise from other adequate ideas or active states of mind, and inadequate ideas or passive states of mind likewise arise from inadequate ideas or passive states of mind. This is taken to imply, first, that inadequate ideas or passive states of mind *never* give rise to adequate ideas or active states of mind. It is taken to imply, second, that there is a dynamic element to reason and unreason alike; each progressively intensifies. Thus, insofar as coerced harmony necessarily involves the production of reactive or passive emotions and inadequate ideas, it follows that it cannot produce active emotions or adequate ideas. This means, so I contend, that the state *cannot* serve a pedagogical function.

Rather, the State is beset with a structural contradiction. It is founded in order to create security and ensure as much liberty as possible. Yet, the coercion through which it acts opens it to a vicious cycle whereby the people are progressively degraded, less and less capable of harmonious self-governance and, therefore, more in need of coercion until liberty and freedom are utterly destroyed.

If the State functions in this manner, it follows that it is something to be opposed. This implies the necessity of revolution. The idea of revolution, however, is exceedingly problematic for Spinoza. Therefore, before proceeding to elaborate the positive alternative to the State so far as I understand it, I consider, in a fifth chapter, entitled “The Idea of Revolution,” the nature of revolution in Spinoza’s work and attempt to develop an account more adequate than those previously considered. The general claim underlying my analysis is that means must correspond to ends. In brief, any revolution that is not adequate to the results it is intended to produce will, in the end, betray them and disappoint right-thinking revolutionaries. That is, revolution is not a transition, it is the progressive creation of the positive alternative envisioned; it is direct action.

I begin chapter four with a discussion of Arendt aimed at mining her work for a typology of revolution. That is, an account of the meaning of the idea. With Arendt, I find that the term has three senses. One, involving the cyclicity of history; this sense of revolution is pre-modern. Two, involving the idea of a decisive shift; this, generally speaking, corresponds to the modern sense of the term. Three, involving the idea of building consensus or cultivating collective attitudes; this is also largely modern in character, but pertains more to the social rather than to the political component of revolutionary activity.

I then proceed to examine several distinct interpretations of Spinoza’s viewpoint as to the nature of revolution and its legitimacy. The first of these attends to revolution according to its

second sense which, so it is claimed, does not exist at all in Spinoza's thought insofar as it presumes the idea of progress and rejects the notion of historical cyclicity; Spinoza is said to do the opposite in both respects. It is noted, furthermore, that even ignoring this difficulty, Spinoza condemns regime change insofar as doing so tends to erode sovereign power rather than to transfer it. Thus, Spinoza is found to advocate reform but not revolution. The second of these claims that Spinoza's condemnation of rebellion does not amount to a condemnation of revolution because the two are not the same. This view attends to revolution according to its third sense and holds that, regarded this way, Spinoza is a strong advocate of revolution. The last of these essentially develops a naturalistic account of revolution focused on revolutionary affects like anger and indignation which, under the right circumstances, tend to produce revolutionary activity. In this sense, the question of legitimation is beside the point.

I then offer my critique of these three interpretations and, in doing so, frame my own account of revolution. I agree that Spinoza discourages rebellion and, likewise, revolution insofar as it entails insurrection. I contest the distinction between reform and revolution; the former is nothing other than the latter in incremental form. I contest furthermore, the view that Spinoza's conception of time precludes the idea revolution. Rather, I suggest, Spinoza recommends a politics viewed *sub species aeternitatis* that is inherently revolutionary because it disrupts the historical myths that allow States to function. I hold, therefore, that revolution is necessarily rational in character — it must be conducted in a manner adequate to its ends — and contest efforts to legitimate it on the basis of passive and reactionary modes of thinking. An uprising built on passive and reactive states of mind will necessarily produce political effects that set into motion the cycle of passivity and repression detailed in chapter two and undermine the cause of freedom at its point of genesis.



Underlying this account of revolution is one fundamental insight: revolutions must be active and affirmative if they are to produce the sort of results to which they aspire. A revolution that is based on a passive, negative, or reactive premise will quickly betray itself and either repeat or add to the indignities perpetrated by the regime it demolishes. This is to say that revolution adequately conceived along Spinozian lines can *never* involve tearing something down and must *always* involve building something up. To put the matter in more concrete terms, the rational revolutionary neither speaks of what he or she *does not* want nor works to undermine things; rather, the rational revolutionary states what he or she positively *wants*, works actively to create it and, in doing so, *displaces* what is undesirable. One does not fight darkness, one turns on the lights.

The fifth chapter of this study, entitled "The Rational Foundation of State," is dedicated to precisely that. In response to our earlier conclusions (a) that the State degrades us and progressively undermines human liberty so that (b) revolution is necessary but (c) revolution must be positive and affirmative rather than negative and reactionary, I present, building upon the embryonic insights of Hess, Kropotkin, and Landauer, my own account of adequately revolutionary activity as conceived by or derivable from the sources of spinozism. In a partial interpretation of the fourth and fifth parts of the *Ethics* together with elements pulled from the political treatises, I combine Landauer's conviction as to the revolutionary function of the community together with (a) Kropotkin's general contention as to the manner in which ethical (and, to that extent, political) behavior, for Spinoza, arises naturally through the process of affective formation independently of coercive measures on the part of any State and (b) Hess' more specific contention as to the central importance of the intellectual love of God to any anarchist reading of Spinoza.

I begin with the contention that the philosopher works not below the horizon of the state, but in direct opposition to it. To make my case, I examine Spinoza's appropriation of the figures of Moses and Jesus, whom he uses in order to exemplify opposing forms of thought and political activity. Moses, so I argue, is used to exemplify the wedding of theology and the State, while Jesus is used to exemplify the wedding of philosophy and salvation. I then proceed to inquire as to the nature of this opposition. Is it that they operate within different socio-political planes (one public, the other private) or is it that they operate as antagonists on the same plane?

I contend, first, that the private/public divide is a fiction and that what takes place in private, thought and speech, *can* have a corrosive effect vis-a-vis the foundations of the State. I then go on to demonstrate that Spinoza's reading of Jesus' mission implies active opposition to the State insofar as it advocates abrogation of the law and aspires to free man from the very fear on which the State depends: the fear of death. Thus, the philosopher actively works to displace the state with his teachings; they do not work on distinct sociopolitical planes.

If the philosopher works to displace the state — if, in other words, the philosopher is a revolutionary — and yet revolution, as I indicated earlier, is necessarily active rather than reactive, productive rather than destructive, in character, it remains to be seen what the philosopher actually *creates*. What is that positively *displaces* the State? My answer to this question is the rational community constituted around the cultivation of adequate ideas and active emotions, the love of God above all.

Having proposed this alternative, I proceed to examine its theoretical foundations. I do so, first, via a discussion of the political covenant as discussed in the *Theological Political Treatise*. I point out that, on Spinoza's reading, there are not one, but two covenants contracted at Sinai. The second corresponds roughly to the traditional account of the social contract: fear

inspires the transfer of natural right to a sovereign power. The first, however does not appeal to fear and involves a transfer of right to God alone, whom each Israelite is entitled to consult on his own; in effect, this amounts to a common agreement to live by the dictates of reason.

As I go on to explain, this agreement to live together in community according to the dictates of reason, when expressed affectively, operates according to the same pattern as the parallel agreement to live together under the coercive power of the State but in the opposite direction. As we will have seen in second chapter, the inadequate ideas and reactive emotions evoked in response to State sponsored efforts to *induce* harmony by force only escalates them, leading to a vicious cycle within which men become less and less capable of self-governance so that they must, therefore, be more and more severely oppressed. The same pattern holds for the adequate ideas and active emotions evoked in rational community. These too reinforce one another; these too progressively escalate such that men become more and more capable of governing themselves, of living in harmony with one another. With this result, I conclude my provisional discussion of the rational foundation of the state.

Having elaborated the affective superstructure (so to speak) of the rational community, I continue, in a sixth and final chapter, entitled “On the Ontology of Mutualism,” to explain its ontological base. More precisely, to explicate in far greater detail the notion of a mutuality of being which I use to describe the condition of life within the rational community. Since, moreover, it was initially on the basis of Spinoza’s metaphysics that theorists like Proudhon and Bakunin held that — far from being an anti-authoritarian — Spinoza was an advocate of absolutism or despotism as the case may be, I take this endeavor, too, as an opportunity to refute that claim.

To do so, I proceed, first, by way of Proudhon’s own anarchistic metaphysical

speculations as expressed in his *Philosophy of Progress*. I find that, in this text, he makes explicit the methodological assumption that for every social theory there is a corresponding metaphysic. Generally, these are divided into two principles: the democratic and the totalitarian. The first takes motion and becoming as its foundation, the second, stasis and being. The first is understood to imply, by analogy, the idea that the individual is a group and that men are constituted in and by their relations, thus giving rise to a condition of ontological solidarity born of spontaneous interaction. This, so Proudhon claims, is the meaning of liberty. The second, in contrast, is understood to imply the opposite in all respects; most generally, the eradication of multiplicity and the concentration and simplification of being. Politically, the analogy is obvious and it is in light of this principle that Proudhon renders his assessment as to Spinoza's political sensibilities. While I disagree with Proudhon's assessment, I value his analysis as it provides us with a frame for articulating the mutualistic character of Spinoza's ontology.

I begin by dispelling the notion that Spinoza is an advocate of "being" which he regards, in fact as an abstraction useful only for imagining some other, more recondite, thing. I then inquire as to what being, for Spinoza, does in fact gesture toward given that the term appears in the definition of substance. To this effect, I demonstrate that Spinoza's definition of substance, as the antepenultimate proposition of the first part of the *Ethics* suggests, that its essence is power. This is taken to imply that substance denotes no stasis but, rather, active self-production. God, for Spinoza, is *causa sui* in the positive and not merely the negative sense. There is no neutral substratum; Substance is not inert, but eternally becomes in itself.

I proceed to discuss Spinoza's deduction of the infinity of substance from its self-causation and how the former — when considered under the attribute of extension — implies the indivisibility of substance and, consequently, the relativity of things; each intersects with every

other and is inconceivable apart from the whole. The ontological condition of extended things, I argue, is expressed in and by their motive interaction. In fact, I contend on the basis of the so-called physical digression appearing in the second part of the *Ethics*, things are constituted in motion. It is not bodies that move, I hold, but movement that bodies; the essence of the thing extended is fundamentally kinesthetic. This interplay of motions in which individuals are reciprocally constituted extends ultimately to encompass, according to Spinoza, the totality of the universe. In this sense, my analysis recalls Landauer's insight as to the community of being as expressed in and by the mutual determination of bodies.

Having, therefore, demonstrated that Spinoza theorizes becoming and not being, the relativity of things as expressed in motion, their consequent intersectionality and, finally, that individual and group are consequently inseparable from, or overlap, one another, I refute Proudhon's judgment of Spinoza point for point and assert that Spinoza's is an ontology of mutualism. More importantly, I show that Spinoza's account of ontological mutualism is superior to Proudhon's insofar as he provides not only for horizontal, but also vertical distinctions. It is not only that, as individuals, we are produced in and as the group, but that the group — more complex, more real, more perfect, more *powerful* — constitutes its own locus of desire, motivating us to forge social bonds with other people, to form human communities. Mediated, moreover, through the love of God, the self-love, the power of the individual, and the love of man, the power of the group, immediately coincide; the collective never functions as an alien force above or against the individual but only as the immediate condition of his self-realization. Spinoza's ontology of mutualism, in other words, explains the dynamic of human solidarity without the risk of slippage into totalitarianism which Proudhon's account rejects outwardly but courts inwardly.

We will, therefore, have demonstrated:

1. The tensions at play in Spinoza's analysis of the foundation of the state and found that he theorizes two mutually inconsistent foundations, an active foundation and a passive foundation.
2. The structural contradiction at the heart of the passive foundation of state which produces a vicious cycle whereby men are progressively degraded and, consequently, subject to increasingly profound conditions of repression, thus necessitating revolution.
3. The specific contours of legitimate revolutionary activity as conceived by Spinoza; namely, that must be conducted *sub species aeternitatis* and, as such, must be active, and positive rather than reactive and negative.
4. According to Spinoza, the rational community is precisely the socio-political institution capable of actively and positively displacing the state. This community is organized around the intellectual love of God, which reveals the mutuality of being.
5. The ontological structure of the mutuality of being as understood by Spinoza which satisfies and exceeds the requirements for an anarchist metaphysic as articulated by Proudhon.

Summarizing these points and offering some final reflections on the concrete structure of the rational community and its meaningfulness or utility as an institution for socio-political organization today, I bring my study to a close.



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## **Radical Readings of Spinoza Heretofore**



## I. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall supply a brief review of the major radical — essentially marxist — interpretations of Spinoza’s work that have, in many respects, dominated recent scholarship. I then review at greater length some of the more prominent anarchist reactions to the same. In response to both, I derive key points for further criticism and elaboration. In what respects are these views problematic or useful?

## II. Late 20th Century Radical Appropriations of Spinoza: Spinozist Marxism

In the broadest of terms, I would suggest that the attraction which Spinoza has held for radical thinkers from the 1960’s through today involves three general efforts.<sup>1</sup> One, to re-envision the nature of the dialectic. Two, to examine the political significance of affect. Three, in doing so, to re-construct political subjectivity for a postmodern world. I shall review this growing body of literature by reference to the following seven exemplars: Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Alexandre Matheron, Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri, and Etienne Balibar.

Althusser responded to the humanist turn in late 20th century Western marxism<sup>2</sup> by reinterpreting Marx’s famous claim to have taken up a position *opposite* to that of Hegel’s.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For objections to the whole approach here to be summarized, see Badiou, Alain 2009, *Logics of Worlds*, translated by Alberto Toscano, New York: Continuum Press; Žižek, Slavoj 2000, “Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!” in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, pp. 90-135, New York: Verso; Žižek, Slavoj 2012, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, New York: Verso. For a general defense, see Stolze, T. 2014. “Hegel or Spinoza: Substance, Subject, and Critical Marxism.” *Crisis Critique* 1(3).

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, W. “Louis Althusser”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/althusser/>>; see also Ruddick’s introduction to Macherey, P. 2011. *Hegel or Spinoza*. Ruddick, S. trans. U. of Minnesota Press. pp. xi-xvii.

<sup>3</sup> In his afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, Marx suggests both. On the one hand, he says that his “dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite.” On the other he says that, with Hegel, the dialectic “is standing on its head” and “must be turned right side up again.” See Marx, K. 1887. “Afterword to the Second German Edition.” In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Moore, S. & Aveling, E. trans. Engels, F. ed. Retrieved 07/07/2016 from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm>. Althusser evidently privileges the first over the second statement.

This was understood not simply as an inversion of Hegelian idealism grounded on the same basic principles but, rather, as the adoption of an opposing principle.<sup>4</sup> Althusser held that the foundation of Hegel's system is teleology; it is teleology that allows him to give meaning to subjectivity on the one hand and to truth on the other.<sup>5</sup> Thus was *opposition* to the hegelian system found to mean *anti-teleology*.

On the basis of this discovery, Althusser turned to Spinoza. Spinoza's radical anti-teleologism<sup>6</sup> and anti-humanism<sup>7</sup> enabled Althusser to dismantle the hegelian idealist dialectic. Spinoza's work also served, for Althusser, the constructive function of illuminating the way toward a legitimately *materialist* dialectic (1) grounded in the idea of the immanent causality governing "the action of the whole on its parts, and of the parts on the Whole — an unbounded whole, which is only the active relation between its parts"<sup>8</sup> and which is (2) determined not by their contradiction, but by their difference.

Of all later marxist appropriations of Spinoza, Macherey's — as represented most prominently in his *Hegel or Spinoza*<sup>9</sup> — comes closest to elaborating and explaining what Althusser had largely intuited.<sup>10</sup> Again, plumbing the spinozist prospect for a genuinely

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<sup>4</sup> "The materialist dialectic," he says, "cannot rest satisfied with the residual forms of the hegelian dialectic (Althusser, L. 1976. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. p. 140)."

<sup>5</sup> Althusser, L. 1976. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. p. 138; cf. *ibid.* p. 190. Montag, W. Althusser and his Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War. Durham: Duke U. Press. pp. 10-12.

<sup>6</sup> I.e. that it constitutes a view of the world as "internally inverted (Althusser, L. 1976. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. p. 135)."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Althusser, L. 1997. "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza." In *The New Spinoza*. Montag, W. & Stolze, T. eds. Minneapolis: U. of Minneapolis Press. p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 140-141. Cf. Althusser, L. 1970. *Reading Capital*. Brewster, B. trans. New York: New Left Books. p. 187. See also Althusser, L. 2003. *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*. Matheron, F. ed. Goshgarian, G.M. trans. New York: Verso. p. 136; there, he speaks of "a structured system" of ideas.

<sup>9</sup> Macherey, P. 2011. *Hegel or Spinoza*. Ruddick, S. trans. U. of Minnesota Press. p. 32. Macherey also later published a five-volume study of Spinoza; on that, however, I will not be commenting here.

<sup>10</sup> Sprinker, M. 1995. "Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and the Labor of Reading." *Yale French Studies*, No. 88. pp. 201-225. See also Antonio Negri's (somewhat disdainful comments) in Negri, A. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. Hardt, M. trans. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press. p. 239, n. 67; p. 267, n. 5.

materialist dialectic.

It is with the notion of truth as adequation with which he begins his study. Knowledge, he says, involves adequation and not representation,<sup>11</sup> which implies both the non-relation of divine attributes and, consequently, the inconceivability of passage from the one (Spirit) through the other (matter or extension).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, if adequate knowledge involves conceiving a thing as it is positively engendered in the infinite power of substance, negation is essentially eliminated.<sup>13</sup> For Macherey, this means (a) that substance has no outside and so cannot be conceived as a subject<sup>14</sup> and (b) that there can be no negation of the negation.<sup>15</sup> Thus does Spinoza's system undermine the Hegelian dialectic both in terms of its process as well as its conclusion, making way for (but not arriving at) a dialectic of substance, or a truly materialist

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<sup>11</sup> Macherey, P. 2011. *Hegel or Spinoza*. p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> As Macherey explains, that thoughts do not represent ideas means that thought and extension (or any other attribute) are arranged not in relation to one another, but in only relation to substance, which each constitutes equally — neither hierarchy nor opposition obtains among attributes (these two points — the assertion that attributes are irreducible, that they equally constitute the identity of substance and, therefore, relate in no way whatsoever (neither hierarchically nor in opposition) — occupy Macherey through the course of the third chapter of the book under consideration). This insight, of course, immediately does away with the basic framework of the Hegelian (idealist) dialectic which casts thought as Spirit and subordinates everything else to itself as it becomes-Real (Ibid. p. 212).

<sup>13</sup> Macherey argues that Spinoza's notion of adequation suggests the infinity of substance "passes intensively in in all its modes" which are, consequently, perceived in their singular reality "according to the immanent necessity that engenders" them "within substance (Ibid. p. 140-41)." In this respect, regarded essentially, determination is affirmation. Regarded existentially, however — insofar, that is, as finite modes act upon and limit one another — determination is negative in character (Ibid. pp. 174-175). Still, because God is the cause of his modalities not only insofar as they exist, but also insofar as they produce effects, argues Macherey (Ibid. p. 145), it follows necessarily that the latter are positive and not negative in character — "God is by definition entirely positive; he is also that which determines all things as such positively (Ibid. p. 182)." In short: where the "negative" appears at all in Spinoza's system, it is ultimately subsumed in the positive. Thus, Macherey concludes, Hegel's reading of the phrase "*determinatio negatio est* (Ep. 50)" to the effect that the finite emerges as a "regressive movement" away from the positivity "located once and for all in the Absolute (Macherey, P. 2011. *Hegel or Spinoza*. pp. 115-116)" is not only based on a strategic mistranslation (Macherey points out that Hegel appends the word "all" to determination, despite the fact that in Ep.50 Spinoza speaks only of the determination of figure (Ibid. p. 127-33), but incorrect.

<sup>14</sup> "By definition entirely positive," coinciding "with its infinite power (Ibid. p. 182)." and expressing itself, therefore, "in an infinite totality that cannot be totalized (Ibid. p. 158)," God "cannot be grasped as such from the outside," cannot, finally, be regarded as an individual (Ibid. p. 182). More precisely, "substance is eternally present in its affections and cannot be thought outside of them, no more than they can be thought without it... the immediacy of this relation of the infinite to the finite is exactly what prevents us from understanding this relation as a completed relation and substance as an absolute subject that accomplishes itself within itself (Ibid. p. 210)."

<sup>15</sup> These, as Macherey indicates, denote the same thing anyway (ibid. p. 211).

dialectic.<sup>16</sup>

If Althusser and Macherey introduced the question of reformulating the materialist dialectic, it was Deleuze who reintroduced the question of affect to political theory.<sup>17</sup> With Deleuze, Althusserian structure becomes difference, while the subject becomes the body and its relations.<sup>18</sup> For Deleuze, the question of difference is first addressed through the notion of the univocity of being<sup>19</sup> which, he holds, Spinoza renders expressive.<sup>20</sup> That the infinite power of being<sup>21</sup> is expressed in finite things or modal essence<sup>22</sup> allows him, via the doctrine of conatus, to ask the question “what can a body do?” and answer: anything it can.<sup>23</sup> This result gives way to an account of the politics of desire whereby — against its relative arrest under the conditions of capital — revolutionary action is linked to the free flow of desire encapsulated in the so-called “body without organs”<sup>24</sup> This body, on Deleuze and Guattari’s account, functions as Spinozist substance in relation to particular instances of desire in which it is univocally expressed.<sup>25</sup> Thus, on the path which leads from the univocity of being to the body without organs, Deleuze and

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<sup>16</sup> This, he says, would be one that “poses the problem of a dialectic of substance... a material dialectic (Ibid. p. 170)” that entails “the struggle of tendencies that do not carry within themselves the promise of their resolution (Ibid. p. 212)” — that “does not presuppose its completion in its initial conditions through the means of a necessarily ideal teleology (Ibid. p. 170)” — or “a unity of contraries but without the negation of the negation (Ibid. p. 212).”

<sup>17</sup> This turn is perhaps best summarized in Hardt, M. 2007. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham: Duke U. Press)

<sup>18</sup> As to his ambivalent relationship with Marx and Marxism see Thoburn, N. 2003. *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*. New York: Routledge. p. 2. As for the resonance of Deleuze and Macherey, see Ruddick, S. 2008. “Towards a Dialectics of the Positive.” *Environment and Planning*, 40(11). Pp. 2588-2602.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze, G. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Patton, P. trans. New York: Athlone Press. p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 40. Unlike Duns Scotus, who (Deleuze holds) understood it “as neutral, neuter, indifferent to the distinction between the finite and the infinite, the singular and the universal, the created and the uncreated (ibid. p. 39).”

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, G. 1990. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. p. 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 197; 217-218.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 269.

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1987. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*. p. 153-54, 318, 341. Cf. Hardt, M. “Anti-oedipus 3.” *Reading Notes on Deleuze and Guattari Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. Retrieved 07/12/2016 from <http://people.duke.edu/~hardt/ao3.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1983. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus*. pp. 254, 327. Thus, “Spinoza’s Ethics” turns out to be “the great book of the BWO” so that “all BWO’s pay homage to Spinoza (ibid. Pp. 153-154).”

(later) Guattari lay the foundations for a revolutionary spinozist politics of affection and desire.<sup>26</sup>

Alexandre Matheron represents, in many respects, a synthesis of the two appropriations already considered; he presents us with a dialectic of affects. Between the poles of absolute separation on the part of the individual and the absolute integration of individual and community,<sup>27</sup> Matheron traces a line that begins with the ontology of the first and second parts of the *Ethics* and culminates in the doctrines of conatus and natural right.<sup>28</sup> This allows Matheron to introduce a dialectic between passion and reason which, passing through several stages of productive contradiction, culminates in an impasse roughly corresponding to the end of the fourth part of the *Ethics*: namely, that reason is too weak to overcome the force of passions that inhibit its social realization.<sup>29</sup> This impasse, for Matheron, emphasizes the necessity of political mediation as articulated in the political treatises that assumes its ultimate form in the liberal state, which neutralizes the passions<sup>30</sup> and — in his view — ultimately gives way, in the

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<sup>26</sup> That being said, legitimate questions have been raised as to the real revolutionary character of this “taking flight” of desire. See Zizek, S. 2004. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge. p. Xii. Incidentally, “taking flight” must be understood quite literally. Deleuze and Guattari seem to advocate the idea that *withdrawing* from the repressive conditions society has, in itself, a broader revolutionary impact. (Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1983. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus*. p. 341).”

<sup>27</sup> Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Editions de Minuit. p. 613

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pp. 78-81.

<sup>29</sup> Actually, this takes place at three scales. One, as an impasse within passionate life itself (Ibid. pp. 81-83). Two, as an impasse between passionate and rational life (ibid. pp. 229-30). Three, and most importantly, as an impasse within rational life itself (Ibid. p. 241).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pp. 238-40. Cf. ibid. pp. 278-83. What does political mediation, on Matheron’s reading, entail? The need for political mediation arises from the practical impossibility — so he claims — of deploying reason at the interhuman scale in consequence of the overpowering influence of external causes (Ibid. p. 282). Political mediation serves, in this respect as the answer to two intersecting questions: (a) can circumstances be organized such that men are externally conditioned to behave as if they were governed by reason? (b) can the perceptual field which constitutes the organizational landscape of such circumstances lend themselves to the development of reason?

When it comes to the “politically impeccable (Ibid. p. 505)” constitution of the liberal state, Matheron’s answer is affirmative in both respects. As he explains it, a “threefold quest” for wealth, for power, and for holiness dominates its affective field. On the one hand, this threefold quest produces conditions for a convergence of desires, for harmony or concord (Ibid. p. 506). On the other hand, the particular social mechanisms which serve as the concrete expression of this threefold quest also give rise to the basic elements of rational life, thus preparing us to become rational in the proper sense (ibid. pp. 505-514). So, according to Matheron, does the mediation of the liberal state constitute a bridge between passion and reason if, nonetheless, the citizen remains, thoroughly alienated in the meantime (Ibid. pp. 513-14).

fifth part of the *Ethics*, to the ultimate conquest of reason in a post-political communism of minds and bodies wherein the “I” and the “we” are thoroughly synthesized.<sup>31</sup>

If Matheron demonstrated the inseparability of the political treatise and the *Ethics* by incorporating the former into the latter, Balibar and Negri demonstrate the same while assuming the opposing posture, incorporating the later into the former while bracketing, largely disregarding, the fifth part of the *Ethics*. If, furthermore, Matheron attends to the nexus of affect and dialectics, Negri and Balibar — each after his own fashion — focus on another nexus, that of affect and subjectivity in their analysis of the multitude, over the individual, as the fundamental political subject.

Negri develops an argument which essentially inverts traditional accounts of Spinoza’s ontology and sees in the interplay of finite modalities the constitution of being.<sup>32</sup> Transposed onto the plane of politics,<sup>33</sup> this leads him to eliminate the distinction between political institutions and civil society; he regards both as arising from the constitutive power of the multitude in the same way that attributes and modalities arise from substance: univocally. He advocates a form of a radical republicanism<sup>34</sup> consisting of three basic elements. These are: (a)

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pp. 612-13; especially n. 95.

<sup>32</sup> To be more precise, Negri traces two fundamental theoretical motions. The first foundation proceeds on a downward path from substance to its modalities. Spinoza’s early works are regarded as largely neoplatonic, allowing for a “transcendental subsumption (Negri, A. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*. Hardt, M. trans. Minneapolis: U. of Minneapolis Press. p. 43)” of modality into substance that prevents the absolute from showing itself as material power (ibid. p. 38). This is mitigated in the first part of the *Ethics*, but not overcome; attributes are said to mediate between substance and its modes (Ibid. pp. 48-52). This problem becomes a crisis in the second book of the *Ethics*; “substance and mode crash against each other (Ibid. p. 62)” and merge into a single “ontological horizon” that demands expression in “a dynamic materiality (Ibid. p. 84).” The latter is supplied, first, in the TTP, which highlights “the constitutive role of the imagination (Goddard, M. 2010 “From the Multitudo to the Multitude: The Place of Spinoza in the Political Philosophy of Toni Negri.” In *Reading Negri*. Chicago: Open Court. pp. 171-192)” such that politics becomes the “metaphysics of the human [imaginal] constitution of reality, of the world (Negri, A. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly*. p. 118).” This insight allows for the second foundation, which takes place in parts three and four of the *Ethics*, wherein “*natura naturata* wins a total hegemony over *natura naturans* (Ibid. p. 129),” constituting it (Ibid. pp. 146-47).

<sup>33</sup> The modal horizon of power is said to demand organization; albeit immanently determined (ibid. p. 180).

<sup>34</sup> A commonwealth “determined by the power of the multitude, which is led as if by one mind (ibid. p. 198).”

“a conception of the State that radically denies its transcendence, (b) a determination of Power (*potestas*) as a function subordinated to the social power (*potentia*) of the *multitudo* and, therefore, constitutionally organized; (c) a conception of... constitutional organization, which... is founded on the right of resistance, of the opposition to Power [*potestas*], of the affirmation of autonomous forces [*potentia*].”<sup>35</sup> The inversion of Spinoza’s system, then, allows Negri to arrive at an account of the State that operates without mediation, the State as a pure constitutive process.<sup>36</sup>

Though he articulates it in less bombastic terms, Balibar does not depart from Negri’s account in any substantial manner when it comes to the inversion of the Spinozist system. Like Negri, he essentially agrees that the multitude functions, in politics at least, as substance functions in Spinoza’s metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> He differs, however, when it comes to his evaluation of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> This is to say that, despite appearances, Negri *never* rejects the state as an institution of political organization. On the contrary, he emphasizes that the multitude “organizes itself in the form of a republic (Ibid. p. 201)” and *not* “a quasi-anarchistic conception of the State.” Spinoza, he says, “has an absolute conception of constitution (Ibid. p. 202).” This line of reasoning remains intact throughout Negri’s later work; thus, in one of his later works, *Spinoza for our Time* does he argue that there are two ways of “being multitude.” The first, which he rejects, is a stateless condition. The second, which he supports, “increasingly wears the aspect of a *constitutio multitudinis* [a self-constitution of the multitude]” and excludes “the possibility of a stateless society... because it is the potency of the multitude that constructs the law... customarily called the State” and makes for “the birth of the Republic (Negri, A. 2013. *Spinoza for Our Time: Politics and Postmodernity*. McCuaig, W. trans. New York: Columbia U. Press. pp. 74-75)” that is “governed by a *Rechtswollen*,” by its own “institutional and constitutional will” synthesized from “the singularities of the multitude (Negri, A. & Hardt, M. 2009. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. p. 375).” Consider also the repeated and emphatic insistence which Negri and also Hardt make over the course of several years to the effect that they are *not* anarchists (Negri, T. & Guatarri, F. 1990. *Communists Like Us: New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance*. Ryan, M. trans. New York: Semiotext(e). pp. 79, 92, 161; Negri, A. & Hardt, M. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. p. 350; Negri, A. & Hardt, M. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin. p. 222. However unmediated the relation between government and the governed, the state form persists.

<sup>37</sup> “There is,” he says, “no external point from which the multitude can be governed (Balibar, E. 1994. “Spinoza the Anti-Orwell: The Fear of the Masses.” In *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*. p. 69).” Rather, because (a) right is measured on the same scale as individuality (Ibid. p. 59) and (b) the causal principle responsible for the preservation of the State (the conatus of State) is the same as that of the individual (Ibid. p. 65) it follows that (c) the right of the State is continuous with the right of the individual, representing a higher order thereof, an “individual of individuals (Ibid. See Balibar, E. 2008. *Spinoza and Politics*. Snowdon, P. trans. New York: Verso. pp. 65-71; Balibar, E. 1997. *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*. *Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis*. Vol. 71. Delft: Eburon. Critique of this view appears in Rice, L.C. 1971. *Spinoza on Individuation*. *The Monist*, Vol. 55, No. 4. pp. 640-659; Barbone, S.L. 1997. *Spinoza*

the capacity of the multitude for self-governance.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Negri wishes to eliminate political mediation and institute an absolute regime that exists without sovereignty, Balibar takes more seriously Spinoza's ambivalence. He considers the absolute state to be a political horizon that is not really achievable<sup>39</sup> but toward which every regime strives in a process of democratization<sup>40</sup> made possible by the fact that, at any rate, every political form and institution has the multitude as its ground and substance.<sup>41</sup> Thus, contrary to Matheron, the State does not mediate between stages of reason and consequently open up into a post-political condition. Rather, the state is all there is.

In sum then, we observe the following. Radical appropriations of Spinoza arising largely from the marxist tradition have "posed to Spinoza" so to speak, the questions which Marx posed to himself in order to re-envision the meaning of marxism after the break with its hegelian origins. Broadly speaking, this effort has drawn on Spinoza's work in order to re-imagine the meaning of the materialist dialectic and to re-conceive the nature of political subjectivity. By posing to Spinoza the questions which *Marx* posed to himself, however, it has also imported into its interpretation of Spinoza some of the more crucial prejudices which Marx himself endeavored under throughout his life. Chief among them: a relatively uncritical attitude toward the modern state as a mode of political organization. With the possible exception of Deleuze and Guattari, who did, to some extent, deploy their notion of the BWO against the State — though even then,

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on Community, Affectivity, and Life Values. Ph.D., Marquette University; Barbone, S.L. 2002. What counts as an Individual for Spinoza? In *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, eds. O. Koistinen, J. Biro, 89-112. New York: Oxford U. Press). In brief, there is a continuity of right which is expressed in and flows through the political community in all its dimensions, whereby the multitude functions as unitary political substance that expresses itself in various organizational modalities (Balibar, E. 2008. *Spinoza and Politics*. p. 70, 120).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> Balibar, E. 2008. *Spinoza and Politics*. pp. 98, 121-122. Were there to be an absolute state in which the political apparatus is *actually* adequate to the multitude whose power it expresses; the mass would "return to itself." But what will then guarantee "that the mass in power will not be frightening to itself (Balibar, E. 1994. "Spinoza the Anti-Orwell." p. 21. Cf. Balibar, E. 2008. *Spinoza and Politics*. p. 119)?"

<sup>40</sup> Balibar, E. 1994. "Spinoza the Anti-Orwell." p. 19; Balibar, E. 2008. *Spinoza and Politics*. p. 69-70, 75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 92.



in a manner which appears more escapist than revolutionary — the status of the State, so to speak, was either not at issue (as in the case of Althusser and Macherey) or actively endorsed in one fashion or another.

Balibar simply regards the mediation of the State as an inescapable necessity of human political organization. Negri and Hardt ostensibly reject political mediation while yet affirming over and again that they are not anarchists — which can only mean that, to one degree or another, they regard the State as inevitable or even desirable. That is, they envision a sort of political *coincidentia oppositorum*, a State/non-State. Matheron, in contrast, reads Spinoza in a manner more or less consistent with Marx's comments in the *Poverty of Philosophy*<sup>42</sup> and Engel's comparable views as expressed in his letter to Bebel concerning Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*,<sup>43</sup> in *Anti-Duhring*,<sup>44</sup> and in *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*<sup>45</sup> — namely, in keeping with the principle of the so-called “withering away” of the State. The dissolution of state power is deferred to some distant future horizon while, in the meantime, the state is reinstalled as the mechanism of an indefinitely long transition between the past and the future — whether that mechanism be organized along modern/liberal lines (as Matheron indicates) or as a “dictatorship of the proletariat”<sup>46</sup> (as Marx, Engels and, after them, Lenin<sup>47</sup> and Stalin<sup>48</sup> believed).

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<sup>42</sup> Marx, K. 1892. *The Poverty of Philosophy* Moscow: Foreign Languages Press. p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Marx, K. 1972. *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press. p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> Engels, F. 1976. *Anti-Duhring: Herr Duhring's Revolution in Science*. Peking: Foreign Language Press. p. 363.

<sup>45</sup> Engels, F. 1978. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Peking: Foreign Language Press. p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> Marx, K. 1972. *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press. p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Lenin, V.I. 1970. *The State and Revolution*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press. pp. 17-26. Cf. Lenin, V.I. 1970. *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Peking: Foreign Language Press. This is an extensive critique of anarcho-communism.

<sup>48</sup> Stalin, J.V. 1954. *Anarchism or Socialism? In Stalin, Works*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Foreign Language Press. pp. 297-391. Stalin essentially repeats arguments for a strong socialist state while admitting the ultimate dissolution of the state. We see, then, that the doctrine of “withering away” can coincide with advocacy even for a totalitarian state.

Either way, the State is regarded as an ultimate solution or part of one and not as one of the elements of the problem. That is, the State is regarded as a mechanism for liberation and freedom and not as a fundamental impediment thereto. Even granting that it serves a transitional function, once installed, the mechanisms of state power have a way of reproducing the conditions of their own necessity and, therefore, of extending indefinitely the so-called transitional period which becomes, then, transitional in name only. This we observe, of course, in the case of Lenin's Bolshevik usurpation of the Russian revolution, wherein the horizon of a promised freedom was quickly displaced by the faceless power of a totalitarian regime. In brief, all such interpretations repeat, albeit in different ways, the same fundamental myth; namely, that the State serves as a mechanism of political salvation. They then draw from Spinoza what they already expect to find while dressing it up in more or less revolutionary rhetoric.

But what if we refuse to follow the same procedure? What if we, instead, allow the tensions underlying Spinoza's critique of political organization to come to a head? It is my conviction that we will find in Spinoza's work a man deeply troubled by the problem of State power in itself. We will find, if we attend carefully to what he has written, a deeply anarchic ethos committed to direct and positive political action rather than revolutionary insurrection. We have, however, gotten a bit ahead of ourselves. Before proceeding to explain the general frame in which I interpret Spinoza and how my argument proceeds, let us take a step back and try to consider the meaning attributed to Spinoza and Spinozism by classical anarchist thinkers. Doing so shall give us *some* framework for what an anarchist interpretation of Spinoza's work would involve.

### III. Spinoza's Place in Anarchist theory

In the last chapter of his *Savage Anomaly*, Negri shares some strongly-worded thoughts concerning the shift of attention under consideration:

“Some have spoken of a liberal Spinoza, and others, of a democratic Spinoza. By the same standard one could also speak of an aristocratic Spinoza or a monarchical Spinoza — and it has been done. Perhaps also an anarchic Spinoza? No one has ever said that. And yet this field of attributing the various labels from the theory of the forms of government and the State to the form of Spinoza's politics is so inane that one might even say an "anarchic" Spinoza!”<sup>49</sup>

I think that this comment is both excessive and hypocritical; negri himself proposes a “communist” Spinoza if not directly in the *Savage Anomaly* itself, undoubtedly in his other works which build on it. Whatever his motivations,<sup>50</sup> he does raise a good point: nobody had yet proposed an anarchist interpretation of Spinoza.<sup>51</sup>

So as to frame what I am proposing to do, it would be worth reconstructing Negri's comment in the form of a question. Why had nobody proposed such an interpretation? The most

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<sup>49</sup> Negri, A. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly*. p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> It seems to me that Negri's antipathy was motivated more by a personal need — given repeated efforts to that effect throughout several works (Brennan, T. 2003. *The Empire's New Clothes*. *Critical Inquiry*. 29(2) pp. 337-367; Mazzarella, W. 2010. *The Myth of the Multitude, or, Who's Afraid of the Crowd?* *Critical Inquiry*. 36(4) p. 715, n. 38) — to distance himself from the spectre of anarchism than by any well-grounded objection.

<sup>51</sup> This is not entirely true. An article appeared in the 1970's linking Spinoza to Georges Sorel; still, it aimed to explain why Sorel gave up his anarchism. See Soulez, P. 1973. *Proudhon et les Theoriciens du Syndicalisme Revolutionnaire*. Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie. Vol. 55. pp. 245-264. In any case, since Negri so expressed himself, a small number of studies have come out. Colson, D. “Anarchist Readings of Spinoza.” *Journal of French Philosophy* Vol. 17(2), Fall 2007; Cohn, J.S & Jun, N.J. “Translator's Introduction to Daniel Colson's ‘Anarchist Readings of Spinoza’.” *Journal of French Philosophy* Vol. 17(2), Fall 2007; Colson, D. 1998. “Lectures Anarchistes de Spinoza I: Bakounine et Proudhon.” *Réfractations*, No. 2. pp. 119-148; Colson, D. 2015. “Lectures Anarchistes de Spinoza II: L'interprétation Marxiste.” Retrieved 08/10/2016 from <http://raforum.info/spip.php?article3479>; Colson, D. 2015. “Lectures Anarchistes de Spinoza III: Une autre lecture de Spinoza.” Retrieved 08/10/2016 from <http://raforum.info/spip.php?article3480>. These studies review some of the material I shall examine here; their positive conclusions, however, tend to operate within a deleuzian frame which, for the most part, I do not adopt. See also Bonet, L. 1993. “Spinoza: Un Philosophe ‘Bon à Penser’ pour L'anarchisme,” *Le Monde Libertaire*; Jun, N. 2013. “Rethinking the Anarchist Canon History, Philosophy, and Interpretation.” *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1.

substantial answer we can supply is this: anarchist thinkers were and to some extent have remained rather ambivalent when it comes to their judgments of Spinoza and his work. Many anarchist responses to Spinoza can be categorized into two main groups: Anti-Romantics, represented by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin, and Romantics, represented by Moses Hess, Gustav Landauer, and the anarcho-primitivists. There is, however, an important outlier unique in that he escapes this dichotomy: Peter Kropotkin. Let us examine these responses in greater detail so as better to understand the extent to which Negri's incredulity is historically appropriate.

#### **A. Anti-Romantic Anarchist Responses to Spinoza: Proudhon and Bakunin**

On the whole, Proudhon's treatment of Spinoza is unsystematic.<sup>52</sup> On two occasions, however, Proudhon offers us more orderly thoughts on the subject. Once in *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, and again in *Philosophie du Progress*. The latter text, I shall treat of extensively later on. Here, therefore, I shall attend only to *De la Justice* which, at any rate, gives us a fairly good picture of Proudhon's viewpoint.

Proudhon's reading of Spinoza suffers from residual romanticism,<sup>53</sup> the central tenet of which (so far as I am concerned) is a certain nostalgia for the infinite<sup>54</sup> that is imputed to the finite (human) mode so that transcendence intrudes upon the plane of immanence. That is,

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<sup>52</sup> Sometimes, he proposes that Spinoza be ignored altogether (complete works vol. 1 p. 338; vol. 3 p. 196, 307; vol. 4. p. 41, 261; vol. 7 p. 31). Sometimes he denounces him as a pantheist (complete works vol 4. p. 220), at other times as a self-deluded atheist (complete works vol 10 p. 263), and still other times as an advocate of liberal religion and, to that extent, as a representative of the bourgeois in its efforts to neutralize revolutionary passions (complete works vol. 9 p. 322.). Yet, elsewhere, he uses Spinoza's conception of the innate productivity of substance as an analogy for the manner in which man generates his own conception of justice without the intervention of external force (complete works vol 36. P. 366).

<sup>53</sup> By "residual romanticism," I understand the account supplied by Friedrich Beiser (Beiser, F. 2003. "The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics." in *The Romantic Imperative*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. pp. 131-152).

<sup>54</sup> Beiser, F. 1992. *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790—1800*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. p. 259.

Proudhon reads Spinoza in a manner more or less consistent with the romantics and proceeds to attack him on the basis of that reading; which is to say that he does not attack Spinoza himself but *spinozism*.

Early on in the text, Proudhon distinguishes two general ways of thinking about the origins justice. One sees it as “intimately connected to the individual” and “consistent with his dignity.” The other regards justice as “external to and above the individual,” as residing in something “whose dignity supercedes” him, whether that be “the social collective considered as a being *sui generis*” or “a transcendent and absolute being called God.” This is the so-called “system of transcendence.” In this way, Proudhon lumps traditional theologians together with “the multitude” of secular reformers who nonetheless “remain faithful to the principle of external subordination.” Thus, he contends, does this approach extend “from Catholicism to pantheism, from the Catechism of the Council of Trent to *Spinoza's Ethics*.”<sup>55</sup>

All instances of this general approach, Proudhon argues, operate through a logic of participation in the absolute<sup>56</sup> whereby man shares in the substance of God, “society, humanity, or some other sovereignty.”<sup>57</sup> This means that “everything is in him and through him” and that “none are outside of him.” However, insofar as “none are identical with him,”<sup>58</sup> it also means that all are subordinated to him, that each thing “receive[s] the modes of its... author.”<sup>59</sup> Spinozism does not rehabilitate the fallen nature of man proposed in Christianity; it simply reinterprets his degraded and subordinate condition.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1858. *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise: Nouveaux Principes de Philosophie Pratique*. Vol. 1. Paris: Librairie de Garnier Frères. pp. 136-37.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp. 136-37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 138.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. pp. 136-37.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 188. Cf. Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise: Nouveaux Principes de Philosophie Pratique*. Vol. 3. Paris: Marpon et Flammarion. p. 33, 181, 202.

Having represented the substance-mode relation as a form of subordination, Proudhon interprets the spinozist doctrine of necessitarianism accordingly. Substance, he claims, is an “ultra-phenomenal” force<sup>61</sup> thoroughly immanent to itself such that “freedom in God is not something other than his infinite spontaneity, spontaneity no doubt freed from foreign determination, but which is itself determined by the necessity of his nature.”<sup>62</sup>

Having articulated his view as to Spinoza’s negation of freedom on the part of God, Proudhon goes on to point out that Spinoza “denies it all the more so in man.” Though we can speak of feeling unconstrained, divine necessity implies that “the soul is a spiritual automaton.”<sup>63</sup> That is, as Proudhon goes on to say, “things do not own the power that appears in them... are only the rays of the cause or universal substance, which is God.”<sup>64</sup> The force of divine necessity is, therefore, represented as a power that God has and man (or any other mode for that matter) does not, as a power he responds to. The substance-mode relation is transformed into a relation between “sovereign action”<sup>65</sup> on the one hand and “conformity of will to God's command”<sup>66</sup> or obedience on the other.<sup>67</sup>

According to Proudhon, man’s obedience to God, his metaphysical subordination, is the foundation of his social and political subordination. If man is a “mere vehicle of infinite power,”<sup>68</sup> he operates under the dominion of an “absolutism that is innate to him,”<sup>69</sup> an

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<sup>61</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise: Nouveaux Principes de Philosophie Pratique*. Vol. 2. Paris: Marpon et Flammarion. p. 311.

<sup>62</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 3. p. 179. Cf. *ibid.* p. 184).”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p. 207.

<sup>65</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 2. p. 311.

<sup>66</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 3. p. 199.

<sup>67</sup> Proudhon attempts to refute Spinoza’s necessitarianism on the grounds that the very proposal of a remedy to the problem of man’s slavery to the passions presupposes he has the ability and freedom to do so, which is not guaranteed. How successful this refutation is, I leave the reader to decide. See *ibid.* pp. 178-85; 207-209.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 207. That is, a slave of God (*ibid.* p. 135).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

unmitigated force<sup>70</sup> which tends to disrupt the general harmony<sup>71</sup> and must, therefore, “pass over to the collective.”<sup>72</sup> Absolutism on the part of the individual, however, does not change when it is transferred to the state, for “it is the nature of all power to stretch to infinity by absorbing all that surrounds it.”<sup>73</sup> As such, Proudhon concludes that “Spinoza offers man... the despotism of the State to balance his will”<sup>74</sup> so that “in politics,” as in metaphysics, “Spinoza concludes in absolutism.”<sup>75</sup>

For Proudhon, then, Spinoza’s thought is anything but amenable to an anti-authoritarian outlook. On the contrary, Spinoza is allied with absolutism and despotism. This alliance is essentially grounded in the manner in which Spinoza represents the relation between substance and its modes which, according to Proudhon, retains a traditional transcendental architecture despite Spinoza’s apparent insistence on the immanence of substance vis-a-vis its modalities. While it goes without question that this interpretation is flawed in a number of respects, it does serve to illustrate the fraught relationship which anarchists have had with the sage of Amsterdam.<sup>76</sup>

Now, unlike Proudhon who, after an initial period of neglect, eventually came around to articulating a fairly comprehensive — if less than successful — response to Spinoza, Bakunin

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<sup>70</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1858. *De la Justice*. Vol. 1. p. 230.

<sup>71</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 3. p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1858. *De la Justice*. Vol. 1. p. 232.

<sup>73</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 3. p. 182.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 136.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

<sup>76</sup> That being said, Proudhon does make some positive use of Spinoza. He uses Spinoza’s work to attack deism for maintaining the incorporeality of God despite having stripped the deity of everything else traditionally ascribed to it (Proudhon, P.J. 1858. *De la Justice*. Vol. 1. p. 193). More importantly, he concludes the entire text as follows:

“We [regard] justice as the first and last reason of the universe, the eternal formula of things, the idea that supports every other idea, the law that affirms itself and demonstrates itself simply because it is affirmed. Thus, we apply to it Spinoza’s definition of his chimerical substance: *per sui causam intelligo id cujus essentia involvit existentiam* [by that which is self-caused, I understand that the essence of which involves Existence] (Proudhon, P.J. 1870. *De la Justice*. Vol. 3. p.600.

did not. Throughout Bakunin's work, Spinoza appears only in passing and is never given any serious consideration. Where reference to Spinoza is made,<sup>77</sup> however, Bakunin's account is roughly similar to that of Proudhon. He does, however, introduce a few additional inferences which are worth paying attention to.

Consider the following passage, in which Bakunin summarizes a metaphysical schema which he attributes to Spinoza (among others):

“Idealists... [proceed] from the higher to the lower, from the superior to the inferior, from the complex to the simple. They begin with God, either as a person or as divine substance or idea, and the first step that they take is a terrible fall from the sublime heights of the eternal ideal into the mire of the material world; from absolute perfection into absolute imperfection; from thought to being, or rather, from supreme being to nothing.”<sup>78</sup>

While it is clear that Spinoza was an not idealist, it is equally clear that Bakunin interprets him that way. Thus, a vertical relation is established between the absolute, the infinite, and the finite things of this world. This, so Bakunin construes it, has catastrophic consequences for the latter.

This, we infer — so far as it relates to Bakunin's interpretation of Spinoza — from an unpublished version of a passage appearing in *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International*.<sup>79</sup>

“Spinoza said, ‘*sub specie aeternitatis*,’ it follows that whatever efforts we make, we are irrevocably condemned to absolute dirt. Let me explain. In the presence of the infinite, all relative magnitudes... are... null, each is separated from the infinite by an infinite

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<sup>77</sup> That is, when Bakunin is not feebly appealing to his respect for Spinoza (among other approved Jews) as a means of deflecting accusations of anti-semitism, a gesture he repeats a number of times over the years and that only serves to confirm what it aims to deny.

<sup>78</sup> Bakunin, M.A. 1970. *God and the State*. Tucker, B. trans. New York: Dover. p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Bakunin, M.A. 1886. “The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International.” In *Liberty: Not the Daughter, but the Mother of Order*. 4(13). pp. 2-3.



distance... is zero. ... Whence it follows that if God exists, the existence of the world and man are void... [so that] assuming first, contrary to all logic, that man and the world can exist when God does, it is impossible for men to purify themselves, to improve, or to win their salvation by their own efforts without the powerful and miraculous intervention of the Divine grace. Now I do not want to dwell on this ... I just wanted to make the reader feel that the idea of the Absolute kills and destroys men, society, and the world to the absolute nullity."<sup>80</sup>

Adopting the top-down approach of traditional metaphysics, which Bakunin ascribes to Spinoza, has the effect of implying the necessary annihilation of finite things. From this result, there arise, for Bakunin, two fundamental consequences. One, to adore God is to destroy solidarity with things finite; theology, pantheistic or otherwise<sup>81</sup> functions as a sort of social solvent.<sup>82</sup> Two, as a social solvent, theology (Spinoza's especially), involves a sort of paradoxical and self-destructive egoism. Those who find existence in God alone "adore *themselves* in him."<sup>83</sup> Yet, as "no one can live humanely outside of human society,"<sup>84</sup> the destruction of human solidarity this entails means breaking with being human; i.e. with being at all.

Beyond the social and, perhaps, psychological consequences of this point of view, there are — according to Bakunin — significant *political* consequences. For he holds that "every state

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<sup>80</sup> Bakunin, M.A. 1871. "La Théologie Politique de Mazzini et l'International. Deuxième Partie: Fragments et Variantes." International Institute for Social History: Archives Bakunin. Fragment I: manuscrit pp. 23-33.

<sup>81</sup> Bakunin does not make a meaningful practical distinction between "theism," "deism," and "pantheism." All function, on his reading, in the same way though perhaps in differing degrees.

<sup>82</sup> Bakunin, M.A. 1887. "The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International." In *Liberty: Not the Daughter, but the Mother of Order*. 4(14). p. 6. Bakunin, M.A. 1886. "The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International." In *Liberty: Not the Daughter, but the Mother of Order*. 4(13). pp. 2-3.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid..

<sup>84</sup> Bakunin, M.A. 1887. "The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International." In *Liberty: Not the Daughter, but the Mother of Order*. 4(16). p. 3.

is a terrestrial church, just as every church... is but a celestial state.”<sup>85</sup> Politics and theology coincide. Thus, a theology that annihilates finitude implies a politics that annihilates the individual and holds that “human liberty must be destroyed if men are to be moral”<sup>86</sup> or “that the masses, always incapable of governing themselves, must at all times submit to the beneficent yoke of a wisdom and a justice imposed upon them, in some way or another, from above.”<sup>87</sup>

Thus, with more psychological insight and critical depth if less erudition, Bakunin makes the same assumption about the structure of Spinoza’s system and derives from it similar consequences. The relationship between substance and mode is fundamentally characterized by subordination. Translated into political language, this metaphysical or theological schematic implies despotism, totalitarianism, absolutism, authoritarianism and so on. In short, for Proudhon and Bakunin alike, Spinoza is the antithesis of any libertarian outlook.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Bakunin, M. 1971. *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism*. In *On Anarchy*. ed. and trans. S. Dolgoff, 102-147. New York: Vintage. p. 138. If this brings to mind Schmitt’s political theology, there is a good reason for that; Schmitt was largely inspired by Bakunin.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 142. See also “Once well established in the imagination of the peoples, the development of the various religious systems has followed its natural and logical course, conforming, moreover, in all things to the contemporary development of economical and political relations of which it has been in all ages, in the world of religious fancy, the faithful reproduction and divine consecration (Bakunin, M. 1970. *God and the State*. Trans. P. Avrich. New York: Dover. p.69).” Cf. “The belief in God, pure spirit and creator of the world, and the belief in the immateriality of the soul ... became the ideal basis of the whole Occidental and Oriental civilization of Europe; it penetrated and became incarnate in all the institutions, all the details of the public and private life of all classes, and the masses as well (ibid. p.78).

<sup>88</sup> In this respect, their conclusions run roughly parallel to those of Alexis de Tocqueville vis-a-vis pantheism generally. In his *Democracy in America*, there appears a “little noted (Smith, Steven B. 2003. *Spinoza’s Book of Life*. New Haven: Yale U. Press. p. 175)” chapter entitled “What Causes Democratic Nations to Incline Toward Pantheism (Tocqueville, A. 2003. *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*. Trans. Bevan, G.E. New York: Penguin. pp. 520-21).” It appears within a broader discussion concerning the influence of democracy upon “intellectual movements.” This discussion begins with the proposition that democratic societies are subject to “continuous shifts (ibid. p. 494).” Such fluidity tends, so he argues, to erode relations of rank in two respects. First, the hierarchy of generations which solvent traditions typically preserve. Second, distinctions of class, which become ephemeral if they persist at all. Citizens thus come to feel that they are more “like each other” than not (ibid.).

According to Tocqueville, this has a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, the citizen tends not to lend particular esteem to the word of another but, rather, to rely on “the individual effort of his own reason” and, so, to retreat “into himself (ibid.),” forming a “very lofty... conception of human reason (ibid. p. 500)” in general and his own reason in particular. On the other hand, due to the great discrepancy between the magnitude of what must be comprehended and the insufficient quantity of time necessary to do so independently, the isolated intelligence is

## **B. Romantic Anarchist Responses to Spinoza: Moses Hess, Gustav Landauer and the Deep-Ecology/Anarcho-Primitivist Nexus**

If Proudhon and Bakunin understood Spinoza largely in keeping with the interpretation of the Romantics and on that account rejected him, other traditions of anarchism understood him in more or less the same manner and enthusiastically embraced him for it. First, Moses Hess, a libertarian socialist remembered now mainly for his early association with Marx and Engels. Second, Gustav Landauer, a late 19th and early 20th century German anarchist remembered primarily for his emphasis on the centrality of the community as a positive form of revolutionary organization. Third, certain contemporary strands of anarcho-primitivism in its connection with the deep ecology movement.

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doomed to superficiality and weakness if it does not “accept many beliefs without any argument so as to deepen his understanding of a small number. (ibid.).” This disposes the democratic citizen to “limitless trust in the judgment of the public as a whole,” toward a form of “corporate thinking (ibid. p. 501).”

With the emergence of corporate thought, comes, according to Tocqueville, an affinity for “general ideas (ibid. p. 505)” which allow the individual to perceive all things in their similarity and, therefore, to produce ideas which embrace “a host of different objects,” and to comprehend the association of “a multitude of effects in a single cause (ibid. p. 520).” Now, as there is “almost no human action... which does not originate in a very general idea men have about God (ibid. p. 510),” it follows that men slowly “formulate the notion of a single God (ibid. p. 510)” and enclose “God and the universe in a single entity (ibid. p. 521).”

This “philosophic system according to which” all things “are to be considered only as the separate parts of an immense being” — namely pantheism — “although it destroys human individuality or, rather, *because it destroys it*, will have a secret attraction for men who live in a democracy (ibid.).” In this respect, Tocqueville’s account of pantheism, insofar as it destroys individuality, aligns it with what he elsewhere calls “soft despotism.” How and in which respects his analysis does not fit Spinoza’s conception of substance is a question that extends far beyond the present context. However, suffice it to say that if Spinoza be lumped together with other pantheists, he would be regarded by Tocqueville, as by Proudhon and Bakunin, as an advocate of despotism (for more on Tocqueville’s notion of democratic, or “soft,” despotism see *Democracy in America*. vol. 2, book 4, ch. 6. pp. 803-809. See also Rahe, P.A. 2010. *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect*. New Haven: Yale U. Press). It can further be noted that, like Bakunin, who regards pantheism as a threat to human solidarity, Tocqueville comments that “the vices which despotism produces” — i.e. egoistic individuality *sans* solidarity — “are precisely those which equality — i.e. the political attitude of which pantheism is the supreme ideology — fosters (ibid. p. 591).” Clearly, Tocqueville, Proudhon, and Bakunin have vastly different views as to what this equation implies; still, the equation is common.

## 1. Moses Hess

Although Moses Hess did not actively identify with the anarchist movement, I concur with Miguel Abensour<sup>89</sup> to the effect that Hess's views were essentially anarchistic in character and without doubt anti-authoritarian.<sup>90</sup> His account of Spinoza emphasizes the unifying character of 'spirit' as a counterforce to the state form; he attends less to the substance-mode relation and what it implies than to the spiritual and political force of the intellectual love of God.

Hess' first major work,<sup>91</sup> *The Holy History of Mankind* amounts to a vast utopian interpretation of the fourth and fifth part of the Ethics. In it, he speaks of the "world's rejuvenation after Spinoza."<sup>92</sup> What exactly does this mean for him?

According to Hess, "once the human creature has regained its unity and recognized God in his depth as well as in his width" he "proceeds in the path of eternal life in God."<sup>93</sup> This means that he lives "in conscious obedience to the divine law" which "he pays homage to... out of free, inner impulse."<sup>94</sup> This law, so Hess continues, teaches that "there is nothing for man in all of nature which promotes more his humane determination, the knowledge of God, than his brethren who are inspired by the same striving" so that "it is further good that men associate, live in society," *this* being "the primary cause which brings about our living" in this way<sup>95</sup> so that "true religion, the knowledge of God revealed in the holy history, *is the only foundation of*

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<sup>89</sup> Abensour, M. 2011. *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*. Blechman, M. & Breugh, M. trans. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp. 50-52; 61.

<sup>90</sup> That is, indeed, an element of the ultimate critique which Marx and Engels lay against him in the second volume of the *German Ideology* and chapter three of the *Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>91</sup> Which, in fact, he signed as "a Young Disciple of Spinoza."

<sup>92</sup> Hess, M. 2004. *The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings*. Avineri, S. trans. New York: Cambridge U. Press. p. 40.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

*states.*”<sup>96</sup>

For Hess, several crucial consequences are brought to bear from this account of social constitution:

1. Community of property:

- a. “Nothing can better correspond to the inner unity of spirits than harmonious cooperation. The harmony of external strivings necessarily supports and promotes the inner ones, and vice versa. The more the activity of one member provides for the benefit of the whole, and the richness of the whole benefits the individual, the deeper is the bond which binds the individuals with the whole and with each other. All separate beings constitute one being when the existence of the one is inconceivable without that of the other. Therefore unity and equality exist only when totality is present in everyone, and when everyone thrives and ripens through the other.”<sup>97</sup>
- b. “The reign of full equality comes into being only where there exists communal ownership ... in all goods... where the treasures of society are open to all.”<sup>98</sup>

2. The dissolution of the state:

- a. “Historical rights” — above all, the right of sovereignty — “have naturally to be abolished... before that primordial equality of men can be restored.”<sup>99</sup>
- b. So that “our era, which has come to know God, will not enter into a covenant aimed at a terrestrial, transient goal: [it will do so] only for its highest salvation,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

the knowledge of God.”<sup>100</sup>

- c. This is because “the people... [becomes] the pristine element... the substance, the God and the Lord, whose life or consciousness, by individuating or universalizing itself, creates an organized whole, a living individual. Who would need... an external law for the whole, when the law lives in its interior?”<sup>101</sup>
- d. Thus, “the law... brings its cycle to a close” and “no new Law will appear; rather, mankind will be united-into-itself internally as well as externally: the Law of God will live in every member, and will be clearly recognized.”<sup>102</sup>

In short, Hess discovers in the unity of spirit which his interpretation of the intellectual love of God affords an account of human being-together which grounds the social condition of man without appeal to external force. Rather, “the eternal laws of love”<sup>103</sup> generate an atmosphere of harmony which, on the one hand, precludes the necessity of law and enforcement. On the other hand, they guarantee that “all things are in common among friends,”<sup>104</sup> that a free communism of goods both spiritual and material is brought to bear.

## 2. Gustav Landauer

In an autobiographical article published in his journal, *Der Socialist*, Landauer reports that his engagement with Spinoza began early on.<sup>105</sup> Though (to my knowledge) he never dedicated a full study, or even a section of one, to Spinoza’s work, I concur with Hanna Delf von

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>104</sup> Ep. 45.

<sup>105</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Twenty-Five Years Later: On the Jubilee of Wilhelm II.” In *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*. Kuhn, G. trans. & ed. Oakland: PM Press. p. 64.

Wolzogen's assessment that a spinozist ethos (albeit a idiosyncratic one) permeates all of his writings.<sup>106</sup> His conclusions are roughly similar to Hess', but his manner of arriving at them differs substantially. So far as I am concerned, this "ethos" is organized around two primary interests. One, the idea of pantheism, or the univocity of being, as a way of conceiving the fundamental unity of things generally and people in particular. Two, the idea that spirit and matter are united. In neither respect can it be said that he faithfully represents what can be considered a plausible interpretation of the text of the *Ethics*, but that is not the point here.

In a long-form essay entitled *The Call to Socialism*, Landauer renders what I regard as the decisive statement on the meaning of socialist anarchism from his viewpoint. Early on in the text, he draws a distinction, on the one hand, between society and the state and, on the other, between spirit spiritlessness: "where spirit is, there is society, where un-spirit is, there is the state;" the state, he says, "is the surrogate for spirit"<sup>107</sup> when the latter "has perished and ceased to exist."<sup>108</sup> In this respect, He continues later, it follows that (libertarian) socialism, "the struggle for new conditions between men" is necessarily conceived as "as a *spiritual* movement,"<sup>109</sup> an effort, as he states elsewhere aimed at the "spiritualization of the world."<sup>110</sup>

What is the nature of this "spirit of which Landauer speaks? Spirit, he says "is something that dwells equally in the hearts and animated bodies of all individuals, which erupts out of them with natural compulsion as a binding quality" that "leads them to associate together"<sup>111</sup> and, in doing so, unites them in a manner that extends "beyond transitory, fragmentary, and superficial

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<sup>106</sup> Wolzogen, H.D. "Gustav Landauer's Reading of Spinoza." In *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew*. Mendes-Flohr, P. & Mali, A. eds. Boston: de Gruyter. pp. 155-172.

<sup>107</sup> Landauer, G. 1978. *For Socialism*. Parent, J. trans. New York: Telos Press. p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. "Through Separation to Community." In *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*. Kuhn, G. trans. & ed. Oakland: PM Press. p. 99.

<sup>111</sup> Landauer, G. 1978. *For Socialism*. p. 43.

temporal phenomena.”<sup>112</sup> For Landauer, spirit is a special bond that exists between individuals insofar as it freely arises from within each. Let us examine this reciprocal relation further.

In an essay entitled “Through Separation to Community,” Landauer explains that:

“It is time to realize that here are no individuals, only affinities and communities. It is not true that collective names are only sums of singularities or individuals; rather, individuals are only manifestations and points of passage, the electrical sparks of something greater, something all-encompassing... The individual is a spark of the soul stream that we know as humanity, species, or universe. If we see the world only as the outside world, then we do see, touch, hear, taste, and smell individuals. If we turn within ourselves, however, we realize that there are no autonomous individuals. ... What we are part of is an unbreakable chain that comes from the infinite and proceeds to the infinite.”<sup>113</sup>

The same, Landauer explains later, is true of bodies, which, in any event, he holds (following Spinoza) to be products of thought: “Spinoza himself says that ‘thingness’ is only the product of our thoughts; thus, I do not see two attributes [thought and extension], but one empire of the psych where an infinite number of psychic individual processes appear in the form of things” or bodies<sup>114</sup> — here, I ought mention, I do not think that he means that thought gives rise to extended things but, rather, that all divisions (i.e. perceptions of particular bodies) in extension exist in the imagination only because extension is essentially indivisible; this is a contention that can be defended on solid spinozist grounds. Thus, he explains, “the individual bodies which have lived on this earth from its beginnings are not just a sum of isolated individual beings; they form a big and real community, an organism; an organism that changes permanently, that always

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>113</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Through Separation to Community.” In *Revolution and Other Writings*. p. 101.

<sup>114</sup> Landauer, G. 1929. “*An Constantin Brunner*.” In *Gustav Landauer: Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*. Frankfurt: Rutten & Loening. pp. 139-41.



manifests itself in new individual shapes.”<sup>115</sup> In brief: Landauer considers the individual as it *truly* is — body and soul — as a part of a free-flowing macrocosm, “creative Nature” or, as he explains, “*natura naturans*.”<sup>116</sup> If, then, “only the infinite universe, the *natura naturans*, the God of the mystics, can really be called I,”<sup>117</sup> this means that “our most individual is our most universal” so, “the more deeply I go into myself, the more I become part of the world.”<sup>118</sup>

This aspiration to “become God,” to “become the world instead of just recognizing it,”<sup>119</sup> to “transform ourselves into the spirit of the world”<sup>120</sup> — in short, to realize that “the microcosm is the macrocosm”<sup>121</sup> — means, according to Landauer, to transform oneself into a community and, in doing so, to “form wider communities”<sup>122</sup> that “reflect the world community that we ourselves are.”<sup>123</sup> This is what he intends by the idea of “spirit,” which is “a unity of separate things, concepts and men.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, like the romantics, Landauer sought, drawing on spinozist inspiration, “to express the world spiritually, to grasp the Absolute and ... to arrange the higher powers of the soul into a worldwide regime, a world order, a sense of the whole.”<sup>125</sup>

After his own fashion, Landauer uses the romantic appropriation of Spinoza,<sup>126</sup> the nostalgia for the infinite or the absolute,<sup>127</sup> to articulate an imaginative manner by which the age-old conflict of individual and collective can be resolved. Or, to be more precise, by which the

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<sup>115</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Through Separation to Community.” In *Revolution and Other Writings*. p. 103.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 106.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

<sup>121</sup> Landauer, G. 1978. *For Socialism*. p. 45.

<sup>122</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Through Separation to Community.” In *Revolution and Other Writings*. p. 105.

<sup>123</sup> Landauer, G. 1978. *For Socialism*. p. 50.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>125</sup> Landauer, G. 1921. “*Gott und der Socialismus*.” In *Der Werdende Mensch: Aufsätze über Leben und Schrifttum*. Postdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag. pp. 14-39. Cf. Landauer, G. 1922. *Shakespeare: Dargestellt in Vorträgen*. Frankfurt: Rütten & Loening. pp. V-VI

<sup>126</sup> See his approving comments on Romanticism in Landauer, G. 1921. “*Gott und der Socialismus*.” p. 18.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

opposition can be eliminated, for it turns out that the individual *is* the collective. This notion enables Landauer to install the real human community — wherein individuality is nothing more than “the expression of the community’s desires in the individual”<sup>128</sup> — in place of the artificial or external consolidation of state power.<sup>129</sup> In any case, we find that Spinoza’s account as to the univocity of being — as to the fact *that natura naturata* express univocally *natura naturans* — inspires Landauer’s formulation of the relationship between individual and community generally and, to that extent, of revolutionary practice in particular.

In describing Landauer’s views as to the way in which the univocity of being contributes to our understanding of community as a revolutionary mechanism, I also noted that Landauer interprets Spinoza’s account of the relationship between thought and extension such that things arise from thought in the sense that we perceive distinct and particular bodies only insofar as we imagine them in abstraction from extension considered in itself. In other words, our actual life world, the world inhabited by things and people, is a product of the imagination.<sup>130</sup> If, therefore, we keep in mind that, for Landauer, the individual is a collective, it follows that the life world is a product of collective imagination. This, too, is an important conclusion for Landauer, for it implies that communities will give rise to arrangements of institutions — taken in the broadest sense, as referring to anything from aesthetics to governance — which, together, reflect its collective character.

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<sup>128</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Through Separation to Community.” In *Revolution and Other Writings*. p. 105.

<sup>129</sup> Considering Landauer’s writings on the whole, this idea is perhaps more thoroughly expressed in his study of Meister Eckhart. However, he himself contends that his his reading of Eckhart is more or less parallel in sense and implication to any reading he might make of Spinoza:

“They are quite right. Meister Eckhart and Spinoza are two opposites. Rationalism is a completely different form of expression than mysticism. They are as different as prophecy and poetry are from science. Yet, over and again, have the philosophers and the ecstasies, the rationalists and the mystics, come together to say the same thing (Landauer, G. 1929. “*An Ludwig Berndt*.” In *Gustav Landauer: Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*. Frankfurt: Rutten & Loening. pp. 322-24).

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Landauer, G. *Skepsis un Mystik: Versuch im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*. p. 102; 109-110.

This notion, he designates by the term “ordered multiplicity.” What is an ordered multiplicity according to Landauer? It is when:

“Multiple forms of organization and supra-individual entities [social institutions] are not united by the threat of violence, but by a spirit that lives in all individuals and that goes beyond earthly and material confines.”<sup>131</sup>

This unity of spirit, Landauer argues, operates not only at the institutional level, but at every level of social production. It gives “people a special form of inwardness, of yearning, of passion, and of sexuality; [it constitutes a reality that gives] people *faces, postures, tools, and souls*.”<sup>132</sup> It governs not only the relationship that obtains between people, but also the way in which that relationship is expressed in the manufacture of things — be they physical or institutional.

This, so he goes on to explain, does not mean that uniformity rules the day. On the contrary, spirit comes “from the individuals, their characters, and their souls” and thence fills “the social forms and... return[s] from there to the individuals with even more strength,”<sup>133</sup> thus allowing “all these wonderful multiple social forms... to proceed to higher forms of unity without... becoming uniform” and “without hierarchical domination.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, spirit makes for the “union of many sovereign elements that [come] together in liberty;” this is “the principle of ordered multiplicity.”<sup>135</sup>

Shared spirit means that many different things (a) can be brought together and integrated without coming into conflict and (b) can give rise to a “totality of... forms” that are “interrelated

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<sup>131</sup> Landauer, G. 2010. “Revolution.” In *Revolution and Other Writings*. p. 129.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p. 226.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

and organized without ever creating a social pyramid or totalitarian power,”<sup>136</sup> to a “reality of social creation without restricting complete spiritual independence and multiplicity of individuals.”<sup>137</sup>

Commonality of spirit thus gives rise to ordered multiplicity, which is a manner of practically organizing society from both a spiritual standpoint as well as a material one. It involves the proliferation of integrated differences arranged on a flat and not a vertical plane. This is the ontological structuring that allows Landauer to claim that “*society is a society of societies of societies; a league of leagues of leagues; a commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths; a republic of republics of republics*”<sup>138</sup> beginning with the society or community that is constituted within the individual, which, in fact, gives rise to him. In this sense we observe, finally, one example as to how, in a certain idiosyncratic fashion, the romantic interpretation of Spinoza, spinozism, can give rise to a positive anarchic vision of “freedom and order” in the form of spirit, “which is self-sufficiency and community, unity and independence.”<sup>139</sup>

### 3. Deep Ecology and Anarcho-Primitivism

In an article entitled “Spinoza and Attitudes Toward Nature,” Arne Naess laments that “the new natural science” that began to emerge with the rise of modernity “eroded God and Spirit as the mansions of all value but did not reinvest nature. On the contrary, nature was given the rather passive, profane job of serving as stuff and machinery.”<sup>140</sup> This process of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>137</sup> Landauer, G. 1978. *For Socialism*. p. 51.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “Spinoza and Attitudes Toward Nature.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 6.

disenchantment begins its slow reversal, so he indicates elsewhere, with the Romantic<sup>141</sup> appropriation of Spinoza. As Bill Devall and George Sessions put it:

“Historically, Spinoza’s system has had a major influence on those thinkers who have been most influential in resisting the development of the modern homocentric technological worldview and society.... The leading figures of the European Romantic movement... read Spinoza and were impressed with his vision of the unity and divinity of nature.”<sup>142</sup>

Thus, in their effort to continue the Romantic project of re-enchanting nature, so-called “deep” ecologists<sup>143</sup> have turned to Spinoza as a “potentially vast source of inspiration.”<sup>144</sup>

The core of this project of appropriation, as the above-quoted passage suggests, involves opposition to “homo-centrism” or, perhaps better put, anthropocentrism, which, as Naess expressed it, they wish to replace with “eco-centrism” or “biocentric or ecocentric egalitarianism.”<sup>145</sup>

The case for this interpretation is made on the basis of “Spinoza's explicit non-anthropocentrism,” which is taken to imply (a) “that our value systems and judgments are usually the result of seeing things in terms of our own narrow interests stemming from our finite human perspective and (b) that “man's ultimate freedom and happiness” involve “awareness of his finite place in the infinite complexity of nature.”<sup>146</sup> This, however, is taken to imply, in turn,

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Drengson, A. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 381-94.

<sup>141</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 6. Drengson, A. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 395-420.

<sup>142</sup> Devall, B. & Sessions, G. 2001. *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Layton: Gibbs Smith. pp. 237-38.

<sup>143</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “The Shallow and the Deep.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 1. Drengson, A. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 7-12.

<sup>144</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “Spinoza and Attitudes Toward Nature.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 6.

<sup>145</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 6.

<sup>146</sup> Sessions, G.S. 1974. “Anthropocentrism and the Environmental Crisis.” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*. 2(1). pp. 71-81.

that “Spinoza attempted to *re-sacralize the world* by identifying God with Nature” so that “God/Nature was conceived of *as each and every existing being*, human and nonhuman.”<sup>147</sup>

This claim is substantiated by interpreting Spinoza’s doctrine of *Natura Naturans* as functionally equivalent to the so-called “Gaia hypothesis” originally formulated by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis<sup>148</sup> in the 1970’s. According to Frederic L. Bender in *The Culture of Extinction*, the account runs (roughly) as follows:

“[The notion of the] ecosphere matches Spinoza’s *Natura Naturans*, nature manifesting itself or ‘nature naturing’... [it] denotes Earth as a dynamic planet, whose complex laws and foundations bring all terrestrial entities... into being. In this... sense, Earth is source and substance of all terrestrial beings. As *Natura Naturans*, the ecosphere is internal to each of its spatiotemporal manifestations.”<sup>149</sup>

As substance expresses itself univocally in its modes, so too the ecosphere in particular forms of life.

While, for Spinoza himself, attending to one’s place in the world is a matter of discerning how best to carry out the human endeavor to exist, for the deep ecologists it is a matter of establishing egalitarian relations among manifestations of substance-qua-ecosphere. It is not simply that all things, for Spinoza, are equally expressions of substance, it is that their equality signifies a specific moral *value* or *right* in excess of *power*.<sup>150</sup> In this sense Spinoza is made to

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<sup>147</sup> Sessions, G.S. 1995. “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour.” In *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*. Sessions, G.S. ed. Boston: Shambhala. pp. 156-84.

<sup>148</sup> Lovelock, J. E. 1972. “Gaia as Seen Through the Atmosphere.” *Atmospheric Environment*. 6(8). pp. 579–80; Lovelock, J.E. & Margulis, L. 1974. “Atmospheric Homeostasis by and for the Biosphere: The Gaia Hypothesis.” *Tellus*. 26(1–2). pp. 2–10.

<sup>149</sup> Bender, F.L. *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology*. Amherst: Humanity Books. p. 20. Cf. *ibid.* p. 248.

<sup>150</sup> Naess, A. 2005. “Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement.” In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 6. For opposition to this idea in the Spinoza scholarship, see Lloyd, G. 2001. “Spinoza’s Environmental Ethics.” In *Spinoza: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*. Vol. 4. Lloyd, G. ed. New York: Routledge. pp. 326-43.

advocate a “complete nihilism” characterized as the “joyful affirmation of life on earth... [a] *total* embracing of life as it is, undistorted by anthropocentrism.”<sup>151</sup>

If this complete nihilism pertains to individual men, all the more so to human civilization. The “inhumanity”<sup>152</sup> of the deep ecologist makes him the opponent not only of modernity and its ideological foundations, but of *civilization* itself. This is where deep ecology meets a certain (perhaps somewhat crooked) branch of anarchist thought.

In contrast to other radical theories, which largely address problems arising from modernity generally and the industrial revolution in particular, anarcho-primitivists address problems raised by another, and far more ancient, transition: the agricultural revolution and its “ideology of farming.”<sup>153</sup> This ideology favors “conformity, repetition, and regularity” over the “spontaneity, enchantment, and discovery” that characterized the “pre-agricultural human state”<sup>154</sup> and frames a twofold act of subordination and domestication. Man domesticates or subordinates nature, men domesticate or subordinate each other;<sup>155</sup> anarcho-primitivism endeavors to intervene at this intersection.

Anarchism, said John Zerzan in an interview with Derrick Jensen, is “the attempt to eradicate *all* forms of domination,” an endeavor that involves not only things like centralized government and the professionalization of power but also extends, for him, to abstract ideas like “time, numbers, language, or even symbolic thought itself” and most certainly to technological

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<sup>151</sup> Bender, F.L. *The Culture of Extinction: Toward a Philosophy of Deep Ecology*. pp. 297-298.

<sup>152</sup> Jeffers, R. 2001. “Inscription for a Gravestone.” In *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Hunt, T. ed. Stanford: Stanford U. Press. p. 372; Jeffers, R. 1989. “The Answer.” In *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers: 1928-1938*. Vol. 2. Hunt, T. ed. Stanford: Stanford U. Press. p. 536.  
See Sessions, G.S. 1977. “Spinoza and Jeffers on Man in Nature.” *Inquiry*. 20(1). pp. 481-528.

<sup>153</sup> Shepard, P. 2005. “Nature and Madness.” In *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections*. Zerzan, P. ed. Los Angeles: Feral House. p. 77.

<sup>154</sup> Zerzan, P. 2012. *Future Primitive Revisited*. Los Angeles: Feral House. p. 11.

<sup>155</sup> Shepard, P. *A Post-Historic Primitivism*. In *The Wilderness Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization*. Oelschlaeger, M. ed. Washington D.C: Island Press. pp 40-89.

development.<sup>156</sup>

The revolutionary task, then, lies in reversing the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to an agrarian one; it lies in the effort to “rewild”<sup>157</sup> mankind, to again become feral,<sup>158</sup> and “be determined to live as barbarians.”<sup>159</sup> The more we do so, the better we live<sup>160</sup> and the more, too, we overcome the “madness” that, according to Paul Shepard, took hold of us and inspired us to destroy the social machinery that allowed us, as primitives, to “live in stable harmony with the natural environment.”<sup>161</sup>

It is unnecessary, I think, to examine all the details of this argument. Suffice to say that it arises from the deep-ecological view that civilization itself is the problem in any particular form it might come in. This sense, if they do not cite Spinoza directly,<sup>162</sup> he lurks in the background. It is mostly this relation — less than a direct engagement with or animosity toward Spinoza’s work considered in itself — which has motivated more recent anarchist anti-spinozism.

In this respect, I point to persistent, if always in passing, denunciations of spinozism on the part of the American green-anarchist, Murray Bookchin. While, in his *Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin speaks of the liberating character of medieval pantheism and *qua element of liberation* regards it as leading directly to Spinoza,<sup>163</sup> when it comes to the use of Spinoza by deep

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<sup>156</sup> Zerzan, J. 2008. “Enemy of the State: An Interview with John Zerzan.” In *Running On Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization*. Los Angeles: Feral House. pp. 67-94.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. To be fair, Shepard does not envision a return to neolithic conditions but, as John Zerzan put it, progress toward the “future primitive (Zerzan, J. 2005. “The Future Primitive.” In *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections*. Zerzan, P. ed. Los Angeles: Feral House. p. 220-21).

<sup>158</sup> Zerzan, P. 2012. Future Primitive Revisited. p. 96

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. p. 197.

<sup>160</sup> Zerzan, P. 2012. Future Primitive Revisited. p. 34.

<sup>161</sup> Shepard, P. 1982. Nature and Madness. Athens: U. of Georgia Press. p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> An exception being Zerzan, J. 2011. Happiness. Retrieved 08/08/2016 from <http://johnzerzan.net/articles/happiness.html>. This text, however, is both extremely short and draws on Spinoza only in the most impressionistic sense.

<sup>163</sup> Bookchin, M. 1982. The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy. Palo Alto: Cheshire Books. p. 206. To further press my case that Bookchin was not hostile to Spinoza per se, but a particular



ecologists (and implicitly by anarcho-primitivists) his disdain is palpable. In the first place, he denounces the eclecticism which allows them to throw Spinoza together with any number of other figures into the same ideological brew despite their many vast divergences.<sup>164</sup> In the second place, and more substantially as far as theory goes, Bookchin protests appeal to Spinoza's supposed "fatalism" on the part of "assorted environmental groups who have made biocentricity a focal point in their philosophies" and so "tend toward a passive-receptive mysticism... that subordinates human action to a supernatural world of largely mythic activity."<sup>165</sup> The point, of course, is not that Spinoza is necessarily a fatalist or a mystic. It is, rather, that Bookchin considers the deep-ecological — and, by extension, anarcho-primitivist — appropriation of the romantic Spinoza to be misleading and, more importantly, deeply inconsistent with the social and political ethics of anarchism.

### C. A Non-Romantic Anarchist Response to Spinoza: Peter Kropotkin

If estimation of Spinoza on the part of Proudhon and Bakunin, Hess, Landauer and the anarcho-primitivists revolves around his Romantic appropriation, on the basis of which the first pair rejects him and the second embrace him, Peter Kropotkin's response is remarkable insofar as, for the most part,<sup>166</sup> he ignores Spinoza's metaphysics altogether. This shift hinges on

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appropriation of him, let me further point out that he writes that "Spinoza, by no stretch of the imagination can be regarded as 'biocentric,' indeed, quite the contrary is true (Bookchin, M. 1995. *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Antihumanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism*. New York: Cassell. p. 95).

In another article, however, Bookchin does indicate that he regards Spinoza *actual* views as problematic in themselves, apart from his place in the pantheon of deep ecology. He questions the "choice of nature as a ground for ethics" and points to Spinoza among others (Bookchin, M. 1999. "Dialectical Naturalism." In *The Murray Bookchin Reader*. Biehl, J. ed. New York: Black Rose. p. 201).

<sup>164</sup> Bookchin, M. 1987. "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement." *Green Perspectives* 4-5. Cf. Bookchin, M. "Will Ecology Become the Dismal Science?" *The Progressive*, December 1991. pp. 18-21; Bookchin, M. 1995. *Re-enchanting Humanity*. pp. 91-95; Bookchin, M. 1996. *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*. New York: Black Rose. pp. 98-100.

<sup>165</sup> Bookchin, M. 1988. "The Population Myth Part II." *Green Perspectives* 15.

<sup>166</sup> There are occasional references to (a) Spinoza's supposed idealism and, consequently, his conviction as to (b)

Kropotkin's willingness to take seriously Spinoza's equivocation *Deus sive Natura* which, according to Kropotkin, means that "that which men call God is Nature itself, misunderstood by man" such that the so-called will of God turns out to be nothing more than an absolute natural necessity that precludes things like miracles and revelation (moral or otherwise).<sup>167</sup>

So interpreting Nature, Kropotkin rejects *both* of the propositions which ground the analytical strategies of Proudhon and Bakunin. Namely, he holds that "Spinoza denied the theologians' [sic] idea of antinomy, by virtue of which God is the bearer of the eternal truth, whereas the world created by Him is its negation,"<sup>168</sup> and, consequently, that he rejects exhibited "complete freedom from Christian mysticism."<sup>169</sup> This freed Kropotkin to recognize (a) that Spinoza "*did not* seek the origin of the moral conceptions and aspirations of man in any supernatural power,"<sup>170</sup> that, consequently (b) he denied "the extra-natural origin of morality"<sup>171</sup> — "Spinoza's ethics," he says... *knows no metaphysical subtleties, nor revelations from above*,"<sup>172</sup> it explains "the moral element in man without invoking any mysterious forces"<sup>173</sup> — which means that (c) Spinoza allows (as Kropotkin himself demands) "*Nature... to be* recognized as the first ethical teacher of man"<sup>174</sup> — not God and not religion.<sup>175</sup>

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the "extra-human" or "extra-natural" and, therefore, problematic, origins of the moral law (Kropotkin, P. 1924. *Ethics: Origin and Development*. New York: Dial Press. pp. 7; 92-93). On the whole, however, these comments are made in passing and are not consistent with Kropotkin's more comprehensive analysis of Spinoza's contribution to the science of ethics. In fact, they directly contradict it.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. pp. 109-10.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p. 161.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p. 162.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

<sup>175</sup> E.g. he states that "There is no doubt that Spinoza was above all aiming to free our morality from the tyranny of the feelings inculcated by religion, and wished to prove that our passions and desires (affects) do not depend on our good or evil intentions. He aimed to represent the moral life of man as being completely governed by his reason (ibid. p. 160)."

Building his account of the nature of this teaching, Kropotkin draws exclusively from the third and fourth parts of the *Ethics* — that is, he presents ethics as a science of the configuration of affects. Doing so, he reaches several rather striking conclusions:

1. “Spinoza... certainly could not conceive morality as something based on coercion exerted by the State. He showed, on the contrary, that without any influence of the feeling of fear of a Supreme Being or of government, human reason will freely and inevitably come to the moral attitude toward others, and that in doing this man finds supreme happiness, because such are the demands of his freely and logically thinking reason.”<sup>176</sup>
2. This means that “there is nothing in nature, wrote Spinoza, that is obligatory: there is only the necessary”<sup>177</sup> and, consequently, that “morality, for its realization and development, has no need of the conception of obligation, or, in general, of any confirmation from without.”<sup>178</sup>
3. Spinoza’s writings emphasize the centrality of natural inclinations toward “mutual aide,” which functions “as an important feature of... social life” among animals. This allows Kropotkin to view Spinoza’s ethical project as coinciding with his own, the groundwork of which is given in his *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* and summarized in *Ethics: Origin and Development*. This gist of this viewpoint is that “that species survived in which the feeling of mutual aid was strongly developed, in which the feeling of social self-preservation held the ascendancy over the feeling of individual self-preservation.”<sup>179</sup>

In essence, then, Kropotkin views Spinoza’s work *not* as the antithesis of anarchism (his version

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 159.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 331. Actually, Kropotkin says this directly of Jean-Marie Guyau, a now-obscure French moral philosopher who was, in his time, highly regarded. Shortly after saying so, however, he attributes the same basic insight to Spinoza (ibid. p. 332).

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 281. Cf. p. 171.

of it at any rate) but, in a rather robust manner, as one of its progenitors.

That is not to say that Spinoza escapes sanction altogether. The gist of Kropotkin's critique, however, is that Spinoza did not go far enough. He writes that Spinoza teaches us "to be active" does not say "in what direction should this activity manifest itself." To be more precise he did not adequately to respond to the "deeply social character," to the call for "human equality," that "was the principal watchword of" the popular revolutionary movements of his day? Why — while recognizing that "desires produced by social life" are "bound to overcome purely egoistic desires" — did "social union" or "work in common" appear "to him as something of secondary importance" relative to "the self-sufficiency of a personality perfect in itself?"<sup>180</sup>

We find, therefore, that by bracketing the first part of the *Ethics* — and, in that sense, largely bracketing late 18th century and 19th century interpretation in its entirety — Kropotkin is enabled to adopt a friendly attitude toward Spinoza that differs from those of Hess and Landauer. In Spinoza he sees a proponent of the idea that men do not need to be coerced to be good, that men are naturally inclined to assist one another — to provide mutual aid — by dint of their intellectual and emotional architecture. As such, Spinoza is regarded as a kindred spirit if not an actual philosophical predecessor. His main objection to lies in the relative weight put on individual "salvation" relative to the good of all.

#### **D. Looking Backwards: The Promise and the Challenge of Spinoza**

So let us now take stock of the foregoing. Most of the anarchist theorists considered here write in relation to an essentially romantic interpretation of Spinoza, in relation to spinozism, whether for or against. Anti-Romantics like Proudhon and Bakunin attend primarily to the first

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. pp. 161-62. Kropotkin

book of the *Ethics* and denounce the presumed verticality, or transcendence, of substance relative to its modes, denying the significance of Spinoza's insistence on its absolute immanence.

According to Proudhon, modes participate in the absoluteness of substance in the same way that worldly phenomena participate in platonic forms; thus do they relate to one another in as subordinate and superordinate respectively. Modes, in this sense, *obey* substance. In so obeying, finite things — man included — become mere vehicles of divine power. Since, however, divine power knows no limits, so too the individual; he turns out to be an absolutist. This disrupts social harmony, which means that his power must be transferred to the state if it is to be brought under control. So transferred, the state becomes an absolute power too. In this way, according to Proudhon, Spinoza justifies a politics of absolutism. Bakunin makes a very similar, if briefer argument. He also adds, however, that participation in the absolute implies the annihilation of the individual. This phenomenon of annihilation dissolves, first of all, his solidarity with other finite beings. Since, moreover, we exist *as humans* only within our human relations, it also destroys our humanity.

We then examined three examples of more or less Romantic anarchistic interpretations of Spinoza. In the first place, we looked at Moses Hess. Hess emphasized the importance of the intellectual love of God (Parts 4-5 of the *Ethics*) over and above the precise contours of the substance-mode relation (Part 1 of the *Ethics*). Knowledge of God, he argues, inspires obedience to the law of God from internal impulse. This law teaches that life together with other men conduces to attainment of the highest good, the knowledge of God; thus does the latter ground social and political life. We then found that, for Hess, this ground implies communism on the one hand and the dissolution of the state on the other. Communism, because the community of good conduces to harmony, which conduces to the knowledge of God. The dissolution of the

state, because the harmony which the knowledge of God entails makes constitutions and laws unnecessary.

After Hess, we considered the work of Gustav Landauer. Landauer returns to attention to the first part of the *Ethics* and also considers elements of its second part. He interprets the substance-mode relation, the relation between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* as one that obtains between macrocosm and microcosm. Spirit is the condition of their univocal relation such that, generally speaking, the individual, in knowing herself, knows the world and, more precisely, knows herself in community. Thus, when spirit is realized, the relation between individual and collective comes from within — this is libertarian socialism (anarchism); then it is not, that relation is imposed from without — this is the state. Landauer then the doctrine of the infinity of extended substance, to imply that the determinateness of things is a product of the imagination. Combined with the mind/matter parallelism and the supposition that the individual is a collective, he concludes that the world such as we experience it is a product of collective imagination. This implies that communities give rise to their own life-worlds, so that the spirited community — where individual and collective coincide — creates a plenum of egalitarian and integrated institutions of self-expression and self-governance: an ordered multiplicity.

Following our consideration of Landauer, we proceeded to touch upon the nexus between deep ecology and anarcho-primitivism. Focusing more on the movements than on individual thinkers, I point out that deep ecologists appeal, first, to Spinoza's denunciation of anthropocentrism and, second, to his assertion as to the interchangeability of God and nature. If the Romantic account of Spinoza's metaphysics *subordinates* the mode to nature *qua* substance, deep ecologists equate "nature" with the biosphere and *sacralize* relative to the human individual. This means the *total* embrace of all life, which translates into a "joyful" nihilism

which rejects not only modernity, but civilization itself. Anarcho-primitivists take their lead from this result; locating the origin of domination at the dawn of the agrarian revolution, they oppose the “ideology of farming” and endeavor to rewild mankind so as to enable him to live, once again, in harmony with nature. This position, finally, is bitterly criticised by social ecologists like Murray Bookchin, who regard it as fatalistic and simply nihilistic — and not in the joyful sense.

Finally, we examined Peter Kropotkin’s reading of Spinoza. Kropotkin brackets the Romantic interpretation of Spinoza in its entirety. He holds that Spinoza has no part in Christian mysticism and that he rejects the notion that the God is an eternal truth before which the world is negated. Thus, he holds, neither do moral ideas arise from a supernatural source nor are they imposed by any coercive force. Rather, men freely come to adopt the moral attitude of mutual aid under the influence of reason. In this sense, if Spinoza’s *Ethics* do not coincide with his own, they come rather close; diverging only insofar as Spinoza’s affirmation of activity does not, according to Kropotkin, adequately identify the form or direction (social union, work in common) that this activity is to take.

So, what do we derive from all of this? One, interpreted after a certain fashion — and assuming that a parallel is to be drawn between theology, or metaphysics, and politics — the substance-mode relation may imply annihilation of human individuality and, in doing so, threaten political solidarity. In this respect, I consider Proudhonian/Bakuninian and deep-ecological/anarcho-primitivist readings to be more or less identical. Both regard substance as more or less equivalent to the notion of absolute sovereignty; they differ only insofar as the one locates this sovereignty in the state and sees it as implying a totalitarian politic, while the other locates it in the biosphere and sees it as implying the utter negation of politics. I consider the

deep-ecological/anarcho-primitivist reading not simply to be implausible as an interpretation of Spinoza but, in its extreme nihilism, patently absurd in this respect; I shall, therefore, pay it no further attention. Insofar, however, as the Proudhonian/Bakuninian critique imputes to Spinoza a morally and politically objectionable, but not exactly nihilistic, standpoint and, moreover, as it has a tradition of interpretation to back it up, it should be taken seriously and replied to.

Two, regarded from a different vantage, that the substance-mode relation can be understood to imply a very different set of political conditions. If all things are one in substance, if there obtains a real univocity of being, it follows that all things are intimately linked to one another and, quite literally, bound in essence. While I question the plausibility of Landauer's procedure for demonstrating his conviction to this effect, I think that his fundamental insight as to fact that it implies the inherent communality of being is both interesting and valuable. First, for its emphasis on the theoretical importance of the *community* as a counter-institution capable of supplanting the state. Second, insofar as the relation between individual and community is seen as taking place at their ontological intersection; the individual is the community, the community is the individual.

Three, that the concrete mechanism giving rise to, realizing, or expressing the ontological intersection of individual and community is the process of affective formation. This insight is — albeit in different respects — emphasized by Hess and Kropotkin alike. The core of Hess' interpretation of libertarian socialism revolves around the idea of the intellectual love of God, which is understood to entail or facilitate both the communism of goods and the withering away of the state. The love of God ensures cooperation; institutional force is dispensable. Kropotkin leaves God out of the picture and attends simply to the formation of moral ideas through the process of affective interplay and the natural reasoning that accompanies it. Thus, he finds that



ideological and material institutions designed to mediate human relations and, in doing so, to bring them to order from without have no place. I consider both versions of this basic insight as to the centrality of the affect-ethic correspondence for libertarian political theory to be of crucial importance.

## The Dual Foundation of State

*“This is the point of the story [of the first man]... God forbade the free man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, saying that as soon as he should eat of it he would straightway fear death instead of desiring to live. Again, the story goes that when man had found woman, who agreed entirely with his own nature, he realized that there could be nothing in Nature more to his advantage than woman. But when he came to believe that the beasts were like himself, he straightway began to imitate their emotions<sup>1</sup> and to lose his freedom, which the Patriarchs later regained under the guidance of... the idea of God, on which alone it depends that a man should be free and should desire for mankind the good that he desires for himself, as I have demonstrated<sup>2</sup> above.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Here, Spinoza refers the reader to E3P27.

<sup>2</sup> Here, Spinoza refers the reader to E4P37.

<sup>3</sup> E4P.68S.

## I. The Significance of a Fractured Text

In an appendix to his magisterial text, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, entitled “A Formal Study of the Plan of the Ethics, and of the Role of Scholia In its Realization: The Two Ethics,” Deleuze supplies the reader with a rather profound account of Spinoza’s *magnum opus* from the vantage of its organization; in view, that is, of the relationship that obtains between the “continuous line or tide” of the *Ethics* — the concatenation of propositions, proofs, and corollaries — on the one hand, and, on the other, the “broken line or volcanic chain”<sup>1</sup> of scholia that erupt at irregular intervals throughout the text at its junctures and points of fission. Concerning the latter, he identifies three fundamental characteristics. The scholia, he holds, are, first of all, *positive*. They are, second of all, *ostensive*. And, lastly, they are *aggressive*. The scholium is positive, he explains, insofar as it “sets out a second proof, which is positive and intrinsic in relation to an initial proof which proceeded negatively, extrinsically.” It is ostensive “since it is independent of earlier proofs and is to be substituted for them, retaining only certain propositions in an axiomatic guise detached from their demonstrative sequence.” It is aggressive insofar as its arguments are often polemical in character, “Spinoza attacks, often violently, those whose minds are too confused to understand, or who, even, have some interest in maintaining confusion.”<sup>2</sup>

From this distinction in method and in style — and also on the basis of his observation that the scholia “in their own discontinuous way the scholia jump one to another” — Deleuze goes on to suggest that “one might say that the Ethics was written twice, in two different tones, on two levels, at the same time.” In consequence, he concludes, “there are... as it were, *two*

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, G. 1990. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Joughin, M. trans. New York: Zone Books. p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 343-44.

*Ethics* existing side by side... the *Ethics* is, in this sense, a double book.”<sup>3</sup> But these two *Ethics* do not *really* stand “side by side.” If the one exists as a sort of “volcanic chain,” then the vital impulse, so to speak, that constitutes its substance lies beneath the “continuous line,” or surface, of the other; it is, to the latter, a *mundus subterraneus* (If I may play with the title of Athenasius Kircher’s work, which Spinoza partially reviewed in conversation with Oldenburg in Ep.29-31) which “rises to the surface” at points of “fracture,” at “turning points” or junctures in the text. Moreover, this ‘*mundus terraneus*’ that covers and conceals it; “the continuity of propositions and proofs,” he says, “can derive its prominent points, its various impulses, its changes of direction, *only from the emergence of something that expresses itself in the scholia* — scholia as stratum, as current — and that generates those fractures where it emerges.”<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, while Deleuze does not so articulate it, the *Ethics* is a text which must be read as operating in tension with itself. It cannot be read synthetically; rather, it is necessary to attend to the play of difference and take seriously apparent incongruities. We must not fail — If I may appeal to the work of an equally profound if, now, less popular philosopher — to take to heart Leo Strauss’ emphatic reminder that:

“Only a minority of readers will admit that if an author makes contradictory statements on a subject, *his view may well be expressed by the statements that occur least frequently or only once, while his view is concealed by the contradictory statements that occur most frequently or even in all cases but one*; for many readers do not fully grasp what it means that *the truth, or the seriousness, of a proposition is not increased by the frequency with which the proposition is repeated.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, L. 1952. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. p. 184. Cf. Strauss, L. 1965. *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*. New York: Schocken. pp. 35-52, 107-146, 215-268. In all frankness, I wince at the

We must be willing to read against the grain of a text if we are to discern its subterranean depths.

To what, in particular do I refer? In Spinoza's work, we may discern not one, but two, foundations of state. The one, we are familiar with in two respects. First, as readers of Spinoza and interpreters of his work we are altogether familiar with his account of natural right and its transfer in the manufacture of sovereignty. Second, as citizens of modern states, each of which functions as such, or so Weber suggests, to the extent that it claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence<sup>6</sup> — a view that has its modern origins, of course, in the work of seventeenth-century theorists like Spinoza (though, evidently, not only him).

The other, we are less familiar with, both as readers of Spinoza and as citizens. We have been taken in by Spinoza's *apparent* insistence that the state form is the best that we can expect, that the masses must be held in check somehow and that, with respect to them, we shall ever require a mechanism of repression, a means to exercise moral and physical violence — the latter to quell dissent, the former to fabricate consent. We have, therefore, been less than sensitive to the critique of this form of social organization which is embedded in Spinoza's account; we have altogether missed the alternative that peaks through Spinoza's dense web of definitions and axioms, propositions, scholia, and corollaries, prefaces and appendices. As citizens of modern states, the state as such appears natural and inevitable though, in point of fact, it is very much a historical construct of recent genesis — and one, moreover, which had just begun properly to organize itself in Spinoza's day.<sup>7</sup> We have difficulty discerning the cracks and crevices where viable exceptions to sovereign authority ferment and give rise to not merely to the *temporary*

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reference to Strauss as a political thinker but must admire, nonetheless, the way he reads.

<sup>6</sup> See Weber, M. 1946. *Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford U. Press. p. 78. Consider, too, Trotsky's comment to the effect that "Up to the present moment there has been no government dispensing with force (Ioffe, A.A. 1920. *Mirnye peregovorii v Brest-Litovsk*. Moscow. p. 102)," which constituted Weber's immediate inspiration.

<sup>7</sup> See Morris, C.W. 1998. *An Essay on the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. See also Oppenheimer, F. 1922. *The State: Its History and Development Viewed Sociologically*. New York: B.W. Huebsch; Graeber, D. 2011. *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. New York: Melville House.

“autonomous zones”<sup>8</sup> which have — especially of late — come to be so celebrated,<sup>9</sup> but to the promise of enduring communal institutions not founded on coercion, but on grounded in free and open association. When we hear Weber say that “if no social institutions existed which knew the use of violence, then the concept of 'state' would be eliminated, and *a condition would emerge that could be designated as 'anarchy,'* in the specific sense of this word”<sup>10</sup> we hear not liberty, but chaos.

However dismissive Spinoza may have been of a certain style of scriptural esotericism which sought to interpolate philosophical and quasi-philosophical insights into the text of the Bible, a more ‘principled’ esotericism which imports not, but uncovers, may not constitute a hermeneutic strategy entirely inappropriate. I propose, then, that as readers of Spinoza and as citizens, we attend more closely. I propose that as readers, we take seriously the radical implications which may emerge from those incongruities that occasionally ripple across the smooth surface of Spinoza’s reasoning, that we not dismiss these as passing errors or ambiguities, thus hermeneutically submerging them in what we take to be his true position when we judge the matter from the vantage of what he *usually* has to say. We ought to read with an eye toward tension in Spinoza’s text, with an eye toward its “points of fracture,” aiming not to explain away its inconsistencies but, rather, to examine them for what they are and learn from them what we can. It is precisely these breaks, these moments of inconsistency, which constitute, in my view, the true window through which the mind of a great thinker can be glimpsed and the site whereupon genuine insight is promised.

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<sup>8</sup> Bey, H. 2003. T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism. New York: Autonomedia.

<sup>9</sup> Here, I have in mind the growing popularity of festivals like Burning Man and Rainbow, which represent, in many important respects, the impulse for, if not the achievement of, open and more egalitarian social structures, free association, self-governance, mutual aid, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> See Weber, M. 1946. Essays in Sociology. p. 78.

## II. Our Fracture Contextualized

Let us, then, proceed toward consider the specific fracture in question. It takes place near the middle of the fourth book of the *Ethics* and concerns the affective ground of social and political life. To make sense of it at all, however, its context is necessarily first to be explicated. We must understand something of Spinoza's views as to the nature and structure of affect in general. To accomplish this, it is perhaps best to consider, at least superficially, his opening remarks on this topic. Spinoza entitles the fourth part of the *Ethics* "On Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions." What is meant by the notion of "bondage" so far as Spinoza here employs it? In his preface to this part, he explains it thusly: "I assign the term 'bondage' to man's *lack of power* to control and check the emotions. For a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master."<sup>11</sup> Why not? Well, to answer this question we must risk a preliminary dive into matters that of necessity will remain somewhat obscure for the present but will, it is hoped, become more clear in due time. Let us, to begin with, clarify the terms of Spinoza's definition. To define the term "bondage," we must grasp what is meant by the terms "power" and "emotion (affect)." Likewise, we must clarify the distinction — if there is one — between power and strength. Lastly, we must comprehend the relationship between the subject of affect and that affect of which it is the subject so far as it relates to control or lack thereof.

By power we provisionally understand the capacity to bring about change. Insofar as I shall later have need to consider the question of power in far greater detail,<sup>12</sup> I will, for the present, let the following suffice. In the first book of the *Ethics*, in the Scholium to Proposition 11, Spinoza states that "the ability to exist is power." Power (*potentia*) is defined as a sort of activity; namely the one involved in existing; is an action internal to or involving the thing

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<sup>11</sup> E.4.Pref.

<sup>12</sup> See ch. 6 of this study.

bearing this force or ability; it is the action of constituting or determining itself from within. We infer from the *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, part two, chapter four, which speaks of the “force [of a thing] to act on anything outside itself,” however, that in addition to power as a self-determination or “power-to” (again, *potentia*), there is also power-over, *potestas*. It is granted that this distinction between *potentia* and *potestas* is meaningful insofar as it describes the activity of existing from two different perspectives. Yet, if all “determination is negation” — as Spinoza holds in Ep.50 — it follows that by determining itself in its existence, one thing negates or limits the existence of another, or alters circumstances so that might otherwise have existed does not come to be. That is, *potentia* and *potestas* refer to one and the same phenomenon but from two different perspectives. To a degree, being is polemical; the activity of self-determination takes place relative to the self-determining activity of all other existing entities — or, at the very least, those in the immediate environment of the thing in question.

Let us grant (it shouldn’t be too hard) that these shifting determinations of existence which constitute the relative exercise of the ability of a thing to exist and, therefore its power, amount to a sort of *variation*. If this is so and:

1. We define change, as Spinoza does — again in his *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, part two, chapter four — as “the variation that can occur in a subject while the essence of the subject remains as it was.”
2. Without venturing all that deeply into Spinoza’s metaphysics, we accept that:
  - a. “God’s existence and his essence are one and the same”<sup>13</sup> — i.e. he is *causa sui*<sup>14</sup> — such that “God is immutable; that is, all the attributes of God are immutable”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> E.I.Prop.20.

<sup>14</sup> E.I.Def.1.

<sup>15</sup> E.I.Prop.20.Cor.2.



for, by E.I.Prop.10, a change in respect of the existence of an attribute would involve a change in respect of its essence and this means that “they would have to become false instead of true, which is absurd.”<sup>16</sup>

- b. “There can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God”<sup>17</sup> so that:
- c. “Whatever is, is in God”<sup>18</sup> and “particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God”<sup>19</sup> — i.e. of his essence.<sup>20</sup>

It follows that

- 3. Variation within the field of relative existential determination is the sort of variation that occurs “in a subject while the essence of the subject remains as it was.”<sup>21</sup>
- 4. The shifting determinations of existence which constitute the relative exercise of the ability of a thing to exist and, therefore, its power, amount to the sort of *variation* which, in this special sense, Spinoza calls “change.”

Therefore, can power, in general, be defined in terms of change. That is, change in the determination of existence which constitutes the modality of substance relative to other such modalities. Contrary, on the one hand, to the classical Aristotelian position that relation is *predicated* of an individual substance — i.e. a mode in Spinoza’s system — that is itself

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> E.I.Prop.14.

<sup>18</sup> E.I.Prop.15.

<sup>19</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>20</sup> E.I.Def.4.

<sup>21</sup> I will not enter, here, consider the problem of whether substance and mode relate in a manner akin to that of its subject and its predicates. For this problem, it is perhaps best to consult Curley and Bennett, who represent the opposing poles of this debate. Curley holds that “Spinoza, in classifying particular things as modes... not intend to say that the relation of particular things to God was in any way like the relation of a predicate to its subject (Curley, E. 1969. *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. p. 37).” Bennett, in contrast, maintains precisely the opposite; he states that “If I am right that Spinoza espoused the field metaphysic... then he could say that the relation of particular extended things to the one extended substance is enormously like the relation of a subject to its predicate’ or (to move out of Curley’s linguistic idiom) the relation of a thing to a property that it has (Bennett, J. 1984. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett. p. 93).”

constituted independently thereof<sup>22</sup> and, on the other, contemporary views of the same, which tend to speak of relation as holding *only* between two things,<sup>23</sup> Spinoza appears to conceive of relation (in this case, the relation of power) as *constitutive* of things. When we later come to examine his argument vis-a-vis the notion of *conatus* this will become rather important. For the present, however, it suffices to mention this intriguing result and move on.<sup>24</sup>

Having accounted, provisionally at least, for the meaning of the term ‘power,’ let us proceed to consider the term ‘emotion,’ or affect, which, not incidentally, is intimately linked to his conception of power and its meaning. Here, Spinoza lightens the interpretive burden for us considerably by informing us directly as to the manner in which he understands the notion. In the third definition in the third book of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines emotion as follows:

“By emotion [affectus] I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.”

Here, we see, first, that emotion, or affect, is the sort of experience that takes place in two parallel registers. To the extent that “that which constitutes the actual being of the human mind

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<sup>22</sup> To this effect, see Aristotle's categories, ch. 7. See also Brower, J. "Medieval Theories of Relations", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/relations-medieval/>.

<sup>23</sup> See Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, sections 4.122-4.1251. See also Copi I. M., 1958, "Objects, Properties, and Relations in the 'Tractatus'," *Mind* (n.s.), 67(266): 145-65. For an example of an argument involving the notion of power which builds on an analogous assumption — i.e. power as a relation between — see Dahl, R.A. The Concept of Power, *Behavioral Science*, 2:3 (1957:July) p.201.

<sup>24</sup> I cannot resist the temptation to comment further by drawing a preliminary distinction between the constitutive character of power vis-a-vis substance itself and the same vis-a-vis its modalities. If we understand by power the “ability to exist,” it constitutes a relation only relative to the modalities of substance, each of which has only a relative capacity in this regard. It does not constitute a relation for substance itself, which “exists solely from the necessity of its own nature and is determined to action by itself alone” — for everything else, all other ‘powers’ are in it — and is, therefore, free in the absolute sense (E.I.Def.7). In my view, this does not contradict my contention that power is linked to the capacity for change and that it is constitutive of things, of all things — including God or substance. It means simply that power as such is not intrinsically relative; only power so far as it involves modality is relative.

is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing”<sup>25</sup> and “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things”<sup>26</sup> such that “whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind [i.e. the body] is bound to be perceived by the human mind”<sup>27</sup> we must consider neither mind alone nor body alone, but the mind in its conjunction with the body. On the one hand, therefore, we have affect so far as it pertains to the body. That is, as Spinoza later puts it, “the actual physical state of our own body,”<sup>28</sup> the growth or the diminishment of its power, of its ability to act or to produce change. On the other, we have affect so far as it pertains to the mind, which “affirms a greater or less force of existence of its body, or part of its body, than was previously the case”<sup>29</sup> not, Spinoza explains, by comparing “the body's present state with its past state,” but insofar as “the idea that constitutes the specific reality of emotion” *now* “affirms of the body something that *in fact* involves more or less reality than was previously the case.”<sup>30</sup>

Second, we see observe that Spinoza’s account of affect is intimately linked to his notion of power. Affect, emotion or feeling, is the expression of power in its perpetual fluctuation. An emotion or a feeling is not a state. Rather, affect expresses dynamic change, variation in power or in the ability to effect change. While this ability waxes, while power grows, emotions and feelings involving the sensation of pleasure obtain, for “pleasure is man’s transition from a state

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<sup>25</sup> E.II.Prop.11.

<sup>26</sup> E.II.Prop.7.

<sup>27</sup> E.II.Prop.12 & Schol.

<sup>28</sup> E.III.General Definition of Emotions.Exp.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Spinoza deploys the same term, ‘*affectus*,’ to describe both (and also further compounds its ambiguity by resorting — E.I.Def.5, for example, which states that “by mode I mean the affections of substance” — to the same in describing the relation between substance and its modalities). Antonio Damasio endeavors to clear up this ambiguity by drawing a distinction between emotion and feeling; he comments that “emotions play out in the theater of the body” while “feelings play out in the theater of the mind (Damasio, A. 2003. *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. London: William Heinemann. p. 28),” thus implying that first the term be used in reference to affects of the body and that the second be used in reference to affects of the mind. This distinction may be useful in Damasio’s efforts to render a popular account of certain neuroscientific insights as to the mind-body problem; for us, however, it is not useful.

of less perfection to a state of greater perfection”<sup>31</sup> — that is, from a state of lesser to a state of greater power.<sup>32</sup> While this ability wanes, while power diminishes, motions and feelings involving the sensation of pain obtain, for “pain is man’s transition from a state of greater perfection to a state of less perfection”<sup>33</sup> — again, from a state of greater power to a state of less power. Thus does Spinoza explain his use of the word “transition” in accounting for the nature and definition of affect:

“I say "transition," for pleasure is not perfection itself. If a man were to be born with the perfection to which he passes, he would be in possession of it without the emotion of pleasure. This is clearer in the case of pain, the contrary emotion. For nobody can deny that pain consists in the transition to a state of less perfection, not in the less perfection itself, since man cannot feel pain insofar as he participates in any degree of perfection. Nor can we say that pain consists in the privation of greater perfection, for privation is nothing, whereas the emotion of pain is an actuality, which therefore can be nothing other than the actuality of the transition to a state of less perfection; that is, the actuality whereby a man's power of activity is diminished or checked.”<sup>34</sup>

Again, affect is nothing other than the physical and mental expression of dynamic variability in the interplay of constitutive forces; that which waxes in its relative power enjoys, while that which wanes in its relative power suffers.

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<sup>31</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.2.

<sup>32</sup> “Perfection,” here, can be understood as equivalent to “power” if.

1. Perfection is the equivalent of reality (E.II.Def.6).
2. Reality is the equivalent of being (E.I.Prop.9).
3. Being is the equivalent of essence, which can be demonstrated by comparison of:
  - a. E.II.Prop.10.Dem, “the being of substance involves necessary existence” with
  - b. E.I.Prop.7, “existence belongs to the nature of substance” and E.I.Prop.20, “God’s existence and his essence are one and the same.”
4. And essence is the equivalent of power (E.I.Prop.34).

<sup>33</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3.

<sup>34</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3.Exp.

Thus far, we have considered only the definition of affect, of emotion and feeling, in itself; we have addressed only the fact or event of power in its variability. That is, we have considered the experience of affect as an effect. However, as Spinoza notes in E.I.Ax.3:

“From a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect; on the other hand, if there be no determinate cause, it is impossible that an effect should follow.”

The fact of affect as an effect begs the question as to its origin; just as there obtains no effect without a cause, so too there obtains no affect without a reason, a force which determines it to be. *Something* produces the feelings and the emotions that we constantly experience.

Here, we arrive at an important distinction that shall in many respects guide the progress of our reasoning henceforth. After defining affect in general, Spinoza goes on to comment that “if we can be *the adequate cause* of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity.”<sup>35</sup> A border, therefore, is to be drawn between active affect on the one hand, and passive affect on the other; the crux of the difference between them being *adequate causation*. An adequate cause, as Spinoza defines it is that “whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause,” while an “inadequate or partial cause” is one the effect of which “cannot be understood through the said cause alone.”<sup>36</sup> When, therefore, the affect we experience “can be clearly and distinctly understood through our nature alone,”<sup>37</sup> it is an active affect. When, in contrast, the affect we experience “takes place in us, or follows from our nature” in such a fashion “we are only the partial cause,”<sup>38</sup> when it can be clearly and distinctly understood only through the conjunction of our nature and that of some other thing or other things — when, in other words, we operate “as a part of nature which cannot be conceived

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<sup>35</sup> E.III.Def.3.

<sup>36</sup> E.III.Def.1.

<sup>37</sup> E.III.Def.2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

independently of other parts”<sup>39</sup> — it is a passive affect. In brief, we are the cause, we produce, active affections, while passive affections are, in part, produced in us.

Here, however, it is necessary to emphasize the qualification I have implied by using the phrase “in part.” As Spinoza indicates in the second definition supplied in the third book of the *Ethics*, “I say that we are passive when something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause.” To be passive, in this sense, is not a state of pure inactivity. To be inert, to be a simple puppet of external force, is not the same as the manner of being implied by passivity. Rather, the emotions and feelings attending to the passive state follow, nonetheless, *from our own nature* which, therefore, constitutes a partial cause in its own right. The passive subject remains a bearer of power, the passive emotion, the passive feeling, constitute *expressions* of that power so far as it operates under the coercive influence of another, external, power — so far as it *responds to* the latter. In this sense, while Spinoza’s use of the term “passivity” is not inappropriate to the extent that, by it, he intends to distinguish affective phenomena free of coercion — relatively speaking, of course, for unmitigated activity is a thing beyond human capacity<sup>40</sup> — from the coerced affective phenomena, it can be misleading if we fail to appreciate the fact that the passive affective state is essentially *reactive*. The opposition between activity and passivity is perhaps best rephrased as a distinction between activity and reactivity. The passive, or reactive emotion, the passive or the reactive feeling, is not powerless; it is the expression or manifestation of *reactive power*.

Having said this, it is also not without value to note that another distinction — and a rather important one — is to be drawn between *active* affections and *strong* affections. An active affection may also be a strong affection — and it is undoubtedly Spinoza’s ultimate claim

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<sup>39</sup> E.IV.Prop.2.

<sup>40</sup> “It is impossible” says Spinoza in E.IV.Prop.4, “for a man not to be part of Nature and not to undergo changes other than those which can be understood solely through his own nature and of which he is the adequate cause.”

that the active affection is ultimately stronger than the passive.<sup>41</sup> However, this does not make strength and activity synonymous.

For example, we may conceive of an active affection which is relatively weak, on the one hand, and, on the other, a passive affection which is relatively strong. Thus, insofar as “the force [vis] whereby a man persists in existing is limited”<sup>42</sup> is it the case that “the force of any passive emotion can surpass the rest of man's activities or power”<sup>43</sup> despite the fact that, all things being equal, active emotions and feelings are stronger than passive emotions and passive feelings. Active emotions may be relatively weak and passive emotions relatively strong; neither activity nor passivity is necessarily indexed to strength or to weakness. These are, rather, independent distinctions.

To put the matter another way and, also, to better highlight the distinction between these two scales of affective evaluation, the relative passivity or activity of an affect is *always* a qualitative measure, while the relative strength or weakness of the same affect is *always* a quantitative one. Let me explain. When we speak of the activity or passivity of an affect, our sole concern is the determination of its causal structure, in the directionality of its origin; is the

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<sup>41</sup> For, a passive emotions ceases to be passive as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it (E.V.Prop.3). To cease passivity is not the same as to annihilate it. Feeling, here, does not wither away into a void of affect; rather, passive feeling is transformed into active feeling. Insofar as “an emotion cannot be checked or destroyed except by a contrary emotion which is stronger than the emotion which is to be checked (E.IV.Prop.7),” this can mean only that the active feeling is stronger than the passive. Take the affections of ambition and pride. In E.V.Prop.4.Schol. Spinoza states that:

“It is very important to note that it is one and the same appetite through which a man is said both to be active and to be passive. For example, we have shown that human nature is so constituted that everyone wants others to live according to his way of thinking... Now this appetite in a man who is not guided by reason is a passive emotion which is called ambition, and differs to no great extent from pride. But in a man who lives according to the dictates of reason it is an active emotion, or virtue, which is called piety... In this way all appetites or desires are passive emotions only insofar as they arise from inadequate ideas, and they are accredited to virtue when they are aroused or generated by adequate ideas. For all desires whereby we are determined to some action can arise both from adequate and from inadequate ideas.”

Ambition is not displaced by the truth of any adequate idea concerning its provenance but, rather by the force of piety which attends to such an idea.

<sup>42</sup> E.IV.Prop.3.

<sup>43</sup> E.IV.Prop.6.

affect under consideration the effect of an interior cause, one expressing the nature, essence, or power of its subject (in which case it is active), or is it the effect of an exterior cause, one expressing the nature, essence, or power of some other subject as well (in which case it is passive)? What matters is less *the number of causes* — there must, of course, be at least two, that which is affected and that which affects it — but *who or what*, so to speak, is responsible for it.

In contrast, when we speak of the relative strength or weakness of an affection, we are solely concerned with the quantity of power contributing to or excluding its production. As indicated above, an affection arising from the sensation of pleasure — be it passive or active in character — is *stronger*, all things being equal, than affection arising from sensations of pain because pleasure enhances the power of its subject and, to that extent, the power or strength of its affections. Insofar as the “power of an effect is defined by the power of the cause”<sup>44</sup> and the accumulation of causes entails the accumulation of power, argues Spinoza, will “the number of causes that simultaneously concur in arousing an emotion” define or determine the relative strength of said emotion.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly will the number of causes *excluding* the existence of the cause of some affect determine the relative weakness of the latter. While — in the third book of the *Ethics*, Proposition 18 — Spinoza maintains that “from the image of things past or future man is affected

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<sup>44</sup> E.V.Ax.2.

<sup>45</sup> E.V.Prop.8. An accumulation of such causes may involve strictly external factors; for example, a large group of hostile individuals or — to be even more concrete — the experience of being struck by multiple blows simultaneously, will inspire a higher degree of distress than the event of confrontation with a single hostile individual or the experience of enduring a single blow. Alternatively, however, the accumulation of causes may also involve more internal factors. Thus does Spinoza suggest that the hate felt for what was once loved, all other things being equal, is stronger than the hate felt for what was never loved, for to the specific “pain that was the cause of... hatred” is added pain owing to the negation of pleasures and their corollary enhancement of powers associated with the experience of love (E.III.Prop.38). The same holds in the reverse as well (and for the same reason): the love felt for what was once hated, all other things being equal, is stronger than the love felt for what was never loved. In this sense, one’s own emotions constitute causal factors with respect to one another, can contribute to the total accumulation of causes and, to that extent, the relative strength of emotions to come.



by the same emotion of pleasure or pain as from the image of a thing present,” he later qualifies his position and explains that this is the case “only insofar as we attend to the image of the thing” and ignore “other things which exclude the present existence” of the thing in question.<sup>46</sup> Thus, he continues:

“a thing which we regard as related to our future or past time to the exclusion of present time, is feebleness, other things being equal, than the image of a present thing. Consequently, the emotion toward a thing future or past, other things being equal, is weaker than an emotion toward a present thing.”<sup>47</sup>

The existence of a thing present to us cannot be excluded; on the contrary, it excludes things past and future such that affection arising from the latter is not only relatively weaker than that arising from the former, but weaker according to its imagined distance from the present.<sup>48</sup>

It is the final sum of contributing causes, the total accumulation of powers bearing on the subject in question once confounding causes are accounted for, which makes for the strength of the resulting emotion or the consequent feeling. This, we may demonstrate by observing Spinoza’s account of the relative strength or weakness of emotions arising from the thought of possibilities and contingencies. Affect vis-a-vis a future possibility, says Spinoza in E.IV.Prop.12. is stronger than the same vis-a-vis a future contingency insofar as the thought of

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<sup>46</sup> E.IV.Prop.9.Schol.

<sup>47</sup> E.IV.Prop.9.Cor.

<sup>48</sup> E.IV.Prop.10.Dem. However, Spinoza qualifies this assertion in E.IV.Prop.10.Schol. on the basis of E.IV.Def.6. The relevant portion of E.IV.Def.6 reads as follows:

“Just as we cannot distinctly imagine spatial distance beyond a certain limit, the same is true of time. That is, just as we are wont to imagine that all those objects more than 200 feet away from us, or whose distance from our position exceeds what we can distinctly imagine, are the same distance from us and appear to be in the same plane, so too in the case of objects whose time of existence is farther away from the present by a longer distance than we are wont to distinctly imagine, we think of them all as equally far from the present, and we refer them to one point of time, as it were.”

Just as the capacity of the imagination is overextended at a certain point of spatial distance such that all things beyond a certain point appear equally far away despite their actual position vis-a-vis the viewer, so too with respect to temporal distance. Thus, contends Spinoza, “with regard to objects that are distant from the present by a longer interval of time than comes within the scope of our imagination, although we know that they are far distant in time from one another, we are affected toward them with the same degree of faintness (E.IV.Prop.10.Schol.).”

possibility involves conceiving its contributing causes (albeit together with confounding causes contributing to its doubtfulness),<sup>49</sup> while the thought of contingency involves no thought of causation but of the essence of the thing alone (i.e. that it is not a self-contradiction).<sup>50</sup> Similarly does Spinoza argue in E.IV.Prop.12 to the effect that the remembrance of things past produces affections stronger than the thought of contingencies insofar as the former involves a penetration of the object of memory into the domain of the present, though it be combined, too, with the thought of the present which excludes it, while the latter, by definition, is not conceived as present in any way. In both cases, the final sum of causes producing and causes excluding the cause of some affection is what determines the strength of that affection. The matter is a strictly quantitative affair and, in this respect, fundamentally different than the distinction between activity and passivity, which involves no consideration of the number of causes, the sum of powers, bearing on the production of one affective state or another, but the *type* of cause involved; again, it is a question, here, of the provenance of causation.

To make a provisional account of our progress thus far, we found that power is to be defined in terms of change, that it involves the shifting determination of existence or dynamic variation of the immutable essence of God so far as it is modally articulated. We found, furthermore, that this variation is expressed in the phenomenal experience of the individual thing, the particular determination of divine power, as emotion or feeling — as affect. Affect expresses the fluctuation of power. This fluctuation, in turn, is evaluated on the basis of two separate but intersecting distinctions.

First, the distinction between activity and passivity — a qualitative determination concerned with the type of causal structure bearing on the emotion or feeling in question. Is this

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<sup>49</sup> E.IV.Def.4.

<sup>50</sup> E.IV.Def.3.

emotion, this feeling, a change which expresses directly and solely the power or nature of the affective subject (for lack of a better term)?<sup>51</sup> Is the latter, to that extent, its adequate cause? In this case, the affection in question is active in character. To the extent, moreover, that “that thing is said to be free which... is determined to action by itself alone,”<sup>52</sup> is the affective subject in so feeling or so emoting, a liberated thing. Active affection involves neither a relative lack of power nor an absence of self-mastery but, on the contrary expresses power in its progressive enhancement; it indicates the exercise of control over oneself and, at the very least, one’s immediate environment. It is by no means a state of bondage.

In contrast, is this emotion, this feeling, a change which expresses power in its response to some other force, power in its reactivity? Is the power in question not, therefore, the adequate cause of the affective states it assumes? In this case, the affection in question is passive in character; it represents the affective subject out of its own control and under the influence of something or someone else. It is not liberated but, on the contrary, exists in a state of “bondage.” When, therefore, we speak of the lack of freedom — when we speak of bondage — it is the event of passivity and the experience of passive emotions that we speak of.

Second, the distinction between strength and weakness — a quantitative determination concerned with the sum of forces involved in producing the affection in question. As I noted, these distinctions are genuinely separate. There indeed obtain active affections that are also strong, but there likewise obtain active affections that are relatively weak; similarly, there are passive, or reactive, emotions that are relatively weak, but many that are strong in the extreme —

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<sup>51</sup> I want to resist using a term like subject because it suggests that there is something underneath power in its affective expression when, in fact, I hold that things coincide with this expression and that there obtains no underlying substrate of being.

<sup>52</sup> E.I.Prop.7. Evidently, this can truly be said of God alone, for Spinoza holds that “there is in Nature no individual thing that is not surpassed in strength and power by some other thing (E.IV.Ax.).” Still, it is also clear from the whole of his philosophical project that the notion of freedom is something which lends itself to degrees. A thing is more or less free in keeping with its relative causal independence.

and this is precisely the problem to which concerns us when we attend to the meaning Spinoza attributes to the term “bondage.”

I enter into bondage, I become passive and unfree, when I am overwhelmed by a heteronomous force or collective of forces, when these are strong and, relative to them, I am weak, when the power I do command is made to express itself in reaction to some other power, some coercive force that is not my own. I am free, in contrast, when I am sufficiently strong to resist the influence of such forces.

### **III. The Fracture Itself**

It is passivity, reactivity, relative weakness, and the affective experience born thereof which occupies Spinoza throughout the beginning of fourth book of the *Ethics*. He is concerned, there, with a state of affairs in which man exists at the mercy of the affective currents which rush over him and carry him along, which determine him to feel as he does, to respond to his physical and social environment rather than to shape it. He is, in other words, exclusively concerned, there, with the state of bondage.

#### **A. The Active Foundation of “State”**

In the scholium to proposition eighteen, however, a significant shift is announced. “I have thus briefly explained,” he states there, “the causes of human weakness and inconstancy, and why men do not abide by the precepts of reason.” “It now remains,” he continues, “for me to demonstrate what it is that reason prescribes for us and which emotions are in harmony with the rules of human reason.” Thus do we observe, in this scholium, a break. The material that appears prior to this scholium, as I have said, fleshes out the state of unreason and its attendant

affective structure, gives us to understand the state of bondage, of passivity, of reactivity, and of relative weakness. The material that appears following this scholium articulates the opposite. He aims, there, to teach us about the state of reason and *its* affective structure; he gives us to understand the state of freedom, of activity, and of relative strength.

Thus, following the scholium in question does Spinoza begin his discussion of the rationality of self-interest, and progresses from there to a series of propositions which, to speak in the most general terms, aim to demonstrate three basic ideas. First, that things like us conduce to our well-being. Second, that men differ insofar as they are subject to passive or reactive feelings and agree so far as they produce active ones. Third, that — to the extent that men agree, men exist in harmony, when they operate on the basis of active feelings and emotions — the truly good things are not only common to all of us, but can be enjoyed by each of us equally; true goods, that is, do not lend themselves to unequal distribution. As such, the wise man does not relate to his goods from the vantage of propriety but, on the contrary, desires that all mankind likewise partake in them.

Having reached this point in his argument — which we shall, of course, later have cause to examine in far greater detail — Spinoza makes a claim which, judged only in itself does not appear particularly astounding but, considered not only of what follows immediately after it but also in light of his later political tracts, is arresting in the extreme. Thus does he express himself in the first scholium to Proposition thirty-seven of the fourth book of the *Ethics*:

“He who from emotion alone endeavors that others love what he himself loves and live according to his way of thinking acts only by impulse, and therefore incurs dislike, especially from those who have different preferences and who therefore strive and endeavor by that same impulse that others should live according to their way of thinking.

Again, since the highest good sought by men under the sway of emotion is often such that only one man can possess it, the result is that men who love it are at odds with themselves; and, while they rejoice to sing the praises of the object of their love, they are afraid of being believed. But he who endeavors to guide others by reason acts not from impulse but from kindly concern, and is entirely consistent with himself.

Whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that is, insofar as we know God, I refer to Religion [*religio*]. The desire to do good which derives from our living by the guidance of reason, I call Piety [*pietas*]. Again, the desire to establish friendship with others, a desire that characterizes the man who lives by the guidance of reason, I call Sense of Honor [*honestas*]; and I use the term "honorable" for what is praised by men who live by the guidance of reason, and "base" for what is opposed to the establishing of friendship. *Moreover, I have demonstrated what are the foundations of the state.*"

Without picking apart or, here, attempting to explain exhaustively all that Spinoza has said in this passage, I believe that it is fair to summarize as follows. He outlines the affective structure of social life so far as it is conducted by men or women operating under the guidance of reason. Such people act with God in mind; thus do they practice "religion." Such people are motivated by an enthusiasm for sharing goods which can be universally enjoyed; thus are they motivated by "piety." In doing so, such men exhibit a sense of "honor" in seeking friendship and acting out of a desire for it.<sup>53</sup> It might also be added — though Spinoza does not list it here — that such

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<sup>53</sup> Here, I think that a remark as to the specific terminology used here is in order. The actual words Spinoza uses here are "*honestatem*" and "*honestum*." In Shirley's translation, it is rendered as "honor." There is some ambiguity, however in this choice, as another term, "*gloria*," which Shirley also translates as honor (see E.III.Def. of Emotions. 30). There is textual support for translating the two by one common term; E.IV.Prop.58 holds that "Honor (*gloria*) is not opposed to reason, but can arise from it" and demonstrates this claim by referring *both* to the definition of *gloria* just quoted *and* to the scholium here under consideration, which speaks of "*honestatem*" and "*honestum*." I

people likewise operate on the basis of another affect related to honor, that which, in E.III.Prop.59, he calls “strength of mind” in the form of “nobility [*generositas*],” by which he means the inclination to act toward the “advantage of another,” the “desire whereby every individual, according to the dictates of reason alone, endeavors to assist others and make friends of them.”<sup>54</sup>

In and of itself, this is neither striking nor particularly controversial. “Of course,” the casual reader may remark, “is it not a rather banal observation that, in Spinoza’s view, rational people get along well with one another? Even if we grant that his manner of arriving at this result is unique insofar as his altruism is, somewhat paradoxically, grounded in egoism, still, any marginally competent student of Spinoza is thoroughly familiar with this intriguing disjunction; there is nothing especially surprising here.” To this dismissal, I reply as follows. I find this

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think, however, an important distinction should be made between *gloria* and *honestas*. It is evident from the account of *gloria* that appears in E.III.Prop.30 that it denotes a passive emotion. When I imagine that I have brought pleasure to something like myself, I have the idea of myself together with the idea of that other thing which is pleased; this means (by E.III.Prop.27) that I will share that feeling of pleasure and I will associate it with the idea of myself as its cause. This is *gloria*. The description of *honestas* that appears in E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.1, however, explicitly refers to a rational and, to that extent, active emotion. Therefore, while both, roughly speaking are aptly translated as “honor” and both refer to the desire to assist other or the enjoyment of so assisting them, the term *gloria* is used when I am determined so to desire or to enjoy in consequence of a passive condition of mind and body while the term *honestas* is used when I am determined so to desire or to enjoy in consequence of an active condition of mind and body.

<sup>54</sup> It is difficult, on the basis of the definitions Spinoza supplies, to distinguish honor from nobility. Both entail the desire to establish friendship. It seems to me that there are two possible — if tenuous — grounds for regarding them as separate ethical notions.

1. In determining the sense of *honor*, Spinoza contrasts it with baseness and links both to considerations of praise and blame. The sense of honor is that which is praised by men living under the guidance of reason. In contrast, what opposes friendship is deemed base by men who live under the guidance of reason. In contrast, when Spinoza determines what is *noble* he does not appeal to any notion of how others might judge us, the degree to which others will hold our motivations and our actions in esteem or otherwise. Perhaps it might be said that the honorable is a quality of moral-being more reflexive in character, action or motivation undertaken with the explicit cognizance of how others will judge us? Perhaps, then nobility is the same type of action or motivation undertaken, however, without explicit awareness of such judgments?
2. In determining the nature of nobility, Spinoza emphasizes the endeavor to “assist others and make friends of them.” If we read “and make friends of them” with an interpolated “thus” — “and *thus* make friends of them” — it might be suggested that nobility specifically involves making friends by coming to the assistance of others. In contrast, honor would involve the desire to make friends generally, not specifically by offers of assistance but, perhaps by way of example, by seeking common ground and mutual understanding with them — a mode of relation I can attain, in principle, without the offer of any special assistance, concrete or otherwise.

passage striking because, on my reading of it, Spinoza is not talking about the social graces of *rational people in general*. Nor is he talking about the manner in which *a rational person* engages with others, be they equally rational or not. On the contrary, he makes a concrete and universal political claim pertaining to the state as such: “*I have demonstrated,*” he says “*what are the foundations of the state.*” To wit, that foundation consists in the conjunction of three active affections: *religion, piety, honor, and nobility*.

## **B. The Passive Foundation of State**

Again, in itself, this claim appears innocuous in the extreme. If however, we read ahead and reflect on his further comments in the second scholium to the same proposition, its genuine peculiarity begins to assert itself. There, Spinoza begins by summarizing his understanding of the sovereign natural right whereby:

“*Every man* does what follows from the necessity of his nature” and judges accordingly as to “what is good and what is bad, and has regard for his own advantage according to his own way of thinking... and seeks revenge... and endeavors to preserve what he loves and to destroy what he hates.”

He then concludes this summary by qualifying it. “Now, if men lived by the guidance of reason,” he says, “every man would possess *this right* of his without any harm to another.” That is — so we shall later see — insofar as men who live under the guidance of reason agree in nature and, to that extent, exist in harmony with one another. The converse, however, is likewise the case. Thus, continues Spinoza:

“Since men are *subject* to emotions... which far surpass the power or virtue of men... they are therefore often pulled in different directions... and are contrary to one



another.”<sup>55</sup>

When men are subject, when they stand in a passive state, when they are assailed by affections arising therefrom,<sup>56</sup> they then exist in disharmony with one another. Strife and conflict arise.

Yet, as Spinoza indicates in the scholium to E.IV.Prop.35, the same men who struggle to coexist peacefully “nevertheless... find solitary life scarcely endurable, so that for most people the definition ‘man is a social animal’ meets with strong approval.” It only a closeted misanthrope like Rousseau who can call Moliere’s Alceste “*un homme droit, sincère, estimable, un véritable homme de bien*”<sup>57</sup> wrongly and inexcusably raised up for ridicule; only such a man can, in Spinoza’s words, “heap praise on the life of rude rusticity”<sup>58</sup> and view social life in itself with suspicion. Thus is man in his passive state stuck in the rather difficult bind familiar to most of us. On the one hand — if I may permit myself continuity in quoting French authors at random — “*L’enfer, c’est les autres*,” hell is other people.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, we can’t do without them, for “the social organization of man shows a balance of much more profit than loss” and men “discover from experience that they can much more easily meet their needs by mutual help

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<sup>55</sup> E.IV.Prop.32-34.

<sup>56</sup> When, for example, they love, when they hate, when they experience anger and seek revenge. For love, as Spinoza explains in book three of the *Ethics* “is pleasure accompanied by the idea of an *external cause* (E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.6).” Indeed, we know that “pleasure is not in itself bad, but good (E.IV.Prop.41)” so far as it consists in the enhances that power of activity of body and mind alike (E.III.Prop.11). *To this extent*, love is likewise a good thing. Still, love of this sort — that is, a love distinguished from the “intellectual love of God” that occupies Spinoza throughout the fifth book of the *Ethics* — involves, nonetheless, the idea of an external cause so that the lover him or herself is but its partial cause; the lover exists, therefore, in a state of passivity and, to that extent, in bondage. He who lives under the guidance of reason, in contrast, seeks freedom from bondage by liberating himself from passivity so far as this lies within his power; he who lives under the guidance of reason does not love in the conventional sense.

The same follows for hate — pain associated with an external cause (E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.7) — and to an even greater degree. For hatred, in contrast to love — which involves, at least, pleasure and, therefore, a relative enhancement of power — “can never be good (E.IV.Prop.45).” To the extent, likewise, that affections like anger and the desire for revenge derive from the feeling of hate (E.III.Prop.39.Schol.), these, likewise, are never good, never serve to enhance, but always to diminish the constitutive power of the individual (E.IV.Prop.45.Cor.1).

<sup>57</sup> Rousseau, J.J. 1896. *Lettre A M. D’Alembert Sur Les Spectacles Publiee avec une Introduction, un Sommaire des Appendices et des Notes Historiques et Grammaticales*. Brunel, L. ed. Paris: Hachette. p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Schol.

<sup>59</sup> Sartre. J.P. 1989. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. Gilbert, F.S. trans. New York: Vintage. p. 45.

and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces.”<sup>60</sup>

For men living not under the guidance of reason, then, there appears a seemingly impossible incongruity between competing personal interests on the one hand and the necessity of mutual aid on the other. According to Spinoza, *the way out of this dilemma is the state*. So as better to observe what is here intended, let us consider his proposal at length:

“In order that men may live in harmony and help one another, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and to *create a feeling of mutual confidence* that they will refrain from any action that may be harmful to another. The way to bring this about... is obvious from E.IV.Prop.7. There it was demonstrated that no emotion can be checked except by a stronger emotion contrary to the emotion which is to be checked, and that every man refrains from inflicting injury through fear of greater injury. *On these terms, then, society can be established, provided that it claims for itself the right that every man has of avenging himself and deciding what is good and what is evil; and furthermore if it has the power to prescribe common rules of behavior and to pass laws to enforce them, not by reason, which is incapable of checking the emotions... but by threats. Now, such a society, strengthened by law and by the capacity to preserve itself, is called a State [civitas].*”<sup>61</sup>

Judging from this passage, let us develop a general image of the state. Faced with the prospect of mutual harm, man is the sort of creature that is *willing* — *willing*, that is, for “the fact that men give up, or are compelled to give up, their natural right and bind themselves to live under fixed rules, depends”<sup>62</sup> not solely on the “universal laws of Nature” but on the expression of such

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<sup>60</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.

<sup>61</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.2.

<sup>62</sup> TTP.4.Intro.

laws in man “insofar as he is part of Nature;”<sup>63</sup> that is, “on human will”<sup>64</sup> — to cede his natural right to judge individually as to good and evil and act accordingly for the sake of a feeling of “mutual confidence.” Mutual *confidence*, therefore, constitutes one of the affective foundations of state. However, this confidence is itself grounded in other affective phenomena. If, by way of analogy, we may speak of confidence as a sort of affective territory, it is a ‘landlocked province’ bordered on all sides by fear and allied to hopes more distant.

Our confidence is bordered, on the one side, by the threat posed by other people and, to that extent, by fear of our fellow man. This feeling of fear induces us to cede our natural right to ‘society’ as a whole which, thenceforth, claims exclusively for itself four rights. First, the right to decide as to what counts for good and what for evil. Second, the right to “prescribe common rules of behavior” accordingly. Third, the right to enforce these rules with threats. Lastly, the right to substantiate these threats by exacting vengeance for failure to uphold the rules such as they are. Thus is the fear we bear vis-a-vis other men in their natural state unguided by the dictates of reason transferred, along with our natural right, to society as a whole; society, as I expressed it earlier according to Weber’s locution, is granted a monopoly on violence and, to that extent, a monopoly on fear. We see, therefore, that mutual confidence is bordered on all sides by mutual fear; fear of one another on the one hand, and fear of the corporate threat that all together pose against each.

Fear of the corporate threat that the state, in its collective monopoly on legitimate violence, represents with respect to the individual citizen is ultimately the most fundamental element of its affective foundation. Thus, in his *Political Treatise*, does Spinoza suggest that “the contract or laws whereby a people transfers its right... depends for its enforcement not on

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<sup>63</sup> TTP.4.1.

<sup>64</sup> TTP.4.Intro.

civil right but,” ultimately, “on right of war.”<sup>65</sup> This means, on the one hand — and I shall later have cause to return to, and to question this assertion — that it is “by violence alone,” and by no civil right, that the citizen resists the direct or the structural violence of his or her government.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, and for our current purposes, more importantly, it is the threat of violence and the concomitant manufacture of fear, that constitutes the very basis of the state. In this regard does Spinoza comment, also in the *Political Treatise*, that

“There are certain conditions that, if operative, entail that subjects will respect and fear their commonwealth, while the absence of these conditions entails the annulment of that fear and respect<sup>67</sup> *and together with this, the destruction of the commonwealth*. Thus, in order that a commonwealth should be in control of its own right, it must preserve the causes that foster fear and respect; otherwise *it ceases to be a commonwealth*.”<sup>68</sup>

Fear comes first and it is only on this foundation that any other political affect becomes significant.

Nonetheless, there are other elements to consider. Though Spinoza does not mention it here, he elsewhere notes that:

“Rule that depends on violence has never long continued; moderate rule endures...From this it follows, first, that... if sovereignty is invested in a few men or in one alone, he should be endowed with some extraordinary quality, or must at least make every effort to convince the masses of this. Secondly, in every state laws should be so devised that men may be influenced not so much by fear as by hope of some good that they urgently

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<sup>65</sup> TP.4.6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.7.30.

<sup>67</sup> The phrase Spinoza deploys here is “*metus et reverentiae*.” Here, the word “*reverentiae*” is translated as “respect.” In the seventeenth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, which I shall consider below, the same term — “*reverentia*” — and is translated as “reverence.” It is evident, therefore, that by “reverence” and “respect” we must intend the same thing.

<sup>68</sup> TP.4.4.

desire; for in this way each will be eager to do his duty.<sup>69</sup>

Enduring rule, Spinoza believes, cannot be established on the threat of violence alone; lasting dominion depends upon more than fear. Rather, it involves two other affective phenomena as well, the one common to all states, however egalitarian, the other serving to stabilize less egalitarian states in particular.

In the first case, Spinoza indicates “hope of some good” that is urgently desired, some “reward,” be it individual or collective.<sup>70</sup> Hope is the counterweight, in all forms of state, to that fear which the state evokes with its monopoly on legitimate violence and thereby constitutes itself. In the sense that hope — an “inconstant pleasure arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt”<sup>71</sup> — involves pleasure associated with an external cause, albeit a cause in doubt and, furthermore, one which obtains not in the present, it implies that the subject of hope is bound by love to the object thereof. For “insofar as we hope or fear something, to that extent we love or hate it.”<sup>72</sup> To the extent that hope is, in the context at hand, linked to things of the state directly or otherwise, it follows, therefore, that hope binds with love the citizen to the state.

Still, as Spinoza goes on to indicate, there are two sides to hope. On the one hand, it is indeed an emotion bearing — as I have said — on things which give pleasure, things which we love. On the other hand, however:

“There is no hope without fear and no fear without hope. For he who is in hopeful

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<sup>69</sup> TTP.5.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Spinoza devotes considerable space in the *Theological Political Treatise* to the contention that the rewards promised by God for fulfillment of the commandments are not otherworldly but, on the contrary, “the observance of ceremonies has regard only to the temporal prosperity of the state and in no way contributes to blessedness (TTP.5).” Here, the hoped for prosperity is both collective and individual; it is, moreover, tied intimately to the perseverance of the state as a functioning institution.

<sup>71</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.12.

<sup>72</sup> E.III.Prop.50.Schol.

suspense and has doubts as to the outcome of a thing is assumed to be imagining something that excludes the existence of the hoped-for thing, and so to that extent he feels pain... Consequently, as long as he is in hopeful suspense, he fears as to the outcome.<sup>73</sup>

In this sense, even those hopes which the state cultivates so as to counterbalance the fear which constitutes its affective foundation are themselves inseparable from the selfsame fears. Hope, to that extent, is as much grounded in the sensation of pain and the concomitant feeling of hate as it is in the sensation of pleasure and the feeling of love. Nonetheless, so far as the “inconstant pleasure” of hope is to be differentiated from the fear we experience vis-a-vis the threat of corporate violence that the constitution of state entails, we must add it to our list of the affective foundations of state.

In the second case and, moreover, in the particular case of rule by the few over the many, there arises the necessity of impressing upon the latter an appreciation for the extraordinary qualities of the former. The masses ought, that is, to be distracted<sup>74</sup> with wonder at their rulers if, by wonder, we understand “the thought of anything on which the mind stays fixed because this particular thought has no connection with any others.”<sup>75</sup> Insofar, however, as wonder “arises from no positive cause that distracts it from other things, but only from the lack of a cause for determining the mind, from the contemplation of one thing, to think of other things” is “the thought of an unusual thing, considered in itself... of the same nature as other thoughts.” Therefore, contends Spinoza, it is not to be counted among the emotions.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.12.Exp.

<sup>74</sup> In E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.4.Exp. Spinoza describes wonder as a “distraction of the mind.”

<sup>75</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.4.

<sup>76</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.4.Exp. In this respect, it can be noted parenthetically, Spinoza distinguishes himself from Descartes. In the second part of his *Passions of the Soul*, entitled “The Order and Enumeration of the

Yet, to that extent does wonder, in itself, lack the capacity to satisfy the political role it is destined to fill in the authoritarian state. Namely, the displacement of affections, of desires, conducing not to the cause of human domestication. For, as I noted earlier, no emotion can “be checked or destroyed except by a contrary emotion which is stronger than the emotion which is to be checked.”<sup>77</sup> Wonder, therefore, must undergo an affective transformation.

Wonder can, in the first place, be differentiated according to its object. Setting aside the astonishment often felt upon contemplation of unique natural phenomena, for example, and attending only to the experience so far as it pertains to things human, we may differentiate wonder according to its moral object. Wonder is felt upon contemplating men and women whose conduct far surpasses our own either in respect of its relative goodness or in respect of its relative badness. In the first case, we experience *veneration*, in the second case, we experience

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Passions,” Descartes writes that “when our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us, *I regard wonder as the first of all the passions* (Descartes, R. 1985. “Passions of the Soul.” In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R. & Murdoch, D. trans. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. Part II.53, p. 350).” He also writes, in letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, that:

“It is true that wonder has its origin in the brain, and cannot be caused solely by the condition of the blood, as joy and sadness can. Yet by means of the impression it makes in the brain, it can act on the body just like any other passion, and in a way more effectively because the surprise which it involves causes the promptest of all movements. We can move our hands or our feet more or less at the same instant as the thought of moving them occurs, because the idea of this movement formed in the brain sends the spirits into the muscles appropriate for this result. In the same way the idea of a pleasant thing, if it takes the mind by surprise, immediately sends the spirits into the nerves that open the orifices of the heart. By the surprise it involves, wonder simply increases the force of the movement which gives rise to joy. The effect of this is that, the orifices of the heart being suddenly dilated, the blood flows into the heart from the vena cava and out again via the arterial vein, thus causing the lungs suddenly to inflate (Descartes, R. 1991. “To Princess Elizabeth, May 1646.” In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R. Murdoch, D. & Kenny, A. trans. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. p. 286-87; cf. Descartes, R. 1985. “Passions of the Soul.” Part II.70-72, 75-78).”

Thus, we see that, for Descartes, wonder is most definitely a passion. Incidentally, this difference also accounts for the difference between the account of laughter given by Descartes and Spinoza. Both agree that laughter is a sort of affect. Descartes, however, determines it in relation to wonder or surprise (Descartes, R. 1985. “Passions of the Soul.” II.124-27, pp. 371-72), which he regards as affections involving both the mind and the body. Spinoza, in contrast, considers laughter to be strictly an affect of the body (E.III.Prop.59.Schol) and determines it in relation to satiation or intoxication — which, I would contend, can be represented as a modality of satisfaction anyway (KV.II.11; KV.II.19 n.18; E.IV.Prop.45.Schol.).

<sup>77</sup> E.IV.Prop.7.

*horror*. When this exceptional goodness or exceptional badness exists not in the abstract, but involves us personally in some fashion or another by affording us pleasure or causing us pain such that we love or fear it accordingly, a transition takes place. No longer is wonder but an idea set apart from other ideas, but, becomes a legitimate affect; *devotion* in the first case, and *consternation*<sup>78</sup> — or, perhaps better put, reverence<sup>79</sup> — in the second.

In here introducing the sense of wonder, Spinoza evidently aim to construct an affective relation between ruler and ruled not based on fear alone, it is to be assumed, therefore, that he has veneration and devotion in mind, not horror and consternation or reverence. However, it is also evident from his discussion of the foundation of the Hebrew state by Moses that cultivating reverence is likewise an essential component of governing people who cannot govern themselves or who are otherwise denied the right to self-governance. Thus, for example does Spinoza dismiss the notion that the revelation at Sinai — which he undoubtedly regarded as the foundation of said state<sup>80</sup> — conveyed any “philosophical or mathematical certainty of God's existence” and insists, instead, that:

“The voice which the Israelites heard... sufficed to strike them with awe of God... and to induce them to obedience... with the blare of trumpets, with thunder and with lightnings.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> E.III.Prop.52.Schol.

<sup>79</sup> “Reverence,” says Spinoza in chapter seventeen of the *Theological Political Treatise*, is “an emotion compounded of fear and awe.” I have discovered no evidence to suggest that “awe” and “wonder” are distinct ideas and, therefore, consider them to function as synonyms of one another. If I am correct in this assumption, then there is no difference between consternation and reverence, for Spinoza likewise defines consternation as the conjunction of fear and wonder (ibid.).

<sup>80</sup> Consider the following. “Without much hesitation they all [the Israelites at Sinai] promised, equally and with one voice, to obey God absolutely in all his commands and to acknowledge no other law but that which he should proclaim as such by prophetic revelation” whereby “it was God alone, then, who held sovereignty over the Hebrews, and so this state alone, by virtue of the covenant, was rightly called the kingdom of God, and God was also called the king of the Hebrews (TTP.17).” We see, then, that the events of Sinai constituted the foundation of the Hebrew state and the appointment of its sovereign.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



In brief then, wonder in the form of veneration and devotion, horror and reverence, constitutes another essential component of the affective foundation of state. At the least of the sort of state in which the few rule the many who must obediently submit to the tutelage of their betters and, if we may judge from the passage quoted earlier from the *Political Treatise*, which counted fear and respect — that is, reverence — among the affective foundations of the state in general, of any state at all.

To complete this summary of political affects, it would not be without value to mention, too, the others which though they are not — I believe — of the affective *foundation* of state, not constitutive of it, nonetheless serve an important role. The first is humility; namely, “pain arising from a man's contemplation of his own impotence, or weakness,”<sup>82</sup> the idea of which occurs to him upon “understanding something more powerful than himself, by the knowledge of which he measures his own power of activity.”<sup>83</sup> Though Spinoza holds this to be a rather rare vice<sup>84</sup> so far as “the mind endeavors to think only of the things that *affirm* its power of activity,”<sup>85</sup> it seems to me that it necessarily accompanies any reflection on the disparity of power obtaining between the individual and the state; with fear, with wonder and reverence, and even with devotion necessarily comes the humiliating recognition of our own smallness and insignificance. Humility, therefore, accompanies these elements of the affective foundations of state as their inevitable result.

The second and third — to wit, shame and repentance — go hand in hand. Unlike humility which follows from and accompanies the affective foundations of state, these affections reinforce what is already founded. Once the covenant whereby a political community establishes

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<sup>82</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.26.

<sup>83</sup> E.IV.Prop.53.Dem.

<sup>84</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.29.Exp.

<sup>85</sup> E.III.Prop.54.

itself is contracted, once institutions of authority are organized, and, finally, once standard behavioral expectations are fixed, shame and repentance come into play. Shame being the sensation of pain “pain accompanied by the idea of some action of ours that we think that others censure.”<sup>86</sup> And, repentance being “pain accompanied by the idea of some deed” — presumably one we ourselves censure — which we associate with an internal cause, namely ourselves (E.III.Prop.31.Schol.). As Spinoza indicates in E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.27.Exp, however, the content of our feelings of repentance, what causes us pain when we associate our causal powers with it, is precisely the ideas we have internalized concerning that which *other censure*. “It is not surprising,” he notes:

“That all our actions that are customarily called wrong are followed by pain, and those which are said to be right, by pleasure. For we readily understand from what has been said that our upbringing is chiefly responsible for this. By disapproving of wrong actions and frequently rebuking their children when they commit them, and contrariwise by approving and praising right actions, parents have caused the former to be associated with painful feelings and the latter with pleasurable feelings.”

That with respect to which we feel repentant is nothing other than that with respect to which we have once felt shame; penitence is the interiorization of shamefulness. Repentance, therefore, like shame — and perhaps even more so — reinforces the moral and legal institutions of state, accompanying and strengthening, but not constituting, its affective ground.

To sum up we have hit upon the sort of human grouping which grounds itself on mutual fear and the consequent production of mutual confidence. We have contemplated the sort of community which depends upon the feeling of hope and wonder, of horror and veneration, of

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<sup>86</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.31.

reverence and devotion. We have considered the social condition that is reinforced by feelings of humility and penitence. Without exception, these are passive affections, involving, therefore, a passive state of mind. To the extent that we are passive insofar as we have inadequate ideas<sup>87</sup> and, conversely, have inadequate ideas insofar as we are passive,<sup>88</sup> the state of mind thus described is decidedly one in which inadequate ideas predominate. To live thusly is not to live under the guidance of reason — as Spinoza remarks, “one should not look for the causes and natural foundations of the state in the teachings of reason.”<sup>89</sup> Yet, it is precisely the affective foundation of that which “*is called a State [civitas]*”<sup>90</sup> that we have elaborated.

Under this foundation, the distinction between slave and citizen becomes rather fuzzy. How so? In his *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza anticipates the following objection to his ostensive advocacy for a transfer of natural right on the part of the populace to a sovereign such that the former are constituted as citizens of a state: are we not then “turning subjects into slaves, the slave being one who acts under orders and the free man one who does as he pleases?” Spinoza replies as follows:

“This is not *completely* true [*italics mine*], for the real slave is one who lives under pleasure's sway and can neither see nor do what is for his own good, and only he is free who lives wholeheartedly under the sole guidance of reason? Action under orders — that is, obedience — is indeed to some extent an infringement of freedom, but it does not automatically make a man a slave; the reason for the action must enter into account. If the purpose of the action is not to the advantage of the doer but of him who commands, then the doer is a slave, and does not serve his own interest. But in a sovereign state

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<sup>87</sup> E.III.Prop.1.

<sup>88</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

<sup>89</sup> TP.I.7.

<sup>90</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.2.

where the welfare of the whole people, not the ruler, is the supreme law, he who obeys the sovereign power in all things should be called a subject, not a slave who does not serve his own interest. And so that commonwealth whose laws are based on sound reason is the most free, for there everybody can be free as he wills: that is, he can live wholeheartedly under the guidance of reason. Similarly, although children are in duty bound to obey all the commands of their parents, they are not slaves; for the parents' commands have as their chief aim the good of the children. We therefore recognise a great difference between a slave, a son, and a subject, who accordingly may be defined as follows. A slave is one who has to obey his master's commands which look only to the interests of him who commands; a son is one who by his father's command does what is to his own good; a subject is one who, by command of the sovereign power, acts for the common good, and therefore for his own good also."<sup>91</sup>

Evidently, the free man is only he who acts under the guidance of reason, while he who acts, to one degree or another, otherwise is free only relatively and only to the extent that he does.

However, as we are already beginning to see, and as I shall later elaborate, the State is neither founded on reason nor are its laws based essentially on sound reason. Rather do they serve, for the most part, to regulate passive people determined only by their passions and not to elevate them beyond these passions, beyond passivity, into reason and activity. For the present, however, I would like to pass over these matters and respond only to the distinction Spinoza draws between the slave and the subject or the citizen.

In the first place, we see that Spinoza already qualifies his claim. He does *not* say that the proposed equivalence of subject and slave is *not at all* true, but that it is *not completely* true.

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<sup>91</sup> TTP.16.

This is to say, I would suggest, that even granting what he has to say here without further critique, we must acknowledge that Spinoza *does* recognize some degree of equivalence between subject and slave. More precisely, if this distinction can be granted at all, it hinges on whether or not, or to which degree, the one who issues instructions and demands obedience acts in his or her own interests or in the interests of the one being commanded. To what extent can the distinction between the command issued on behalf of the commanded and that issued in the interests of the one commanding really be applied to the State?

Spinoza elaborates this distinction by pointing to the difference between children and human chattel. A parent commands children, but only (presumably) in the best interest of the latter. In contrast, a Master commands the people he owns in the service of his own needs and desires only. Ignoring the fact that paternalistic ideas have indeed been transferred to the master-slave relation — ideas which Spinoza does not address at all — I think it is worth challenging the analogy he wishes to draw between the child and the subject. As children are to parents, so too subjects to rulers; this is what Spinoza wishes to suggest. Just as the former are not slaves, so too the latter. There is, however, an extremely important distinction to be made between the relation of parent to child — the relation of adult to minor — and the relation of sovereign to subject. It is that — with the possible exception of mentally challenged men and women who, it is often argued (with a greater or lesser degree of justice) remain in a permanent state of minority — the first relation has a determinate limit. Children eventually (and inevitably) achieves majority and assumes a social role independent of and for all intents and purposes equal to that of the adults that raise them. The same is not true in the case of the subject who, as it were, are compelled to remain in a permanent state of minority. The state endures only to the extent that the autonomy of the citizen is suppressed.

Thus, as Spinoza indicates on a number of occasions, is it the case that the state acts in its own interests as a corporate entity independent of the needs and interests of its constituency. In chapter six of the Political Treatise, for example, Spinoza maintains, first, that “men by nature strive for a civil order and it is impossible that men should ever utterly destroy this order.” In consequence, he goes on to explain, “the quarrels and rebellions that are often stirred up in a commonwealth will never lead to the dissolution of the commonwealth by its citizens... but to a change in its form — that is, if their disputes cannot be settled while still preserving the structure of the commonwealth.” He then concludes as follows — and this is the point — “therefore, by the means required to preserve a state I understand those that are necessary to preserve *the form of the state* without any notable change.”<sup>92</sup> Here, we see that the state, the corporate power of the people, has, as it were, its own conatus and strives to preserve its own particular form whether or not the populace approves, whether or not this form best serves the interests of the populace.

It is further to be pointed out that the transfer of right and, to that extent, the monopoly of violence that constitutes the State and maintains the multitude in a perpetual condition of political minority entails also the professionalization of power. Political power is no longer something shared and *exercised collectively* by the multitude, but something represented and exercised *over* the multitude.

This is evidently the case with respect to the monarchical and aristocratic forms of statecraft; it is, however, no less true of democratic *statecraft* — and here I draw a firm distinction between democratic practice and democratic statecraft; they are not the same thing. In a democratic *State*, citizens are appointed to govern, to “undertake offices of state,” and to

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<sup>92</sup> TP.1-2; cf. TTP.18.

vote in the supreme council” not by the latter, but by the law. The law, however, is itself formulated by the supreme council and the officers of state. As such, a loop of self-justification is generated that cannot but exclude the majority from participation in the so-called “absolute state” and thus creating its own “island of governance,” so to speak.

It is in consequence of this tendency of democratic statecraft that Spinoza can entertain the thoughts with which he closes the Political Treatise (however abruptly):

“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... Now, if women were naturally the equal of men and were equally endowed with strength of mind and ability-qualities wherein human power and consequently human right consists-then surely so many and such a wide variety of nations would have yielded some instances where both sexes ruled on equal terms and other instances where men were ruled by women, being so brought up as to be inferior in ability. But as such instances are nowhere to be found, one is fully entitled to assert that women do not naturally possess equal right with men and that they necessarily give way to men. Thus it is not possible for both sexes to have equal rule, and far less so that men should be ruled by women.”<sup>93</sup>

The fact that, by law, women have been kept from rule constitutes proof that they are not fit for rule, which emerges as a gendered monopoly. Though the content of our exclusions may change over time, the fact of it does not. Thus does the State under its passive foundation constitute a mechanism for the production of political minority, excluding the majority from practices of self-governance and rendering them unfit for it. I shall consider this further in the following chapter,

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<sup>93</sup> TP.11.

but this suffices for the present.

#### **IV. Three Interpretive Strategies in Response to the Fracture**

In this way, we are finally in a position to observe the fracture that has opened in the so-called foundation of state. On the one hand, Spinoza holds that the foundation of the state consists in religion, in piety, and in honor — that is, in active affections, active states of mind. He seems to believe that the state is a rational construct productive of reasonable people who organize their lives — private and public — accordingly. On the other hand, Spinoza holds that the foundation of state consists all the passive feelings I have just enumerated, in passive states of mind. From this perspective, he seems to believe that the state is an irrational construct designed to reign in irrational people incapable of reasonably organizing their own lives, private or public, and needful of political and moral tutelage.

Which is it? Are the natural causes and foundations of the state to be found in reason or not? Is the state grounded in active emotions and active feelings, or passive emotions and passive feelings? It can be both no more than there can obtain such a thing as passive activity or active passivity. This is an oxymoron, for the two notions are essentially incongruent. As such, we observe a fracture in the foundation of state between the account of it given in E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.1 and that given of it in E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.2. This result leaves us with a few interpretive options.

In the first place, we may take seriously both accounts such as they are and suppose that Spinoza has allowed a degree of incoherence to creep into his exposition. That is, we may assume that, indeed, there are two accounts, that both refer to one and the same foundation, that they are inconsistent with one another, and, finally, that Spinoza simply failed to spot the



inconsistency. This interpretation is implausible in the extreme. Beyond the fact that Spinoza labored in the writing of the *Ethics* for many years and was meticulous with his wording, there are three additional reasons that ought to militate against this position. The first two I will address here; the third I will explain in the following paragraph as it pertains to other interpretive options as well. First of all, it is rather uncharitable. Why assume that Spinoza has overlooked something when we are not necessarily compelled to do so? Second of all, it is less fruitful than the alternatives. If we adopt this reading then we have simply reached an impasse beyond which there is nothing more to say; the matter is to be dropped and other topics to be considered. If, in contrast, the inconsistency is not dismissed, there is much left to be said, for we are forced to make some meaningful account of the incongruity.

In the second place, we may simply reduce one account to the other and deny that a rift has opened at all. In doing so, we would first have to decide as to the direction of this reduction. Here, an obvious interpretive temptation presents itself. It is that Spinoza evidently takes up the line of reasoning represented in E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.2 in his overtly political works, the *Theological Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*. Though we have already considered material from these texts bearing on the matter at hand, it is, here, worth rehashing the same so as to make explicit the parallel.

In the scholium under consideration, we have found Spinoza to argue as follows. To the extent that men do not live “by the guidance of reason” but are subject to overwhelming, inconstant, and variable passions, is it “necessary for them to give up their natural right” and “to create a feeling of mutual confidence that they will refrain from any action that may be harmful to another.” As indicated above, it is possible to generate this trust, this confidence, when the right to exact vengeance is ceded to the state, when the state becomes the only legitimate arbiter

of violence. In this way are all lesser passions subsumed in and displaced by fear of the punitive force of the state and men “live in harmony and help one another” by default.

The same fundamental line of reasoning reappears in the *Theological Political Treatise*. In chapter sixteen of this text, Spinoza rehashes his belief that the “natural right of every man is determined not by [his] sound reason, but by his desire and his power” whereby “Nature's right and her established order... forbids only those things that no one desires and no one can do.” In this way, he goes on to say, nature “does not frown on strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit, or on anything at all urged by appetite.” Yet, continues Spinoza, everyone desires, nonetheless, “to live in safety free from fear,” which is impossible, so he contends, when “every individual is permitted to do just as he pleases.”

Faced with this difficulty, Spinoza holds, men agree that “the unrestricted right naturally possessed by each individual should be put into common ownership, and that this right should no longer be determined by the strength and appetite of the individual, but by the power and will of all together.” This “power and will of all together,” the corporate power and will of the state, is that which is to “compel all by force and coerce them by threat of the supreme penalty, universally feared by all” to abide by said covenant even in cases where, by natural right, it would be null and void so far as no agreement — again, by natural right — is valid beyond its utility and circumstances arise where, vis-a-vis the individual citizen, the political contract, relative to the degree of harm or benefit presenting itself, is inutile. In this way do men trade in the fear they harbor of one another for a common terror that threatens all equally; in this common, harmonizing, and coercive fear does the state materialize for the man who exercises his natural right not by sound reason, but via his passions — for the passive man.

Though it has been suggested that the *Political Treatise* represents Spinoza's attempt to

account for the foundation of state and political authority without appeal to any formative contract<sup>94</sup> it seems to me that Spinoza thinking in this respect is largely consistent in the transition to this text from the *Theological Political Treatise*. Indeed, he does not actually deploy terms related to the notion of the covenant or the contract. Still, he speaks throughout the text of right in its *transfer*. This is precisely what a contract effects generally — the transfer of our rights over something to another — and the political contract in particular, which is nothing other than the transfer of right as such. Thus, evoking the account of human nature developed several times already in the preceding, does Spinoza express himself as follows in the text at hand:

“If human nature were so constituted that men lived only as reason prescribes and attempted nothing other than that, then the right of Nature, insofar as that is considered as specific to man, would be determined solely by the power of reason.’ But men are led by blind desire more than by reason, and therefore their natural power or right must be defined not by reason but by any appetite by which they may be determined to act and by which they try to preserve themselves.”<sup>95</sup>

Though blind passion is, so we have indicated above and Spinoza reaffirms here, indeed involves

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<sup>94</sup> Ted Stolze, for example, says the following in interpreting the *Political Treatise*:

“If each individual were rationally to calculate that he should use others’ natural sociability for his own interest in order to defend himself against their natural unsociability, a state would eventually emerge without mediation of a social contract... such a cycle of interpersonal passions does indeed offer a possible non-contractarian explanation of how political authority arises (Stolze, T. 2000. *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*. Retrieved 11/26/2015 from [academia.edu/2578459/\\_Indignation\\_Spinoza\\_on\\_the\\_Desire\\_to\\_Revolt](http://academia.edu/2578459/_Indignation_Spinoza_on_the_Desire_to_Revolt)).”

He supports this contention using sources drawn primarily from the work of Alexandre Matheron including Matheron, A. 1990. “*Le problème de l’Evolution de Spinoza du Traité Theologico-Politique au Traité Politique*,” in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*. Curley, E. & Moreau, P.F. eds. NY: Brill, 1990. pp. 258-70; Matheron, A. 1992. “Passions et institutions selon Spinoza,” in *La raison d’Etat: politique et rationalité*. Lazzeri, C. & Reynié, D. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. pp. 141-70; Matheron, A. 1994. “*L’indignation et le conatus de l’Etat Spinoziste*,” in *Spinoza: puissance et ontology*. Revault d’Allonnes, M. & Rizk, H. Paris: Kimé, 1994. pp. 153-65. A number of other sources could be cited; however, as it is largely a tangential point here, I will not consider them further.

<sup>95</sup> TP.2.5.

a passive state in contrast to reason which is eminently active, nonetheless, both, he contends here “are the effects of Nature, explicating the natural force whereby man strives to persist in his own being.”<sup>96</sup> As such, there is no endeavor undertaken not by the sovereign right of Nature which, as I have noted earlier, “forbids only those things that no one desires and no one can do,” frowning not “on strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit, or on anything at all urged by appetite.”<sup>97</sup> To the extent, moreover, that men are especially cunning animals, they are “by nature enemies. For he is my greatest enemy whom I must most fear and against whom I must most guard myself.”<sup>98</sup> In consequence, the guarantee of civic harmony which, contends Spinoza, is a necessary precondition for the “factual” and non-”notional” exercise of freedom, depends upon the transfer of natural right. “The natural right specific to human beings,” he says, “can scarcely be conceived except where men have their rights in common” and all are guided “by one mind.”<sup>99</sup>

While it might be contended that to hold rights in common and to be guided “as it were” by a single mind involves — at the surface at least — something other than a transfer of right to the state on the part of the individual, I think that this is rather implausible. In the same text Spinoza expresses himself as follows:

“If a commonwealth grants to anyone the right, and consequently the power’ (for otherwise... such a grant is of no practical effect), to live just as he pleases, thereby the commonwealth surrenders its own right and transfers it to him to whom it gives such power.”<sup>100</sup>

Here the right of the commonwealth is positioned parallel to the prospect of an absolute right that

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> TP.2.8.

<sup>98</sup> TP.2.14.

<sup>99</sup> TP.2.15.

<sup>100</sup> TP.3.3.

the individual might hold “to live just as he pleases” without restriction. Thus, the commonality of right which the commonwealth is said to hold is necessarily absolute; for it cannot grant what it does not have. If it is absolute, in which way did it become so if not by transfer? It is for this reason that Spinoza speaks of (and rejects) a *transfer* of right back to the individual.<sup>101</sup> The production of a commonality of right, the conduction of life “as if by one mind” is the consequence of a transfer of right. This transfer is precisely that in which the political contract or covenant consists, even if these terms are not used. We see, therefore, that in the *Political Treatise* as in the *Theological Political Treatise* and in E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.2, Spinoza conceives of the foundations of state in terms of the coercive function of the latter. Because people are passionate, because people are passive, they cannot live in harmony and must, therefore, cede their natural rights and submit to the repressive forces of the state which shapes them into a single corporate body and fashions for it a single corporate mind using affective mechanisms appropriate to the sort of folk that they are — namely those involving the manipulation of passive emotions to produce affective effects outwardly similar to those which emerge from a life lived under the guidance of reason.

We see, therefore, why it would be so tempting to adopt the second of the aforementioned interpretive options. To reduce the disjunction between the first and second scholia appended to E.IV.Prop.37 to the second means that a consistent and coherent account of Spinoza’s views can be traced from the *Ethics* to his more explicitly political texts. The political covenant made among passionate and passive people fearful of one another to cede their natural right and thus give rise to a collective right feared collectively, a sovereign right which manufactures obedience by manipulating passive emotions to suppress the causes of disharmony

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<sup>101</sup> The idea of a transfer of right appears at least eleven times in the *Political Treatise*. See TP.3.3, 4.6, 6.4, 6.8, 7.2, 7.5, 7.14, 7.17, 7.23, 8.9, 8.17. To me, this seems to demonstrate rather clearly that the notion of a covenant consisting in the transfer of rights in the production of sovereignty is not foreign to the text.

rather than to *produce harmony* will appear as a doctrine on the margins of the *Ethics*, a work devoted to precisely that, and then creep to the core of the *Theological Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, to texts which it is more thematically central to. An integrated notion of Spinoza's philosophical project is preserved and the tension which I have attempted to emphasize is mollified.

While, indeed, this interpretive option ensures theoretical continuity between the *Ethics* and the political texts, it is not without its confounding difficulties. The chief of these is the pre-analytical supposition that the *Ethics* must be read in light of the political texts. While the former constitutes a constant point of reference, both explicit and implicit, for the latter, the same is not true in reverse. There is no reference to the political texts in the *Ethics* and there are evident reasons, when we consider the chronology of Spinoza's authorship, as to why this would be the case. As such, when we consider the *Ethics* in light of the political texts, we must acknowledge that this is an interpretive choice and not an interpretive imperative. The *Ethics* may, with perfect justice, be read independently and interpreted accordingly. With respect to the case at hand, *if we choose* to reduce the first scholium to the second by interpreting both in light of the political treatises, we do so not because there is necessarily a compelling reason to be found within the *Ethics* themselves but because we lend credence to a second pre-analytical assumption.

Our second pre-analytical assumption is that continuity and consistency necessarily trump all other considerations when contemplating the work of a serious thinker. But must we really take it for granted, when smooth transitions between texts we suppose to inhabit the same conceptual system are threatened by carefully reading the same and taking note of their precise contours, that the latter — precision — is to be sacrificed to the former — smoothness of

reading? Must we assume that there is a single line of reasoning and that all that a man has to say can be situated within it? Or, is it at least plausible to suppose a degree of complexity, of tension and even of ambivalence and to interpret accordingly?

I would argue that while reading for smoothness or consistency, simplicity and clarity, may command a certain appeal, it is hardly an imperative. Faced with a disjunction of the sort we are considering, what really compels us to assume that one element is necessarily to be subordinated and contextualized while the other is to be superordinated, to be positioned as the context for the other?

Very little, I would argue. I suggest, therefore, that Deleuze is to be taken very seriously when he proposes that the *Ethics* is a fractured text and, more specifically, that we glimpse, here, at one such fissure. Between the first and second scholia to E.IV.Prop.37 a faultline has opened. It is ungenerous and unfruitful to suppose that this is accidental. It is appealing but unnecessary to reduce one of its elements to the other — and also equally unfruitful. Let us — for the sake of argument at least — suppose neither that the disjunction is accidental nor aptly contextualized and, instead suppose that its two elements represent two independent trains of thought which ought to be assigned significance in their own right.

Thus do we arrive at the following conclusion: the foundation of state is fractured. Or, perhaps more concretely expressed, there obtains a dual foundation of state. On the one hand, we find a state founded essentially on passive emotions. In the natural state, prior to the manufacture of civil right, people fear one another because each does as he pleases and not necessarily under the guidance of reason. Therefore do they contract to cede their individual hold on natural right to the community at large, the collective power of which all fear equally. On the basis of this grounding fear and the confidence to which it gives rise is the conventional

state founded. It is then bolstered by a wide array of other passive conditions of mind like hope and wonder, horror and veneration, reverence and devotion, shame, humility, and penitence. On the other hand, we find a “state” founded on active conditions of mind like religion, piety, and honor. This is a “state” that can only be described as such when bracketed by shudder quotes. For, if we take heed, again, of Weber’s definition of state — namely, that institution which claims for itself the sole exercise of legitimate violence — this “state” is hardly that, for it does not rely on violence and fear at all. Such a “state” is really a community in the order of *anarchy*. We therefore arrive at the following conception of our fissure: it separates the order of state from the anarchic order. It separates from a notion of human community which relies on force to manufacture consensus, which conceives of community as of derivative of violence, the notion of human community which sees mutuality and cooperation as natural to the human condition and force as exception. The fractured or dual foundation of state, in this sense, boils down to the *tension* between an essentially authoritarian model of governance and a non-authoritarian or anti-authoritarian model of governance — a tension, moreover, which Spinoza does not seem eager to ameliorate. Rather, he allows the incongruity to stand. In my view, this suggests that — for Spinoza at least — each model has its place, that the disjunction cannot and should not be resolved by erasing or minimizing it after one fashion or another, but, instead, taken for what it is and examined more closely.



## **The Structural Contradiction of Political Passivity**

*“To men so habituated to it,  
obedience must have appeared no longer as bondage, but freedom.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> TTP.17.

## **I. Introduction: The Necessity of Distinguishing what is Said in Favor of Sociality in General from what is Said in Favor of the State Form.**

In the preceding chapter, we saw how there erupts a certain tension in Spinoza's conception of the affective foundation of the state, that this foundation is fractured and splits into two apparently incongruent elements. On the one hand, the "state" appears to rest on a foundation of active affects like piety, honor, and religion — as Spinoza determines these qualities. To that extent is it the work of rational people, does it represent man in a condition of strength and view harmonious cooperation as a natural element of human experience fostered not by coercion but, presumably, the process of education whereby we are liberated from our more passive, weak, and regressive tendencies. On the other hand, the state appears to rest on a foundation of passive affects like fear, confidence, and hope — to name the most prominent — which serve as a basis for coercing cooperative behavior. From this vantage, social harmony is viewed as the product of force. It is not, or not directly, the expression of liberty; it is what results from the transfer of liberty and the fabrication sovereignty. In the first sense, the "state" is anything but, it is more like a community — and I shall have more to say on this later. In the second sense, the State — and, for the sake of referential simplicity, I shall henceforth use the capitalized term, "State," to refer to this particular institution — resembles something like the political institution we know today.

In the present chapter, I should like to accomplish three things. In the first place, it is my aim more deeply to examine Spinoza's argument on behalf of the State. On what basis would statecraft emerge as a worthwhile and even necessary endeavor? Why ought man make the

State his social habitat? In the second place, I should like to examine the structural tendency of passive affect. If the State is founded on passive affects and it is intended to accommodate a specific set of needs or serve a specific range of functions vis-a-vis prospects for human happiness both collective and individual, the raw human materials of which its foundation consists ought to conduce to the process and the ends to which they will be put. That is to say, if the State is designed to bring about a particular human condition, a certain way of living together, and can do so only with the sort of people it takes for its basic element — passive men — these folk ought to be configured such that they can, indeed, arrive at the condition planned for them. Passive affects and passive men should conduce to the ends to which they are to be directed. Finally do I intend to confront the aims of the State with its human material so as to determine whether, or to what extent, the model Spinoza seems to have advocated seems, on the basis of the theoretical resources he supplies, to work out. It is my contention that, organized on the basis of passive affects, the fit is far less snug than Spinoza lets on.

At the outset, however, I deem it necessary to draw a fundamental distinction which, in itself, is neither unique nor particularly novel but which is often glossed over or otherwise neglected by interpreters of Spinoza's political philosophy. It is that there is a difference between society, generally construed, social life and its immanent political structure, and the State. The State is a form of social life but the two do not coincide in all respects; to enjoy social relations is not the same as to enjoy civil relations, but something quite apart.

Though it hardly seems controversial, let us strengthen the point by recalling E.V.Prop.10.Schol., where Spinoza speaks of "the good that follows from mutual friendship *and social relations*." Here, "social relations" function as an equivalent of shared friendship. That friendship broadly construed, and to that extent, "social relations," exists outside of and apart

from any formal structure of state is evident. Though — for reasons which need not be considered just now — Spinoza indeed recommends the State over the rustic hermitage even to the rational man, this by no means implies that friendship and well-ordered social relations sans the mediation of State are beyond him. On the contrary, he is motivated — as I indicated earlier — by a spirit of honor and nobility; he seeks friendship because it is an intrinsic good. He “hates nobody, is angry with nobody, envies nobody, is indignant with nobody, despises nobody.”<sup>1</sup> He freely gives of himself and what is his because reason dictates it and in response to no other cause; “between friends,” remarks Spinoza in his September, 1661 letter to Oldenberg, “*all things... should be shared.*”<sup>2</sup> While it is certainly the case that the free man enjoys friendship when he lives as a citizen of the state, it is also undoubtedly the case that the mediation of the state is not a necessary condition for his ability and inclination to do so. As such — if it was not already evident — we find that friendships, or social relations broadly construed, obtain independently of the State form.

This means that while conditions of sociality *may* coincide with those of civility — social life as mediated by the State — they are not constituted by the latter. The social condition and the civil condition are two different things. The one, civility, amounts to a subtype of the other, sociality in general. Civility is a *way of being-social* adapted, so he seems to hold, to the capacities of people presumed otherwise incapable of enjoying the benefits of sociality. Thus, contends Spinoza in the first chapter of the *Political Treatise*, “all men everywhere, whether barbarian or civilized enter into relationships with one another” though not all such relationships assume the form of the State.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.IV.Prop.73.Schol.

<sup>2</sup> Ep.2.

<sup>3</sup> TP.1.7.

From the assertion that civility constitutes a subtype of sociality but does not constitute the latter as such, two further claims can be derived. On the one hand, it follows that what is said regarding sociality in general applies, at least in degrees, to civility. We find, therefore, that when Spinoza avers that “the social organization of man shows a balance of much more profit than loss” and excoriates the “satirists,” “theologians,” and “misanthropes” who, respectively, deride, revile, and reject communal life, when he maintains that “men will still discover from experience that they can much more easily meet their needs by mutual help and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces,”<sup>4</sup> his comments supplement a discussion of which life under the guidance of reason is the subject.<sup>5</sup> That is, the sort of life enjoyed by people who do not require the mediation of state to organize themselves and provide collectively for their various needs. Nonetheless, it would be ridiculous to suggest that the state does not also constitute, at least in principle, a mechanism for mutual aid and defense. These are essential features of the State and Spinoza discusses them at length in the *Theological Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*; I think it unnecessary to digress in order to support this general and rather uncontroversial proposition. We see, then, that what is said concerning sociality in general obtains, transitively, of civility — it obtains insofar as and to the extent that the latter constitutes a modality of the former.

Yet, on the other hand, is it also naturally true that what is said concerning sociality in general obtains of civility *only* insofar and to the extent that the latter constitutes a modality of the former. These are not features of civility conceived in itself as a distinct mode of consociation; they do not enable us to grasp civility in its particularity. What constitutes the civil state in its distinction from sociality in general is, therefore, a thing apart. Therefore, if we wish

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<sup>4</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Schol.

<sup>5</sup> E.IV.Prop.35 & Cor.

to understand the nature of the State in particular along with its special characteristics, it is necessary to exclude consideration of features not proper to it alone. In the present section, therefore, wherein this is indeed what we wish to grasp, instances in which Spinoza commends collective life insofar as it conduces to things like mutual aid and defense, insofar as the joining of forces entails, for all involved, an enhancement of for all and thus for each, insofar as we are best served when ideally stimulated by creatures most like us, and so on — all of which are undoubtedly elements of sociality first and civility only to the extent that it is a form of sociality — will all be disregarded. Only those features of collective life will be considered that are unique to the State in itself that support its establishment or otherwise justify its legitimacy.

## **II. The Three Intersecting Bases of Rational Statecraft**

There are three such features of collective life unique to the State in itself and which thus support the establishment of this form of social organization or otherwise legitimate it. All three are, in one fashion or another linked to the affective foundation of the State as articulated in the preceding chapter and briefly summarized above. In essence, they emerge from the assertion that, under certain conditions there is a supportable link between three aspects of human experience collective and individual: reason, force, and harmony. So far as I understand it, these three aspects are, for Spinoza, related vis-a-vis the State, through the following propositions (here, I will list them and will, afterward, attempt to justify my position textually):

- 1. Reason and Harmony Go Hand in Hand:** Reason and harmony go hand in hand such that a bi-conditional relation obtains between them. This means, on the one hand, that if reason is present harmony is present. It means, on the other hand, that if harmony is present, reason is present.

**2. Reason Accords with the Negation of Liberty if the Alternative is Disharmony: If**

harmony can be obtained only at the expense of liberty or of some degree thereof and the alternative is conflict, it is rational to choose harmony over liberty. Thus does reason, in this case, accord with the negation of liberty.

**3. Coerced Harmony Serves a Pedagogical Function, Leading Passionate Men to**

**Reason:** Leading a rationally organized life, a harmonious life, even if only under coercive conditions serves, or often serves, a pedagogical function. It enables us to become rational people who behave in this fashion autonomously and not simply in reaction to heteronomous causes or forces. Sovereignty or, in certain circumstances, the sovereign, functions as a tutor to the multitude who, by obedience to the commands issued toward it, learn to become rational creatures who act in keeping with rational laws insofar as they are rational.

This sequence of propositions can be simplified and also synthesized as follows:

1. Reason  $\Leftrightarrow$  Harmony.
2.  $\therefore ((\sim\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \text{Harmony}) \wedge (\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \sim\text{Harmony})) \Rightarrow (\text{Reason} \Leftrightarrow \sim\text{Liberty})$
3. Irrational Men  $\Rightarrow ((\sim\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \text{Harmony}) \wedge (\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \sim\text{Harmony}))$
4. Irrational Men
5.  $\therefore ((\sim\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \text{Harmony}) \wedge (\text{Liberty} \Rightarrow \sim\text{Harmony}))$
6.  $\therefore \text{Reason} \Leftrightarrow \sim\text{Liberty}$
7.  $\therefore \text{Reason} \Leftrightarrow (\sim\text{Liberty} \wedge \text{Harmony})$
8. Reason  $\Leftrightarrow \sim(\text{Irrational Men})$
9.  $\therefore (\sim\text{Liberty} \wedge \text{Harmony}) \Leftrightarrow \sim(\text{Irrational Men})$

Let us now see how Spinoza himself progresses through the steps of this argument.

## A. Reason and Harmony Go Hand in Hand

This statement is best considered by comparing two parallel propositions made in part four of the Ethics and which also cross reference one another — or, to be more precise, that appearing second references that which first appeared.

1. Proposition thirty-five reads as follows: “Insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent only do they always necessarily agree in nature.”

I shall have reason to return to this proposition and its demonstration in a later chapter.

Therefore, I will not, here, further explicate it or consider its context. I will, however, point out the following. Spinoza holds that if reason obtains, so too harmony, thus implying the following conditional: Reason  $\Rightarrow$  Harmony.

2. Proposition forty reads as follows: “*Whatever* is conducive to man's social organization, or causes men to live in harmony, is advantageous, while those things that introduce discord into the state are bad.”

While in considering proposition thirty-five I opted temporarily to disregard its demonstration, an adequate grasp of the proposition now under consideration — so far as it fits into the broader point I wish to make — is absolutely crucial and cannot be ignored. To prove the claim he makes in proposition forty, Spinoza reasons thusly: “*Whatever* things cause men to live in harmony cause them also to live by the guidance of reason.” This, he explains, is derivable from E.IV.Prop.35 (just cited).

That which causes men to live by the guidance of reason is good or advantageous in that “the mind, insofar as it exercises reason, judges nothing else to be to its advantage except what



conduces to understanding”<sup>6</sup> and “We know nothing to be certainly good... except what is really conducive to understanding.”<sup>7</sup> Things that “cause men to live in harmony” and, to that extent, “by the guidance of reason” are good, that is, insofar as the good is determined solely in relation to the degree to which understanding and reason are enhanced. It is by the same reasoning, though in reverse, that what disrupts harmony and, to that extent understanding and reason, is deemed bad.

What is important here, I believe, is that the success of this demonstration depends on the relationship Spinoza supposes to obtain between harmony and reason. If what conduces to harmony, indeed, conduces to reason, then what conduces to harmony is necessarily advantageous so long as we grant the truth of the other propositions Spinoza deploys in this proof. If, however, what conduces to harmony does not necessarily conduce to reason, then what conduces to harmony is not necessarily advantageous.

In this demonstration, that, indeed, what conduces to harmony conduces to reason is established on the basis of E.IV.Prop.35. However, it does so by means of a rather peculiar reading of that proposition which is by no means self-evident and may involve a degree of distortion. As I noted above, E.IV.Prop.35 establishes that if reason obtains, so too harmony; its conclusion is a conditional statement. Namely, that Reason  $\Rightarrow$  Harmony. In the language of the proposition at hand, we would be inclined to express it as follows: what *conduces to* reason *conduces to* harmony. While the interpolation of, if I may so put it, “that which conduces” into the proposition already modifies it and raises its own difficulties,<sup>8</sup> it has, at least, an intuitive

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<sup>6</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.

<sup>7</sup> E.IV.Prop.27.

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of argument, let us suppose something like a comic-book scenario in which an intelligence-enhancing serum is developed. This serum is composed of materials, however, which are so rare as to be used up entirely in the production of the first batch of the serum. If the serum is administered it will undoubtedly lead to the emergence of one or more supremely rational beings who, let us suppose, will be uniquely positioned to advance the cause of

consistency. If when reason obtains harmony likewise obtains, it seems correct to aver that what makes it the case that reason indeed obtains will also make it the case that harmony obtains.

Therefore, we may — for the sake of argument at least — set aside objections stemming from this interpolation. What seems far more problematic and, to that extent, difficult to accept, is the understated but, for all that, undeniable, reversibility which Spinoza seems to read into his original proposition, E.IV.Prop.35. For, as he represents it in E.IV.Prop.40 it reads “*Whatever* things cause men to live in harmony cause them also to live by the guidance of reason” — what conduces to harmony conduces to reason. We find, then, that Spinoza seems to assert the identity of two evidently non-identical statements:

1. Reason  $\Rightarrow$  Harmony: what conduces to reason conduces to harmony.
  - a. This is E.IV.Prop.35 as it originally appears in the text.
2. Harmony  $\Rightarrow$  Reason: what conduces to harmony conduces to reason.
  - a. This is E.IV.Prop.35 as it is represented in the demonstration to E.IV.Prop.40.

It is therefore the case that, in E.IV.Prop.40, Spinoza wishes to represent E.IV.Prop.35 not simply as a conditional statement, but as one of the following (logically identical) bi-conditionals:

3. Harmony  $\Leftrightarrow$  Reason.
4. Reason  $\Leftrightarrow$  Harmony.

What Spinoza, therefore, appears to imply is that harmony obtains if and only if reason obtains and visa-versa — that reason obtains if and only if harmony obtains. It seems to me that there is

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harmony so far as their power extends. Yet, would not the inescapable inequity of serum-distribution itself produce disharmony, perhaps even (and likely) disharmony disproportionate to the harmony which those who ingest it might be capable of generating? Here, we have something which conduces to reason but not necessarily to harmony when we consider not simply the capacities and inclinations of the individual but the larger context in which this individual lives and acts. Nonetheless, as I indicate above, we can, in the interest of the broader point that I wish to make, set aside such objections and accept Spinoza’s implied contention for what it is.

ample room here for justified skepticism as to the validity of this inference which Spinoza draws from E.IV.Prop.35. In the first place, and probably of the utmost importance, is the simple fact that a conditional does not necessarily imply its converse. The statement “*if* one ingests ayhuasca *then* one hallucinates” is not necessarily true in the converse. That one hallucinates can be explained on the basis of a number of other possible causes; perhaps the individual in question has ingested another drug, perhaps he or she has a high fever, or is mentally ill — the list goes on. This is evident. Having simply demonstrated that if reason obtains harmony obtains likewise, therefore, does not enable us to infer the converse: that if harmony obtains, so too reason. A separate demonstration is demanded or, in lieu of that, it must be shown that the statement and its converse are implied together by the original.

A separate demonstration to the effect that reason obtains on the condition that harmony obtains is, so far as I can tell, lacking. Is it the case, then, that *both* statements — if there is reason then there is harmony *and* if there is harmony then there is reason — are implied by Spinoza’s original demonstration in E.IV.Prop.35? After a fashion, yes, but — or so I would argue — not in a manner that supports the general thrust of Spinoza’s broader argument as I have been reconstructing it here. In his demonstration to E.IV.Prop.35, Spinoza argues as follows — and here, I will simply paraphrase, leaving out the internal references he supplies; the textual infrastructure of his reasoning, here, is less crucial than its basic message. In the first place, he contends that men who operate on the basis of passive emotions *can* differ and *may* come into conflict; “insofar as men are assailed by passive emotions,” he says, “they *can* be different in nature... and contrary to one another.” In the second place, he explains that a man necessarily aims toward what, according to the laws of his own nature, he judges to be good and seeks to avoid what he deems evil or otherwise bad and that, under the guidance of reason, he aims

toward or avoids those things which follow from his nature insofar as it is an instance of *human nature*. Such a man, therefore, seeks or avoids those things which *every single man* likewise acting under the guidance of reason seeks or avoids. In this way, Spinoza concludes, are men in *necessarily* agreement with one another so far as and to the extent that they live under the guidance of reason.

Let us consider, however, what Spinoza has actually demonstrated. His closing statement, “men also are *necessarily* in agreement insofar as they live under the guidance of reason” is telling. What Spinoza has supplied us with are the conditions under which men agree, under which men live in harmony, *necessarily*. When each of us lives under the guidance of reason, he contends, we necessarily pursue or avoid what human nature dictates is to be sought or avoided. In this sense we cannot but agree — we coexist harmoniously *by necessity*.

The incidence of harmonious coexistence *by necessity*, however, does not exhaust all possible instances of harmonious coexistence. To exclude such instances, to wit instances in which harmonious coexistence with others is the incidental result of a life not conducted according to the guidance of reason, would mean proving the inverse of the proposition. In order to show, that is, that under no circumstances will the conduct of an irrational individual agree with, exist in harmony with, the conduct of other individuals, Spinoza would have to demonstrate not only that Reason  $\Rightarrow$  Harmony, but *also* that  $\sim$ Reason  $\Rightarrow \sim$ Harmony — i.e. that the negation of reason necessarily entails the negation of harmony. In the first part of his demonstration to E.IV.Prop.35, however, Spinoza *does not* show that men operating on the basis of passive emotions, unreason, *must* differ and *must* come into conflict *by necessity* — he does not show that they must, of necessity, coexist in a state of disharmony. He shows only that they *may so live*, in contrast to men of another and better sort who *cannot live otherwise than in*

*agreement with others*. That, by happenstance or in consequence of a special convergence of circumstances harmony may characterize a definite system of human relations not governed by reason is not excluded. We may indeed happen to agree even if it is not reason which determines us to do so.

If, therefore, by “harmony” we intend *only* such conditions of agreement as are dictated by human nature as such — that is, conditions of agreement in which all involved parties desire only that which vis-a-vis human nature as such is desirable and avoids only that which is likewise abhorrent — if, in other words, by harmony we intend the sort that *reason* dictates, then it is certainly the case *both* that where reason obtains, so too harmony, and the converse, that where harmony obtains, so too reason. Reason, after all, is in this case built into and implied by the very notion of harmony itself. It is not so much that Spinoza would have inferred a bi-conditional from a simple conditional but, rather, both from a fuzzy definition whereby harmony and reason are insufficiently distinguished from one another.

It seems to me, however, rather implausible that this is the case. For one, we have already seen that E.IV.Prop.35 demonstrates *only* that harmonious coexistence with others results necessarily from a life conducted according to reason. Again, that it proves only that Reason  $\Rightarrow$  Harmony and not that  $\sim$ Reason  $\Rightarrow$   $\sim$ Harmony, that if unreason obtains, disharmony obtains. By demonstrating *only* that disharmony *may* arise between irrational men, the possibility is left open — it is not excluded — that harmony may indeed obtain among them. Therefore, harmony as such *cannot* entail reason. It seems, moreover, that when, in E.IV.Prop.40, Spinoza deems advantageous “*whatever* is conducive to man's social organization, or causes men to live in harmony” he comes to include and not to exclude. He intends, that is, to suggest that there are things which conduce to harmony which are not directly born out of reason but will lead us in the

direction of reason insofar as — and I repeat again here the second part of the dubiously implied bi-conditional — that what conduces to harmony conduces to reason. Again, harmony is not itself necessarily rational or of itself borne out of reason.

That such is the case, even in Spinoza's own explicit estimation, we may infer from a string of related comments appearing in the *Theological Political Treatise*. In the preface of that text, he speaks of the "supreme mystery of despotism, its prop and stay." Namely, the keeping of "men in a state of deception" by cloaking, "with the specious title of religion," that "fear by which they must be held in check, so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation, and count it no shame, but the highest honor, to spend their blood and their lives for the glorification of *one man*." "The Turks," he avers there, have instituted this practice in an especially extreme and particularly successful fashion having, by "pomp and ceremony," gained "such a thorough hold on the individual's judgment that... no room" is left "in the mind for the exercise of reason, or even the capacity to doubt." By aesthetic manipulation of the experience of the sublime, reason is suppressed and devotees are made to agree — after a fashion to be of one mind and to exist in harmony with one another, if only by default.

In a similar vein does Spinoza likewise remark, in chapter six of the same text, that "experience seems to teach us that *peace and harmony are best served* if all power is conferred on one man" — a state of affairs explicitly exemplified by "the Turks" and intimately linked, so we have just learned, with the numbing effect of religious ceremony and its associated dogmas as perfected by them and manifest in the Islamic religion. Now, he does, indeed, denounce peace and harmony of this sort — "if slavery, barbarism, and desolation," Spinoza says there, "are to be called peace, there can be nothing more wretched for mankind than peace." Likewise does he comment in the *Political Treatise*, chapter five, section four that "a commonwealth whose peace

depends on the sluggish spirit of its subjects who are lead like sheep to learn simply to be slaves can more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.” This denunciation, however, is negligible so far as we are concerned.

In the first place, it is overstated. Spinoza wishes to set “peace and harmony” of this sort apart from peace and harmony as such; peace, he contends there, “consists not in the absence of war but in the union or harmony of minds.” But is it really the case that the opinions and practices shared by “the Turks” fail entirely to constitute a condition of mental union and harmony? Are they really that different — so far as he describes them — from the absolute submission to God and the ritualized obedience that Spinoza tends to admire — or, at least, revile less — in ancient Israelite religion? I think not. Israelite religion entailed, first, an absolute transfer of right to God and, after that, to his mediator.<sup>9</sup> It likewise entailed a “long

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<sup>9</sup> It is certainly the case that, as of the so-called “first covenant” brought into effect when, at Sinai the Hebrews declared with one voice “whatever God shall speak, we shall do” without, as Spinoza notes in the seventeenth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, naming a mediator and, therefore, retaining for themselves “an equal right to consult God,” an equal share “in the government of the state.” Yet, this first covenant was abrogated the moment that “*so overwhelmed with fear*” by the sublimity of the theophantic experience, the people made “an absolute transfer to Moses of their right to consult God and to interpret his decrees” and thus appointed him to “the supreme kingship, since he alone had the right to consult God, to give God’s answers to the people, and to compel them to obey.” Absolute deference to God is embodied by absolute deference to Moses and in obedience to the commands he issues.

When Spinoza holds, in the same chapter, that “this promise, or transference of right to God, was made in the same way as we have previously conceived it to be made in the case of an ordinary community when men decide to surrender their natural right For it was by express covenant and oath that they surrendered their natural right and transferred it to God, which *they did freely, not by forcible coercion or fear of threat*” he contradicts not only himself but also the scriptural passages which he himself cites, wherein the people express the tremendous fear of God, their mortal fear. As he notes, they asked “why should we die? For this great fire will surely consume us; if again we are to hear the voice of God, we shall surely die!” Thus were they evidently — at least from Spinoza’s perspective — coerced by fear to submit to a divine and, ultimately to a human, overlord, being (at that point at least) unfit for self-rule in any case (as Spinoza explains in chapter five, “the task of establishing a wise system of laws and of keeping the government in the hands of the whole community was quite beyond them).

Thus, however it may be that the Ottoman sultans conducted themselves vis-a-vis the populace, however tyrannical their use of religion may actually have been (or not been as the case may be), we can easily observe that the general structure of religious myth and practice so far as Spinoza describes it in Islam is not fundamentally different than the manner in which the same is described vis-a-vis the ancient Israelites. His estimation of these religious traditions — made independently of contemporary political applications — should, therefore, also be roughly equivalent.

schooling in obedience”<sup>10</sup> whereby “a people incapable of self-rule” could be made subservient by prohibiting men from the performance of:

“Any action at their own discretion. The people could do nothing without being required at the same time to remember the law and to follow its commands, which were dependent solely on the ruler's will... This, then, was the object of ceremonial observance, that men should never act of their own volition but always at another's behest, and that in their actions and inward thoughts they should at all times acknowledge that they were not their own masters but completely subordinate to another.”<sup>11</sup>

This condition of utter subservience, however, Spinoza considers productive of a “closely united”<sup>12</sup> and free people, of a stable political unit. That is, to constitute a sort of harmony.<sup>13</sup>

Thus while it is certainly arguable that the Ottoman sultanate was far, far closer to tyranny than the Hebrew theocracy, the ideological structure of Islam so far as Spinoza describes it is not all that different from the ideological structure of the ancient Israelite religion. As such, if the latter conduces to a sort of harmony, a sort of peace, and even a sort of liberty, it seems difficult to contend, even it is uncritically held that the former *does not in fact*, that it *cannot*.

In the second place — and at a far more basic level — what Spinoza really seems to object to is less the contention that relations mediated by an ideology of this sort constitutes a

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<sup>10</sup> TTP.17.

<sup>11</sup> TTP.19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfson distinguishes Spinoza from “all religious philosophers before him, who saw in scriptural history examples of good government which are to be followed, Spinoza found in it examples of bad government which are to be avoided (Wolfson, H. 1962. *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism Christianity and Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. Vol. 2. p. 155).” I think that this is true, but only in a special sense. If we are to take the *Theological Political Treatise* at face value, it seems to me that the contrary is true. Spinoza has many favorable things to say about the government of the ancient Hebrews. If, however, we read the *Theological Political Treatise* as I am wont to — namely as a critique of the State as such — then it is most certainly correct. On this reading, however, Spinoza would not be singling out the ancient Hebrews for criticism but using them as a mechanism to criticize the State, in general, as a political structure.



form of harmony, and more the notion that such a harmony is desirable. As he suggests, it is inimical to liberty; but this does not mean that those who share such views and practices fail, in point of fact, agree on something and, to that extent, to exist in harmony with one another. They do, and, so far as we are here concerned, this is all that matters. Whether harmony of this sort enhance liberty or diminish it was never the issue; we may, therefore, grant that liberty is diminished without detracting thereby from the force of our argument. For all that we require here is evidence to the effect that a sort of harmony exists which neither follows from nor tends toward reason, and that is precisely what we observed. Harmony of the sort Spinoza describes in speaking disparagingly of the Ottomans and, perhaps, Islam generally, precludes reason.

If so, we find it to be demonstrably false — from within the theoretical resources Spinoza makes available to us that “ $\sim\text{Reason} \Rightarrow \sim\text{Harmony}$ ,” that a condition of *unreason* leads necessarily to a condition of disharmony. We find invalid, therefore, Spinoza’s interpretation of E.IV.Prop.35 as it appears in his demonstration to E.IV.Prop.40. E.IV.Prop.35 can teach us nothing more than that “ $\text{Reason} \Rightarrow \text{Harmony}$ ” — that (again, to express it in the idiom of E.IV.Prop.40) what conduces to reason conduces to harmony. It cannot teach the converse, “ $\text{Harmony} \Rightarrow \text{Reason}$ ,” that what conduces to harmony conduces to reason. As such, the implied bi-conditional, “ $\text{Harmony} \Leftrightarrow \text{Reason}$ ” or “ $\text{Reason} \Leftrightarrow \text{Harmony}$ ,” does not follow. Reason and harmony do not go hand in hand; what conduces to reason indeed conduces always to harmony, but what conduces to harmony does *not always* conduce to reason. If, therefore, Spinoza gives us to understand that “whatever is conducive to man’s social organization, or causes men to live in harmony, is advantageous (E.IV.Prop.40)” *because* “whatever things cause men to live in harmony cause them also to live by the guidance of reason,”<sup>14</sup> it follows that the proposition

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<sup>14</sup> Again, this is Spinoza’s interpretation of E.IV.Prop. 35 as it appears in the demonstration to E.IV.Prop.40.

fails.

## **B. Reason Accords with the Negation of Liberty if the Alternative is Disharmony**

Building on our demolition of the bi-conditional “Harmony  $\Leftrightarrow$  Reason” or “Reason  $\Leftrightarrow$  Harmony” it is possible likewise to demolish the reasoning which leads from items two through seven — which concludes that reason goes hand in hand with the negation of liberty when this negation is accompanied by and produces harmony — in the demonstration mapped out above. Let us, then, proceed step by step.

From the first item, that “Harmony  $\Leftrightarrow$  Reason” or “Reason  $\Leftrightarrow$  Harmony,” the second item concludes that if the negation of liberty is conducive to the manufacture of harmony and the preservation of liberty is conducive to the negation of harmony, then reason goes hand in hand with the negation of liberty. If, however, what conduces to harmony does not *necessarily* conduce to reason then it is not entailed in the fact that the negation of liberty produces harmony and that the preservation of liberty disharmony that reason will go hand in hand with the negation of liberty. Not all conditions of harmony are also rational; namely, those conditions of harmony which involve the negation of liberty. If this is, indeed, the case, it is a matter of indifference that there obtain irrational men such that the negation of liberty produces harmony and the preservation of liberty disharmony. Either way, it will not follow necessarily that reason and the negation of liberty will go hand in hand; for harmony and reason do not necessarily go hand in hand.

Still, to dismiss the proposition in this way does not really do justice to the breath of Spinoza’s reasoning here. Treating him fairly demands that we consider the matter from another vantage. Namely, the distinction between “reason” considered as a sort of absolute

quantity either present or absent and that which is “reasonable,” which expresses reason to a degree and, in that degree, constitutes a desideratum. Here, I have in mind, first of all, what Spinoza has to say in E.IV.Prop.65 and its corollary and, ultimately, the use to which he puts this proposition in his political writings. Let us, however, begin by tracing his line of thought and only then, arrive with him, at its conclusion.

The first thing to consider is the meaning Spinoza ascribes to the distinction between that which is called good and that which is called bad. Much could be said on this topic. For the present, however, let us note only that, as he sees it, we call good “whatever advances us towards perfection,”<sup>15</sup> whatever increases our capacity for activity<sup>16</sup> and, so, produces in us a sensation of pleasure,<sup>17</sup> and that we call bad “what hinders, or also what does not advance us towards it,”<sup>18</sup> whatever diminishes our power of activity<sup>19</sup> and, so, produces in us a sensation of pain.<sup>20</sup> Good and bad, in this sense are relative designations; nothing is “good” or “bad” in any absolute sense but, vis-a-vis the particular condition in which we find ourselves, better or worse compared to some other thing. Thus does Spinoza express himself as follows in the preface to the fourth part of the *Ethics*:

“The terms “good” and “bad”... indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another. For one and the same thing can at the same time be

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<sup>15</sup> KV.2.4.

<sup>16</sup> E.IV.Prop.29.

<sup>17</sup> Pleasure, he explains in E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.2, is to be conceived as “man's transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection.”

<sup>18</sup> KV.2.4.

<sup>19</sup> E.IV.Prop.29.

<sup>20</sup> Pain, he explains in E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3, is to be conceived as “man's transition from a state of greater perfection to a state of less perfection.”

good and bad, and also indifferent.”<sup>21</sup>

Because the determination of the good, of the bad, and of the indifferent is essentially relative, a single thing, depending on what it is compared to, can, and often does, fit in one and the same moment, into any one of these categories.

Insofar as rational desire arises “*only* from an emotion of pleasure that is not passive,”<sup>22</sup> and, to that extent, *only* from knowledge of the good — which is “nothing other than the emotion of pleasure... insofar as we are conscious of it”<sup>23</sup> — it follows, so Spinoza argues in E.IV.Prop.63.Cor., that rational desire *directly* involves *only the pursuit of good*. We shun evil — when, again, acting under the guidance of reason — only indirectly, only so far as it is excluded by what we actively strive for. Now, if it is the case that nothing is absolutely good or bad in itself but, rather, that each thing is only relatively good or relatively bad depending on what it is compared to, it follows, so Spinoza argues in the course of his demonstration for E.IV.Prop.65, that “a lesser evil is in reality a good.”<sup>24</sup> Reason dictates, rational desire, therefore, directly seeks this good *when the alternative is the greater evil*. As such, contends Spinoza, “by the guidance of reason we pursue... the lesser of two evils.”<sup>25</sup>

It is by this line of reasoning that Spinoza justifies the submissive position that is human life in the civil condition, the range of his rights in relation to the right and power of Nature so far as it is embodied in the State and far exceeds his own,<sup>26</sup> so far as he is, therefore, bound to

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<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, it is worth mentioning the fact that, here, Spinoza seems to admit an intermediate evaluation, the indifferent, that separates the good from the bad. In the *Short Treatise*, in contrast, he holds that we call “bad” what “what hinders, or *also what does not advance us towards*” perfection. It seems that, there, what neither helps nor hinders, what is neutral, is *bad* and not simply indifferent.

<sup>22</sup> E.III.Prop.59.

<sup>23</sup> E.IV.Prop.8.

<sup>24</sup> Likewise, it stands to reason, is the lesser of two goods in reality an evil.

<sup>25</sup> E.IV.Prop.65.

<sup>26</sup> TP.1.2.

obey.<sup>27</sup> “It may be objected,” he admits in the third chapter of the *Political Treatise*, that it is “contrary to the dictates of reason to subject oneself entirely to the judgment of another” such that “the civil order is irrational and could be instituted only by men destitute of reason, not by men who are guided by reason.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, he continues there, the State may, and often does, compelled citizens to behave in a fashion that is patently and directly irrational. In response to these objections, Spinoza first makes note of the fact that the civil condition is not an unmitigated evil but, rather, serves a number of human interests both directly and indirectly.<sup>29</sup> More germane to our present concerns does he then proceed to argue as follows:

“A man who is guided by reason has sometimes to do, by order of the commonwealth, what he knows to be contrary to reason, this penalty is far outweighed by the good he derives from the civil order itself; *for it is also a law of reason that of two evils the lesser should be chosen*. Therefore, we may conclude that nobody acts in a way contrary to what his own reason prescribes insofar as he does that which the law of the commonwealth requires to be done.”<sup>30</sup>

The suppression of individual liberties which the civil order necessarily entails is, indeed, an evil. However, the conditions of mutual existence which it facilitates among men guided primarily by their passions and not yet by reason, the benefits which such men and their rational neighbors alike derive “from the civil order itself,” constitute a disproportionately great good the dissolution of which — with the breakdown of the rule of law among men of passion not yet

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<sup>27</sup> TP.3.5.

<sup>28</sup> TP.3.6.

<sup>29</sup> He notes — as we have already observed in the preceding chapter — that so long as men live largely under the guidance of their passions and not of reason, “that each man should remain in control of his own right” is an impossibility which “sound reason” cannot, therefore, require. In this respect does reason dictate the civil condition. So far as “the teaching of reason is wholly directed to seeking peace” and, under aforementioned circumstances, this is beyond us without the institution of common laws that are kept inviolate, does reason dictate, likewise in this respect, too the civil condition generally and obedience to the commands of the sovereign in particular.

<sup>30</sup> TTP.3.6.

elevated to reason — constitutes a disproportionately great evil. If reason, therefore, commends the lesser of two evils — the evil entailed in the limit which the State presents vis-a-vis individual liberties as compared to the evil entailed in the fall of the state — reason likewise commends the conditions of life as mediated by the State.

Here, I have less to undermine the validity of the general deduction Spinoza has made — it seems to me valid — and more simply to point out its limitations. What is actually being argued? How far does this line of reasoning go? In essence, Spinoza juxtaposes two very specific conditions, compares them, and draws *from this comparison* — and from this comparison alone — his conclusions. To be more explicit, Spinoza considers *only* two alternatives. We have, on the one hand, the brutal and chaotic relations that may obtain among men who live under the guidance of passion and not reason when they are unrestrained by the corporate power and right of the State and its sovereign rulers. We have, in other words, disharmony and the harm it entails. On the other hand, we have that security which the State, at the expense of certain liberties and by essentially forceful methods, supplies — and sometimes even at the expense of reason itself when rational men are compelled to act against their better judgment in the interest of peace and the benefits it entails. In brief, Spinoza presents us with the following alternatives: disharmony, or harmony enforced. Between these two options, the latter is evidently the rational choice for the reasons elaborated upon above — the State is the lesser of these two evils.

It is my ultimate contention, however, not simply that there is another option to consider, but that, from within the theoretical resources which Spinoza leaves us with, this option peeks through. Without, here, discussing what will occupy us in a later chapter, I will say only that it is the prospect of rational *community* as an institution invested with the capacity slowly to displace

the State form. Between the rational community and the form of state, we are faced no longer with the alternative of disharmony and harmony enforced — the greater and the lesser of two evils — but that of irrational harmony, harmony enforced, and rational harmony, libertarian harmony. Here, it is the latter which constitutes the greater of two goods and, to that extent, the rational choice with supplants and displaces the State form. However, to elaborate further upon this contention — as I have already indicated — we must wait for later chapters.

### **C. Coerced Harmony Serves a Pedagogical Function, Leading Passionate Men to Reason**

In my view, one of the strongest claims that could be made on behalf of the State involves its role, at least in potential, as a tutelary force. Could, that is, the State function to train passionate and irrational people in reason and, to that extent, for liberty it constitutes a decidedly *positive* institution. Were the state to be construed as a step in the direction of liberty and not an end in itself it would not, in my view, constitute but the better of two evils but, in fact, a definite and unmitigated good. “If,” “could,” “were” — I have already shown my hand. I am skeptical of it all, not simply from my own perspective, but also on Spinoza’s behalf.

It must certainly be admitted that, on several occasions, Spinoza seems to lean, at least, in a direction contrary to the one I have indicated. However, as I suggested in the preceding chapter, it is less my aim to defend a conclusive and unassailable interpretation of what the man has to say and, in most cases, more to illuminate the tensions which I believe are very much at play in his writing and which make him such an intriguing author. I aim less to impose a definite shape upon his thinking and more, perhaps, to reveal its underside, those implied results which Spinoza himself may have aimed — consciously or not — to suppress. Still, before coming to the underside of things and its uncovering, let us first consider Spinoza’s text at its surface with

respect to the question of the role of the State as a tutor to the subject-citizen.

To this end, let us first consider what Spinoza has to say with respect to his own contention that neither is humility a virtue nor repentance. In his scholium to E.IV.Prop.54 he essentially qualifies his position. “As men seldom live according to the dictates of reason,” he says:

“These two emotions, humility and repentance, and also hope and fear, bring more advantage than harm; and thus, if sin we must, it is better to sin in their direction. For if men of weak spirit should all equally be subject to pride, and should be ashamed of nothing and afraid of nothing, by what bonds could they be held together and bound? The mob is fearsome, if it does not fear. So it is not surprising that the prophets, who had regard for the good of the whole community, and not of the few, have been so zealous in commending humility, repentance, and reverence. *And in fact those who are subject to these emotions can be far more readily induced than others to live by the guidance of reason in the end, that is, to become free men and enjoy the life of the blessed.*”

We see, here, that in Spinoza’s opinion, the sort of passive emotions which — so we observed in the preceding chapter — constitute the foundation of the State serve not only to inculcate a submissive and obedient attitude, but also to make way for life under the guidance of reason. Thus does the State which supplies the organizational framework for such feelings — which, at least in certain respects, exercises dominion and right over the “faculty of judgment” of the citizen who cannot, or cannot adequately “use reason aright”<sup>31</sup> — serve a sort of pedagogical function.

Thus does Spinoza express himself similarly in the *Political Treatise*. On the one hand

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<sup>31</sup> TP.2.11.



he holds that:

“Since men, as we have said, are led more by passion than by reason , it naturally follows that *a people will unite and consent to be guided as if by one mind not at reason's prompting but through some common emotion*, such as... a common hope, or common fear, or desire to avenge some common injury.”<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, in speaking of the sort of State which — throughout the *Political Treatise* and regardless of the particular form of political organization that occupies him at one moment or another — he attempts to describe, Spinoza states that:

“When we say that the best state is one where men pass their lives in harmony, I am speaking of human life, which is characterized not just by the circulation of the blood and other features common to all animals, but especially *by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind*.”<sup>33</sup>

Again, we see that what Spinoza wishes to articulate is a form of social organization which begins with unreason, with passive emotions, and concludes with reason and correspondingly active emotions. This is, in any event, the exoteric message which appears clearly upon reading the relevant texts even at a superficial level. As I have suggested, however, it is equally the case that the complacency with which we read about the political utility of fear and hope, humility and regret conceals a much deeper sense of ambiguity vis-a-vis the state as an instrument for human liberation. Is it indeed the case that passivity and passion *of any sort* will, in the end, lead us in the direction of activity and reason? Can the State serve the pedagogical or tutelary function Spinoza seems to indicate it may?

If, by the pedagogical or tutelary function of the state we intend direct instruction, our

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<sup>32</sup> TP.6.1.

<sup>33</sup> TP.5.5.

immediate reply to this line of questioning is: clearly not! For, as Spinoza notes in his *Political Treatise*, chapter eight, section forty-nine, “academies founded at public expense are established not so much to encourage natural talents as to restrain them.” Public education, as generations of radicals of one stamp or another have consistently maintained, functions less to liberate the popular mind and more to shape it according to the needs of the State; it does not make free but trains obedient servants. Restricting the pedagogical function of State to its institutions of direct instruction and judging it accordingly, however, is evidently reductive and, to a degree, besides the point — at least vis-a-vis our present concerns.

Turning to the State itself as a pedagogical institution — a means of educating by something like habituation — if the following passage from the *Political Treatise* is at all generalizable, I still have my doubts. There are people, he says there:

“Who restrict to the common people the faults that are inherent in all mankind, saying, ‘There is no moderation in the mob; they terrorize unless they are frightened;’ and, ‘The common people is either a humble servant or an arrogant master, there is no truth or judgment in it;’ and the like. But all men share in one and the same nature; it is power and culture that mislead us”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, when they say, likewise, that:

“There is no truth or judgment in the common people” is not surprising, since the important affairs of state are conducted without their knowledge, and from the little that cannot be concealed they can only make conjecture. For to suspend judgment is not a common virtue. So to seek to conduct all business without the knowledge of the citizens and then to expect them not to misjudge things and to put a bad interpretation on

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<sup>34</sup> TP.7.7.

everything, this is the height of folly.”<sup>35</sup>

Power and culture mislead us in a very special way. As we have observed over and over again, the coordination of social life in the form of the State is necessary, or at least justified, on the grounds that the masses must be restrained, that they must be coerced into rational behavior and self-management if order is to prevail at all. In this sense, it would appear that masses precede the State, which subsequently organizes them. Here, however, we see that the contrary is true; it is the State which produces its own politically and socially displaced masses, its own population of ignorant and petulant children. It is not that the State raises the multitude from chaos, imparting to it shape, stability, but rather, by lifting — through representation in one form or another — public affairs from the public milieu, that the masses are de-skilled in the arts of self-management and self-rule, that they become perpetual minors in need of transcendental governance. We see, then, that it is the structure of State itself which, in certain respects at least, does not make free, does not educate for autonomy, but manufactures political and social minority — “passivity... is a palpable imperfection, because the patient must *necessarily be dependent* on that which has caused the passivity from outside”<sup>36</sup> “Power and culture” mislead, making ignorant and not wise. Let us examine this process in further detail by returning critically to our earlier examination the affective foundation of the State.

Before doing so, however, I would like to dispel at the outset a possible objection to my account. Perhaps it is not that he means to imply that the passive emotions on the basis of which people are organized lead, themselves, to the emergence of active ideas and active emotions, to reason. Perhaps, that is, it is not to be inferred that certain passive emotions serve a tutelary function. Perhaps it is that the general social conditions which obtain when a group of people are

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> KV.I.2.

harmoniously organized — even if this harmony stands on force and coercion, on the production and manipulation of certain useful passive experiences — lends itself to the spread of reason. It is, in other words, the *harmony* that the State facilitates *and not the force of passivity by which it is manufactured* that is decisive. This passive, this coerced, harmony is, in any event, a real harmony.<sup>37</sup> To put the matter in brief: it might be suggested that a state of harmony can be divorced from the mechanisms whereby it is brought about.

In the first place, I reply that I have already demonstrated the flaw in Spinoza's supposition to the effect that harmony and what conduces to it necessarily conduce to reason. Harmony in itself does not conduce to reason; *rational* harmony conduces to reason. Still, perhaps I persist in misconstruing the issue. Perhaps, when we suggest that harmony conduces to reason, we are to understand *not* that there is an immediate link between the two — that a passive state of mind leads to an active state of mind — as I imagined earlier, but that harmonious conditions are simply those that do not interfere with the progress of reason, while conditions of disharmony constitute an evident impediment. Harmony, in this sense, is not itself to be construed as a direct causal factor in the emergence of reason, but as a state of affairs in which reason may act as a cause and extend itself.

In reply, I would begin by pointing out that in this proposition harmony appears to be a neutral factor<sup>38</sup> existing outside of and above the progress of reason which it is said to facilitate. This would mean that it lacks a causal trajectory of its own, but constitutes nothing more than the exterior environment for another, the progress of reason which, like the bees of which Spinoza speaks in the twenty-fourth chapter of the second part of his *Short Treatise*, maintains itself and

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<sup>37</sup> This is, more or less, the position taken by Matheron. See Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza*. pp. 519-24. There, Matheron praises the (provisionally) rational virtues of commerce in the liberal state.

<sup>38</sup> For more on neutrality see below.

diffuses according only to its own laws. This is simply not the case; human harmony is actively produced and has, therefore, its own content. It exercises its own causal force and this will advance or impede the cause of reason.

Granted that the sort of harmony that concerns us here is that grounded in passive emotions, we will have to consider the unique causal trajectory of passive emotions and the harmony to which they may give rise. Does a harmony produced via the manipulation of passive emotions, a sort of coerced harmony, with its own causal force indeed tend toward the emergence of reason, toward more active emotions? Is such harmony itself a sustainable state of affairs in the first place? Or is it, instead, a condition which tends, in both respects, in the opposite direction? It is my contention that this is, indeed the case; harmony induced, because it depends on passive states of mind, on inadequate modes of thought, impedes the progress of reason and is itself internally unstable.

Here, it might be worth capitalizing on an illustrative example which Spinoza formulated in the twenty-fourth chapter of the second part of his *Short Treatise*:

“Although the bees, in all their work and the orderly discipline which they maintain among themselves, have no other end in view than to make certain provisions for themselves for the winter, still, man who is above them, has an entirely different end in view when he maintains and tends them, namely, to obtain honey for himself.”<sup>39</sup>

Setting aside the question of relative intent, it is possible simply to observe that, here in the production of honey, there are two orders of causality that are linked only tenuously. On the one hand, we have the beekeeper, who — by, for example, the provision of resources, protection from predators, and so on — facilitates the activities of the hive and enables it to thrive. On the

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<sup>39</sup> KV.II.24.

other hand, we have the interior operations of the hive itself. Vis-a-vis the latter, the former is essentially a neutral factor; the bees maintain “orderly discipline... *among themselves*,” melliferean society is self-organizing. The beekeeper merely supports it from without; he does not organize it or otherwise interfere with its internal functions.

The human lawgiver, in contrast, is the architect of harmony which — by hypothesis — lets reason be if it does not itself constitute it, lead to it, or produce it. She actively interferes with and gives shape to the relationships that obtain between men. In this sense, she is anything but an external benefactor; she is not a neutral factor but plays a decisive role in the interior organization of the body politic. As such, the mechanisms by which she does so cannot be disconnected from the ends they are intended to serve. Even if it is not passive emotions themselves which serve the tutelary function but the harmony they generate, the latter remains passive in character, which all the consequences that implies.

This objection being dismissed, let us return to the topic at hand. We have seen, already, that according to Spinoza, *passive* emotions like hope, fear, confidence, humility, repentance, and the desire for vengeance — thus, hate and anger — constitute the affective foundation of the State. If we wish to consider whether or not the State can actually serve the functions that it is ostensibly designed to perform — to wit, making free, educating a population for autonomy, for reason and self-management, for living in harmony with others and accruing thereby the benefits of sociality without, the harm of repressive force — it is first necessary to inquire as to whether passive emotions can, indeed, make us reasonable. If the manipulation of passive emotions can do more than shape behavior, giving it a rational hue or texture, as it were, a superficially rational form but, instead actually shape rational people then, and *only then* can the State be viewed as an institution tending toward liberty. If, as the education of the population proceeds,

that is, the State form will slowly “wither away” then, indeed, the State is an institution that stands on firm rational ground. If, however, this is not the case — if the education of the people restrains its natural talents for harmonious coexistence and does not encourage them, if manipulating our passive emotions simply makes us more passive and not less — is it not the case that the so-called rational grounds of the State are, in point of fact, far shakier than we have been lead to believe?

To begin with, let it be noted that, already in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* did Spinoza remark that “the operations by which imaginings are produced” — and “the emotion called a passive experience is a confused idea”<sup>40</sup> or a mode of imagining<sup>41</sup> — “are subject to other laws which are quite different from the laws of the intellect.”<sup>42</sup> There is one law for things of the intellect and quite another for things of *passive* experience. This disjunction of “legal” paradigm means, I presume, that there is no progression from the former to the latter, but instead, a gap. Why this gap? Why do not passive affections — especially those of a more gregarious character — indicate, in a fragmentary fashion at least, the distinctions between good and bad which the exercise of reason ultimately determines more clearly?<sup>43</sup> To answer this question, we shall have to examine the tendency of passive emotions as Spinoza understands them.

It can be immediately and without equivocation be denied that, *in themselves*, the passive *ideas*, that emotions like hope, fear, penitence, and so on represent will lead to active ideas and active affects — that, for example, the feeling of remorse will, in itself, lead to an adequate grasp

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<sup>40</sup> E.III.General Definition of Emotions.

<sup>41</sup> As Spinoza explains in E.II.Prop.40.Schol.2, we call that which we perceive “through the senses in a fragmentary [mutilate) and *confused* manner... ‘knowledge of the first kind,’ ‘opinion,’ or ‘imagination.’”

<sup>42</sup> TIE.86.

<sup>43</sup> KV.II.4.

of the distinction between that which is good and that which is bad. How is this so? Spinoza supplies a proof to this effect which is far more involved than what we require here. The gist of it, however, runs as follows.

The mind, Spinoza argues, is a complex thing consisting in a great number of ideas. Some of the ideas of which the mind is composed correspond directly to the parts of the body and the various states that these parts assume. In this case, the mind perceives things simply “from the common order of nature;” it is “determined externally — namely, by the fortuitous run of circumstance — to regard this or that.”<sup>44</sup> When, however, the mind conceives several ideas of this sort at once, observes “their agreement, their differences, and their opposition”<sup>45</sup> and thus forges some notion of the properties of things in general, its ideas follow not simply from the common order of nature, but also from the power of the mind itself; they are internally generated. While a degree of confusion obtains when it comes to ironing out how exactly Spinoza construes the distinction between the adequate and the inadequate idea, the idea that is true, and the idea that is false,<sup>46</sup> I think that the clearest demarcation — and also the one which

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<sup>44</sup> E.II.Prop.29.Cor. & Schol.

<sup>45</sup> E.II.Prop.29.Schol.

<sup>46</sup> In E.II.Def.4, Spinoza defines an adequate idea as follows: “by an adequate idea I mean an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself without relation to its object, has all the properties, that is, the intrinsic characteristics, of a true idea.” He then explains that by specifying the *intrinsic* characteristics of a true idea, he means to “exclude the extrinsic characteristic — to wit the agreement of the idea with that of which it is the idea.” There are several problems with this definition. In the first place, it defines one notion by another, which is, however, left undefined: the “true idea.” All we learn about the true idea is that *the only thing* we have learned about it earlier in the *Ethics*, namely, that “it must agree with that of which it is the idea (E.I.Def.6) is but an extrinsic characteristic that does not directly give us to understand what the notion itself means, but only how it must relate to its object. Spinoza does discuss true ideas throughout the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. In point of fact, however, we learn, there, more about false ideas than true ones; we learn, that is, how to avoid falsity and not how directly to identify truth — what, that is, a true idea is in itself. We do learn that a true idea is a certainty and that certainty, in turn, is “nothing other than the objective essence itself (TIE.35).” But the notion of the objective essence is still left undefined. In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza supplies a bit of useful information. There, he states as follows:

“The human body... is nothing else than a certain proportion of motion and rest. Now the ‘objective essence’ of this actual ratio of motion and rest which is in the thinking attribute, this (we say) is the soul of the body (KV.App.2).”

If we take our cue from this source, however, we find that a vicious circle has been created from which there is no escape. A true idea is the “objective essence” of a thing, but the objective essence of a thing is nothing other than



seems most consistent with Spinoza's account of adequacy in general<sup>47</sup> — is this. Namely, that the adequate idea is that of which the mind itself is the adequate cause; it is that idea which can clearly and distinctly be understood through the causal force of the mind alone. Thus are thoughts of the second sort necessarily adequate.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the inadequate idea is that of which the mind itself is an inadequate cause; it is that idea which *cannot* clearly and distinctly be understood through the causal force of the mind alone but only through the conjunction of the idea of some other thing<sup>49</sup> — i.e. that external entity producing change in the body, sensation, and to that extent a corresponding idea in the mind. Thus are thoughts of the first sort necessarily inadequate. In brief, then, the mind consists both in adequate ideas on the one hand and, on the other, inadequate ideas.

The mind thus composed of both adequate and inadequate ideas can, accordingly, be regarded as existing in an active or in a passive state. The human mind, Spinoza suggests in E.III.Prop.1, “is *necessarily* active” insofar as it has adequate ideas and “*necessarily* passive” insofar as it has inadequate ideas. How so? Simply put, because “we are active when something

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the true idea of it! Furthermore, this account would, in the first place, only supply us with the so-called extrinsic characteristic of the true idea anyway. Here, the true idea of a thing, or its objective essence, is that which corresponds to the thing of which it is the idea; namely, the particular ratio of motion and rest that the body is. Spinoza's definition of the adequate idea as it appears in the *Ethics*, therefore, is problematic to say the least. Thus, his comment in Epistle 60 to the effect that “between a true and an adequate idea I recognize *no difference* but this, that the word ‘true’ has regard only to the agreement of the idea with its object (*ideatum*), whereas the word ‘adequate’ has regard to the nature of the idea in itself. Thus, there is no real difference between a true and an adequate idea except for this extrinsic relation.” The true and the adequate are, indeed, one and the same thing; only the frame of reference differs, the vantage from which it is regarded. When, therefore, Spinoza defines the adequate idea as the *intrinsic* characteristic of the true idea, he can mean nothing other than that the adequate idea is an adequate idea, which is less than informative to say the least.

I, therefore, agree with Jonathan Bennett (see his *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. pp. 167-178) to the effect that Spinoza's definition of the adequate should be abandoned. Our notion of the adequate idea ought to be derived from the manner in which it is distinguished from the inadequate idea; namely, by the distinction between internal and external causality. Those ideas which the mind itself generates are adequate, those which are in some fashion impressed upon it from without (even from the body itself without regard to any other external body) are inadequate.

<sup>47</sup> Again, Spinoza calls adequate that cause “whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause (E.III.Def.1).”

<sup>48</sup> E.II.Prop.38. & Cor..

<sup>49</sup> Again, Spinoza calls inadequate that cause “whose effect cannot be understood through the said cause alone (E.III.Def.1).”

takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause” and “we are passive when something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause” or the inadequate cause.<sup>50</sup> Thus, is the mind so far as it consists in adequate ideas, ideas of which it is itself the sole cause, *necessarily* an active thing. In contrast, is the mind so far as it consists in inadequate ideas, ideas of which it is itself not the sole, but only the partial, cause, *necessarily* a passive thing.

That the mind is active so far as it seats adequate ideas and passive insofar as it seats inadequate ideas does not, however, speak to us of the tendency of the one or the other. Perhaps a passive state of mind or inadequate idea may lead to an active state of mind or an adequate idea. This, Spinoza categorically denies. “The more the mind has inadequate ideas,” he says in the corollary to E.III.Prop.1, “the more it is subject to passive states” and, on the other hand, he continues, “it is the more active in proportion as it has a greater number of adequate ideas.”

There is a progressive character to those states which the mind assumes. How so?

To answer this question, we must first go all the way back to the first part of the *Ethics*. The last proposition, the thirty-sixth, is based on the following three premises:

1. Each existing thing expresses God’s nature<sup>51</sup> or power<sup>52</sup> — these being identical.
2. From the given definition of any one thing the intellect infers a number of properties which necessarily follow in fact from the definition.”<sup>53</sup>
3. The more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes it has,”<sup>54</sup> the more properties it has, it follows that from that which commands an infinite nature — namely, God — there

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<sup>50</sup> E.III.Def.2.

<sup>51</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>52</sup> E.I.Prop.34.

<sup>53</sup> E.I.Prop.16.Dem.

<sup>54</sup> E.I.Prop.9; derived from E.I.Def.4.

follow an infinite number of properties, “infinite things in infinite ways.”<sup>55</sup>

If, indeed, each existing thing constitutes a particular determination of God’s nature, essence, or power and there follows from the latter an infinite number of things in an infinite number of ways — if, in other words, its causality is inexhaustible — it stands to reason that from each existing thing there must follow at least one other thing. Therefore, concludes Spinoza there, there exists nothing “from whose nature an effect does not follow.”<sup>56</sup> Ideas, being a sort of mental-thing, are such that effects follow necessarily from them.

They do so, moreover, according to the nature of that from which they follow. Thus, “whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas that are adequate in it are also adequate.”<sup>57</sup> Adequate ideas and adequate ideas alone follow from other, prior, adequate ideas. Likewise, if “inadequate and confused ideas follow by the same necessity as adequate... ideas”<sup>58</sup> whence do they so follow — and follow necessarily — if not from other inadequate and confused ideas, ideas that exist in the first place only insofar as “they are related to the particular mind of someone?”<sup>59</sup> As such is the inverse of E.II.Prop.40 is also true:<sup>60</sup> as adequate ideas follow

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<sup>55</sup> E.I.Prop.16.

<sup>56</sup> E.I.Prop.36.

<sup>57</sup> E.II.Prop.40.

<sup>58</sup> E.II.Prop.36.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> For further support as to this contention, let us briefly consider Spinoza’s demonstration to E.II.Prop.40 — again, that adequate ideas alone follow from other adequate ideas — “this is evident. For when we say that an idea follows in the human mind from ideas that are adequate in it, we are saying no more than that there is in the divine intellect an idea of which God is the cause, not insofar as he is infinite nor insofar as he is affected by ideas of numerous particular things, but only insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind.” It stands to reason, then, that when, in contrast, we say that an idea follows in the human mind from ideas that are inadequate in it, we are saying that there is in the divine intellect an idea of which God is the cause only insofar as he is affected by the idea of some particular thing. The amalgam of ideas of particular things does not add up to a true or adequate idea. Rather, as Spinoza explains in the first scholium to E.II.Prop.40, it leads to further confusion. “The human body, being limited,” he explains:

“Is capable of forming simultaneously in itself only a certain number of distinct images... If this number be exceeded, these images begin to be confused, and if the number of distinct images which the body is capable of forming simultaneously in itself be far exceeded, all the images will be utterly confused with one another.... But when the images in the body are utterly confused, the mind will also imagine all the bodies confusedly without any distinction, and will comprehend them, as it were, under one attribute,

necessarily from other adequate ideas, so too do inadequate ideas follow necessarily from other inadequate ideas. It is never the case that from an inadequate idea there arises an adequate idea or an active state.

Thus, we find that the mind is active insofar as it has adequate ideas and passive insofar as it has inadequate ideas, that it is *more* active as it has more adequate ideas and *more* passive as it has more inadequate ideas, and that the adequate idea alone arises from some prior adequate idea and inadequate idea alone from some prior inadequate idea. What of the parallel state of relative activity or passivity? The pattern holds. “Whatever follows from the nature of the mind and must be understood through the mind as its proximate cause must necessarily follow from an adequate idea or an inadequate idea” contends Spinoza in E.IV.Prop.3.Dem. “But insofar as the mind has inadequate ideas,” he continues, “it is necessarily passive... Therefore, the active states of mind follow solely from adequate ideas, and thus the mind is passive only by reason of having inadequate ideas.” If an adequate idea or an active state of mind obtain, it is because there has been a prior adequate idea or active state of mind; likewise, if an inadequate idea or a passive state of mind obtain, it is because there has been a prior inadequate idea or passive state.

Two critically important conclusions may be derived from these results, both of which militate against the contention that coerced harmony conduces to reason. First, an adequate idea or an active state will *never* arise from an inadequate idea or a passive state. Second, as we have already begun to see, there is a dynamic element to reason and unreason alike; the exercise of reason, the having of adequate ideas and the feeling of active affects necessarily involves the

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namely, that of entity, thing, etc... these terms signify ideas confused in the highest degree.” We see, then, that from inadequate ideas we arrive never at adequate ideas, but only at other inadequate ideas, ideas which are, in point of fact, more confused and more disordered than those we had before. Accordingly, if corresponding to inadequate ideas we have passive states of mind, is it the case that from one passive state of mind we arrive never at an active state of mind, but only at further passive states and, quite possibly states of more comprehensive, strengthened, or otherwise intense passivity.

having of further adequate ideas and the further feeling of active affects. In contrast, the having of inadequate ideas and the feeling of passive affects necessarily involves the having of further inadequate ideas and the further feeling of passive affects. Before drawing the ultimate conclusions which I wish, here, to emphasize, I should prefer, first, to consider further the nature of State-mediated, coerced, harmony.

We have already examined, and questioned, the implied bi-conditional generated between E.IV.Prop.35 and E.IV.Prop.40 to the effect that Reason  $\Leftrightarrow$  Harmony. I do not intend to revisit the same material. Here, I want to look at what makes for harmony or impedes it. In E.IV.Prop.30 and E.IV.Prop.31, Spinoza renders two parallel propositions. Both are based on the notion, repeated already a number of times here, that is bad which causes pain or, in other words, what checks our powers of activity. If something were to constitute, for us, an evil by virtue of what it had in common with us, then it would constitute, also, an evil for itself; it would check its own power of activity in this respect. This, as Spinoza holds in E.III.Prop.4 — “nothing can be destroyed except by an *external* cause” — is absurd. Therefore, he maintains, “nothing can be evil for us through what it possesses in common with our nature, but insofar as it is evil for us, it is contrary to us.”<sup>61</sup>

Now, Spinoza denies that, for us, anything can be neutral. Although, as I already indicated in note twenty-two above, Spinoza counts that which is *neutral* among those things that are bad in his early *Short Treatise*. His more considered opinion, however, is simply that there is no such thing as a neutral thing. In E.IV.Prop.31.Dem. he refers to an E.IV.Ax.3 (which does not exist in extant texts of the *Ethics*) which, there, he takes to imply that what “nothing will follow” from the nature of the neutral thing “which serves to preserve our nature; that is, by

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<sup>61</sup> E.IV.Prop.30.

hypothesis, which serves to preserve the nature of the thing itself.”<sup>62</sup> This, as Spinoza continues there, is patently absurd; for by E.III.Prop.6, each thing endeavors to preserve itself. More broadly, one might simply ask: if the thing in question will produce no effect that tends toward its preservation and we have no reason to assume it will produce effects contrary to its nature, then what effects will it produce? I conjecture that it would produce no effects at all. Yet, E.I.Prop.36 holds that there obtains nothing from which an effect does not follow. A thing which produces no effects simply doesn’t exist; therefore, neutral things do not exist. All effects have a positive element to them, they preserve the nature of something. If so, they both preserve in other things that of said things which shares its nature with the entity in question or, alternatively, impede in or destroy in other things that of said things which shares not its nature with the entity in question. In essence, the dynamism of Spinoza’s system, the fact that things are either actively preserved or actively impeded, that nothing simply is, means that nothing can be neutral with respect to any other thing. In degrees, all things entail, by their very existence, good for some things and evil for others and never nothing at all.

There is, however, a problem with this reading that is born out in E.III.Post.1, which reads “The human body can be affected in many ways by which its power of activity is increased or diminished; and also in many other ways which *neither increase nor diminish its power of activity.*” This would seem to imply that if there is no such thing as an absolutely neutral thing, there are things that are neutral for us. Therefore, whether such things can actually exist or not, practically speaking the distinction is immaterial; either way, such things do not exist *for us*.

Consider E.II.Prop.26.Dem. “if the human body is not affected in any way by an external body

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<sup>62</sup> See Akkerman, A. 1980. *Studies in the Posthumous Works of Spinoza: On Style, Earliest Translations and Reception, and Modern Edition of Some Texts*. Ph.D. Dissertation, U. of Gronigen. p. 192. This dissertation proposes the following text for the missing axiom: “from the nature of a singular thing which is neither good nor evil, nothing can follow which aids the preservation of our nature.” Curley cites this proposal in his translation of the *Ethics*.

then... neither is the idea of the human body... affected in any way by the idea of the existence of that body; i.e. it does not in any way perceive the existence of that external body.” Now, if a thing affects us only slightly, it is not neutral; it simply has a minute effect, either beneficial or otherwise. A truly neutral thing would not affect us in any way. If so, on what basis could we perceive a truly neutral thing? I propose that we cannot. If the neutral exists, we cannot be aware of it.

One possible objection to this theory might arise from Spinoza’s treatment of the problem of Buridan’s ass. In E.II.Prop.49.Schol. He contends as follows:

1. “Fourth, it may be objected that if man does not act from freedom of will, what would happen if he should be in a state of equilibrium like Buridan's ass? Will he perish of hunger and thirst? If I were to grant this, I would appear to be thinking of an ass or a statue, not of a man. If I deny it, then the man will be determining himself, and consequently will possess the faculty of going and doing whatever he wants.”
2. “As to the fourth objection, I readily grant that a man placed in such a state of equilibrium (namely, where he feels nothing else but hunger and thirst and perceives nothing but such-and-such food and drink at equal distances from him) will die of hunger and thirst. If they ask me whether such a man is not to be reckoned an ass rather than a man, I reply that I do not know, just as I do not know how one should reckon a man who hangs himself, or how one should reckon babies, fools, and madmen.”

Here, it might be said, Spinoza grants that there can be a condition of neutrality. Two instances of “such-and-such food and drink at equal distances” from the ass will, with respect to one another, be “neutral” in the view of said ass. I think, however, that this is not really a problem of neutrality. In fact, neither portion is neutral; both have a value. Both are good; both would

improve the condition of the ass and halt its starvation. The question is whether the ass can decide between two equally *good* things if it lacks free will. A neutral thing, so far as we are concerned here, is a thing which is neither good nor bad and this, I hold, Spinoza considers as imperceptible.

Since, therefore, Spinoza denies that anything can be neutral, the same reasoning via which he demonstrates that nothing can be evil for us through what it possesses in common with our nature goes to support the parallel claim that in the degree to which “a thing is in agreement with our nature, to that extent is it necessarily good.”<sup>63</sup> In brief, harmony consists in commonality of nature; we are in harmony to the extent that we are similar to one another. But what is it that makes us similar to one another?

To answer this question, let us consider propositions thirty-two through thirty-four of the fourth part of the *Ethics*. Spinoza argues, first that insofar as the nature of a thing is precisely its *power*, its condition of activity,<sup>64</sup> and not its weakness, its conditions of passivity arise not from its own nature but, rather, from the same in its state of externally-caused negation.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, he explains, is the nature of no one thing similar to that of any other on the basis of its passive condition but, on the contrary, only its conditions of activity; “insofar as men are subject to passive emotions,” he holds, “to that extent they cannot be said to agree in nature.”<sup>66</sup> Things are similar to one another, things agree in nature, by virtue of the positive content of which they are constituted, what actively makes them to be as they are, *not* by virtue of what they are not. Thus, contends Spinoza in a particularly sweet scholium to E.IV.Prop.32:

“He who says that white and black agree only in the fact that neither is red is making an

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<sup>63</sup> E.IV.Prop.31.

<sup>64</sup> E.III.Prop.7.

<sup>65</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

<sup>66</sup> E.IV.Prop.32.



absolute assertion that white and black agree in no respect. So, too, if someone says that stone and man agree only in this respect, that they are both finite... he is making the general assertion that stone and man agree in no respect. *For things that agree only negatively, that is, in what they do not possess, in reality agree in nothing.*”

We agree, then, on the basis of what, *actively and positively*, we are and never on the basis of what we are not. We never truly agree, then, with respect to our passive states, our conditions of mutual negation.

On the contrary, because the nature of our emotions, our passive state, is “defined by the potency... of external causes as compared with our own power”<sup>67</sup> such that there are as many varieties of emotion as external causes,<sup>68</sup> on the one hand, and individual essences<sup>69</sup> on the other, does it follow that “in comparing different men we distinguish between them solely by difference of emotion.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, contends Spinoza, men “differ in nature insofar as they are assailed by emotions that are passive.”<sup>71</sup> Not only is it the case that we agree, that we are similar, only with respect to our power and our activity, the positive content of our individual existence, and never on the basis of our weakness and passivity, but, in point of fact, it is precisely the latter — and it alone — which makes for our differences. As Spinoza continues in E.IV.Prop.34, moreover, we are not merely *different* insofar as we are passive, but *contrary to one another*. Our condition of passivity is what makes for conflict and *disharmony*.

Now, it might be contended that, in Spinoza’s view, the State functions to manufacture a

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<sup>67</sup> E.IV.Prop.33.Dem.

<sup>68</sup> E.III.Prop.56.

<sup>69</sup> E.III.Prop.51.

<sup>70</sup> E.III.Prop.51.Schol.

<sup>71</sup> E.IV.Prop.33.

degree of similitude and, on that account, conditions of social and political harmony.<sup>72</sup>

Concretely, and put in the most general terms, it regulates two things: actions and beliefs. As to the regulation of beliefs, Spinoza holds that, while “a catholic or universal faith must not contain any dogmas that good men may regard as controversial,” such a faith *should* “therefore contain... those dogmas which obedience to God absolutely demands, and without which such obedience is absolutely impossible.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, though the State, generally speaking, ought intervene neither in the private thoughts of the individual nor in her communication of those ideas to others — this being the most fundamental teaching of the *Theological Political Treatise* as a whole — the State has, nonetheless, the right to institutionalize certain basic theological principles. In this respect, the State is responsible for a degree of direct ideological conformity.

As to the regulation of behavior, we have laws that the state and its representatives promulgate. A law, contends Spinoza, is a “rule of life which man prescribes for himself or for others for some purpose,” be it simply “to safeguard life and the commonwealth” or to promote the “supreme good;” namely, the “true knowledge of God.”<sup>74</sup> In the simplest sense, what a law does is produce conformity of deed, similarity of behavioral practice. More deeply, it is the law which serves — or seems to serve — to generate the singularity of mind of which Spinoza speaks in the *Theological Political Treatise* and repeatedly emphasizes in the *Political Treatise* as a basic component of the ontology of the State.

While Spinoza consistently maintains that “the natural Divine Law does not enjoin ceremonial rites (ibid),” we observe this function most explicitly in the latter. “The patriotism of

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<sup>72</sup> Della Rocca, M. 2010. “Getting his Hands Dirty: Spinoza’s Criticism of the Rebel.” Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide. Melamed, Y.Y. & Rosenthal, M.A. eds. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. pp. 180-82.

<sup>73</sup> TTP.14.

<sup>74</sup> TTP.4.

the Hebrews,” he explains in the *Theological Political Treatise*, chapter seventeen:

“Was not simply patriotism but piety, and this, together with hatred for other nations, was so fostered and *nourished by their daily ritual* that it inevitably *became part of their nature*. For their daily worship was not merely quite different, making them altogether unique and completely distinct from other peoples, but also utterly opposed to others. Hence this daily invective, as it were, was bound to engender a lasting hatred of a most deep rooted kind, since it was a hatred that had its source in strong devotion or piety and was believed to be a religious duty.”

I should like, later, to return to the relationship between patriotism and *hate* as understood by Spinoza. For now, however, it will suffice to point out that daily ritual, ceremonial law and, I would suggest, law in general, serves to generate pious patriotism. It creates, in other words, a sacred belief in the common social body and, to that extent, serves to preserve that body. Thus, contends Spinoza,

“Nature creates individuals, not nations, and it is only difference of language, of laws, and of established customs that divides individuals into nations. And only the last two, laws and customs, can be the source of the particular character, the particular mode of life, the particular set of attitudes, that signalize each nation.”<sup>75</sup>

Law and customs are such an effective tool for forging group identity, in point of fact, that their power, in the case of the Jews, persists to this day, as Spinoza points out in reference to the ritual of circumcision:

“The mark of circumcision, too, I consider to be such an important factor in this matter [i.e. of the continued existence of the Jews] that I am convinced that this by itself will

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<sup>75</sup> TTP.17.

preserve their nation forever. Indeed, were it not that the fundamental principles of their religion discourage manliness, I would not hesitate to believe that they will one day, given the opportunity... establish once more their independent state, and that God will again choose them.”<sup>76</sup>

In short, law creates commonality, has the power to produce and secure a socio-political body and a oneness of mind; this reflects, moreover, no superficial change but — in degrees — a change in nature. If so, the State which issues these laws constitutes a mechanism for the manufacture of commonality.

Still, it cannot be ignored that all this similitude which, on Spinoza’s reading, the Hebrew State facilitated, was grounded first on unmitigated terror. So as to observe how this is so, let us consider at length Spinoza’s account of the Hebrew covenant as it appears in chapter seventeen of the *Theological Political Treatise*.

While it is indeed the case that, finding themselves in a natural state after having left Egypt, the ancient Hebrews — on Spinoza’s interpretation — all “equally and with one voice” declared that “whatever God shall speak, we shall do” and thus promised to transfer “to God all their natural power of self-preservation — which they probably thought they themselves had hitherto possessed — and consequently all their right.” In this way, they agreed “to obey God absolutely in all his commands and to acknowledge no other law but that which he should proclaim as such by prophetic revelation.” They made this promise, moreover, “not by forcible coercion or fear of threats.” In doing so, however, nobody was “named as a mediator;” they did not “transfer their right... to any mortal man.” Thus was it “God alone... who held sovereignty over the Hebrews.” This covenant, therefore “left them all completely equal, and they all had an

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<sup>76</sup> TTP.3.

equal right to consult God, to receive and interpret his laws; in short, they all shared equally in the government of the state.” As I understand it, this means not that they bore the *collective* right to consult God as a corporate body but, rather, that each had the individual authority to do so. If so, it follows that the first covenant was not really a State at all.

If each individual has the right to consult God and receive the law according to his own understanding, then none has the authority to coerce any other to observe God’s law according to his own understanding. Common ideas and a common system of behavior could arise, then, only insofar as consultation with God is understood to function as an equivalent to the exercise of reason. For, as we have seen, we agree to the extent that we are rational and disagree, differ, struggle with one another, insofar as we are not. This first covenant emerges, therefore, as a collective promise to live under the guidance of reason *only*; it is not a political contract of the sort we considered in the preceding chapter, where sovereignty is transferred because reason is *not* being exercised and people endanger one another.

The similitude of ideology and practice which Spinoza describes throughout the *Theological Political Treatise*, therefore, originates *not* with the first covenant, but with the second. This covenant starts with God’s ‘decision’ to contract no “covenant with them until they had experienced his wonderful power.” Upon exposure to divine might, however, terror and not beatitude ensued; “on this first appearance before God,” Spinoza explains, “they were so terrified and so thunderstruck at hearing God speak that they thought their last hour had come.” This inspired them to desist from consulting God directly:

“So, overwhelmed with fear they went to Moses again, saying, ‘Behold, we have heard God speaking in the midst of the fire; now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will surely consume us; if again we are to hear the voice of God, we shall surely die.

Go thou near therefore, and hear all that our God shall say. And *speaking thou (not God) to us*. All that God shall speak *unto thee*, we shall hear and do...’ By this they clearly abrogated the first covenant, making an absolute transfer to Moses of their right to consult God and to interpret his decrees. For at this point *what they promised was not as before, to obey all that God should speak to them, but what God should speak to Moses...* Therefore Moses was left as the sole lawgiver and interpreter of God's laws, and thus also the supreme judge, whom no one could judge, and who alone acted on God's behalf among the Hebrews, that is, held the supreme kingship, since he alone had the right to consult God, to give God's answers to the people, and to compel them to obey.”<sup>77</sup>

We see, then, that the second covenant is made *not* on the basis of a decision to live collectively under the guidance of reason, but out of *intense fear*. Thus is it the case that all the similitude which the Ancient Hebrew may have enjoyed, a similitude born out of legal and ideological principles established *by Moses* in his role as supreme law giver and mediator between the Hebrews and their God, emerges neither from an active state of mind nor from any adequate idea, but precisely from a passive state of mind and an inadequate idea: the sensation of terror.<sup>78</sup> Thus, while the state does function, after a certain fashion, to manufacture similitude, it does so on the basis of passive emotions — fear, in the first place, and arising from our fear, hope<sup>79</sup> and confidence<sup>80</sup> — which are manipulated in the interest of forging a common political body.

Yet, “the emotions of hope and fear,” and likewise confidence, “cannot be good.”<sup>81</sup> Hope and confidence, as I indicated in the preceding paragraph, cannot be without fear, which involves

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<sup>77</sup> TTP.17.

<sup>78</sup> I shall have more to say on the distinction between these two covenants in the following chapter.

<sup>79</sup> E.III.Definitions of Emotions.12-13 & Exp; *ibid.*14.Exp.

<sup>80</sup> E.IV.Prop.47.Schol.

<sup>81</sup> E.IV.Prop.47.

pain,<sup>82</sup> while pain is “man’s transition from a state of greater perfection to a state of lesser perfection.”<sup>83</sup> This is the contrary of good.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, it follows, is the one who acts on the basis of such emotions both lacking in virtue and, consequently, not under the guidance of reason. Spinoza explains in E.IV.Prop.23 that — as we saw earlier, in our examination of E.IV.Prop.1 — one is passive insofar and to the extent that he is “determined to some action from the fact that he has inadequate ideas.” This means, by his definitions of the adequate cause on the one hand and, on the other, of the state of activity<sup>85</sup> — which, again, we have considered rather closely above — that “insofar as a man is determined to some action from the fact that he has inadequate ideas, he cannot be said... to be acting from virtue”<sup>86</sup> if, by “acting from virtue,” we mean that he brings about “that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature.”<sup>87</sup> The passive man is, by definition, lacking in virtue.

Now, Spinoza argues in E.IV.Prop.63 that insofar as:

1. Pain involves a check on the degree to which the the mind is active,<sup>88</sup> to which it exercises reason.<sup>89</sup>
2. Whereby it is that no emotion relating to pain is related to the mind insofar as it is active.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> E.III.Definitions of Emotions.13.

<sup>83</sup> E.III.Definitions of Emotions.3.

<sup>84</sup> Good is “every kind of pleasure (E.III.Prop.39.Schol.)” — that is, every kind of “transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection” or “what is useful to us (E.IV.Def.1).”

<sup>85</sup> I.e. E.III.Def.1-2.

<sup>86</sup> E.IV.Prop.23.

<sup>87</sup> E.IV.Def.8.

<sup>88</sup> E.III.Prop.11.

<sup>89</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

<sup>90</sup> E.III.Prop.59.

3. Fear entails pain<sup>91</sup>

It is the case that:

4. When we experience fear, our mind is not active but passive, and exercises not reason such that “He who is guided by fear, and does good so as to avoid evil, is not guided by reason.”<sup>92</sup>

Categorically, to act out of fear, even when the content of the activity is such that it could be construed as rational — and this, after all, is no great novelty, for, as Spinoza explains in E.IV.Prop.59, “all actions to which we are determined by a passive emotion, we can be determined thereto by reason without that emotion<sup>93</sup> — is to act unreasonably and, therefore, to act without virtue. The same follows for hope and confidence, which, as I noted above, are grounded in the experience of fear. Thus, contends Spinoza do all of these emotions “indicate a lack of knowledge and a weakness of mind” such that:

“The more we endeavor to live by the guidance of reason, the more we endeavor to be independent of hope, to free ourselves from fear, and to command fortune as far as we can, and to direct our actions by the sure counsel of reason.”<sup>94</sup>

Spinoza uses this result to excoriate certain religious authorities “who know how to censure vice rather than to teach virtue, and who are eager not to guide men by reason but to *restrain them by fear so that they may shun evil rather than love virtue.*”<sup>95</sup> Is it, however, religious authorities alone that organize their followers in this fashion? No, evidently not. This is precisely the affective foundation of the State, which, in all its permutations, ultimately boils

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<sup>91</sup> E.III.Prop.18.Schol.2.

<sup>92</sup> E.IV.Prop.63.

<sup>93</sup> I.e. actions in themselves carry no essential value content, are neither good nor evil on their own; everything depends on the causal structure which gives rise to said action.

<sup>94</sup> E.IV.Prop.47.Schol.

<sup>95</sup> E.IV.Prop.63.Schol.



down to the insight that fear is politically utile, that fear seems to create harmony among those of us who seem unable otherwise to organize ourselves for our own mutual aide.

We find, then, the following. Operating under the guidance of the State, being subject to the affections out which the State is constructed and on the basis of which it operates, we are passive. We have inadequate ideas — we enjoy a dearth of knowledge and a weakness of mind. We are lacking in virtue. If this is the case, then the supposedly stable foundation of this State that ensures our security is fragile in the extreme. It progressively undermines itself, steadily to replacing relative liberty with ever greater repression. There is a vicious cycle of political domination which erodes every freedom. This is how it works.

The State, as we pointed out in the preceding chapter, is constructed in response to the presumption of human irrationality, the incapacity of men to live in harmony with one another without being forced to do so in one manner or another. The affective mechanism whereby this force is exercised is the condition of shared fears, shared hopes, and mutual confidence. Because we fear one another, or are made to fear one another, we agree to transfer our dispersed and fragmented amalgam of fears to the State as a collective body with a monopoly on legitimate violence. We trade our fear of one another for fear of the state, for hope in the security which the state seems to offer. Yet, these very emotions — fear, respect, devotion, hope, confidence — these passive states of mind, these essentially inadequate ideas, do not make us more rational people. They do not make us better people. On the contrary, they represent the same passivity, the same irrationality, weakness, and lack of virtue, that we had before, only with a different hue or a different shape. We direct these emotions to a corporate entity rather than toward one another. But this difference, a change in the object with respect to which we assume such states, does not fundamentally change the states themselves. We are still the same sort of people who

must be forced to get along. What the State supplies, then, is a state of agreement, a condition of harmony, of the *negative* kind. Just as the black and white are 'alike' only insofar as neither is red, so too are citizens alike only insofar as none are stronger than the corporate body that now threatens them.

Still, though we have not changed, though the states of mind we assume seem to be more or less the same, it appears that we do get a degree of harmony. It appears that by we do, in point of fact, get security in exchange for liberty. Appearances, however, are rather deceiving.

If it is the case that when we do not live under the guidance of reason, when we operate on the basis of inadequate ideas, of passive states of mind we do not and cannot agree with one another, we *differ* from one another, we enter into conflict with one another, it would seem that this supposed harmony is more of a veneer than anything else. It is, moreover, a thin one at that.

Not only does this fragile harmony not lead us to a condition of reason such that we *can* agree, can share genuine and lasting similitude, can cooperate and be free of conflict, but it carries within itself a dynamic, a progressive element as well. From our inadequate ideas and our passive states of mind we arrive at *more* inadequate ideas and *further* passive states of mind. We become less capable of generating harmony among ourselves. If it was precisely for this reason that the State and its repressive institutions, the constitutive threat it wields, were founded in the first place, it follows that the State then becomes *more necessary and not less*. There arises a greater need for security and, therefore, a broader scope of liberties that must be withheld by force. However, we then become *more weak*. This means that we necessarily operate on the basis of ideas that are *more inadequate* and that we assume state of mind that are *more passive*, which means that we are *even less capable of creating harmony amongst ourselves*, of regulating our own social and political lives. This, in turn, means that the State must increase security,

must withhold more liberties, must become even more repressive — and so it continues on and on. There is vicious cycle to sovereignty; dominion is a self-valorizing socio-political structure which slowly displaces everything else of value.

We find, then, that coerced harmony does not lead toward reason. In fact, by nurturing passive emotions, inadequate ideas, it acts as a corrosive agent. It slowly deteriorates reason and virtue. It therefore erodes itself, kindles a subterranean disharmony. It therefore primes us for further coercion, for the erosion of more liberties, and the cycle repeats itself.

Thus, however effective the means devised “to influence men’s minds,” to replace sheer terror with something more captivating, like “the joy springing from devotion, that is, love mingled with awe” — which entails, in any case, a fundamental condition of fear anyway — the “long schooling in obedience” that is the life of the citizen of State, even a well-organized one, the end result is not liberty, but its *appearance*. “To men so habituated to it,” says Spinoza, “obedience must have appeared no longer as bondage, but freedom.”<sup>96</sup> It is the appearance of liberty, and not liberty itself, that the passive foundation of State can, in the best of circumstances, supply. Its tutelary function is an illusion.

### **III. Concerning Nationalism and Hatred or the State as an Irrational Corporate Body**

Having come to the end of our examination of the nature and tendency of coerced harmony, having arrived at the result that coerced harmony is internally unstable and does not lead to reason but progressively undermines it, I would like to make a brief supplementary point as to the remark with which I closed the preceding section. I indicated that the State supplies the appearance of liberty. This appearance of liberty (as opposed to the fact of it) constitutes, I

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<sup>96</sup> TTP.17.

think, the basis for a Spinozist critique of nationalism.

The State does not merely manipulate or redirect pre-existing inadequate ideas and passive states of mind in order to generate agreement or harmony in negative form, but fosters — toward the same end and with equally problematic results — its own such ideas and its own such states of mind that do not exist outside of the State. Or, at the very least, which have far less an opportunity to express themselves. One of the most prominent of these is national, religious, and ethnic hatred. Excessive pride with respect to these social categories could likewise be identified but, seeing as the two tend to go hand in hand and the former is more immediately problematic, I will place interpretive emphasis there.

Let there, first, be recalled three points:

1. “Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.”<sup>97</sup>  
Among other implications, this means that nothing is without its special perfection insofar as each is that which it is by virtue of some positive expression of divine substance.
2. Spinoza defines hatred as “pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause.”<sup>98</sup>
3. Pain — as I have noted a number of times already — involves a transition from a greater to a lesser state of perfection.<sup>99</sup> It follows that pain impedes us and is, to that extent, bad.<sup>100</sup>

For these reasons, “hatred... never be good.”<sup>101</sup> This is so on three accounts. First, if indeed

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<sup>97</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>98</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.7.

<sup>99</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3.

<sup>100</sup> E.IV.Def.1.

<sup>101</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.

each thing expresses the perfection of God or Substance in a definite and determinate way, “we can feel no hatred... for anything, because, if we do, we deprive ourselves of that perfection which is to be found in everything.”<sup>102</sup> Second, if hatred is inseparable from pain, it follows that hatred, like pain, is necessarily bad, involving always “desolation, enervation, and annihilation.”<sup>103</sup> Third, we “endeavor to remove or destroy whatever we imagine to be opposed to pleasure and conducive to pain”<sup>104</sup> because doing so constitutes a source of pleasure in itself.<sup>105</sup> That is, because the idea of what excludes that which causes us pain, that which we hate, “assists the conatus of the mind”<sup>106</sup> by driving out the thought of that which causes us pain, that which we hate, that which checks the power of the mind to think.<sup>107</sup> Thus do we endeavor, likewise, to injure or destroy those men whom we hate.<sup>108</sup> Yet, “the good which every man *who pursues virtue* aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind.”<sup>109</sup> When we aim to harm or destroy others, however, it is evident that we do not desire for them the good which we desire for ourselves. To that extent are we not among the men who pursue virtue but, rather, the opposite; we are then bad people. For these three reasons, then, hatred is always bad and never good.

Now, in E.II.Prop.18 Spinoza explains that the human mind imagines a given body when that body of which it is the idea, the human body, is “affected and conditioned by the impressions of an external body in the same way as it was affected when certain of its parts were acted upon by the external body.” When, that is, my body assumes a state similar to that which it

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<sup>102</sup> KV.II.7.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> E.III.Prop.28.

<sup>105</sup> E.III.Prop.20.

<sup>106</sup> E.III.Prop.20.Dem.

<sup>107</sup> E.III.Prop.13.

<sup>108</sup> E.III.Prop.39.

<sup>109</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.

entered in consequence of the influence of a given external body, my mind will imagine said external body. If, therefore, when having first assumed that state, “the human mind was... conditioned in such a way that the mind imagined two bodies at the same time... it will now also imagine two bodies at the same time, and the mind, in imagining one of them, will straightway remember the other as well.”

Granted, therefore, that mental images represent the affective states of our body more than the nature of those external bodies that affect it,<sup>110</sup> it follows that the same reasoning applies to affective states. If the human mind was once conditioned in such a way that it experienced two emotions simultaneously, when it later experiences the one it will likewise experience the other.<sup>111</sup> If so, when we come into contact with some external body which brings it about that we experience the first affection, it will likewise bring it about that we experience also the second. In such manner will that body be the indirect cause of said emotion. Anything, therefore, can constitute the indirect cause of any emotion, the indirect cause of pain.<sup>112</sup> (Here, I omit Spinoza’s argument by hypothesis from the neutrality of some entity. As I suggested earlier, I question not only the notion that that we can perceive what is neutral with respect to us, but whether something can be neutral at all). In this way, likewise, can it come about that we hate anything whether or not it is itself the efficient cause of pain;<sup>113</sup> for, as I have noted a number of times, we love or hate whenever pleasure or pain is *associated* with an external cause. What matters is the association, not the fact.

The same holds for parts or aspects of things as for whole objects or entities. Insofar as I associate the emotions I experience in connection to the whole of a thing with some part or

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<sup>110</sup> E.II.Prop.16.Cor.2.

<sup>111</sup> E.III.Prop.14.

<sup>112</sup> E.III.Prop.15.

<sup>113</sup> E.III.Prop.15.Cor.

aspect of it, I will experience the same emotions when confronted with that part or aspect on its own, independently of the whole. Thus is it that “from the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have something similar to an object that is wont to affect the mind with... pain, we shall... hate it, although the point of similarity is not the efficient cause of these emotions.”<sup>114</sup> By virtue of the mere fact that two things are associated in our minds, we will feel about the one what we feel about the other; if I hate X and it is associated with Y in my mind by virtue of any point of similarity, however tenuous, I will likewise hate Y. Such unwarranted hate, has deeply problematic trajectory.

In the first place, it is naturally reciprocal. In E.III.Prop.27 Spinoza argues that if:

“The nature of the external body is similar to the nature of our own body, then the idea of the external body in our thinking will involve an affection of our own body similar to the affection of the external body.”

Consequently, he continues:

“If we imagine someone like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, this thought will express an affection of our own body similar to that emotion. So from the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, we are affected by a similar emotion along with it.”

Thus will he who imagines someone to be affected with hatred will by that very fact himself be affected with hatred. That is, he will feel pain associated with an external cause. Aware of no other cause, he will feel this pain together only with the idea of the one who hates him. Thus will he hate the one who hates him.<sup>115</sup>

This sets in play another vicious cycle. The one who first hated, who subsequently

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<sup>114</sup> E.III.Prop.16.

<sup>115</sup> E.III.Prop.40-41.

perceives that he is now hated in return, will respond with commensurate hatred while, yet, his original hatred persists. Thus will he hate doubly. It stands to reason that the same phenomenon takes place with respect to the one who was first hated when he is, now, the subject of a fresh hatred. He too will hate doubly. And so the operation repeats itself. In this way is “hatred... increased by reciprocal hatred.”<sup>116</sup>

Now, one such point of similarity whereby one may come to associate with something indirect pain and, consequently, indirect hatred is national identity. Thus, argues Spinoza, “if anyone is affected with... pain by someone of a... nation different from his own and the... pain is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the general category of that class or nation, he will... hate not only him but all of that same class or nation.”<sup>117</sup> Hence the origin of national or cultural bias. Thus inspired by hate, the desire to eliminate that which is hated emerges — so we discovered earlier — as a natural outcome. Hence the origin of national or cultural violence. National identity, the sort of social category created by the State, serves, therefore, as a pretext for hatred and violence.

We observe this quite prominently in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Although command cannot be exercised over minds in the same way as over tongues,” Spinoza points out in the seventeenth chapter that minds are, nonetheless “to some degree under the control of the sovereign power, who has many means of inducing the great majority to... *hate*... whatever he wills.” Thus, he continues, though:

“It is not by direct command of the sovereign power that these results are produced... experience abundantly testifies they often proceed from the authoritative nature of his power and from his guidance, that is, from his right. Therefore there is no absurdity in

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<sup>116</sup> E.III.Prop.43.

<sup>117</sup> E.III.Prop.46.



conceiving men whose... hatred, contempt and every single emotion is under the sole control of the governing power.”

Here, we see that the sovereign representative of the state *can induce* in the citizenry the feeling of hatred. Later in the same chapter, we find that such hatred serves a crucially important political function, galvanizing the populace and uniting it.

In the first place, we find that the dark complement of that collective transfer of right, whereby the Hebrews — on Spinoza’s reading — are said to have founded their state, is hatred. “Having transferred their right to God,” he says “believing that their kingdom was God’s kingdom and that they alone were God’s children” they came to feel, likewise, that “the other nations were God’s enemies for whom they therefore felt an implacable hatred” believing this hatred to constitute “a mark of piety.”

This pious hatred was reinforced, in turn, by the daily rituals of which I spoke earlier and became, thereby, a natural component of the national character. “The patriotism of the Hebrews,” he contends, again, in the same chapter:

“Was not simply patriotism but piety, and this, *together with hatred for other nations*, was so fostered and nourished by their daily ritual that it inevitably became part of their nature. For their daily worship was not merely quite different, making them altogether unique and completely distinct from other peoples, but also *utterly opposed to others*. Hence this daily invective, as it were, was bound to engender a lasting hatred of a most deep-rooted kind, since it was a hatred that had its source in strong devotion or piety and was believed to be a religious duty-for that is the bitterest and most persistent of all kinds of hatred. And this was reinforced by the universal cause of the continuous growth of hatred, to wit, the reciprocation of hatred; for the other nations inevitably held them in

*bitter hatred in return.*”

As Spinoza sees it, this hatred, which “was not only permissible but a religious duty” served, among, other things, “to fortify the hearts of the Hebrews to endure all things for their country with unexampled steadfastness and valor.” It was “particularly effective not only in keeping them in their native land but also in avoiding civil war and in removing the causes of strife” by forging exclusive bonds among the populace.

Now, it could be said that in emphasizing so strongly the supposed Jewish hatred for the gentile Spinoza is repeating standard anti-semitic tropes and, in this way, proceeding in bad faith. To an extent it is true; he *is* playing on these persistent and deeply noxious themes. However, I think that the crucial point lies in the use to which these tropes are put. As I see it, a reading of the *Theological Political Treatise* sufficiently narrow to support the supposition that Spinoza’s remarks concerning Jewish hatred of the gentile indicated a social condition peculiar to the ancient Hebrew state or to Jews in general is simply unwarranted. It is altogether evident that, throughout the text, Spinoza uses the ancient Hebrew State as an exemplar of States in general; his aim — one of his aims, at any rate — is to derive general lessons about the nature of the state, its formation and its organization, from the biblical narrative in a fashion comparable to the manner in which Machiavelli treats those texts chronicling the history of the Roman people. On what grounds can we justly exclude his discussion of political hatred from this hermeneutic structure? We cannot; what Spinoza has to say about the relationship between patriotism and hatred of the outsider has, without doubt, general import. Hatred of outsiders seems to constitute, in his view, a fundamental component of any ideology of national unity.

Though I think that this contention stands on its own, seeming to emerge as it does from the hermeneutic architecture of the *Theological Political Treatise* as a whole, it seems to me that

it can be demonstrated from the distinction which Spinoza attempts to draw between the enemy and the object of hatred. In chapter sixteen of the *Theological Political Treatise* he notes that “it is not hatred but the state's right that makes a man an enemy.”<sup>118</sup> Yes, we can grant that it is not hatred which *makes* the enemy. Yet, to the extent that the enemy is the one who is believed to have *injured* the state (ibid.) — to have caused it *pain*, if only metaphorically — the enemy is necessarily *hated*. For, as we have repeatedly observed, hate is pain associated with the idea of an external entity, an outsider. Hate does not make the enemy, but the enemy is necessarily hated. Moreover, if the enemy is simply the one who does not recognize the sovereignty of the State — this itself constituting the equivalent of injury (ibid.) — every outsider is an enemy. Thus is every outsider hated. Hate, therefore, is inseparable from the notion of national unity, from the patriotic sense of belonging to some particular State as to a corporate body. In this sense, the State constitutes the framework for a mode of hatred that cannot exist without the State. This hatred, moreover, is not an unwanted byproduct, but an indispensable organizing mechanism; it is the basis for the feeling of and pride in national sovereignty or liberty.

Yet, at the same time, we find that Spinoza holds that “whatever we desire as a result of being affected by hatred is base, and, in a state, unjust.”<sup>119</sup> Hatred, as we observed above, is *never* good. If so, the State comes apart at its seams. If hatred is the inescapable dark side of that patriotism indispensable to its ideological architecture — which makes for the so-called freedom which ostensibly constitutes its highest aim — then it turns out that the State is organized around precisely that which delegitimizes it. It is rational on the grounds that it is irrational. Though he who lives “through reciprocal hatred lives a miserable life indeed,”<sup>120</sup> the

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<sup>118</sup> TTP.16.

<sup>119</sup> E.III.Prop.45.Cor.2.

<sup>120</sup> E.IV.Prop.46.Schol.

State maintains security on the grounds that it encourages reciprocal hatred and, to that extent, the perpetual escalation of violence.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Rational Statecraft Harbors Within Itself a Structural Contradiction**

I began the second section of this chapter with a summary of the specific rationale justifying the State as a particular socio-political form distinct from the social condition of man in general and the benefits that accrue to men by their association with others. This involved, in essence, an assertion to the effect that a just thread links three things: reason, force, and harmony. This thread, so I suggested, is woven of three propositions which, for the sake of exposition here, I list in an order different than that in which they originally appeared:

1. Reason and Harmony Go Hand in Hand.
2. Reason Accords with the Negation of Liberty if the Alternative is Disharmony.
3. Coerced Harmony Serves a Pedagogical Function, Leading Passionate Men to Reason.

So far as I am concerned, the foregoing analysis, with respect to these three propositions, demonstrates the following. First, reason and harmony do not go hand in hand *necessarily*. Rather, a distinction is to be made between rational harmony and irrational harmony. Or, to put it in those terms we discovered over the course of our examination, a distinction is to be made between positive harmony — which involves the real properties and the true nature of those things which are said to agree — and negative harmony — which involves no real agreement at all. Second, while it has not been disputed that given the choice between coerced harmony and manifest disharmony, the former is the lesser of two evils and, therefore, the rational option, two caveats must be made to our acquiescence. First, we have found that the very notion of coerced harmony is in certain respects self-contradictory. If it exists at all, it is a fragile state of affairs, a

temporary respite from disharmony and not a stable alternative. Second, even if we ignore the fragility of coerced harmony, this option is rational only to the extent that it is the *sole* viable alternative to manifest disharmony. If, however, non-coercive harmony exists as a viable socio-political option, it is evidently the better choice. Finally, coerced harmony *does not* serve a pedagogical function; there is no path that leads from the state of being we assume under coercion, under the ‘guidance’ of the State, to reason and virtue. On the contrary, being dominated makes us more wretched while, as I indicated in the final section of this chapter, at the same time leading us to believe that the very mechanisms that degrade us express and embody our condition of freedom and liberty. Thus do we find, as Alexandre Matheron put it, that at the root of the state, there is "*quelque chose d'irremédiablement mauvais*," something irretrievably bad.<sup>121</sup>

In a later chapter I will lay out the framework for what this alternative, from the theoretical resources available to us in Spinoza’s collected writings, would look like. In what immediately follows, however, I would like, first, to examine the problem of the socio-political alternative. To be more clear, in speaking of an alternative to the State, I am already indicating its displacement or dissolution. I am gesturing toward revolution. But revolution itself is a problematic topic for Spinoza that must be addressed alone and prior to any consideration of the

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<sup>121</sup> Matheron, A. 2011. “L’Indignation et le Conatus de l’Etat Spinoziste.” In *Etudes sur Spinoza et les Philosophies de l’Age Classique*. Lyon: ENS Editions. pp. 219-229. In this respect, I strongly disagree with Matheron when in *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza* he mitigates this claim and states that:

“In liberal states... passions of the second column [i.e. “derivations of love and hate as a function of circumstances”], which clearly outweigh those of the third [i.e. “inter-human love and hate”], moderate each other due to their very multiplicity and tend toward *hilaritas*... The problem we posed at the end of Chapter VII [i.e. the problem of alienation], therefore, no longer appears as insoluble. The circle can be broken and the cycle restarted: there is no need to be reasonable for the future, because in a well-constructed society, external causes organizing themselves so that we create the perceptual field and the peace which reason needs to triumph. *The liberal state liberal, without being a machine to make wise, would at least prepare us to have wisdom*... Is it not thanks to it that Spinoza himself was able to achieve his philosophical project? (Matheron, A. 1988. *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. p. 519).

No, the liberal state *does not* prepare us to have wisdom but, on the contrary, impedes our rational development by enacting harmony by force.

substance of any particular revolutionary motion.

## The Idea of Revolution

*"I come, for in deserts of power I was born and came of age;  
I come, for the powerful have awakened and nourished my rage;  
I come, for humanity's breast cannot kill the strong seed of life;  
I come, for no one can forever forge in chains human freedom's strife"*<sup>1</sup>

— Joseph Boshover

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<sup>1</sup> Bovshover, J. 1975. Revolution. In *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century*. Foner, P.S. ed. Champaign: U. of Illinois Press.

## **I. Introduction: Revolutionary Ideas and the Idea of Revolution**

In his *Radical Enlightenment*, Jonathan Israel identifies a few fundamental objectives. One of these is “to demonstrate that the Radical Enlightenment, far from being a peripheral development, is an integral and vital part of the wider picture [of the European Enlightenment] and was seemingly even more internationally cohesive than the mainstream Enlightenment.”<sup>1</sup> Prosecuting this claim, he proposes two intersecting theses involving the status of Spinoza and Spinozism vis-a-vis this trajectory of the Enlightenment, the support of which occupy him throughout much of the text.

He holds, first, that there exists, or had existed, a “persistent and unfortunate tendency in modern historiography to misconstrue and underestimate” the prominence of Spinozism in “European intellectual debates of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.”<sup>2</sup> He holds second, and by logical extension, that “Spinoza and Spinozism were, in fact, the intellectual backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere,”<sup>3</sup> its very “philosophical matrix.”<sup>4</sup> Spinoza, as he puts it elsewhere, rightly “emerged as the supreme philosophical bogeyman of Early Enlightenment Europe.”<sup>5</sup> On Israel’s account, the cohesion of the Radical Enlightenment is attributable to the fact that its various developments can ultimately be traced to and converge upon Spinoza’s unique contribution — in one permutation of it or another — to the republic of letters.

There was, he contends:

“Always an inherent tendency during the Enlightenment for democratic and egalitarian

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<sup>1</sup> Israel, J. 2001. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford U. Press. p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. vi.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



revolutionary movements urging drastic change to justify their programs via monist... systems defining the moral order as something purely natural and properly constructed exclusively on the principles of equity and reciprocity in social relations. Conversely, it followed directly from their structures and value-systems that a comparable revolutionary and egalitarian tendency could not easily feed on [the work of Moderate Enlightenment figures which, though more popular], could not help the oppressed peasantries of Europe, religious minorities, serfs, slaves, tradesmen... imprisoned debtors, and other victims of an archaic legal system and penal code, and underprivileged colonists, including the Spanish American Creole; only radical ideas could.”<sup>6</sup>

Spinoza’s system, being the most robust and comprehensive iteration of the monistic idea, constitutes, therefore, the very bedrock of these movements. This is not merely a matter of historical coincidence, an empirical fact. Rather, so Israel wants to suggest, radical *political movements* arise naturally *from* and are philosophically inherent to *radical ideas*; prime among them, Spinoza’s.

This brings us to a crucial point not only so far as Israel’s work as a historian is concerned, but also with respect to the manner in which he gives us to understand Spinoza’s radicalism. What Israel has to say with regard to Spinoza’s role vis-a-vis the emergence and the development of the Radical Enlightenment generally and radical political movements in particular arises from the methodological position he assumes throughout his work, in each and every one of his major texts. In brief, it is his opposition to historical materialism and its progeny. In his *Enlightenment Contested*, for example — though similar passages could be selected from any of his other books — Israel writes that:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

“The ‘new’ social history’s subordination of the intellectual to allegedly deeper and more powerful social structures is part of a venerable tradition of historical and social thought reaching back via the Annales School in France and Marx all the way to Montesquieu who was the first in modern times to assert that there is such a thing as an underlying set of structures — geographical, climatic, economic, or racial — which generate in particular societies a fixed or slow-moving social and moral disposition generating social forms and structures held to be more fundamental, and more apt to determine the overall shape of historical development, than the supposedly surface froth of mere articulated doctrines, ideas, and elite culture.”<sup>7</sup>

While Israel does not go so far as to dismiss the role of socio-cultural, economic, or other material factors in the progress of historical change — he is, in other words, not a strict idealist — he does take seriously, in his examination of the Enlightenment and its opposition, the fact that

“All late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century commentators were convinced... it was philosophers who were chiefly responsible for propagating the concepts of toleration, equality, democracy, republicanism, individual freedom, and liberty of expression and the press, the batch of ideas identified as the principal cause of the near overthrow of authority, tradition, monarchy, faith, and privilege.”<sup>8</sup>

This leads him to adopt what he describes as “the ‘controversialist’ approach to intellectual history,” which is a:

“Methodology envisaging the interaction between society and ideas as a series of

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<sup>7</sup> Israel, J. 2006. *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752*. New York: Oxford U. Press. pp. 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. vii.

encounters in which concepts partly shared and partly disputed are deemed not the sole motor of social and political change, since material shifts remain major factors, but *the prime channelling and guiding force.*”<sup>9</sup>

What is important to stress, from Israel’s emphasis on the concept, the idea, as *the* prime guiding force underlying social and political change, is that — on this account — what makes Spinoza a revolutionary figure is the *impact of his ideas*. Whether the philosopher himself endorsed revolutionary activity or not becomes irrelevant. He was a revolutionary, in other words, because political and social revolutions arise from intellectual revolutions, from revolutions of the mind. If therefore, Spinoza accomplished the latter, he is responsible for the former.

Israel is therefore unconcerned with place of revolution in Spinoza’s own writings. To inquiry after the extent to which Spinoza could even have conceived of revolution in the modern sense, the extent to which he endorsed or rejected insurrection and resistance, and so on, he could simply reply: “it doesn’t matter.” Spinoza’s status as a radical and revolutionary thinker depends only on the nature and influence of his ideas. These constitute a social and political force in their own right that functions independently of whatever endorsement Spinoza may have given or declined to give to the revolutions that his work inspired. In this sense, however important Israel’s contribution to intellectual history, in having highlighted the centrality of this inspiration, it does not supply us with resources adequate — or even particularly relevant — to the task of examining Spinoza’s own perspective vis-a-vis social and political revolution.

In the present section, it is my aim to do precisely that. That is, to consider *not* Spinoza’s impact on the development of revolutionary thought, the *revolutionary character of his ideas*. In the wake of Israel’s tremendous labors this seems, in the first place, to constitute a rather

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

uncontroversial assertion and, in the second place, one the critique of which — were I inclined to offer one — would necessarily constitute a lengthy text in its own right. I take it for granted that, in this respect, Spinoza was the revolutionary *par excellence*. Rather is it my intent to inquire as to the *idea of revolution* so far as he articulates it or, at any rate, as it is derivable from his writings.

To this end, I will begin by determining more precisely what, in the first place, might be meant by the term “revolution” so far as it appears in the literature on this topic in Spinoza scholarship. My aim, here, shall not be to offer a comprehensive historical analysis but, instead, simply to supply and explain its various shades of meaning in the employ of conceptual exemplars. Having done so, I will then proceed to summarize what Spinoza himself has directly to say concerning social and political change. I will then review three distinct and, in my view representative, positions taken up in the scholarly literature in interpretation of Spinoza’s somewhat ambivalent remarks — one which takes them more or less at face value and regards Spinoza in a rather conservative light, as an advocate of incremental reform rather than radical social or political transformation, and two which, for different reasons, brackett them and discover, in Spinoza, a measured but nonetheless firm advocate of revolution. Finally, I will articulate the grounds on which I find each of these approaches lacking and, in doing so, indicate the contours of my own position on the question, a position which I shall articulate more precisely in the following chapter.

## **II. Revolution in Three Senses**

So far as it is treated in the scholarly literature dealing with the idea of revolution in Spinoza’s written corpus, there appears to be three senses in which the idea of revolution is

developed, each, so far as I am concerned, derived in a distinct manner, from the literal meaning of the word. That which is in revolution, first of all, *revolves*. It rolls; it moves and changes in a *circular or cyclical fashion*. That which is in revolution, second of all, *revolts*. It *rolls over*, or *is overturned* once and for all. That which is in revolution, lastly, *rolls along*; it flows. In this sense, the idea of revolution involves the notion of a current in which things are swept up and carried along together. We have, then, three sense in which the motion of revolution is to be conceived: rolling around, rolling over, and rolling along. Here, of course, I speak in terms most general; let me now elaborate.

That which is in revolution “rolls around.” Revolution, in its original significance, involved the idea of cyclical motion or change and that heavenly bodies constituted the exemplar; the idea of ‘revolution’ begins with astronomy.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “when the word first descended from the skies” and was subsequently “introduced to describe what happened on earth among mortal men,” as Hanna Arendt put in in her *On Revolution*, did it appear:

“As a metaphor, carrying over the notion of an eternal, irresistible, ever-recurring motion to the haphazard movements, the ups and downs of human destiny, which have been likened to the rising and setting of sun, moon, and stars since times immemorial.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This is, indeed, how Spinoza uses the term in the rare cases that he does. Thus, for example, in his *Hebrew Grammar*, is the Hebrew word *galgel* twice translated as “to revolve” and linked to the root verb *galal*, which he twice translates as “to roll (HG.16 & 31).” Incidentally, *galgal* is also the term used by medieval Jewish philosophers to denote the Aristotelian spheres.

It is in this particular sense of the word that it turns up elsewhere. In the second chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, for instance, we find that Spinoza contrasts the “more scientific attitude” of those who “understand that the earth moves and the sun is motionless or does not *revolve* around the earth” and attempt “to extort this meaning in the teeth of the Scriptural text” with “the simple view that Joshua... and all the host along with him believed that the sun *revolves* around the earth.” Here, we find that the condition of rolling around, of moving in a circular — or at least cyclical — fashion, bears special semantic weight in the field of astronomy. Celestial bodies exist in a state of revolution; which revolves around which may be a matter of dispute, but the sort of movement itself is not. In Spinoza’s writings, then, words related to “revolution” denote cyclical motion in general and the orbit of celestial bodies in particular. They are not used in a political context.

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, H. 1990. *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin. p. 42.

Human society conceived along astronomical lines likewise “rolls along uniformly;”<sup>12</sup> it proceeds through a repeating sequence of determinate stages akin to the various positions assumed by the heavenly bodies as they proceed through their various orbits.<sup>13</sup>

According to this view, human things are eternal, but not static.<sup>14</sup> The time of revolution curls in on itself; there is change, but each instance of it turns out to be nothing more than an *restoration* of some preexisting state of affairs whose time has come again. Like other natural phenomena, human affairs *necessarily* recur. The wise man, like the astronomer, discerns things to come that are “removed from all influence of human power.”<sup>15</sup>

Revolution thus conceived belongs to the Medieval and Renaissance worlds in which God or Fortune makes history, not man — not for the most part at least.<sup>16</sup> In one respect,

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<sup>12</sup> Copernicus, N. 1992. On the Revolutions. *Nicolaus Copernicus: Complete Works*. Rosen, E. trans. Vol. 1. Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers. p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> As Arendt suggests in the above-mentioned text, it is in the work of Polybius that we discover the *locus classicus* of revolution thus conceived. So as to supply an exemplar for reflection, let us therefore turn to the sixth book of his *Histories* for inspiration (Polybius. *The Histories with an English Translation in Six Volumes*. Paton, W.R. trans. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press). There, Polybius first nods his head to Plato’s notion of *anacyclosis* as elaborated in Books eight and nine of the *Republic*, where a devolution from the rule of kings or aristocrats (see *Republic* 587d — where Socrates assumes that “we identify a king and an aristocrat” — that Plato wishes to equate monarchy with aristocracy) to that of tyrants is traced, and then goes on to elaborate the model after his own fashion, emphasizing “*natural* transformations into each other of the different forms of government (Histories.VI.5).” Polybius innovates, however, where he introduces a loop into this downward spiral that seems not to have existed in Plato’s conception. “Such is the cycle of *political revolution*,” he remarks, “the course appointed by nature in which constitutions change, disappear, and finally return to the point from which they started.” Anyone, he continues “who clearly perceives this may indeed in speaking of the future of any state be wrong in his estimate of the time the process will take, but if his judgement is not tainted... he will very seldom be mistaken as to the stage of growth or decline it has reached, and as to the form into which it will change (Histories.VI.7).”

<sup>14</sup> In this way, the form of eternity here considered departs drastically from that which arises from the parmenidean tradition that — as Harry Wolfson so amply demonstrated in his now classic study — shaped many of Spinoza’s own views and according to which the eternal is *timeless*, exclusive of *any change of any sort*. Parmenides considered being “ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect (Coxon, A.H. 2009. *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing. p. 64)” such that “justice did not loosen it in her fetters and move it either to come to be or to be perishing, but holds it fast (Ibid. p. 67).” Being is always “the same and in the same state,” it “remains thus where it is perpetually (Ibid. p. 72)” and *in this sense eternal*.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt, H. On Revolution. p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Machiavelli — Renaissance political theorist *par excellence* — has been widely regarded as the father of modern political science. Croce, for example, wrote once that Machiavelli was the first to discover “the necessity and autonomy of politics, politics which is beyond moral good and evil, which has its own laws against which it is futile to rebel, which cannot be exorcised or banished from the world with holy water” — in this realization was the political in its modernity, according to Croce, born (See Berlin, I. 2013. *Against the Current: Essays in the History*

however, it *does* give rise the idea of revolution the modern sense. The idea of recurrence implies *inevitability*; revolution is “irresistible.”

That which is in revolution also “rolls over.” Revolution is irresistible insofar as it is irrevocable; it involves or at least aspires toward a decisive shift, a break with what has passed that cannot be reversed.<sup>17</sup> This break, says Arendt, is “inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history *suddenly begins anew*.” The past does not repeat itself and what is to come is necessarily unprecedented. This means that revolution in the properly modern sense involves first an innovation in temporal consciousness.<sup>18</sup> As Arendt explains, “only under the conditions of a rectilinear time concept are such phenomena as novelty [and] uniqueness of events... conceivable at all.”<sup>19</sup>

It is in this respect that revolution is to be distinguished from rebellion or revolt. “Medieval and post-medieval theory,” Arendt says, “knew of *legitimate rebellion*,” but even legitimate rebellion does not a revolution make. “A challenge of authority or the established

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of Ideas. Princeton: Princeton U. Press. p. 67. This translation of the passage appears there; Berlin also offers a significant and rather interesting critique of the proposition. However, I will digress no further to consider it). Yet, as Arendt notes, he himself operated within a decidedly premodern theoretical framework; he was not, by any means, a revolutionary in the sense that now understand that designation. As Leo Strauss put it, “Machiavelli *appears* to have broken with all preceding political philosophers... Yet his largest political work ostensibly seeks to bring about the rebirth of the ancient Roman Republic; far from being an innovator, Machiavelli is a *restorer* of something old and forgotten (Strauss, L. 1987. Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527. In *History of Political Philosophy*. 3rd ed. Strauss, L. & Cropsey, J. eds. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. p. 279).”

In fact, Arendt seems to suggest that the notion of revolution as restoration persisted well into the Modern era and began to be displaced only once it became evident that restoration had become impossible and that it was necessary “to embark upon an entirely new enterprise (*On Revolution*. p. 45).” In demonstrating this claim, she points to Thomas Paine who, in his introduction to *The Rights of Man* could still speak of the American and the French revolutions as follows. “What we now behold,” he says there, “may not improperly be called a ‘*counter-revolution*.’ Conquest and tyranny, at some earlier period, dispossessed man of his rights, and he is now recovering them” while yet he speaks of the same event as one which “promises a new era to the human race (Paine, T. 1848. *The Rights of Man: An Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution*. New York: G. Vale. p. 103).” The unprecedented changes which these very modern revolutions set in motion are *still* represented as if they involved a restoration of some prior state of affairs whose time had come once again.

<sup>17</sup> This semantic shift, Arendt highlights in the July 14, 1789 exchange that took place between Louis XVI and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld Liancourt. When the former was informed of the storming of the Bastille, he is reported to have exclaimed “*C’est une revolte*.” Liancourt then corrected him; “*Non, Sire*,” he said, “*c’est une revolution* (*On Revolution*. p. 47).”

<sup>18</sup> *On Revolution*. p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*. p. 27.

order of things *as such*” is lacking, it was always a matter of *restoring* legitimate authority.<sup>20</sup> In other words, mere revolt fits well within the model of revolution in its “astronomical” sense, within a cyclical conception of time.<sup>21</sup>

In brief, *revolution* is felt as irresistible insofar as it is seen to constitute a rupture in the continuum of history, an absolute turning over of things that is unlike a rebellion or even a civil war, which serve a restorative function and operate within a cyclical temporal format. The truly revolutionary rupture, in contrast, presupposes a straightening out of the temporal spiral, whereby all movement is progressive and the future is forever uncharted.

That which is in revolution, finally, “rolls along.” The irresistibility of revolution gives rise to an intuition of its seductive qualities, the manner by which, in the rush of its current, those party to it are swept up and carried along in “an *irresistible movement*.”<sup>22</sup> Here, the irresistibility

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> It resembles revolution in the proper sense only incidentally, only insofar as violence is often a factor in both. But, says Arendt, violence is essentially incidental to revolution and at best its inevitable accompaniment; it by no means adequately circumscribes the thing itself. We can well recall many examples in which legitimately revolutionary transitions have been conceived without the accompanying thought of violence — this is especially pronounced in the utopian tradition, where the revolutionary idea can be isolated from pragmatic exigencies external to it. To take one of countless examples, consider the case of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*. After having been apprised of the course of events giving rise to the socialistic condition of society enjoyed in Boston in the year 2000, the narrator remarks to Dr. Leete — who had recounted this history — “Such a stupendous change as you describe...did not, of course, take place without great bloodshed and terrible convulsions.” Dr. Leete replies as follows:

“On the contrary... there was *absolutely no violence*... The whole mass of the people was behind it. There was no more possibility of opposing it by force than by argument. On the other hand the popular sentiment toward the great corporations... had ceased to be one of bitterness, as they came to realize their necessity as a link, a transition phase.... the great corporations had taught the people... that the larger the business the simpler the principles that can be applied to it... Thus it came about that... when it was proposed that the nation should assume their functions, the suggestion implied nothing which seemed impracticable even to the timid (Bellamy, E. 1888. *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*. Boston: Ticknor & Co. pp. 80-81.”

Whatever we may make of his particular proposals or their probability, the point stands: a revolutionary transition is conceived which does not entail violence. The two often coincide but do not actually overlap.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 48-49. It is to be granted that Arendt, herself was highly critical of this aspect of revolutionary consciousness. In her view it ultimately lead to the equation of freedom with necessity and, to that extent, unfreedom. “The metaphors of stream and torrent and current” were coined, she comments, by the revolutionary actors themselves “who, however drunk they might have become with the wine of freedom in the abstract, *clearly no longer believed that they were free agents* (ibid.).” Rather, were “willful aims and purposes” were supplanted by “the anonymous force of the revolution (ibid. p. 51).” In place “of freedom, necessity became the chief category of political and revolutionary thought (ibid. p. 53).” This, she contends, is the meaning of the famous dialectics of



of revolution involves not simply the irrevocability of some political change or another,<sup>23</sup> but the manner in which this has taken place and what it accomplishes. For, whence leads “stream and torrent and current” of revolution? According to Arendt, toward a fresh “*space of appearances*.”<sup>24</sup>

What is a “space of appearances?” In her *On the Human Condition*, Arendt explains that the space of appearance is a sort of “in-between”<sup>25</sup> wherein an individual — by speech and by action — takes shape discursively, becomes *someone* by inserting himself into “an already existing web” of human meaning, revealing himself as an agent but not as “*the author or producer of his own life story*.”<sup>26</sup> In this respect, the torrent of revolution gives rise to a recrudescence of group identity in which individuals slowly precipitate.

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freedom and necessity in which both eventually coincide (ibid. p. 54),” giving rise to the “grandiose ludicrousness (ibid. p. 58)” that “a revolution must devour its own children (ibid. p.44).”

My concern, however, is not her retrospective evaluation of this aspect of revolution in the modern sense. Rather, I am concerned only with the nature of this aspect. How did she conceive its theoretical contours? What makes it what it is?

<sup>23</sup> In fact, the idea of revolution as pivotal historical shift and the idea of revolution as an irresistible current productive of a collective identity constitutive of freedom — coincide. Thus does Arendt contend as follows in *The Human Condition*:

“To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin... This beginning is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created... *It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before... the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle.* The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable (Arendt, H. 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press).”

As we shall observe below, to act (or to speak) and, in this manner, begin to be someone takes place within the space of appearance. The unexpected beginning, the miraculous departure from “what happened before” — that is, the very notion of the historical rupture — is inseparable from the formation of a space of appearance. In this way, the idea of revolution conceived as an interruption, a rolling-over, overlaps with its conception as a rolling-along.

<sup>24</sup> On Revolution. p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> In *On the Human Condition*, Arendt explains that “action and speech create a *space between the participants* which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where *I appear to others as others appear to me* (The Human Condition. p. 198).” The space of appearance, on this account is a space *between people* wherein they appear to one another. By appearing to one another, however, Arendt does not mean that they merely “show up” simply to present themselves for observation. Rather, it is “in acting and speaking” that “men show who they are... and thus make their appearance (ibid. p. 179).” Conversation and collective action, “sheer human togetherness” constitutes the substance of the space of appearance — this is the in-between (ibid. p. 180).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

This precipitation of individuality within a refreshed collective narrative, a public sphere, is what, according to Arendt, constitutes human freedom:<sup>27</sup> it is in this space that we are released from the singularity of our own subjective experience<sup>28</sup> and, likewise, that we generate and exercise effective power<sup>29</sup> — and, as we learn from Spinoza, *freedom is power* and visa-versa. Without it, she says, there is only force, only tyranny.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the irresistibility of revolution whereby it comes to be experienced as a torrent, an incessant and rushing current in which we are necessarily swept up and carried along thus produces a novel intersection of individual and group identities on the one hand and, on the

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<sup>27</sup> The space of appearance or the public realm, she says, is precisely “where freedom can unfold,” where “it charms and become a visible, tangible reality (On Revolution. p. 33).” Freedom, Arendt maintains “is exclusively located in the political realm,” in the public sphere (On the Human Condition. p. 57).

<sup>28</sup> Though, she says, “the common world is the common meeting ground of all” it is nonetheless the case that: “Those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life... *Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear* (On the Human Condition. p. 57).”

The public sphere, the space of appearance, is the space of freedom because it consists in a plurality of positions, perspectives from which the “paradoxical plurality of unique beings (ibid. p. 176)” can be realized. By it we are free in the sense that we can become more fully ourselves. In contrast to our condition of being-in-private, we are seen, in public, no longer “only under one aspect,” permitted no longer to present ourselves “in only one perspective.” Thus are we no longer “imprisoned in the subjectivity of [our] own singular experience (ibid. p. 58).” In the space of appearance we become real and “to be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality;” that is, of the freedom to be (ibid. p. 198).

<sup>29</sup> “Power springs up between men,” Arendt explains “when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse... Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them (ibid. p. 200).”

<sup>30</sup> Whoever “isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, *forfeits power and becomes impotent* (ibid. p. 201).” When power is forfeited and yet control is desired, the alternative is force, “which indeed one man alone can exert against his fellow men and of which one or a few can possess a monopoly by acquiring the means of violence (ibid. p. 202).” We have, then, collective action and power contrasted with isolation and force. The latter combination is precisely how Arendt conceives *tyranny*. “The outstanding characteristic of tyranny,” she says is that it rests on isolation:

“On the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion... Tyranny prevents the development of power, not only in a particular segment of the public realm but in its entirety; it generates, in other words, impotence as naturally as other bodies politic generate power (ibid.).”

If, therefore, we grant that tyranny, the combination of isolation and force, the negation of human plurality and the power which it constitutes, represents likewise the negation of freedom, it follows, by the inverse, that human plurality, the space of appearance, the public realm and the power it constitutes, and so on, are precisely that which is to be conceived as human freedom.

other, a framework for collective power or freedom that resists — or constitutes, at any rate, the exception to — the singularity of tyranny and violence.

In sum, then, we discover three senses in which the idea of revolution is conceived. In the first place, that which is in revolution *revolves*. It rolls; it moves and changes in a *circular or cyclical fashion*. All things recur, and each transition is nothing more than a restoration. Though revolution in this sense does not enter into the modern configuration of the idea, the sense in which revolution is *inevitable* and *irresistible* does.

In its irresistibility, revolution involves, first of all, a sort of *rolling-over*. A final *overturning* of or rupture in history takes place and some unprecedented state of affairs is arranged. The ring of time is replaced with an arrow. It involves, second of all, an impression of *rolling-along* or of being swept up in a current by which collective and individual identities are rearticulated through collective action and public discourse, through an exercise of freedom.

### **III. Spinoza's Position Concerning the Legitimacy of Revolution: Three Perspectives**

Having, therefore, completed our summary of revolution in three senses, it is upon us now to consider three distinct views as to whether a legitimately revolutionary viewpoint can be detected in Spinoza's work and, if so, how or in which manner. Michael Rosenthal — whose perspective is by far the most traditional — holds that while Spinoza is a strong advocate of *reform*, in no way can he be considered a supporter of revolution. Hasana Sharp and Ted Stolze, in contrast, maintain that a revolutionary spirit can be detected in Spinoza. Sharp builds her case by de-emphasizing the temporal component of the idea of revolution in the modern sense and highlighting the importance of its social component. Stolze, on the other hand, builds his case on Spinoza's naturalism and the consequent centrality of indignation as a political affect.

It is the aim of the present section not to critique these three distinct perspectives concerning Spinoza's position as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of revolution. It is, rather, my intent only to survey them and to consider the textual support each draws upon in pressing its case. In the following section, however, I will indeed offer my judgment as to the strengths and weaknesses of each along with my own viewpoint on the subject.

### **A. Revolution has no Legitimate Place in Spinoza's Political Philosophy**

Michael Rosenthal<sup>31</sup> opens his discussion with an approving reference Jonathan Israel's research into the origins and development of the Radical Enlightenment. He agrees that "Since Spinoza's writings inspired these ideas" — namely, ideas like the secularization of politics, the freedom of expression, the supremacy of egalitarian and democratic government, and so on — "there is little question that he was a revolutionary thinker." He disagrees, however, that this actually makes Spinoza an advocate for revolution in any meaningful sense. A "revolution of the mind" may, indeed, be connected directly to political revolution, but this means neither that the two phenomena are identical nor that the latter is necessarily prefigured in the former. Rather, contends Rosenthal, when it comes to interpreting Spinoza's work in itself, it is better "on the level of the individual... to think of progress in terms of *improvement* rather than transformation, and on the level of the collective, to think of it as *reform* rather than revolution." Spinoza is no radical, but occupies a position we might describe as center-left. To borrow the phrase that inspires Rosenthal's analysis, Spinoza hearkens to the "siren song" of revolution but, like Odysseus, fastens himself to the mast of the ship of state so that it will veer neither toward a Scylla nor a Charybdis.

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<sup>31</sup> Rosenthal, M. 2013. "The Siren Song of Revolution: Spinoza on the Art of Political Change." In *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 34:1. pp. 111-132.

Rosenthal's case is essentially built on two propositions. First, that "Spinoza... condemns any radical attempt to change the form of a political regime." This proposition, he advances on the basis of a presumed similarity between acts of treason, rebellions, seditions, and revolts — which Spinoza treats explicitly — and revolution — which he does not. Both, he seems to suggest, involve regime change and would, to that extent, be structurally equivalent from Spinoza's perspective. Second, that "Spinoza calls into question the idea of systematic historical progress" and was, in this sense, "not aware of the modern ideas of revolution" which — so we discovered earlier — involve a rectilinear conception of time. If this temporal experience is missing in Spinoza's work, Rosenthal contends, it follows that no account of regime change appearing therein could bear revolutionary significance so far as we have since come to construe it. This, it might also be added, would be the case even had Spinoza written *approvingly* of such events and aspirations.

## **1. The Condemnation of Regime Change**

Let us, therefore, begin with the first proposition, that revolution is akin to rebellion or treason, and that Spinoza univocally condemns all such phenomena of regime change. The first part of the proposition cannot be decisively demonstrated at all from Spinoza's own writings for the simple fact that the word "revolution" appears in them but rarely and *never* in a political context — a point, albeit for different reasons, that Rosenthal takes care to emphasize. As I see it, this is an interpretive choice on Rosenthal's part. If we nonetheless grant him this association, we may proceed to consider Spinoza's explicit position vis-a-vis regime change and assume that it would indeed carry over to the question of revolution had Spinoza raised it.

To begin with, what is it to act in a treasonous or seditious fashion, to rebel, or to revolt.

What, in Spinoza's view, do these things mean? So far as I understand it, the crucial term to define is treason; all the others derive their sense from it. As we have observed a number of times, Spinoza conceives of the State as a contracted transfer of natural right by the individuals invested with it to the community as a whole as it represents itself directly or by one or another indirect means. So represented, natural right becomes sovereign power. Once sovereign power has been constituted, obedience on the part of the subject becomes a duty, for "whoever transfers to another his power of self-defence, whether voluntarily or under compulsion, has fully ceded his natural right and has consequently resolved to obey the other absolutely in all matters; and this he is obliged to do without reservation." To the sovereign power — however it be represented — therefore, "belongs the sovereign right of commanding what he will."<sup>32</sup> From the constitution of sovereign power we derive the significance of treason. A subject is said to have committed this crime," says Spinoza:

"If he has *attempted* for *any* reason to seize for himself the sovereign power's right or to transfer it to another... if anyone embarks on some undertaking of public concern on his own initiative... he has violated the right of the sovereign power and is guilty of treason and is rightly and properly condemned."<sup>33</sup>

An act is treasonous to the extent that it involves the usurpation of sovereign power in any manner at all, however well intentioned.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, treason is political injustice, for "he is

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<sup>32</sup> TTP.16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> As Spinoza immediately goes on to explain, "I say without qualification 'he who for any reason' attempts to seize for himself the sovereign power's right; thus making no distinction between cases where either injury or gain to the entire state would have unquestionably resulted. Whatever be the reason for the attempt, he is guilty of treason and is rightly condemned." Cf. "Since the sovereign alone has the right to deal with public affairs or to appoint ministers for that purpose, it follows that a subject is committing treason if he engages in any public business on his own initiative without the knowledge of the supreme council, even though he believes that what he intended was in the best interests of the commonwealth (TP.4.3)."

called unjust who endeavours to appropriate to himself what belongs to another.”<sup>35</sup>

Sedition and insurrection fall well within the self-same theoretical architecture, constitute the same “injustice.” Spinoza holds that those political beliefs are seditious which, “when posited immediately have the effect of *annulling the covenant* whereby everyone has surrendered his right to act just as he thinks fit.” That is, which undermine the sovereign power; for “merely to hold such an opinion is to violate the pledge tacitly or expressly given” to it.<sup>36</sup> Thus is a seditious opinion nothing other than a sort of verbal treason.

The same goes for insurrection, open rebellion, and revolt. In his *Political Treatise*, Spinoza maintains that:

“The... rebellions that are often stirred up in a commonwealth never lead to the dissolution of the commonwealth by its citizens... but to a change in its form — that is, if their disputes cannot be settled while still preserving the *structure* of the commonwealth.”<sup>37</sup>

In other words, a rebellion involves *not* the dissolution of sovereign power but, rather, two overlapping events. First, its usurpation. This is the case not only with respect to its ostensive

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<sup>35</sup> TP.4.23.

<sup>36</sup> TTP.20. This claim seems to run against the grain of Spinoza’s aim throughout the *Theological Political Treatise* — namely, that the State can be preserved in safety “only by granting to the individual citizen the right to have his own opinions and *to say what he thinks* (TTP.Pref.).” He seems to contend, however, that a distinction is to be made between performative speech and the mere expression of ideas. Thus, in TTP.20 does he specify that the expression of seditious viewpoints is objectionable “not so much because of his judgment and belief as because of the action that is implicit therein.”

The political covenant, were it ever actually contracted, could be nothing other than a performative expression and “obedience is not so much a matter of outward act as internal act of mind (TTP.17).” The ancient Hebrews, for example, were said to have *promised* to obey God and, afterward, Moses as the representative of God. If the covenant is effected by the “internal act of mind” and by performative expression, so too is it thusly revoked. It is for this reason, I believe, that Spinoza holds, “if anyone holds the opinion that the sovereign is not possessed of full power, or that promises need not be kept, or that it behoves everyone to live as he pleases, or if he holds other such views as are directly opposed to the said covenant, he is guilty of sedition (TTP.20).” The same goes for speech acts which are not so much intended to express ideas as to incite a crowd to revolt. The freedom to express any other other idea that does not directly impinge on the salience of the political covenant, however, Spinoza defends.

<sup>37</sup> TP.6.2.

*ends*, but also with respect to its *means*; for, as Spinoza maintains, it is the right of the sovereign power “to levy militia, to assign military duties, to issue commands”<sup>38</sup> and so on. The organization of an armed rebellion is, by definition, a usurpation of sovereign power. Rebellion involves, secondly, the transfer of sovereign power. It is not the commonwealth itself that is overthrown — or which, at least, the rebel aspires to overthrow — but its *structure*; namely, the manner in which sovereign power is represented in its distribution. Open rebellion, therefore, is nothing other than treason of a particularly ambitious variety.

We see, then, that treason, sedition, revolt, and rebellion are proscribed because they are “unjust,” involving — as they do — an appropriation of sovereign power by those to whom it does not belong. What is at stake, here, is not simply the fact that these sorts of activities are illegal. This is no surprise; of course the State cannot condone that which erodes its foundation. What matters, however, is the fact — or the possibility, at any rate — that this foundation has been eroded. *If* rebellions and the like do not simply transfer sovereign power but erode it *then* they are, on the whole, pernicious; for the constitution of sovereign power — superficially at least — arises from the dictates of reason and, to that extent, represents the very embodiment of freedom.<sup>39</sup>

This question as to whether or not rebellions and the like indeed erode sovereign power hinges on their effectiveness. If, on the whole, rebellion results in a successful and enduring transfer of sovereign power — this, I take it, being the measure of its success as a political instrument — then, it would seem, sovereign power has not been eroded in any significant

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<sup>38</sup> TP.4.3.

<sup>39</sup> I have already called into question this dichotomy. The State certainly offers a condition of life superior to that achievable sans political organization of any form. Political organization, however, is neither identical with the State form nor exhausted by it. The real question, therefore, is whether or not, among forms of political organization, the State form is best. I contend it is not. That, however, is not at issue here. Here, we have taken the State form for granted and interpret accordingly.



manner. Rebellion is not pernicious. If, on the other hand, rebellions are generally unsuccessful, if the structure of sovereign power repeatedly fluctuates, then the latter is rendered unstable and to that extent weak. Rebellion is pernicious. So, are rebellions generally successful or not? Are rebellions, in this sense, pernicious always or potentially beneficial? No, Spinoza seems to maintain rather consistently. Rebellions are generally unsuccessful — the transfer of sovereign power is tentative on the whole — and, therefore, largely pernicious.

Let us consider a few examples.

**a. The Usurpation of Religious Authority**

In his preface to the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza denounces the sedition of those who “with an impudence quite shameless, seek to usurp much of this right [the right of civil authorities] and, under the guise of religion, to alienate from the government the loyalty of the masses.”<sup>40</sup> The inevitable result, so Spinoza explains in chapter nineteen of the same text, is that “there will inevitably arise strife and dissensions that can never be allayed.” The consequential result is that “nothing whatsoever is gained” by this division and, “on the contrary, evil is aggravated.” Here, the usurpation of sovereign power remains incomplete; still, to the extent that it has taken place we may speak of it as a sort of “partial” regime change that carries with it a corresponding and inevitable division of loyalties whereby the State is weakened and ultimately destabilized.

Here, Spinoza speaks of a process whereby sovereignty is split in such a manner that the government is destabilized by divided loyalties. The people, he supposes, feel compelled to side with religious authorities against the secular regime. In the case of the

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<sup>40</sup> As he explains in chapter nineteen of the same text, “everyone knows how much importance the people attach to the right and authority over religion, and how they all revere every single word of him who possesses that authority, so that one might even go so far as to say that he to whom this authority belongs has the most effective control over minds.”

Hebrew state, however, the opposite takes place; the usurpation of sovereignty concerning religious matters arouses ire against religious authorities and destabilizes the state by influencing the people to inaugurate a strong secular monarchy which ultimately devolves into outright tyranny.

#### **b. Transition to and from the Monarchy: The Rise and Fall of the Hebrew State**

We have already observed the founding of the Hebrew State so far as Spinoza understood it. To restate it in brief, after initially having collectively transferred their natural rights to God and then to Moses, the latter assumed supreme kingship over them. Rather, however, than naming a successor, Moses ultimately established a theocracy, dividing sovereignty between a priestly class (the Levites) invested with legislative authority and a confederation of tribal councils, each invested with executive authority over their own territories except in cases of national emergency when dictatorial powers would be temporarily transferred to a commander-in-chief appointed directly by God.

In some respects, this division of sovereign right — together with several other measures designed to encourage spiritual and political cohesion of the people<sup>41</sup> — served to check abuses of power. In this way, it promised to constitute a mechanism for “avoiding civil war and... removing the causes of strife.” Yet, according to Spinoza, the system was fundamentally flawed from the start.

The very institution of an entitled priestly class meant that “right and honor” were not equally distributed. This inequity, ultimately destabilized the commonwealth.

Popular resistance could be quelled only by spectacular violence whereby the people

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<sup>41</sup> For example, they shared a common religion and a common holy place, the maintenance of which was a responsibility shared by all. Likewise, was a shared patriotic feeling and corresponding hatred of outsiders (as I have discussed in an earlier chapter) fostered by common theological commitments and ritual practices.

were reduced to a state of exhaustion; between periods of unrest, there obtained but a “cessation of rebellion rather than a restoration of harmony.”

Dire consequences resulted from thus breaking the spirit of the people.

Ultimately, explains Spinoza, “there ensued great changes, unbounded license, self-indulgence and sloth, leading to a general decline” such that:

“After being frequently subjugated, they came to open rupture with divine rule and sought a mortal king, making the seat of government a court rather than a temple, with all the tribes no longer retaining a common citizenship on the basis of the divine rule and the priesthood, but by allegiance to a king.”

Under the first constitution, “all the tribes would have enjoyed equal right and honor,” would gladly have supported “the sacred right of their own kinsfolk,” deferred to their account of God’s word, and, in this manner, would ultimately “have remained far more closely united.” Under the second constitution, however, a path was forged that led to the displacement of the total theocratic regime and the rise of the monarchy.

This transition, in turn, constituted “ample material for fresh sedition, which led ultimately to the downfall of the entire state.” As Spinoza explains, “the first kings to be chosen from private station were content with the rank to which they had been elevated.” Because, however, “rule by sufferance” is intolerable to the monarch, their descendants “gradually began to bring about extensive changes so as to hold the absolute sovereignty.” To undermine the authority of the priestly class, they introduced foreign worship and false prophets; this, however, only stirred up resistance. Resistance movements, however, “merely succeeded in installing a new tyrant at the cost of much citizen blood” because “the causes of tyranny remained” such that “there was no end,

then, to discord and civil wars, but the causes which led to the violation of the divine law were always the same, and could be removed only along with the whole constitution.”<sup>42</sup>

Now, when Spinoza derives, from this sordid tale of political error, a lesson as to the fatal consequences attending to the decision of “a people unaccustomed to the rule of kings... to set up a monarchy,” it is often understood that he has in mind the appointment of Saul. It was, after all, with Saul’s rise to power that a new regime of a radically different form was inaugurated, setting into motion the course of events whereby the preexisting tribal government was slowly displaced.

It seems to me, however, that the real force of Spinoza’s argument lies in his assertion that the decision to appoint Saul was essentially inevitable.<sup>43</sup> All of the discord, Spinoza suggests, which transpired before and after the rise of the monarchy had its origin in the Hebrew constitution itself and followed more or less naturally from it. It followed, namely, from the division of sovereignty between religious and secular spheres, on the one hand, and, on the other, the election of the Levites to assume rights over the former. This, in turn, had its own origin in the *second covenant* whereby absolute sovereign right was transferred to Moses such that the latter became “supreme king.” Had this first transition from pure theocracy to Mosaic monarchy not taken place neither

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<sup>42</sup> All passages quoted in this subsection until this point hail from the seventeenth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*.

<sup>43</sup> This was a popular position among medieval biblical exegetes. Basing themselves on the Talmudic claim that the Israelites assumed responsibility for three commands upon entry into the promised land, one of which was the appointment of a king (Sanhedrin 20b), most exegetes held that Samuel’s reluctance to appoint a king was arose from no principled objection to the institution in general but, rather, from the manner in which the demand was made. The most notable exception is that of Don Isaac Abarbanel, who explains in his commentary to the first book of Samuel that biblical laws pertaining to the appointment of kings are to be interpreted as conditional obligations. That is, should the people wish to appoint a king, there are certain regulations which must be observed. Any *obligation* to appoint kings, however, Abarbanel denies emphatically (introduction to ch. 8). Were this the case, the flaw to which Spinoza points in the original covenant is far less severe. The transfer of sovereignty would then exist as possibility but would not stand at the very foundation of the covenant. For more on this topic see Lorberbaum, Y. 2011. *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury.

would the discord ensuing from that constitution which he subsequently implemented. I maintain, therefore, that it is the establishment of the first Hebrew monarchy under Moses that constitutes the true object of Spinoza's critique. This interpretation will become more important in the following chapter. For present purposes, however, we see that Spinoza considers disastrous regime changes whereby people unaccustomed to political conditions under the authority of a king enter into them.

By the same token we observe with Spinoza that the reverse is no less disruptive and, therefore, no less conducive to the disintegration of the State. "People, accustomed to royal rule and constrained by that alone," he remarks, "will despise and mock a lesser authority; and therefore, on removing one king, it will find it necessary to appoint another in his place, as did the prophets of old. And the successor will be a tyrant not by choice, but by necessity."<sup>44</sup> For, in order to assert his own authority and avoid "reigning on sufferance" he will be forced to avenge the death of his predecessor and thus follow in his footsteps. In both respects, therefore — the transition to and from the monarchy alike — Spinoza is highly skeptical as to the results to be expected from regime change.

Now, to further support his contention as to the futility of regime change — the transition *from* monarchy in specific — Spinoza also points to the course of events which began with the execution of Charles I and ended with Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. In combination with his discussion of Dutch resistance to the machinations of Philip II of Spain, however, I would like to consider this episode in the subsequent subsection as indicative of Spinoza's notion as to the cyclical character of historical time. I will, therefore, omit consideration of this sequence of events here.

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<sup>44</sup> TTP.18.

From both of foregoing examples — that of the usurpation of sovereignty in religious matters at least on the part of religious authorities and, especially, that of the transition to and from the monarchy on the part of the ancient Israelites — we see that, on the whole, it is Spinoza’s contention that rebellions are generally unsuccessful. The transfer of sovereign right to which they aspire is largely tentative. In consequence, do rebellions serve, on the whole, simply to destabilize the State rather push it toward progressively better forms of political organization. In this sense, rebellions are not simply unjustified from the constitutional standpoint of the regime against which they act, but pernicious in the sense that they are generally ineffective. “A people,” he states, “has often succeeded in changing tyrants, but never in abolishing tyranny or substituting another form of government for monarchy.”<sup>45</sup> Thus do rebellions lead to results worse than those that prevailed beforehand — or at any rate not better. It seems that, from Spinoza’s perspective, they are, at the very least, not worth the bloodshed. Thus, contends Rosenthal, despite the temptation to adopt an esoteric reading of books like the *Theological Political Treatise* and thus to discover a more revolutionary message than appears on their surface, “Spinoza should be read more literally. He was aware of the temptation of radical political change, yet he thinks we should forswear it”<sup>46</sup>

## **2. The Limits of Progress and the Cyclicity of Political Change**

As I began the last subsection with a theoretical account of revolt as it can be derived from the philosophical resources supplied to us within Spinoza’s work and only then proceeded to reflect on his examples, I would like to adopt the same procedure here. Especially insofar as Rosenthal actually restricts himself to the former and does not venture to consider the latter.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.19.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal, M. 2013. “The Siren Song of Revolution.”

In the third chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza explains that because the power of God determines all things in Nature, it acts both through human nature and upon it from without. On this basis does he account for the traditional distinction between general and particular providence:

“Whatever human nature can effect solely by its own power to preserve its own being can rightly be called God's internal help, and whatever falls to a man's advantage from the power of external causes can rightly be called God's external help.”<sup>47</sup>

God's “external help,” Spinoza goes on to explain, is fortune, while his “internal help,” in contrast, is virtue. For that is virtuous which “can be understood solely through the laws of [a man's] own nature.”<sup>48</sup> If, by E.III.Def.1, which holds that what follows from our nature is that of which we are the adequate cause, and constitutes, by E.III.Def.2, that with respect to which we are considered active, it follows that God's “internal help” is a mode of action while his “external help,” that of which we are not the adequate cause and with respect to which we are not active, is a passion.<sup>49</sup>

It is only with respect to our virtues, our own actions, contends Rosenthal, that we can speak of progress. If we rely on fortune, he explains:

“Then our lot will vary; it will sometimes be up and other times down. But if we depend on our own nature and the knowledge of how our individual nature relates to nature as a whole, *then we can continuously improve.*”<sup>50</sup>

An account of human history, then, in which progress is the governing principle — an account in which revolution in the properly modern sense is conceivable — will be one in which consistent

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<sup>47</sup> TTP.3.

<sup>48</sup> E.IV.Def.8.

<sup>49</sup> E.III.Def.3.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenthal, M. 2013. “The Siren Song of Revolution.”

action, individual and collective, predominates over passion.

Is “progressive development” on the part of the individual or the collective, indeed, attainable? According to Rosenthal, it is not. In essence, his case stands on the fact of human finitude. Spinoza holds that “the power whereby... man, preserves its own being is the very power of God... not insofar as it is infinite but insofar as it can be explicated through actual human essence.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, he also holds it to be axiomatic that “there is in Nature no individual thing that is not surpassed in strength and power by some other thing”<sup>52</sup> such that “the force whereby a man persists in existing is limited.”<sup>53</sup> If, indeed, human power is limited, Spinoza explains, it follows that he necessarily “undergoes changes other than those which can be understood solely through his own nature and of which he is the adequate cause.”<sup>54</sup> This means that passions are an inevitable part of human experience.<sup>55</sup>

If so, explains Rosenthal, it turns out that we are very much dependent upon fortune. This means that while some things are under our control and lend themselves to progressive development, many things are not. There are, he says, neither “general natural principles that guarantee progress in our ability to strive and act according to our natures” nor “historical principles that undergird a steady ascendancy” from a weaker form of government to a stronger one.<sup>56</sup>

Not only does his system afford no theoretical guarantee of progress according to Rosenthal, but the regime changes, too, which Spinoza identifies follow “not a linear pattern of

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<sup>51</sup> E.IV.Prop.4.Dem.

<sup>52</sup> E.IV.Ax.

<sup>53</sup> E.IV.Prop.3.

<sup>54</sup> E.IV.Prop.4 & Dem.

<sup>55</sup> E.IV.Prop.4.Cor.

<sup>56</sup> Rosenthal, M. 2013. “The Siren Song of Revolution.”



progress, but a traditional cyclical pattern of constitutional metamorphosis.”<sup>57</sup> We have seen this already, to a degree, in the political polarity of tyranny and rebellion which plagued the ancient Hebrew State. It appears, however, even more definitively in Spinoza’s account of the English Civil Wars, the appointment of Cromwell to the Protectorate, and the ultimate restoration of the monarchy under Charles II on the one hand and, on the other, Dutch resistance to the imperial efforts of Philip I of Spain.

Concerning the English Civil Wars, Spinoza remarks as follows. The English people attempted to dismantle the monarchy by legal means but found changing their form of government impossible. To manage the ensuing chaos, Cromwell was promoted to the Protectorate. He then secured his position, on the one hand, by exterminating the royal line and its prominent supporters and, on the other hand, by starting a war so as to distract the populace.

“Too late, then” concludes Spinoza:

“Did the people come to realize that to save their country they had done nothing other than violate the right of their lawful king and change everything for the worse.

Therefore, when the opportunity came, it decided to retrace its steps, and was not satisfied until it saw a complete restoration of the former state of affairs.”<sup>58</sup>

Here, then, regime change follows a circular pattern whereby all things return to their beginning and nothing meaningful or lasting is achieved.

While Spinoza maintains that the Dutch War of Independence and the subsequent creation of the Dutch Republic did not constitute a revolt insofar as the Estates had always retained sovereignty and never transferred it to the counts that governed the Provinces, the same cyclical model appears. Philip II of Spain attempted to usurp sovereignty — this constituted, in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> TTP.18.

effect, a revolt vis-a-vis the legitimate sovereign power. The ultimate result was a restoration of sovereignty to the Estates such that, as in the case of England, matters ultimately came full circle, returning to their origins.<sup>59</sup>

In both cases, history assumes a cyclical form and it seems that Spinoza conceives of historical change according to the traditional model of revolution summarized earlier. That is, revolution in the astronomical sense, whereby all change ultimately tends toward the restoration of some prior state of affairs and progress is illusory. In this way does Rosenthal hold that “without historical principles of development, what we can aim at is the reform of already established collective systems with their many idiosyncrasies.”

### **3. Summary of Section III.A**

To conclude this section then, we find that a substantial case has been made as to absence of a meaningful place for revolution in Spinoza’s philosophy. As I indicate earlier, it is based, firstly, on the contention that revolution constitutes a form of revolt or rebellion and that, according to Spinoza, these phenomena are both illegitimate and ineffective, tending, on the whole, to erode the foundations of the State and thus proving pernicious. It is based, secondly — as we already found in Arendt — on the contention that the rise of a properly revolutionary mindset demands a conception of time that allows for progress, a rectilinear sense of temporality as opposed to the cyclical temporality that pervaded political thought from ancient times through the end of the Medieval period. According to Rosenthal, progress is always and necessarily relative in Spinoza’s view. Moreover, as he also points out, Spinoza’s accounts of political change tend to reflect the impression that history, indeed, assumes a circular pattern.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

In lieu of the revolutionary approach to political change, Rosenthal ultimately advocates a reading of Spinoza which emphasizes the centrality of incremental reform. I will not venture to present his account of this contention here. I will, however, remark, first of all, that incremental reform *also* presupposes a progressive conception of temporality. If indeed things can slowly improve in the long run, do we not assume that time will not turn in on itself and restore us to some prior — and presumably worse — condition? If “a man maintains,” for example, “that a certain law is against sound reason, and he therefore advocates its repeal” not by violating it or stirring up “popular hatred” against the magistrate, but by submitting his opinion “to the judgment of the sovereign power,”<sup>60</sup> if he thus attends to the siren song of revolution<sup>61</sup> without succumbing to it, what temporal consciousness separates him necessarily from his less reticent companions in political and moral innovation? Furthermore, it seems to me that Spinoza has a lot to say about the nature of time and, in these accounts, it does not seem to assume a circular form. This objection, however, I will treat of later. For the present, let us proceed to examine the two central claims on which is based the sort of case against revolution in Spinoza’s work that Rosenthal’s argument exemplifies: that revolution is like rebellion, and that revolution requires a progressive account of historical time.

## **B. Rationality and Revolution in Spinoza’s Political Philosophy**

Hasana Sharp maintains that Rosenthal’s conviction as to Spinoza’s unequivocal disapproval of revolution is overly “hasty.” On his interpretation, the fact that Spinoza neither did nor could have employed the word “revolution” in a political sense only serves to support the contention that there is no room for this idea in Spinoza’s system. Sharp, in contrast, turns this

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<sup>60</sup> TTP.20.

<sup>61</sup> TP.7.1.

proposition on its head with the suggestion that, because the term never appears in Spinoza's work, it is not at all a matter of course that the idea it designates is one he would have condemned.

More substantially, Sharp objects to Rosenthal's most fundamental hermeneutic assumption, an assumption which, as I noted earlier, simply cannot be grounded in Spinoza's own writings; namely, that revolution is akin to revolt and rebellion.<sup>62</sup> Citing Arendt's authority on the subject of revolution, she notes that "revolutions are more than successful insurrections"<sup>63</sup> and then continues as follows:

"Insurrection and regime change can just as easily be conservative or reactionary as revolutionary, and thus Spinoza's views on these phenomena are not necessarily the appropriate place to discover his position on the question of revolutionary change."<sup>64</sup>

For Sharp (and for Arendt as well), "revolution typically refers to an insurrectionary movement *under the banner of universal freedom.*" Both elements are crucial. The sheer fact that an insurrection, a rebellion, or a revolt has taken place does not a revolution make; its aim must be freedom. If so, Spinoza's condemnation of *regime change* — the object of which may not be freedom — does not *necessarily* carry over to the case of revolution;<sup>65</sup> revolution is more than

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<sup>62</sup> If the idea of revolution is as absent from Spinoza's work as Rosenthal wishes to claim, on what grounds can it be suggested that Spinoza equates it with things like revolt and rebellion?

<sup>63</sup> On Revolution. p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Sharp, H. 2013. "*Violenta Imperia Nemo Continuit Diu*: Spinoza and the Revolutionary Laws of Human Nature." In *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 34:1. pp. 133–48.

<sup>65</sup> It seems to me that this qualification of Spinoza's viewpoint on regime change is less than thoroughly even-handed. Yes, in principle it is the case that to condemn revolt is not necessarily to condemn revolution if the former does not necessarily entail the cause of freedom. However, Spinoza does condemn that rebellion in the wake of which Cromwell assumed the protectorate and which ultimately concluded itself in the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. While a far-right figure like Oswald Mosley may have seen in Cromwell the progenitor of British fascism, a man like Leon Trotsky can likewise say concerning him that:

"One dictatorship moves society forward while another drags it back. Mussolini's dictatorship is a dictatorship of the prematurely decayed, impotent, thoroughly contaminated Italian bourgeoisie: it is a dictatorship with a broken nose. The 'dictatorship of Lenin' expresses the mighty pressure of the new historical class and its superhuman struggle against all the forces of the old society. If Lenin can be

that.<sup>66</sup>

Sharp's account of the revolutionary and her case against Rosenthal as to its legitimate place in Spinoza's work rests on a shift of interpretive emphasis in Arendt's work. We have already seen that the idea of revolution once involved the notion of temporal cyclicity and that this construction has very little to do with modern usage of the term. Modern usage, we found, revolves around that sense in which the revolutionary is *irresistible*, that in which it involves *both* the impression of an irreversible rolling-over of things, a certain progressive linearity of time, *and* of a consuming current, the forging of collective identity or the public sphere. Aside from his contention as to its equivalence with rebellion or regime change — a position which Sharp dismisses out of hand — Rosenthal rests the whole of his case on an interpretation of revolution deriving wholly from the shift in historical or temporal awareness it is said — in the Arendtian account — to involve. Essentially, he argues, if a suitably robust conception of time as a progressive affair cannot be located in Spinoza's work it follows that neither can revolution. As Sharp sees it, however, the matter is not so certain.

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juxtaposed to anyone then it is not to Napoleon nor even less to Mussolini but to Cromwell and Robespierre. It can be with some justice said that Lenin is the proletarian twentieth-century Cromwell (Trotsky, L. 1999. "Two traditions: the seventeenth-century revolution and Chartism." <https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/trotsky/works/britain/intro01.htm>. Marxists Internet Archive. Retrieved 21 January 2016)."

Trotsky clearly saw Cromwell as a representative of "historically progressive tendencies," tendencies toward freedom. If so, would this not render Spinoza an opponent of regime change regardless of its tendency and, therefore, of simple revolt and true revolution alike?

<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, Sharp *does*, to some extent, deal directly with Spinoza's discomfort with regime change by mitigating its severity. In the first place, she submerges it in Spinoza's naturalism. "Although Spinoza repeatedly remarks that toppling tyrants and ruining the state is typically disastrous," she says, "he observes just as often that the laws of human nature are such that the ruin of any particular tyrannical state is inevitable. Oppressive circumstances give rise to insurrection no less certainly than the earth revolves around the sun." In the second place, and by extension, she interprets Spinoza comments regarding rebellion not in terms of a fixed doctrine, but as counsel. "None of these claims" concerning the inadvisability of rebellion "are absolute imperatives," she says; rather, they "are prudential maxims meant to guide those seeking to transform the causes of tyranny." Spinoza warns against the "danger (TTP.18.7)" and the "risk (TTP.18.10)" that insurrection involves; he does not, Sharp wishes to emphasize, rule it out. Thus, she concludes "Spinoza, indeed, has a grim view of the ability of insurrections to overcome the suffering that inspires them. From this observation of human nature, however, Spinoza certainly does not arrive at anti-revolutionary principles of government; far from it."

If indeed revolution is “conceivable *only* when humans come to see themselves as the authors of their destiny, as the architects of their way of life, whose medium of existence is not the rigid lawfulness of the cosmos, but freedom itself,” *then*, Sharp admits, the position that Rosenthal’s argument exemplifies stands on rather solid grounds:

“On this understanding of revolution, it is unclear whether Spinoza is among ‘the last of the medievals’ or ‘the first of the moderns.’<sup>67</sup> It would be unsurprising if Spinoza were a cusp figure who, like Machiavelli, was both ahead of his time and bound to a classical perspective.”<sup>68</sup>

Still, just as Rosenthal prosecutes his case by emphasizing one element of the idea of revolution in the modern sense, Sharp follows suite by emphasizing the other. Namely, that related to the formation of collective identity.

She suggests that “if we understand revolutionary transformation not in terms of radical novelty and rupture, but in the terms of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, I think we

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<sup>67</sup> This is a contention made most forceful, in my view, by Harry A. Wolfson, who demonstrated that Philo was “not only in the midst of a general philosophic tradition, which was started with Plato, but he is also the founder of a new trend within that tradition — a trend which continued without any interruption for about seventeen centuries, terminating ultimately with Spinoza (Wolfson, H. 1962. *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press. Vol. 1. p. 103).” Namely, “the ancillary conception of philosophy in its relation to Scripture, which was introduced by Philo (ibid. p. 155)” and uprooted by Spinoza who denied, in the *Theological Political Treatise*, “that the prophecy of the Old Testament was of divine origin (ibid. vol. 2. p. 72).” Spinoza was, therefore, indeed the last of the medievals, having put this venerable medieval notion to its final rest, and necessarily, then, also the first of the moderns.

<sup>68</sup> Compare this with Arendt’s comment in *On Revolution*:

“The words which of course always occur [in Machiavelli’s work] are ‘rebellion’ and ‘revolt’, whose meanings have been determined and even defined since the later Middle Ages. But *these words never indicated liberation as the revolutions understood it, and even less did they point to the establishment of a new freedom...* The very idea of equality as we understand it, namely that every person is born as an equal by the very fact of being born and that equality is a birthright was utterly unknown prior to the modern age (On Revolution. pp. 39-40).”

It could also be pointed out that terms like ‘revolt,’ ‘rebellion,’ and so on occur frequently in Spinoza’s writing as well, while the term ‘revolution’ — as I noted earlier — does not. It seems evident to me that Spinoza’s conception of natural right entails the view not only that every human, but *everything*, commands by virtue of its very existence as much right, as much freedom, as it has power — which means that the claim to freedom of each thing is equivalent to that of any other in principle if not in practice. However, his evaluation of the revolt as a socio-political phenomenon does seem to presume that certain people are unfit for rule, if only as a result of their upbringing.

will find in Spinoza an ardent revolutionary spirit.” The passage to which she herself refers appears in the first part of the text. “Each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it,” contend the revolutionary duo:

“Is compelled...to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the *form of universality*, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. The class making a revolution appears from the very start, if only because it is opposed to a class, not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society; it *appears as the whole mass of society* confronting the one ruling class.”<sup>69</sup>

Sharp then goes on to comment that while “these remarks expose how the universal representation of the general welfare can conceal its particular class interest” — in a marginal comment in the manuscript, Marx calls this “the illusion of common interests” — the important point to note is that the revolutionary class counts as such *only* to the extent that, in point of fact:

“Its interest *really is* more connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes, because under the pressure of hitherto existing conditions its interest has not yet been able to develop as the particular interest of a particular class.”<sup>70</sup>

As such, Marx and Engels contend, “Every new class... achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously.”<sup>71</sup> *This* is what makes it a revolutionary class: its ideas are more universal and they correspond to a broader base of inter-est.<sup>72</sup> Thus, suggests Sharp, “the ultimate revolutionary movement is the one that organizes the interests of its

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<sup>69</sup> Marx, K. & Engels, F. 1970. *The German Ideology*. Dutt, C.; Lough, W.; & Magill, C.P. trans. Arthur, C.J. ed. New York: International Publishers. pp. 65–6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>72</sup> “Interests,” as Arendt contends, “constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together (*On the Human Condition*. p. 182).”

constituents into an effective unity, such that each and every one, while striving for himself, brings about those effects that benefit others as well.” “Revolutionary change,” she later continues:

“Refers to the institution of a stable new social and political basis rather than to an ephemeral eruption, or a displacement of rulers through insurrection. The stability of revolutionary change is owed to its generalizing character. It aligns more and more members and groups.”

Revolutionary change is about generating common ideas and aims corresponding to collective actions which serve an increasingly broad base of constituents; it is constituent power<sup>73</sup> and collective freedom.

There are two crucial insights to be gleaned here. First, that what counts for revolutionary is the production of a form of universality encompassing and aligning the mass of society, giving shape to particular interests and identities. Second, that this alignment constitutes in itself the base whereby to articulate the shape of the common good, to configure the structure of that which conduces to *power* and, in that sense, to exercise freedom in an increasingly inclusive fashion.

It seems to me that Sharp’s appeal to Marx and Engels serves less to supply a notion of

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<sup>73</sup> Here, one might refer to Negri’s Spinoza-inflected theory of constituent power. Beyond the obvious material in which Negri considers Spinoza directly — for instance, his *Savage Anomaly* and *Spinoza for our Time* — a particularly interesting presentation of his core ideas appears in *Insurgencies*. There, he remarks as follows:

“I... am convinced that Spinoza's philosophy allows us to construct a first schema of the concept of constituent power and to guard it from misunderstandings and mystifications. The effort to theorize "a causality that accounts for the effectiveness of the All upon its parts and the action of the parts upon the All" makes Spinoza "the only or almost the only witness" of a theory of a totality without closure, a constituent power without limitations (Negri, A. 1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Boscagli, M. trans. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press. p. 24).

In speaking of the relative effect of whole and part, Negri quotes from Althusser, L. 1976. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press. p. 141. The sense which he has given to the quotation, however, is his own. Althusser, there, is speaking of the use to which he put Spinoza’s work in his critique of the Hegelian dialectic as it persists in Marx.



revolution essentially distinct from that encapsulated in Arendt's account of the revolutionary as a sort of current which sweeps us up into a new space of appearance and more to justify her emphasis on only one element of Arendt's more comprehensive account — this one. She is, throughout, less interested in the materiality of common interests than the alignment of minds which this commonality entails. She substitutes for Arendt's account of revolution as entailing *both rolling-over and rolling-along*, an account entailing only the latter — as Rosenthal does the opposite.<sup>74</sup> Cognizant, now, of the form and direction of Sharp's argument, let us examine its content.

In essence, Sharp's argument orbits the contention that notions like the alignment of interest, effective unity, inter-est — i.e. the production of a space of appearance — constitute, in the first place, a plausible way to understand Spinoza's frequent assertion that his political principles are guided by the aim of constituting a commonwealth that is guided "as if by one

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<sup>74</sup> However, in drawing her reference from Marx and Engels' notion of common interest rather than from Arendt, with whom she is evidently dealing, Sharp leaves herself open to two objections. One, she misrepresents Marx and Engels. Two, she fails to deal with the generally negative estimation of this account of revolution as understood by Arendt.

Sharp represents the idea of common inter-est as if it were characteristic of revolution in general. Yet, Marx and Engels evidently regard this idea as an ideological illusion, not a revolutionary event. "This whole semblance, that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas," they claim, "comes to a natural end, of course, as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organised, that is to say, as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest as general or the 'general interest' as ruling (German Ideology. p. 66)." Still, Sharp's appropriation can be rehabilitated if she is understood to accept, with Althusser, that "ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence" and that its form in a classless society is "the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is lived to the profit of *all men* (Althusser, L. 2005. For Marx. Brewster, B. trans. New York: Verso. p. 235)." Here, universal interest is a *revolutionary* ideology.

But why does Sharp appeal to Marx and Engels, instead of Arendt, in the first place? I suspect that her reticence stems from Arendt's palpable disdain for this aspect of the revolutionary idea (see note 23 above). Again, Arendt holds that it often implies the rule of necessity and the negation of freedom. This objection could have been met without appealing to sources external to Sharp's study; namely, to Spinoza's notion of "free necessity (Ep. 58)." It seems to me, furthermore, that freedom in the public sphere as "something created by men" is explicitly contrasted with the idea of freedom as "a gift or a capacity," as "the *liberum arbitrium* which makes the will choose between alternatives (On Revolution. p. 124)." Clearly, Arendt is not committed to an account of freedom that excludes necessity, for that would involve falling back into the medieval problematic she explicitly rejects. Therefore, making note of the difficulty in Arendt and then appealing to the principle of free necessity would have suited Sharp's argument perfectly well and would likewise have enabled her to avoid her rather thorny reference to Marx and Engels.

mind”<sup>75</sup> and, in this second place, that this process of unification expresses his view of freedom. If, she maintains

“Political programs can be called revolutionary, insofar as freedom is their motivation and justification, and insofar as freedom implies an expansion of the scope of the general interest to the whole political body, Spinoza ought to be called a revolutionary.”

Let us, then, consider this relation between unity of mind and freedom.

So far as Sharp addresses it, unity of mind and freedom are linked by reason. My objection to this contention concerns not the claim itself. I agree that the two intersect in a fundamental and crucially important manner. As I shall explain later in this chapter, I disagree insofar as Sharp seems consistently to locate this intersection as taking place within the State. For now, however, let us set aside my objections and concern ourselves only with a reconstruction of argument in itself — so far, at least, as I understand it.

For Spinoza, freedom is intimately related to the exercise of reason. To begin with, let us consider the case of reason; what is it? “The essence of reason,”<sup>76</sup> says Spinoza, “is nothing other than our mind insofar as it clearly and distinctly understands.” That is, insofar as it has adequate ideas.<sup>77</sup> What, in turn, is an adequate idea? I have considered this already, but for the sake of simplicity, let me repeat myself. An adequate idea, briefly put, is one which the mind, in conceiving it, is necessarily active.<sup>78</sup> That is, an idea which “which can be clearly and distinctly understood through” the nature of the mind in itself,<sup>79</sup> an idea concerning which the mind

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<sup>75</sup> TTP.16.

<sup>76</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.Dem.

<sup>77</sup> E.II.Prop.40.Schol.2.

<sup>78</sup> E.III.Prop.1. This is a better definition than this which appears in E.II.Def.4 and its explanation, neither of which are particularly informative as to the nature of adequate ideas so far as they actually operate within Spinoza’s system.

<sup>79</sup> E.III.Def.2.

constitutes an adequate cause.<sup>80</sup> It is the essence of reason, then, for the mind to conceive ideas which follow from its own nature.

From this account of reason, we may observe immediately the relation that obtains between reason and freedom. That is said to be free, says Spinoza, “which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone” while, in contrast, that is “said to be necessary or rather, constrained, if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way.”<sup>81</sup> It would seem that this account of freedom leaves room for God alone; to a degree this is indeed the case, but we know from Ep. 58 that Spinoza uses it to describe the condition of finite things as well. How so? To be constrained absolutely is simply not to be, for the being of a thing, according to Spinoza, is its power and its power is always positive, always active.<sup>82</sup> That it is at all implies that it enjoys a degree of liberty; if it is constrained, unfree, its constraint is necessarily incomplete. Thus is liberty, too, relative in character and not exclusive to God.<sup>83</sup> If, therefore, to exist and to act from the necessity of one’s own nature — in degrees at least — is to be free, and to reason is to conceive ideas which follow from the mind’s own nature, then the exercise of reason is freedom. As Spinoza remarks, “a free man is he who is guided solely by reason.”<sup>84</sup>

Now, in what manner is this association of freedom and reason related to unity of mind and purpose? In two respects. First insofar as both are linked to the notion of virtue which is,

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<sup>80</sup> E.III.Def.1.

<sup>81</sup> E.I.Def.7.

<sup>82</sup> In E.III.Prop.7.Dem. Spinoza speaks of “the power of any thing, or the conatus *with which it acts or endeavors to act*” and calls this the essence of the thing.

<sup>83</sup> Of course, God, being — according to Spinoza — absolutely infinite is constrained in no manner and, therefore, absolutely free. In this sense, we might say that being is skewed in favor of liberty. Freedom absolute is a metaphysical necessity, while absolute constraint is a metaphysical impossibility. When I say that liberty is relative, I mean that all things but God are free in degrees; there is nothing that is absolutely unfree and only one thing, God, that is absolutely free.

<sup>84</sup> E.IV.Prop.68.Dem.

itself, a collective endeavor in many respects. Second, insofar as the exercise of reason in itself necessarily entails things we share with others. Let us start with virtue. What is virtue? “By virtue and power” says Spinoza, “I mean the same thing; that is (III.Prop.7)... man's very essence, or nature, insofar as he has power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature.”<sup>85</sup> Concerning virtue, then, we can say, first of all, that constitutes virtue, for us, with respect to which we are the adequate cause and, to that extent, are active. That constitutes virtue, therefore, in respect of which we are free and, to that extent, of which we act under the guidance of reason. We may point out, second of all, that Spinoza's definition of virtue — as he himself here indicates parenthetically — overlaps with the doctrine of conatus, of striving. That strives well, however, which strives together; “the more a thing is in agreement with our nature, the more advantageous it is to us, that is, the more it is good,”<sup>86</sup> the more it enhances our perfection,<sup>87</sup> the more it increases our power.<sup>88</sup> In this way, as Sharp points out, is “the power of any thing, or the conatus with which it acts or endeavors to act” not strictly speaking a thing alone, but something that exists “*in conjunction with other things*.”<sup>89</sup> All effective conatus, striving, is collective striving. Freedom and reason, therefore, imply unity of purpose with others; they imply working and striving together.

Let us now consider the manner in which the exercise of reason involves that which we share with others. According to Spinoza, reason, as opposed to opinion, arises “from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things.”<sup>90</sup> That is, from the fact that there are “things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the

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<sup>85</sup> E.IV.Def.8.

<sup>86</sup> E.IV.Prop.31.Cor.

<sup>87</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.2.

<sup>88</sup> “The perfection of things should be measured solely from their own nature and power (E.I.App.).”

<sup>89</sup> E.III.Prop.7.Dem.

<sup>90</sup> E.II.Prop.40.Schol.2.

whole” which, to that extent, cannot but be conceived adequately.<sup>91</sup> More precisely, from the fact that, from this “it follows that there are certain ideas or notions *common to all men*”<sup>92</sup> generally and, to all members of any given social organization in particular.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, just as it is the case that to strive is to act in common, to strive together, so too, to reason is to think in common, to reason together. As Sharp puts it, though “adequate ideas follow from one’s nature and are proper to her mind, privileged sources of rational ideas are those that extend beyond her particularity and express her connection to others.”

Therefore do we find, first, that freedom coincides with the exercise of reason. We find, second, that reason coincides with virtue such that the latter, likewise, coincides with freedom. If virtue is something that involves collective striving, then, so too does freedom and the exercise of reason. Similarly, if reason is understood to entail recognition of that which we share, an awareness of our commonality, then we are free to the extent that we share this awareness. Thus, again as Sharp expresses it, though Spinoza “does not obviously call for a militant uprising of the oppressed on behalf of a classless society, he is concerned with establishing the concrete conditions by which each member of the *civitas* will be psychically and physically invested in the welfare of all.” This, she says, is Spinoza’s “revolutionary counsel: Create a single mind among constituents by democratizing institutions and social conditions, thereby knitting together the individual and the general welfare.” This revolutionary counsel reflects, in her view, what Marx and Engels described in the *German Ideology* and, to that extent, a form of the idea of revolution conceived in relation to the irresistibility of its current whereby it carries us all along together and instils in us a sense of collective identity and collective purpose.

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<sup>91</sup> E.II.Prop.38.

<sup>92</sup> E.II.Prop.38.Cor.

<sup>93</sup> E.III.Prop.46.

Now, before proceeding to the next subsection, I would like to make one further observation concerning Sharp's position that will later become rather important as I present my own interpretation of the revolutionary idea in Spinoza's work. It is that the revolutionary counsel which Spinoza is said to proffer feeds directly into the institutional framework of the State; Spinoza, she says "is concerned with establishing the concrete conditions by which each *member of the civitas* [emphasis mine] will be psychically and physically invested in the welfare of all." The civitas, the State, is taken for granted; while she speaks effusively concerning "the best State," it is, nonetheless, always of the State that she speaks. Thus does she advocate not an interpretation of Spinoza which highlights the radicalism of his democratic ethos, but the adoption of Balibar's theory of democratization; "the logic of the prescriptions emerges in Balibar's terms," she says, "as a theory of democratization, which is valid *for every regime*." While there may be much that commends this view, it is one in which a radical critique of the State as such plays no part. As I shall explain below, however, to accept the form of State is also to undermine the rationalistic approach to the idea of revolution. For, the singularity of mind on which the State thrives is passive and not active; it derives, as I have argued elsewhere, not from reason, but from imagination and from passion. As Sharp put it, "Spinoza's social contract is... an expression of a common *imaginative perception* of what is conducive to persevering in being;" it is appearance, imagination and not reason, that holds the state together and makes its founding contract binding.

### **C. Passion and Revolution in Spinoza's Political Philosophy**

In section III.A we examined the case against attributing to Spinoza a viewpoint favorable to the idea of revolution based loosely on Michael Rosenthal's analysis. Section III.B

was then devoted to presenting a dissenting account based on Hasana Sharp's contention that an adequate conception of the notion of the *una mente* which attends to its rational constitution supplies us with a conceptual structure which is both revolutionary in character and also loyal to the word and spirit of Spinoza's work. In the present section, we will have a look at another dissenting interpretation which lays emphasis not on the revolutionary tendencies or potential of human reason, *its* power to forge collective narratives and collective action, but on the contrary, on power of human *passions* and their natural tendency to galvanize resistance to repressive conditions.

In the essay, *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*, Ted Stolze, as his title implies, proposes to "consider not an individual's obligation to obey legitimate political authority but instead what can trigger his or her desire to resist illegitimate political authority."<sup>94</sup> More fundamentally, it is his aim to demonstrate that this desire does not merely demolish the illegitimate, but also serves to reconstruct the foundations of legitimate authority.

Stolze's case is built on Spinoza's contention — one to which I have made reference previously — that "one should not look for the causes and natural foundations of the state in the teachings of reason."<sup>95</sup> Rather are these causes and these foundations to be discovered in human passions. While Stolze makes reference to a few plausible accounts as to the nature of said passionate foundations — for example, in the chaotic and intolerable fluctuation that, in the natural state, takes place between the sociability that arises from the feeling of pity combined with ambition for glory on the one hand, and on the other hand, the unsociability that arises from the splicing of envy with the ambition to oppress — the affective "necessity of some form of

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<sup>94</sup> Stolze, T. 2000. *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*. Retrieved 01/24/2016 from [https://www.academia.edu/2578459/\\_Indignation\\_Spinoza\\_on\\_the\\_Desire\\_to\\_Revolt](https://www.academia.edu/2578459/_Indignation_Spinoza_on_the_Desire_to_Revolt).

<sup>95</sup> TP.1.7.

state” is ultimately derived from the sense of indignation in its relation to phenomena of revolt and rebellion.

The argument is centered around two cross-referenced passages in the *Political Treatise*. The first appears in the sixth chapter. “Since men,” contends Spinoza there:

“Are led more by passion than by reason , it *naturally follows* that a people will unite and *consent* to be guided as if by one mind not at reason's prompting but through some common emotion, such as (as we said in Section 9, Chapter 3) a common hope, or common fear, or desire to avenge some common injury.”<sup>96</sup>

In this passage, Stolze emphasizes the fact that the consent to unite and to be guided “as if by one mind” is decidedly qualified by Spinoza’s naturalism. The decision to do so arises neither from some hidden spring of arbitrary free will nor from any rational calculation of advantage and disadvantage but, rather, as a common and, more importantly, spontaneous emotive inclination. As he goes on to suggest, the strange thing about the passage is not so much the fact that Spinoza grounds the formation of States not in reason, but emotion — and passive feelings at that — this, of course, he announced from the start.<sup>97</sup> It is, rather that, in so speaking of the foundation of the State, Spinoza cross references section nine in chapter three of the text under consideration. Said passage reads as follows:

“Matters which arouse *general indignation* are not likely to fall within the right of the commonwealth. It is without doubt a natural thing for men to conspire together either by reason of a common fear or through desire to avenge a common injury. And since the right of the commonwealth is defined by the corporate power of the people, undoubtedly the power of the commonwealth and its right is to that extent diminished, as it affords

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<sup>96</sup> TP.6.1.

<sup>97</sup> TP.1.1.



reasons for many citizens to join in a conspiracy. There are certainly some things to fear for a commonwealth, and just as every citizen, or every man in a state of nature, as he has more reason to fear, is the less in control of his own right, the same is true of a commonwealth.”

As Stolze explains, the two passages differ in one crucial respect. Namely, that the first speaks of the formation of the State, while the second of its limits and, by extension, the conditions of its downfall. For, as Spinoza goes on to explain in the fourth section of chapter four — again, of the same text — a commonwealth that fails to mind its limits is a failed commonwealth, one that loses “control of its own right.” If, for example, the “ruler of the state” acts in an undignified fashion, “openly violates or holds in contempt those laws that he himself has enacted,” or otherwise unleashes his most base and violent appetites on the populace, “the destruction of the commonwealth” is the result. The ruler then “turns” that fear which, as I have noted many times, constitutes the very essence of the State “into indignation, and consequently the civil order into a condition of war.”

Thus, while an exceedingly repressive government can, to an extent, utterly monopolize power and instil tremendous fear, thereby creating conditions of “slavery, barbarism, and *desolation*,”<sup>98</sup> gaining “such a thorough hold on the individual's judgment” that room is left neither for reason nor even doubt<sup>99</sup> such that a sort of “civic death” prevails, it can do so for only so long. Fear, after all, is an “inconstant pain arising from the idea of a thing... of whose outcome we are in some doubt.”<sup>100</sup> It differs, therefore, from hate — i.e. “pain accompanied by

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<sup>98</sup> TP.6.4.

<sup>99</sup> TTP.Pref.

<sup>100</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.13.

the idea of an external cause”<sup>101</sup> — only insofar as uncertainty is introduced. We necessarily hate what we fear. The oppressed subject hates, therefore, his or her oppressor.

So long as conditions of “desolation,” of silent solitude, persist, this hatred is inactive. The theory of the imitation of emotions, however, precludes the indefinite prolongation of such solitude. “From the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves... to be affected by an emotion,” holds Spinoza, “we are thereby affected by a similar emotion.”<sup>102</sup> When, therefore, we sense that another has been injured, we too feel that injury, we too attribute it to an external source and, therefore, we too feel hatred.

While, in point of fact, our sympathetic injuries arise from our relationship with *the one first injured* and not his or her aggressor such that our feeling of hatred should be directed to the former and not the latter, it is also the case that she is not the adequate, but merely the partial, cause of our psychic injury; the one first injured is herself the passive object of someone else’s action; she injures us not freely but under compulsion. If, therefore, “hatred toward a thing that we think of as free must... be greater, other conditions being equal, than toward a thing subject to necessity”<sup>103</sup> it follows that the hatred we might feel in consequence of the effect the injured herself has upon us is overwhelmed by the hatred we feel toward the adequate — and in this sense “free” — cause of the injury. We hate the aggressor. This is indignation, which Spinoza defines as “hatred toward one who has injured another.”<sup>104</sup>

The imitation of affects so far as it gives rise to indignation, therefore, serves to bridge the gap between private suffering with its private hatred and collective suffering with its collective hatred. It gives rise to a suffering and indignant public. To the extent, moreover that

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<sup>101</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.7.

<sup>102</sup> E.III.Prop.27.

<sup>103</sup> E.III.Prop.49.

<sup>104</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.20.

“he who hates endeavors to remove and destroy the thing that he hates”<sup>105</sup> and revels in his success<sup>106</sup> will the indignant public aim to destroy its hateful and repressive overlords, will it celebrate their downfall. In this way does indignation “catalyze fear” such that “each subject’s externally imposed solitude shatters and opens up the possibility of a collective revolt against oppressive rule.”<sup>107</sup> In the feeling of indignation, therefore, we discover a coherent account of rebellion justified in consequence of its natural provenance; rebellion arises naturally from human nature under conditions of oppression. Indignation is the affective phenomenon whereby the State is rightfully dismantled.

As Stolze explains, however, “indignation is responsible” *both* “for the fall and” also for “the rise of states.”<sup>108</sup> How so? Here the aforementioned cross-reference that appears in the first section of the sixth chapter of the *Political Treatise* becomes relevant. There, Spinoza is concerned not with the dissolution of States, but with their foundation; “people will unite and consent to be guided as if by one mind,” he says there, “through some common emotion.” It is at this point that he refers the reader back to the ninth section of chapter three where, as we have already pointed out, he treats of *indignation*. This suggests, so Stolze wishes to claim, that in this “oblique” reference to indignation do we discover “the ontological genesis of the state”<sup>109</sup> so far as it is to be conceived from within the theoretical resources of the *Political Treatise*. Thus is it the case that “the quarrels and rebellions that are often stirred up in a commonwealth never lead to the dissolution of the commonwealth by its citizens;”<sup>110</sup> rather, “through generalized indignation” will the commonwealth “undergo an affective re-composition” and in “a more-or

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<sup>105</sup> E.III.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>106</sup> E.III.Pro.20.

<sup>107</sup> Stolze, T. 2000. *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> TP.6.2.

less altered form of state... reemerge.”<sup>111</sup>

In short, then, do we discover in Stolze, an account of revolution which, unlike Sharp’s, appeals not to Spinoza’s rationalism, but to the affective element of his political philosophy. For Stolze, the State rises, falls, and reconstitutes itself once again through the sense of indignation that by virtue of which we hate oppression and join in solidarity in order to oppose it. In this sense, again unlike Sharp, Stolze does not simply sidestep the critique of revolutionary consciousness in Spinoza as exemplified to Rosenthal’s interpretation by focusing on a different element of the revolutionary. Rather, he confronts this view directly and supplies an account of Spinoza’s conception of the affective structure of rebellion which counterbalances his reservations as to prudence of revolt. It appears that the crux of Stolze’s reply is this: prudent or not, rebellion is a natural response to oppression. If, indeed, it is Spinoza’s aim to “conceive men... as they are” and not as he “would like them to be,” if he wishes not “not to deride, bewail, or execrate human actions, but to understand them,” then revolution belongs to human nature in the same way that thunder and lightning belong “to the nature of the atmosphere” — it is no more wrong than it is right, it simply is.

#### **D. Section Three Conclusions**

In this section, we have examined three perspectives as to Spinoza’s position vis-a-vis the legitimacy of revolution. In the first place, the idea of revolution is conceived as a subset of phenomena like insurrection and revolt. Spinoza’s reservations concerning the former are transferred to the latter. More fundamentally, as Rosenthal explains, the idea of revolution is understood — following Arendt — necessarily to involve a progressive conception of time

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<sup>111</sup> Stolze, T. 2000. *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*.

which seems to be lacking in Spinoza's work. Where Spinoza does consider history as a process and, in this way, indirectly the nature of historical time, he seems to adopt a model more akin to the ancient and medieval sense of time in its cyclicality, to an "astronomical" notion of time's passage. Thus, concludes Rosenthal, is Spinoza no revolutionary but, instead, among those who heed the siren song of revolution while bound to the mast of the ship of State and who, consequently, take up the cause of *reform*.

In the second place, is revolution decoupled, on the one hand, from phenomena of revolt and rebellion, thus sidestepping the difficulty raised by that pervasive disdain which Spinoza expresses concerning such events. It is decoupled, on the other hand, from the progressive experience of historical time. While Arendt had accounted for the idea of revolution in its modern sense by appeal *both* to the experience of historical time as a progression *as well as* to the inclusive reproduction of the public sphere, the space of appearance, or, perhaps as Marx and Engels had expressed it, the universal extension of inter-est, of being-between, Sharp sets aside the former in favor of the latter. The struggle for freedom entailed in the revival of the inclusive public sphere encapsulates adequately and sufficiently, so she indicates, the idea of revolution; its particular temporality is a matter of indifference. It is Sharp's contention, that the idea of revolution in this revised form can indeed be discovered in a rationalistic account of Spinoza's insistence that the State constitute a corporate body<sup>112</sup> that acts collectively with a singularity of mind if not — and this she stresses — a sublation of individual in the collective. On this reading, it turns out that Spinoza indeed advocates the idea of revolution, albeit in a restricted — or at least special — sense.

Finally, is an account of revolution which, likewise, emphasizes singularity of mind over

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<sup>112</sup> TP.3.9.

the temporality of revolution proposed but which differs from the first in two respects. First, Stolze emphasizes the affective component of consensus building, of constructing that singularity of mind the political centrality of which, in Spinoza's view, cannot be underestimated. Second, by promoting not only the destructive, but also the constructive qualities of indignation, of hatred concerning oppression and of oppressors, Stolze undermines the force of the aforementioned reservations Spinoza articulates with respect to phenomena of revolt rather than sidestepping them. In this way is the insurrectionary element of revolution restored and, via Spinoza's pervasive naturalism, validated.

#### **IV. Spinoza's Position Concerning the Legitimacy of Revolution: A Critique of the Three Foregoing Perspectives**

In examining the three preceding perspectives as to Spinoza's position concerning the legitimacy of revolution — or, more broadly and by extension, its very nature — I should like to begin with those elements of each which I consider to be on-point and only then proceed to articulate my viewpoint as to their particular deficiencies. From the singular vantage of any one of the interpretations considered, my opinions in this respect will undoubtedly seem rather inconsistent. As I shall go on to explain, however, this appearance of inconsistency arises from the fact that I assume a fundamentally different starting point in my estimation of the nature, aim, and framework of sociopolitical activity best conceived according to Spinoza.

In brief, it is my position — a position which I have emphasized throughout this study and shall continue to elaborate in the chapters that follow — that Spinoza ultimately advocates a form of life conducted under the guidance of reason. This sort of life, contrary to the view of many commentators on Spinoza's political thought, does not simply take place below the

threshold of the State. Rather, to the extent that the State is constituted, as I have explained repeatedly, not on the basis of reason but of the passions, does this sort of life, the life of reason, displace the State. We might suggest that Spinoza distinguishes politics from Statecraft. Politics thus conceived, we shall see in Spinoza an advocate of the idea of *rational* revolution and also an opponent of simply revolt along with the passions it inevitably entails.

## **A. Approbation of Rosenthal's Position Respecting Rebellion, Critique of his View**

### **Respecting Progress and Temporality**

Let us begin, then, with Rosenthal's account. In what respect do I believe that Rosenthal has made both a valid and a significant contribution to the question of revolution so far as it has or, as the case may be, has not, a legitimate place in Spinoza's political philosophy? Rosenthal insists, first and foremost, that we cannot dismiss Spinoza's strong reservations as to the wisdom of rebellion.

It is certainly the case, as Sharp points out in Arendt's name, that a revolution is more than a revolt which has gathered sufficient momentum to topple the prevailing regime, that a revolution *is* more than a successful insurrection. Yet, however far revolution *exceeds* insurrection, the two do indeed overlap to one degree or another — if only by historical precedent. Revolt, therefore, goes hand in hand with revolution unless excluded explicitly, something which Sharp does not do. A revolution is more than a rebellion but, so far as we are here given to understand, a rebellion it is nonetheless. If so, by dint of what interpretive privilege are we entitled to dismiss Spinoza's unqualified and persistent rejection of revolt, rebellion, insurrection and the like? If revolution revolt entails, to it must Spinoza's reticence likewise transfer — insofar at least, as revolt it indeed entails. It is irrelevant whether Spinoza's

apparent rejection of the idea of revolution so far as it entails revolt constitutes a true theoretical position or prudent advice, as Sharp and Stolze would have it. It is equally irrelevant that rebellions and revolutions are — in consequence of the basic affective elements of human nature — often inescapable. What matters is that they tend to destabilize the body politic and, to that extent, give rise to more harm than good. In this respect, then, Rosenthal's somewhat conservative interpretation of Spinoza is well put.

That being said, however, there exists an important exception to Rosenthal's interpretation of Spinoza's views on the topic of revolution that other commentators seem not to have picked up on. There is, in fact, one instance in which Spinoza does *explicitly*<sup>113</sup> condone overt rebellion. In chapter sixteen of the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza has the following to say concerning the sovereignty of the "heathen" over god-fearing men:

"If those at the head of government are heathens, we must either make no contract with them, resolving to suffer anything rather than to transfer our right to them; or, if we have made a contract transferring our right to them and thereby deprived ourselves of the right to defend ourselves and our religion, we are bound, or may be compelled, to obey them and keep our pledge. *An exception is made in the case of one to whom God, by sure revelation, has promised his special help against the tyrant, or has given specific exemption.* Thus we see that three young men alone out of all the Jews in Babylon refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar, being assured of God's help. All the rest—with the exception of Daniel also, whom the king had worshipped—no doubt obeyed, being compelled by right, perhaps with the thought that they were given into the king's hands by God's decree, and that it was by God's design that the king held and preserved his

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<sup>113</sup> That is, without resort to the more intellectualistic or passionistic accounts of Spinoza's doctrine of revolution as represented by the work of Sharp and Todd respectively.



supreme dominion. On the other hand Eleazar while his country still stood, resolved to give his people an example of steadfastness, so that by following him they would be encouraged to endure anything rather than allow their right and power to be transferred to the Greeks, and would go to any lengths to avoid having to swear allegiance to heathens.”

While, on the one hand, Spinoza emphasizes the fact that, once transfer of sovereignty is contracted, deference becomes a duty even if the one to whom we defer is a heathen, this is not a universal rule. Exception is made for those whom God assures of success. In the specific case mentioned in the above-quoted passage, this exemption extends only to a small number of people. Yet, there is nothing which prevents us from assuming that were God to guarantee success to a large group of people, the same exemption would apply. In fact, Spinoza devotes extensive and important sections of the *Theological Political Treatise* to precisely such a mass exception. Namely, the case of the ancient Hebrews who attained freedom from slavery under the Pharaonic regime. In the most concrete terms, the Exodus amounts to a large slave revolt — the success of which was guaranteed by God — whereby those sovereign rights once possessed by the King of Egypt were transferred first to God and ultimately to Moses. Similarly, in chapter nineteen of the same text, does he maintain that “the prophets, from the nature of the authority they possessed, could appoint a new king and pardon regicide” — what is the appointment of a new king or regicide by a form of revolt? If so, it follows that revolt is justified when accompanied by divine promises.

Of course it is possible to dismiss this claim on the grounds that Spinoza speaks of this justified revolt in terms of revelation which, in essence, he denies. Yet, to argue so would mean to suggest that Spinoza condemned the Hebrew Exodus, which is evidently not the case. As such, we can grant that revelation-guaranteed revolt is approved as such.

Now, as to the nature of revelation, Spinoza contends that just as “the prophets could be said to have possessed the mind of God” so too is “mind of God and his eternal thoughts are inscribed in our minds, too, and therefore we also, in Scriptural language, perceive the mind of God” though, so far as “natural knowledge is common to all men, it is not so highly prized.”<sup>114</sup> Whether natural knowledge is prized or not is immaterial; what matters is that, for Spinoza, it counts as an equivalent to revelation so far as it consists in the inscription of God and his thoughts in our mind. “Natural knowledge” is a form of “revelation.” If so, it follows that if, when revelation assures the legitimacy and success of revolt that revolt is justified, so too when “natural knowledge,” reason assures the same. It would seem, then, that revolt *can* sometimes be justified if it is dictated by reason.

More importantly, I disagree fundamentally with the distinction that Rosenthal wishes to draw between reform and revolution. To begin with, it is worth noting, as Saul Alinsky has pointed out in his *Rules for Radicals*, that:

1. “It is most important for those of us who want revolutionary change to understand that revolution must be preceded by reformation. To assume that a political revolution can survive without the supporting base of a popular reformation is to ask for the impossible in politics.”<sup>115</sup>
2. “Those who, for whatever combination of reasons, encourage the opposite of reformation, become the unwitting allies of the far political right.”<sup>116</sup>

It is an ideologically weighted mistake to distinguish between reform and revolution. The two, in fact bleed into one another. As Alinsky goes on to suggest “evolution” — and to this, we

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<sup>114</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>115</sup> Alinsky, S. 2010. *Rules For Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Knopf Doubleday. p. xxi.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. xxii.

might append ‘reform’ conceived in isolation from revolution — “is simply the term used by nonparticipants to denote a particular sequence of revolutions as they synthesized into a specific major social change.”<sup>117</sup> Reform *adequately conceived*, however, is simply another word — so I would like to suggest — for revolution on the installment plan. As such, I object on principle to Rosenthal’s contention that in Spinoza’s work the idea of reform can be discerned but the idea of revolution cannot. If the former is admitted as a human prospect, then equally does the latter follow suite.

There are, moreover, specific interpretive difficulties to which Rosenthal’s position gives rise. Rosenthal wishes to demonstrate not only that revolution *qua* rebellion would be unacceptable to Spinoza, but that the very idea of it can have no meaning for him. As I indicated earlier, his view is based on two interrelated propositions, both of which arise from the contention he shares with Arendt that the idea of revolution in the modern sense involves a progressive conception of historical time. It is my view that in both respects Rosenthal’s case is overstated.

In the first place, holds Rosenthal, is systematic progress itself an idea alien to Spinoza’s philosophy altogether, political or otherwise. He argues, so I explained above, that men are finite things and thus superseded in power by many other things; we are, to that extent, subject to shifts in fortune. This means that in part at least we are creatures not of action, but passion such that *systematic* improvement in our condition — dependent as this is on our activity — is excluded. There is, so Rosenthal will have us believe, no natural principle guaranteeing that things can or will get better for us.

I object to this claim on two accounts. One, it is inconsistent with Rosenthal’s own

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

conclusions.

As I have indicated, Rosenthal wishes to see an advocate of reform if not revolution. Setting aside my view as to the continuity of reform and revolution, can we not simply point out that the former implies progress no less than the latter? Even if we grant that there is a fundamental difference between the two phenomena, that distinction cannot arise from the presumption of progress; both assume it. It would, rather, arise from the *nature* of said progress — is it gradual in character or is it sudden? — and, for our purposes, this question is perfectly irrelevant; Rosenthal’s case rests not upon the articulation of progress into types, but on its inconceivability. Either, therefore, neither reform nor revolution are conceivable, or both are. If Rosenthal considers the former plausible, likewise must plausibility be extended to the latter.

Two, it is false that there obtains in nature no principle guaranteeing the prospect of progress. Human conatus and the rational desire for political organization that this entails both constitutes an element of nature and *does* militate in the direction of systematic progress because it militates in the direction of reason and, to that extent, action. Rosenthal is not wrong to remind us that every natural force has its limits and, to that extent, neither human conative powers nor their attendant inclinations are assured of success, the human tendency to cooperate, to think and act together, to pool conative resources, is indeed a formidable tool the capacities of which cannot be underestimated. While Spinoza lived at the very cusp of the anthropocene and could scarcely have envisioned the vast changes that have taken place since his time, he did say that we do not “know what the body can do, or what can be deduced solely from a consideration of its nature,” and that “experience abundantly shows that solely from the laws of its nature many things occur which” we “would never have believed possible.”<sup>118</sup> If this is true of one body,

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<sup>118</sup> E.III.Prop.2.Schol.

how much more so many working together? What bars these bodies and the minds that think them, then, from making a revolution?

In the second place, Rosenthal contends that Spinoza tends to think of historical time in cyclical terms and, therefore, to evince a decidedly medieval course of thought. He emphasizes the case of the English Civil Wars — to which I also added a few other examples — which, as it appears in Spinoza’s analysis, followed a cyclical pattern of development. As I see it, however, this amounts to a claim about Spinoza’s conception of time which fails, in fact, to take into account what he has actually to say on the subject directly.

Thorough examination of Spinoza’s position on the question of time and temporality in relation to the infinite and the eternal would require at least a full chapter in its own right. I have no intention of doing so here. I would like, however, to draw out a few relevant points.

One, Spinoza acknowledges three distinctions when it comes to the matter under consideration: eternity, duration, and time. Eternity, he defines as follows: “existence itself insofar as it is conceived as necessarily following solely from the definition of an eternal thing;”<sup>119</sup> an eternal thing, in other words, is that “thing to whose nature it pertains to exist, or — and this is the same thing — a thing from whose definition existence follows.”<sup>120</sup> Duration, in contrast, “is the indefinite continuance of existing” that belongs to “created things, insofar as they persevere in their actuality”<sup>121</sup> and this perseverance is “considered in the abstract as a kind of quantity.”<sup>122</sup> Time, finally, “is not an affection of things,” maintains Spinoza, “but a mere mode of thinking.” It is “a being of reason” which serves, so he explains, “to explicate duration,” to determine it. This takes place when “we compare it with the duration of other

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<sup>119</sup> E.I.Def.8.

<sup>120</sup> E.I.Prop.19.Dem.

<sup>121</sup> CM.I.4.

<sup>122</sup> E.II.Prop.45.Schol.

things that have a fixed and determinate motion.”<sup>123</sup> The being of reason, however, “can in no way be classed as [a] being;”<sup>124</sup> like measure, time, and number, it is but a “mode of imagining.”<sup>125</sup> Whether we imagine the so-called arrow of time in its forward movement or its turning in on itself in cyclical repetition, we imagine nonetheless.

Two, when we think of time, rectilinear, circular, or otherwise, what we are doing is organizing duration and putting it in order. We postulate a determinate relationship between instances of duration. Order, however, is likewise — for Spinoza — a mode of imagining. “From our comparing things with one another,” he says in the fifth chapter of the *Cogitata Metaphysica*:

“There arise certain notions that are nevertheless nothing outside things themselves but modes of thinking... Such notions are opposition, *order*, agreement, difference... and any others like these. These notions, I say, are quite clearly perceived by us insofar as we conceive them not as something different from the essences of the things that are opposed, ordered, etc., but *merely as modes of thinking whereby we more easily retain or imagine the things themselves.*”

Moreover, do these modes of thinking, of imagining, reflect nothing other than the self-interested and anthropocentric prejudices of mankind. Thus, in the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics* does Spinoza explain that:

“When men become convinced that everything that is created is created on their behalf,<sup>126</sup> they were bound to consider as the most important quality in every individual

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Cf. “Time... is a product of the imagination, and arises from the fact that we see some bodies move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with equal speed (E.II.Prop.44.Schol).”

<sup>124</sup> CM.I.1.

<sup>125</sup> EP.12.

<sup>126</sup> This notion, so Spinoza explains there, arises as follows. People “find within themselves and outside themselves a considerable number of means very convenient for the pursuit of their own advantage... the result is

thing that which was most useful to them, and to regard as of the highest excellence all those things by which they were most benefited. Hence they came to form these abstract notions to explain the natures of things: Good, Bad, *Order*, *Confusion*, Hot, Cold, *Beauty*, *Ugliness*.”

Linearity, circularity, and so on, these are simply ways of putting things in order, of imagining them to be similar in certain respects and different in others. These are essentially aesthetic notions that indicate not the nature of things themselves, but the nature of our needs as we project them onto things. Not only, then, is it simply the case that time constitutes a mode of imagining for Spinoza, but so too the order of time and its pattern.<sup>127</sup>

Three, it is the case that Spinoza acknowledges the natural and in certain respects inescapable tendency of men to perceive things according to the manner in which they appear and not as they are. Knowing, therefore, that the imagination is responsible for our experience of time and the shape of its passage alike, that these phenomena arise from our anthropocentric

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that they look on all the things of Nature as means to their own advantage. And realizing that these were found, not produced by them, they come to believe that there is someone else who produced these means for their use. For looking on things as means, they could not believe them to be self-created, but on the analogy of the means which they are accustomed to produce for themselves, they were bound to conclude that there was some governor or governors of Nature, endowed with human freedom, who have attended to all their needs and made everything for their use.

<sup>127</sup> Let it nonetheless be pointed out that despite the fact that the rectilinear perception of time, like that of its circularity are imaginative constructions or order arising from human need and desire, there are certain indications in Spinoza's writings that time does indeed observe, in his view, a certain linear progression.

1. In PCP.I.Ax.10 Spinoza explains that “to preserve a thing, no lesser cause is required than to produce it in the first place.” For example, he says, “although our thought began to exist, its nature and essence does not on that account involve necessary existence any the more than before it existed, and so in order to persevere in existing it stands in need of the same force that it needs to begin existing.”
2. From this, he deduces in CM.II.11 that:
  - a. “Present time has no connection with future time.”
  - b. “Because the parts of duration have no interconnection, we can say that God does not so much preserve things as continue to create them.”

Now, if the present has no connection with the future, it stands to reason that it likewise has no connection with the past. Neither, it stands all the more so to reason, does the future bear a connection with the past. Yet, God is said to “continue to create.” If no connection obtains between (1) the past, (2) the present, and (3) the future, what reason have we to assume that this continuity has a circular form, that passage from (1) to (2) to (3) will ultimately result in a return to (1) and, therefore, a repetition of the cycle? None. If so, does it not follow that God's creative continuity is necessarily progressive, if only in the sense that the past cannot be repeated?

prejudices, does not make them go away. As Spinoza puts it, “nothing positive contained in a false idea can be annulled by the presence of what is true, insofar as it is true.”<sup>128</sup>

Yet, it is “in the nature of reason to perceive things in the light of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*].”<sup>129</sup> If so, it follows that the mind is possessed of a tendency to overcome its anthropocentric disposition and, therewith, its temporal bias. The “essence of reason is nothing other than our mind insofar as it clearly and distinctly understands.”<sup>130</sup> The perception of things *sub specie aeternitatis*, being of the nature of reason, therefore, is likewise of the nature and essence of the human mind. If the conatus of the mind to preserve itself, the manner in which it exercises its “force to persist in existing” is “to do those things that necessarily follow from its given nature,”<sup>131</sup> it follows that it is the conative inclination of the mind to so perceive things; “we know” in fact “nothing [else] to be certainly good.”<sup>132</sup> Thus to conceive of things constitutes, therefore, our highest virtue, that which most embodies, for us, a condition of empowerment. While indeed circumstances often conspire to inhibit us from doing so, it is this state of mind to which we aspire.

In this sense what I would like to suggest is that while some evidence exists lending a degree of credence to the view that Spinoza thought of time in cyclical terms it is entirely unsystematic and, unlike the explicit adoption of polybian anacyclosis that appears, for example,

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<sup>128</sup> Thus his classic example: “when we gaze at the sun, it seems to us to be about 200 feet away; and in this we are deceived as long as we are unaware of its true distance. With knowledge of its distance the error is removed, but not the imagining, that is, the idea of the sun that explicates its nature only insofar as the body is affected by it. Thus although we know its true distance, we shall nevertheless see it as being close to us. For... it is not by reason of our ignorance of its true distance that we see it as being so near, but because the mind conceives the magnitude of the sun insofar as the body is affected by it.” Cf. E.II.Prop.35.Schol.

<sup>129</sup> E.II.Prop.44.Cor.2.

<sup>130</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.Dem.

<sup>131</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.Dem.

<sup>132</sup> E.IV.Prop.27. That is, to reason (E.IV.Prop.26).



in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*,<sup>133</sup> anecdotal to boot. If it is even the case that a degree of cyclicity can be detected in Spinoza's impression of temporality, this impression plays no meaningful or systematic role in anywhere in his work. Rather, his cause is that of reason and to that extent — if I may so express it — he advocates a politics seen *sub specie aeternitatis*.

It might be suggested that this view conflicts with my earlier contention that progress is indeed conceivable for Spinoza. If the political community is to view itself *sub specie aeternitatis*, one might inquire, how is it that said community effects change of any sort? Would not this view project us into a rather extreme form of political quietism? I reply, first, that the same question applies to the individual who, by all accounts, Spinoza exhorts to better him or herself by taking up the cause of reason. How can she do so if all things are eternally determined? Spinoza's answer to both questions, or so I take it, is the principle of conatus. We are the power relations in which we are embedded, we are determined, as individuals and as communities, to enhance our power; we do so not in spite of nature and its eternal laws, but in expression of them. This is all that progress means, reformist, revolutionary, or otherwise.

## **B. Approbation of Sharp's General Position Respecting the Rationality Revolution, Critique of her Apparent View Respecting the Statist Ends Thereof**

As I have already indicated in the preceding subsection, I disagree with Sharp's "hasty" dismissal of Rosenthal's "hasty" willingness to take at face value Spinoza's reticence concerning the prudence of rebellion. Indeed, revolt does not a revolution make — revolution is more than that. Still, I believe that Spinoza's rejection should be taken seriously.

As I also argued in the preceding subsection, it is my view that the supposed distinction

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<sup>133</sup> See Book I, chapter two.

between reform and revolution is an erroneous one. If Alinsky is correct — and I believe that he is — revolution conducted rightly is incremental in character and not sudden. Rational revolution is a divisible quantity produced, so to speak, in discrete units. What distinction is there, then, between reform and revolution thus conceived? It is, first of all, the ultimate goal of regime change. After all, there is a great difference between the bringing about of a series of small changes with the aim of responding to discontent, quelling it, and thus strengthening the prevailing regime, on the one hand and, on the other, the bringing about of a series of small changes ultimately designed to topple that regime.

Now, if it was simply a question of toppling regimes, it seems to me that Spinoza's concerns would remain in place. What difference does it make if we overthrow a regime slowly or quickly? Either way, the result is the same: political instability leading to the general intensification of human suffering. Here, so far as I am concerned, is where the rationality of a revolution comes into play.

The emphasis here, as I will go on to explain in the chapters that follow, lies not on the elimination of what is problematic but rather on extending the scope and power of the good. When just, egalitarian, and to that extent, rational institutions of collective self-governance arise from the bottom up through incremental changes, they slowly displace the less egalitarian and less rational institutions of State, institutions which rely on the manipulation of passive conditions of mind, on obedience, to perpetuate themselves. The State undergoes a gradual process of obsolescence. Though Sharp does not state her case in these terms at all, I do believe — as I shall later explain — that an account of rational revolution analogous in some respects at least to the one which she presents tends in this direction. To that extent do I concur with her analysis of the legitimacy of the idea of revolution in Spinoza's work: it is the trajectory of the

rational community to build an inclusive power base and, *in this manner*, to oppose the repressive forces of tyranny and injustice, to take up the cause not simply of liberation, but freedom.

In thus describing the trajectory of rational revolution, however, I have also highlighted if not my disagreement with Sharp, at least wherein there obtains between us a distinction of emphasis. As I said, nowhere does Sharp evince sensitivity to the fact that the rational community, the corporate power, the singularity of mind and political body which the revolutionary force of reason produces is something other than the State. On the contrary, it seems that, for her, the departure from one regime has its end in the formation of another; revolution has its beginning and end in the State. Thus, for example, does she explain that:

“Strength of mind and social harmony is more likely to be found in commonwealths that resemble, according to Spinoza, quarrelsome families. The best state provides mechanisms for productive disputes, because simple obedience is insufficient for a vibrant commonwealth.”<sup>134</sup>

As I have explained in an earlier chapter, however, the paternalistic model of governance — and in using the term here, I emphasize not gender, but the dynamics of power and responsibility that obtain between parents and children generally — presupposes, first of all, a relation between the rulers and the ruled. Just as parents are invested with natural authority over the child and, at least in most cases, a natural aptitude for this authority — to the extent at least that parents are relatively independent, can provision themselves and their children with the necessities of life and provide some practical and moral instruction in the ways of the world, while children are relatively dependent in these respects — so too does the paternalistic State model imply that

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<sup>134</sup> Sharp, H. 2013. “*Violenta Imperia Nemo Continuit Diu*.”

some are cut out for leadership while others are cut out to follow. Yet, as I pointed out earlier, Spinoza holds that “all men share in one and the same nature” while “it is power and culture that mislead us;”<sup>135</sup> there are no natural rulers, no natural lead. The child grows into adulthood and emerges from the protective shade of parental authority; if the citizen does not so emerge, it is due to no natural cause, but to violence, overt or otherwise.

It may be that that the best State is the one which can sustain healthy disputation, that the “best commonwealth should establish provisions by which critique of the rationality of its laws is built into its regular functioning” and install thereby “mechanisms for its rational reconstruction;”<sup>136</sup> indeed, such political aspirations are admirable to a degree. If, however, the State form presupposes the professionalization of power, if it makes perpetual the perseverance of a parent child relation between those who exercise political power and those who do not — however open the channels of communication — then it is not rational. Or perhaps better, it bears rational elements but maintains itself on an irrational foundation. As I have already demonstrated, sovereignty is created and preserved by instilling in the populace passive emotions and inadequate ideas; these produce the relation of obedience which characterizes the human condition under the aegis of the State. If the foundation of State is rational, it is so only provisionally. The tendency of reason, the revolutionary tide of virtue flows past the state and does not break on its shores.

### **C. Critique of Stolze’s View Respecting the Passionate Character of Revolution**

Though Stolze makes a valiant effort to supply an account of legitimate revolution in Spinoza’s work and to counter, thereby, the prevailing opinion that that it does not exist, there is

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<sup>135</sup> TP.7.27.

<sup>136</sup> Sharp, H. 2013. “*Violenta Imperia Nemo Continuit Diu*. Cf. TP.27.29.

— in my opinion — little to commend in his conclusions. As I delineated it above, Stolze’s argument is based on the natural consequences of political mismanagement. It is true that if the sovereign power, in Spinoza’s view, is to maintain control over its own right “it must preserve the causes that foster fear and respect;” The rulers or ruler of the state cannot:

“Run drunk or naked with harlots through the streets, act on the stage, openly violate or hold in contempt those laws that he himself has enacted... slaughter subjects, despoil them, ravish maidens and the like.”<sup>137</sup>

When he does so, as Stolze points out, he “turns fear into indignation, and consequently the civil order into a condition of war.”<sup>138</sup> In this sense, it is indeed “legitimate” to resist sovereign power; this is a natural and perhaps inevitable response.

Yet, simply because a revolt is natural or even inevitable, simply because it abolishes a tyrannical regime (if it does) does not make it a revolution. As I have repeated over and again, the aim of revolution is freedom, freedom and not mere liberation. If so, let us ask whether a resistance movement inspired by indignation can meet the necessary criteria — at least so far as Spinoza would interpret it.

Indignation, so we saw above, is, first of all, a sympathetic response to the suffering of others. If action, as we have observed on several occasions already, is defined in terms of adequate causation — if, in other words, we are active when our deeds and our experiences arise from aspects and properties of our own nature and not as a result of external influences — it is without doubt that indignation is in no way an action, but undoubtedly a reaction. Equally important, indignation is an emotion that involves pain and, to that extent, hatred. We empathize with others and share their pain; in doing so, we share in the hatred they bear towards the cause

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<sup>137</sup> TP.4.4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

of that pain. In brief, indignation is a passive emotion, a passion or a reaction, involving hatred and pain.

If indignation is thus to be conceived, it is problematic in two respects. First, being a passive emotion, a reaction, it involves not freedom, but the negation thereof. “I assign the term ‘bondage’ to man's lack of power to control and check the emotions,” says Spinoza in his preface to the fourth part of the *Ethics*, “for a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse.” When “the mind is *determined* to think of one thing rather than another,” to “affirm a greater or lesser force of existence of its body, or part of its body, than was previously the case,”<sup>139</sup> we are *made to feel*, when the emotional phenomena that take place in us follow not only from our nature but, rather, from the way our nature *reacts* to the power and influence of something else, when, in other words, we exist in a state of passivity, we are slaves and not free men. While, therefore, it may be the case that indignation often constitutes the affective motor driving efforts aimed at human *liberation* from tyranny, it does not make for free men. Indignation is not, therefore, revolutionary in character because it serves not the cause of *freedom*.

Second, as a species of hatred and, to that extent, a phenomenon of pain, indignation is especially objectionable. “Hatred,” explains Spinoza, “can never be good.”<sup>140</sup> Why? To begin with, because “we endeavor to remove or destroy whatever we imagine to be opposed to pleasure and conducive to pain.”<sup>141</sup> When that which so impedes our pleasures or increases our suffering

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<sup>139</sup> E.III.General Definition of Emotions.

<sup>140</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.

<sup>141</sup> E.III.Prop.28.

is another human being, we “endeavor to injure him.”<sup>142</sup> When endeavor to injure others or to destroy the things we hate, we “endeavor to do something that is bad”<sup>143</sup> because he who lives under the guidance of reason — and to the degree that they do — “desires for another” only “the *good* which he seeks for himself.”<sup>144</sup> In fact, “he who lives by the guidance of reason” reacts not indignantly to violence, but “endeavors... to repay with love or nobility another's hatred, anger, contempt, etc. toward himself.”<sup>145</sup> This seems counterintuitive, especially when introduced into the arena of politics; yet, as I shall explain in later chapters, it is indeed, Spinoza's true teaching vis-a-vis the idea of revolution.

More broadly, it might be added, hatred necessarily involves pain; it is, as I have noted before, nothing other than the feeling of pain that is associated with an external cause.<sup>146</sup> In this way, hatred involves, with equal necessity, the “transition from a state of greater perfection to a state of less perfection;”<sup>147</sup> that is, it checks our “power of activity.”<sup>148</sup> The feeling of hatred reflects our condition of weakness not only insofar as it is a passive emotion, but also because the sensation from which it arises is one in which we experience immediately the diminishment of our natural capacities, our ability to realize that which in which our nature consists. It is for this reason that “among all the emotions that are related to the mind insofar as it is active, there are none that are not related to pleasure or desire”<sup>149</sup> and, by the inverse, that emotions related to pain and aversion are related to the mind insofar as it is inactive or passive. If, therefore, virtue is

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<sup>142</sup> E.III.Prop.39.

<sup>143</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.Dem.

<sup>144</sup> E.Prop.37.Dem.

<sup>145</sup> E.IV.Prop.46.

<sup>146</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.7.

<sup>147</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3.

<sup>148</sup> E.III.Prop.11.

<sup>149</sup> E.III.Prop.59.

synonymous with power<sup>150</sup> and with its enhancement, according to Spinoza, we are lacking in virtue, we are “bad” insofar as we feel hatred and to the degree that we do. For this reason, as for the preceding one, is indignation “necessarily evil,”<sup>151</sup> is each and every thing that we “desire as a result of being affected by” it base and unjust.<sup>152</sup>

While Stolze does acknowledge this to be the case and, to some extent, addresses the problem in his article, I find his response unsatisfactory or, perhaps better put, rather incomplete. Though indignation is necessarily a bad frame of mind to assume, Stolze admits, must, he asks, “all sad passive political affects remain sad?”<sup>153</sup> In brief, he responds in the negative and it is certainly true that Spinoza considers it possible and, indeed, necessary to convert passive states of mind into active ones. Yet, the conversion Stolze actually entertains falls short of this goal. It is a matter, so addresses it, of linking indignation “up with hope.”<sup>154</sup> Undoubtedly, hope is better than indignation insofar as it involves pleasure, albeit of an “inconstant” sort. That hope is not altogether bad, however, does not make it good; in any case, hope is not only a passive affection, but one that is mixed with fear and, to that extent, pain.<sup>155</sup> In this sense, it arises from and perpetuates our condition of weakness and servitude in both respects considered above. Hope may be less sad than indignation, but it cannot set us free.

For the same reason that indignation does not and cannot make free, that it is no revolutionary affect but constitutes its own condition of servitude, does the political reaction undertaken on the basis of indignation fall into a vicious cycle of passivity and repression. It may well be, as Stolze contends, that indignation catalyzes fear and thus grounds the singularity

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<sup>150</sup> E.IV.Def.8.

<sup>151</sup> E.IV.Prop.51.Schol.

<sup>152</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.Cor.2.

<sup>153</sup> Stolze, T. 2000. *Indignation: Spinoza on the Desire to Revolt*.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.13.Exp.



of mind in which political communities consist, it may be that it is responsible not only for the fall, but also for the rise of States. But that is precisely the problem. As I explained in the preceding chapter, no active emotion arises from a passive one, no adequate idea from an inadequate one; in other words, the conversion of which Stolze speaks is precluded. Passive feelings and inadequate ideas are not transformed into active feelings and adequate ideas, the latter arise from their own kind, command their own force and, in doing so, *displace* the former. “Sad affects” may become happier ones, but they remain passive in character.

In this manner, indignation falls short of the idea of revolution in two respects. One, the perseverance of passivity, as I have already explained, is a political problem. It is by virtue of our passivity that we exist in disharmony. It is in consequence of our condition of disharmony that we consent to be ruled, that we assume a position of voluntary servitude that is itself preserved by evoking and manipulating passive feelings and inadequate ideas, that — to this extent — leads to a state of affairs in which further feelings and ideas of this degraded sort arise, thus necessitating enhanced repression. So the vicious circle rolls. If indignation liberates, therefore, it does so in a way that virtually guarantees we shall have further cause for liberation because it does not make free. Two, and by extension, that indignation descends into the vicious circle of passivity and repression means that resistance inspired by it does not escape the astronomical idea of revolution, the ancient and medieval conception of revolution in its cyclicity. It is progressive neither in the temporal sense to which Arendt attended — for the historical time in which repression folds before resistance, which gives way to further repression curls in on itself and repeats eternally — nor is it progressive in the dynamic sense that I outlined briefly above. Indignation enhances neither our individual nor our collective power, but instead weakens both. In this manner, too, does indignation fall far short of the idea of revolution.

## V. Conclusions: Chapter Four

I opened this chapter with a discussion of the idea of revolution and the revolutionary power of ideas as conceived by Jonathan Israel. It was contended there, that Spinoza is undoubtedly a revolutionary figure insofar as his work and, perhaps also, his person inspired generations of revolutionaries. His thought, so Israel contends, had a profound effect on the development of the Radical Enlightenment, granting it consistency and theoretical cohesiveness. Yet, I pointed out, the fact that Spinoza's work had a revolutionary effect does not *necessarily* mean that he himself advocated the cause of revolution. On the contrary, the extent of Spinoza's revolutionary sympathies has been a matter of debate for some time.

In many ways, the degree to which we may justly attribute to anyone revolutionary sympathies depends on the manner in which we conceive the nature and character of revolution in the first place. Simply because one calls himself a revolutionary does not make him so. Therefore, before considering Spinoza's case, it was important to determine more precisely the idea of revolution in itself. To do so, I drew, first of all, on Arendt's distinction between revolution in the pre-modern and the modern sense and, second of all, on her further distinction between two respects in which the latter is conceptually constructed. The idea of revolution in its pre-modern sense, we found, is constructed from an astronomical model and involves the notion of cyclicity. In this manner, it shares little with the idea of revolution in its modern sense. However, to the extent that it conveys an impression of inevitability, the idea does carry over into modernity in two respects. First, in the idea of revolution as an irreversible transition — from this notion comes the assertion that the idea of revolution in its modern sense necessarily

entails a conception of historical progress. Second, in the idea of revolution as a sort of irresistible current sweeping us all along together — from this notion comes the assertion that the idea of revolution in its modern sense involves the formation of a collective identity and, through that identity, a shared understanding of and ambition toward the experience of freedom. Revolution in its modern sense, then, involves ideas of collective progress and collective freedom.

Having determined the idea of revolution along these lines, I then went on to examine three representative positions as to the conceivability of revolution in Spinoza's theoretical universe on the one hand and, on the other, its legitimacy. According to the first position, exemplified through the work of Michael Rosenthal, revolution is seen as akin to phenomena of rebellion and revolt and, to this extent, lacks legitimacy for Spinoza even if it is considered natural and circumstantially inevitable. More importantly, revolution in the properly modern sense is excluded, so it is argued, because progress is inconceivable for Spinoza and also because there obtains some evidence that he thought of political transformation in cyclical terms.

According to the second position, exemplified through the work of Hasana Sharp, the idea of revolution is divorced from phenomena of revolt and rebellion. In this way are Spinoza's reservations concerning these sorts of events dispatched with straight away. The case for Spinoza's revolutionary consciousness is then made by, first, bifurcating the idea of revolution in its modern sense as Arendt had accounted for it. The progressive conception of time is divorced from the building of consensus and the construction of freedom in the public sphere; the significance of the former is dismissed, the importance of the latter is highlighted. Reflection on the social tendency of reason is then deployed in order to make the case that if revolution in the properly modern sense involves only the construction of public consciousness, the forging of a

singularity of mind in association with which the notion of freedom is developed, then Spinoza emerges as an advocate of revolution.

According to the third position, exemplified through the work of Ted Stolze, the link between revolt and revolution is restored. A case for the legitimacy and, indeed, the centrality of revolution is then built up from Spinoza's assertion as to its naturalness, from the admission that in spite of his reservations, political and social upheaval is often the inescapable result of governmental mismanagement. The natural response to repressive conditions, to political violence, is hatred and indignation. Indignation, then, constitutes the affective motor of rebellion. In this manner is an account of natural and, to that extent legitimate, revolution made on basis not of human reason, but human passions.

Having thus examined the case of revolution Spinoza's work from the vantage of three representative positions, I supplied a critical response which yielded the following results.

1. Spinoza's reticence vis-a-vis revolt, rebellion, and the like is rightly extended to the case of revolution insofar. Though revolution is indeed more than a successful insurrection, if an insurrection it is in any case, we ought take to heart Spinoza's skepticism and not dismiss it.
2. The distinction between reform and revolution is not aptly put by Rosenthal. Gradual change can be revolutionary in character when its aim is a fundamental alteration in the nature and character of the political association with respect to which it takes place.
3. In any case reform, like revolution, presupposes the possibility of progress and, therefore, that there obtains a progressive principle in nature. So far as we are concerned it is human conatus, which guides systematic action toward the improvement our general conditions of existence.

4. The notion that Spinoza thinks of time in cyclical terms is true anecdotally but not systematically. Spinoza's system yields the view that rational people view things in the light of eternity and that it is *this* perspective which ought to guide us in all respects. The arena of politics is no exception; thus should we expect in Spinoza's system, a conception of politics *sub species aeternitatis*.
5. Spinoza advocates a form of rational revolution which realizes the vision of a politics conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*.
6. Rational revolution is incremental in character and involves the active creation of political institutions which positively displace the prevailing regime and its distribution of power. Its aim is not to tear down, but to build up and replace; thus are phenomena of revolt and rebellion, reactive modes of political engagement, excluded.
7. Contra Sharp, the end of rational revolution is not the State. The State exists when and so long as men operate on the basis of passive emotions and inadequate ideas; furthermore, it perseveres by perpetuating these degraded conditions of mind. Reason annihilates them and, therefore, the affective foundations of the State; it looks to horizons beyond the State form.
8. While reason gives rise to its own affective structures, active affects and, in this respect we may indeed — as I will explain in coming chapters — conceive of rational revolution in affective terms, if an account of the naturalness of revolution is constructed on the basis of affections deriving ultimately from passive states of mind the result is problematic in the extreme. Passive emotions may inspire liberation, but never freedom; in fact, they create the sort of social conditions in which human freedom is even less likely to thrive.

In the chapters that follow, it is my intention to build on these results and thus produce an adequate account of the politics of the rational man, the character of the rational community and, in doing so, describe the contours of a revolution conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*.

## **The Rational Foundation of "State"**

The second grand rabbi of Lubavitch taught that “when two discuss a subject in divine service and they study together, *there are two Divine souls against one natural soul.*”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schneerson, M.M. 1998. Tevet 20. In *Hayom Yom*. Kagan, Y.M. trans. New York: Otzar Hachassidim Lubavitch.

## I. Introduction

In the first chapter of this study, on the basis of the evident incongruity that obtains between the two scholia appended to the thirty-seventh proposition of the fourth part of the *Ethics* — the first of which speaks of a rational and active foundations, the second of which speaks of passionate, imaginative, and thus passive foundations — I proposed that the so-called foundation of state is fractured. There are, I suggested, two foundations grounding two distinct and separate forms of political organization. The passionate, imaginative, and thus passive foundation serves to ground the State, the negative character and structural instability of which I examined in the second chapter. The rational and active foundation serves to ground something else; it serves to ground what, for the sake of exposition only, I will call the rational community. I would I like, now, to elaborate upon the character of this community and *its* structural tendencies as distinct from those of the State.

To do so, it is necessary, first to demonstrate that reason and philosophical virtue, as Spinoza understands such things, are not to be construed in apolitical terms; that the philosopher, in other words, is not a strictly private figure as some have suggested. It must be shown that while the philosopher is not of the State, he operates *not* below its horizon as a pensive and fundamentally innocuous figure akin to the castrated academic of the modern Western university but, on the contrary, *in opposition to it*. For political engagement is *not* synonymous with statecraft. To make my case in this respect, I shall begin by highlighting the dramatic distinction that Spinoza draws between Moses and Jesus, the exemplar of statecraft and the exemplar of philosophy respectively. On my account, Jesus presents himself not as the solitary sage which a superficial reading of the *Theological Political Treatise* yields but, instead, an active political force operating against the State form as represented (but, in my personal view, not actually



embodied by) the Laws of Moses. The implicit result is that philosophy — or the philosophical way of life — as understood by Spinoza undermines the affective foundations of State power, displacing it with a less repressive form of social and political organization.

Having demonstrated by analogy the political character of philosophy and, by extension, the political activity of the philosopher, I shall proceed to built up an account of the affective foundations of rational, anti-statist politics so far as they seem to appear in Spinoza's work.

## **II. Moses and Jesus: Theology of the State and its Philosophical Opposition**

In the fifth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza remarks that “if anyone sets out to teach some doctrine to an entire nation and wants it to be intelligible to all in every detail, he must rely entirely on an appeal to experience.” In one respect, this means, as Spinoza indicates there, an appeal to “historical narratives.” Historical events, however, are the work of men. If, therefore, moral instruction involves an appeal to experience in the form of historical narratives, it also involves using those narratives to construct heroes and villains or, more generally, human types which come to organize reflection on a certain sort of thinking, feeling, or acting. As Spinoza explains in his preface to the first part of the *Ethics*, “men are wont to form general ideas” which “they regard as models;” people construct ideal models of things like houses and chairs and judge the relative perfection of their work accordingly. Likewise, he continues, do they imagine “that men are more perfect or less perfect insofar as they are nearer to or further from” the “idea of a man.”

While Spinoza aspires, in that section of the *Ethics*, to depict something approaching a universal model — however problematic such a notion may be given his other philosophical

convictions<sup>1</sup> — we might also suggest that exemplars arise too from historical narratives and that when this takes place, they are “adapted particularly to the understanding of the common people”<sup>2</sup> to whom these narratives are addressed. It seems to me that this is the case — or at least that it can be — not only with respect to the configuration of particular virtues or groups of virtue, but also with respect to the form and structure of *how virtue is articulated*. That is to say, we can well imagine exemplars of moral instruction.

Two such prominent exemplars appearing in distinction from one another throughout the *Theological Political Treatise* are Moses and Jesus. From Spinoza’s account of it, the fundamental distinction between these two figures *seems* to be articulated at the intersection between two thematic axes; reason and imagination on the one hand and, on the other, ethics and politics.

### A. The Case of Moses: Imagination, Law, and Stability

Moses, argues Spinoza, “perceived God’s revelations with the aid of the imaginative faculty alone, that is, through the medium of words or images.”<sup>3</sup> As he goes on to explain, however:

“Imagination by itself, unlike every clear and distinct idea, does not of its own nature

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<sup>1</sup> If, as he holds, again in the preface to the fourth part of the *Ethics*, that “perfection and imperfection are in reality only modes of thinking.” The “perfect example,” the model, is simply an abstraction arising from the inability of the human mind “to imagine the unimportant differences of individuals (such as the complexion and stature of each, and their exact number)” in consequence of which it “imagines distinctly only their common characteristic insofar as the body is affected by them. For it was by this that the body was affected most repeatedly, by each single individual.” This, he says, is what takes place when we use the word “man” and predicate it “of an infinite number of individuals.” Those, he goes on to remark, “who have more often regarded with admiration the stature of men will understand by the word ‘man’ an animal of upright stature, while those who are wont to regard a different aspect will form a different common image of man, such as that man is a laughing animal, a featherless biped, or a rational animal. Similarly, with regard to other aspects, each will form universal images according to the conditioning of his body (E.II.Prop.40.Schol.1).”

<sup>2</sup> TTP.5.

<sup>3</sup> TTP.1.

carry certainty with it. In order that we may attain certainty of what we imagine, there has to be something in addition to imagination, namely, reasoning.”<sup>4</sup>

The result is that Moses’ prophecy carried, “of itself” no “mathematical” certainty, but amounted to a sort of moral conviction<sup>5</sup> arising from no special understanding as to how things really are, but from the way in which they appeared *to him*, fitted to his own temperament, adapted to the beliefs in which he had been brought up<sup>6</sup> and, likewise, to those in currency among his Israelite brothers.<sup>7</sup>

It is with his moral convictions that Moses formulated the legal foundations of the Hebrew State. Though he “did not perceive God's decrees adequately, as eternal truths” basic principles were revealed to him on the basis of which:

“He perceived a way by which the people of Israel could well be united in a particular territory to form a political union or state, and also a way by which that people could well be constrained to obedience. But he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that this way was the best of all ways, nor that the end for which they were striving would be a consequence necessarily entailed by the general obedience of the people in such a territory.”<sup>8</sup>

He “he perceived,” says Spinoza, “all these things not as eternal truths, but as instructions and precepts”<sup>9</sup> and thus acted “*as a lawgiver*, compelling people to live good lives *by command of*

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<sup>4</sup> TTP.2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> TTP.2.

<sup>7</sup> TTP.4. Even that Moses perceived no image of God is accounted to no special apprehension of God’s nature on his part — that Moses requested such a vision in the first place indicates, so Spinoza contends, that he “believed that God was visible, that is, visibility was not in contradiction with the divine nature (TTP.2)” — but, rather to a specific deficit in his imaginative faculty, to the fact that his “imagination was not receptive to such an image (TTP.2).”

<sup>8</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

law.”<sup>10</sup> As such, so Spinoza maintains in his preface to the *Theological Political Treatise*, “the Law revealed by God to Moses was simply the laws of the Hebrew state alone... binding on none but the Hebrews, and not even on them except while their state still stood.”<sup>11</sup> The Mosaic instruction, so he goes on to explain in the fifth chapter of the same text, consisted in no “moral precept;” it was designed not to enhance “the peace of mind and the true blessedness of the individual” but to further “the good of the commonwealth and state.” Thus did Moses refrain from justifying “his precepts by reasoning, but attaches to his commands a penalty, a penalty which can vary, and must vary, to suit the character of each single nation,” thus did he condemn but the “external act” and not the wish motivating it.

As Spinoza presents him, we discover in Moses an exemplar of inspired *statecraft*. It is with his imagination — by means of words, signs, and figures — that he perceives the divine message. He thus perceives this message not as an eternal truth, but according to his own time and place, to the particular characteristics and needs of his own constituency. Likewise, he appeals not to the mind, so to speak, but to the heart; one is convinced of the Mosaic imperative not because it makes sense, but out of fear or hope; he appeals to the imagination and to those emotions which arise from it. Thus is the Mosaic instruction communicated in the form of a command, does it take shape not a teaching, but in the formulation of laws. What Moses wields, so he yields; the State begins in and maintains itself by the imagination and what follows from it.

## **B. The Case of Jesus: Reason, Eternal Truth, and Salvation**

The same is not true of Jesus, so far as Spinoza represents him. In fact the opposite is the case; while “God’s revelations were,” as a rule, “received only with the aid of the imaginative

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<sup>10</sup> TTP.2.

<sup>11</sup> TTP.Pref.

faculty” Christ constitutes the exception.<sup>12</sup> His “prophecy” was of a totally different order. How so? To answer this question, let us first consider Spinoza’s opening remarks concerning the nature of prophecy. He insists, to begin with, that:

1. “The human mind contains the nature of God within itself in concept, and partakes thereof, and is thereby enabled to form certain basic ideas that explain natural phenomena and inculcate morality, we are justified in asserting that the nature of mind, insofar as it is thus conceived, is the primary cause of divine revelation.”
2. Insofar as the human mind partakes of divine nature and thus conceives certain ideas that constitute divine revelation, “it follows that natural knowledge can be called prophecy, for the knowledge that we acquire by the natural light of reason depends solely on knowledge of God and of his eternal decrees.”<sup>13</sup>

If prophecy involves knowledge as to the nature of God and his decrees, natural knowledge fits the bill even if “it is not so highly prized by the multitude who are ever eager for what is strange and foreign to their own nature.” Moreover, “it is in no way inferior to” what is more conventionally thought of as prophecy “in respect of the certainty” it involves and “the source from which it derives.”<sup>14</sup> If we recall the considerable *uncertainty* bearing upon more recognizably prophetic experiences, natural knowledge turns out, in fact, to be decidedly superior — though it is not often recognized as such.

An exception, however, to the rough rule of thumb that natural knowledge is not regarded as prophetic in character appears to be the instance of *intuitive knowledge* which, like the

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<sup>12</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> All passages quoted in this paragraph appear in TTP.1.

intellectual love of God, is as excellent as it is difficult and rare.<sup>15</sup> According to Spinoza, it is this sort of knowledge that Jesus enjoyed:

“We may quite clearly understand that God can communicate with man without mediation, for he communicates his essence to our minds without employing corporeal means. Nevertheless, a man who can perceive by pure intuition that which is not contained in the basic principles of our cognition and cannot be deduced therefrom must needs possess a mind whose excellence far surpasses the human mind.”<sup>16</sup>

That intuitive knowledge exceeds common sense and normative reason is what, on Spinoza’s account, makes Jesus eligible for the “prophetic” role. The way that he knows things differs from the common stock of men, it is “strange and foreign” to them and, in this respect, “highly prized.”<sup>17</sup>

Without digressing into an extensive discussion of Spinoza’s view as to the distinctions that obtain between imagination, reason, and intuition, let it simply be stated that intuition is a condition of knowledge achieved “without going through any procedure.”<sup>18</sup> It involves, rather, “adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”<sup>19</sup> Adequately to know the essence of things is to know them “under a form of eternity”<sup>20</sup> and to know things under a form of eternity is, in turn, to know them as they are in God; it is to know God. In this manner of knowing, God is not an object of knowledge aside from and outside of the knower; rather, to know God in this way is to

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<sup>15</sup> E.V.Prop.42.Schol.

<sup>16</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>17</sup> “I do not believe,” he says, “that anyone has attained such a degree of perfection surpassing all others, except Christ.” I think that this is something of an exaggeration for Spinoza, who seems to hold that we can, indeed, aspire to intuitive knowledge of God. Still, it does go to show that Jesus was, for him, an unusual figure and, to that extent, in his manner of knowing, sufficiently distinct from the common run of men to merit their esteem.

<sup>18</sup> TIE.24.

<sup>19</sup> E.II.Prop.40.Schol.2.

<sup>20</sup> E.V.Prop.29.

know from within, to know God as he knows himself.<sup>21</sup> In *this sense*, it is to possess divine knowledge.

This is the sort of knowing that is attributed to Jesus. “Nowhere,” says Spinoza, “have I read that God appeared to Christ or spoke with him, but that God was revealed to the Apostles through Christ.” Thus, he continues, “if Moses spoke with God face to face as a man may do with his fellow... then Christ communed with God mind to mind.”<sup>22</sup> Less a prophet, therefore, than “the mouthpiece of God,” Jesus, unlike Moses, is said to have “perceived things truly and adequately.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, again, unlike Moses, the revelation of Christ is said:

1. To have been adapted neither to his own beliefs nor to those of the Jews in general; “this would be the height of absurdity.”<sup>24</sup>
2. Involve “axioms that are universally true” and intended “to teach not only the Jews but the entire human race.”<sup>25</sup>

However divine this wisdom attributed to Jesus, Spinoza states nonetheless and in an unqualified that: “I discount the fantastic view that the prophets had human bodies but nonhuman minds, so that their sensations and consciousness were of an entirely different order from our own.”<sup>26</sup>

When, therefore, he speaks as he does of Jesus, it is evidently not his intention to convey the

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<sup>21</sup> Thus, for example, does Spinoza point out that his proofs to the effect that “everything (and consequently the human mind, too) is dependent on God in respect of its essence and of its existence” as they appear in the first part of the *Ethics* are “demonstrated in a general way.” Though they be “legitimate and exempt from any shadow of doubt,” these proofs do “not so strike the mind as when it is inferred from the essence of each particular thing which we assert to be dependent on God (E.V.Prop.36.Schol.). In contrast, “the mind’s intellectual love toward God” — which arises necessarily from the third kind of knowledge (E.V.Prop.32.Cor.) — “is the love of God wherewith God loves himself (E.V.Prop.36).” If this love is God’s own, so too the knowledge whence it arises.

<sup>22</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>23</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>24</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>25</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>26</sup> TTP.1.

Church's view that the man was "consubstantial" with God in any special way<sup>27</sup> — in no way different, at any rate, than anything else is consubstantial with God. It is, rather, his intention to present Jesus as the philosopher *par excellence*; as Strauss put it: "since man has no higher faculty than reason, or since there cannot be suprarational truths, Jesus cannot possibly have been more than the greatest philosopher who ever lived."<sup>28</sup>

Now, Alan Donagan<sup>29</sup> disagrees with this characterization of Jesus on the grounds that:

1. Spinoza seems to attribute to Jesus but the second kind of knowledge (rational knowledge consisting in common notions) when he explains that the message was universally communicated by virtue of its adaptation to "doctrines held in common by all mankind;" namely, "axioms that are universally true."<sup>30</sup>
2. The knowledge of Jesus is said not to be "contained in the basic principles of our

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<sup>27</sup> Let me elaborate briefly. Take, for instance, the following passage from the Catechism: "we do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'consubstantial Trinity.' The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd. ed. n.253)" such that, in respect of Jesus in particular: "the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man (Ibid. n. 464)."

For Spinoza, this whole notion is utterly absurd. He holds that *all things* are consubstantial with God insofar as God is the only substance (E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2 and E.I.Prop.11) in which all other things abide; *nothing*, he believes, is substantial except insofar as it is in God (E.I.Prop.25.Cor). In contrast, the Church affirms that the consubstantiation of Jesus and God means not that Jesus, like anything or anyone else, is a "part" of God — if such a thing can be said of God who, according to Spinoza, is by his essence indivisible — but "wholly" God. For this to stand in Spinozistic terms, four things would have to be the case. As a man, Jesus would necessarily constitute (a) a mode, "that which is in something else and conceived through something else (E.I.Def.5)" and (b) a finite thing insofar as that "is said to be finite... when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature (E.I.Def.2)" — a body, for example. As God, however, Jesus would necessarily constitute (c) substance, "that which is in itself and conceived through itself (E.I.Def.3)" and (d) an infinite thing (E.I.Def.6) that cannot be limited in any way.

Church doctrine vis-a-vis the consubstantiation of Jesus and God involves, therefore, two outright contradictions (1) that something can be in itself and conceived through itself while also in something else and conceived through something else and (2) that something can be finite while also being infinite. For the Church, this is unproblematic; the catechism states explicitly that the philosophical terms it uses to articulate the doctrine of the trinity are not intended to submit faith to "human wisdom;" rather, the trinity is said to signify an "ineffable mystery (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd. ed. n.251)." But Spinoza admits of no such mysteries; "I call a thing impossible," he says, "if its nature implies that it would be a contradiction for it to exist (TIE.53)."

<sup>28</sup> Strauss, L. 1988. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Donagan, A. 1996. "Spinoza's Theology." In *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. ed. Don Garrett. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. p. 371.

<sup>30</sup> TTP. IV.



cognition”<sup>31</sup> such that it falls short of and does not transcend the standards of philosophy.

As I see it, however, there are four items of evidence militating against Donagan’s viewpoint:

1. These two positions, as Donagan presents them, are incongruent. If Jesus’ knowledge was of the second kind only, then his teaching *is* “contained in the basic principles of our cognition.”
2. Even were it the case that, according to Spinoza, Jesus’ knowledge was of the second kind and not the third, this would still make him a philosopher. As I mentioned above,<sup>32</sup> Spinoza describes the the first part of the *Ethics* in its entirety as an example of knowledge of the second kind<sup>33</sup> because it is presented *more geometrico*. It stands to reason, then, that the *Ethics* as a whole follows suite; knowledge of the third kind is described but *not engendered*. If, therefore, we accept as legitimately philosophical only knowledge of the third kind, it follows that Spinoza is not a philosopher. Does this result not exceed the bounds of plausibility?
3. Spinoza suggests directly that Jesus’ project was philosophical in character: “we can clearly see,” he remarks, “how dangerous it is to refer to religious jurisdiction *matters that are purely philosophical*, and to legislate concerning beliefs that are frequently subject to dispute, or can so be. Tyranny is most violent where individual beliefs, which are an inalienable right, are regarded as criminal. Indeed, in such circumstances the anger of the mob is usually the greatest tyrant of all. *It was in giving way to the anger of the Pharisees that Pilate ordered the crucifixion of Christ, whom he knew to be innocent* “  
The case of Jesus’ execution is taken as case and point that religious jurisdiction ought

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<sup>31</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>32</sup> Note 20.

<sup>33</sup> E.V.Prop.36.Schol.

not extend to matters philosophical.

4. Spinoza states that “it is not reason but revelation that can teach us that it is enough for blessedness or salvation for us to accept the divine decrees as laws or commandments, and that there is no need to conceive them as eternal truths.”<sup>34</sup> Revelation conveys divine decree as law and command, not eternal truth. The latter is the purview of philosophy. Jesus, is consistently described as teaching such truths; thus Jesus must be a philosopher.

If we accept that (1) Jesus is presented to us, by Spinoza, as a philosopher, (2) Spinoza intends not merely to distinguish theology from philosophy but, as Strauss contends, to displace the former with the latter, and (3) theology is wedded to the State, as I hold, it follows that this account of Jesus fits comfortably into my ongoing contention that the subtext of the *Theological Political Treatise* is the emergence neither of “the liberal state”<sup>35</sup> nor the “rational state... real in higher degree,”<sup>36</sup> but critique of the State form as such. Jesus’ mission would represent the displacement of three intersecting conceptual elements:

1. The displacement of Mosaic prophecy.
2. The displacement of theology.
3. The displacement of the State form.

These, he replaces with philosophy, on the one hand and, on the other — or so I would like to suggest — the rational community.

That being said, let us return to the question of what, according to Spinoza, Jesus actually knows. Spinoza teaches that “he who loves above all the intellectual cognition of God, the most perfect Being, and takes especial delight therein, is necessarily most perfect, and partakes most

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<sup>34</sup> TTP.Supplementary Notes.31.

<sup>35</sup> Strauss, L. 1965. Spinoza’s Critique of Religion. New York: Schocken. p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 244.

in the highest blessedness;”<sup>37</sup> for “salvation or blessedness or freedom”<sup>38</sup> is “nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God.”<sup>39</sup> The intuitive knowledge of God — without here attempting further to explicate it — is what Spinoza means when he uses words like salvation, blessedness, and freedom, while “the means required to achieve this end... may be termed God's commands, for they are ordained for us by God himself, as it were, insofar as he exists in our minds. So the rules for living a life that has regard to this end can fitly be called the Divine Law.”<sup>40</sup>

We have already seen that, on Spinoza’s account, Mosaic prophecy arose from the imagination, was adapted to specific historical conditions and took the form of law or command as opposed to teaching. Consequently, neither does it bind now that conditions have changed nor does it conduce to blessedness and salvation; on the contrary, it is “the ignorance of the Pharisees,” which lead them to believe “that the blessed life was his who observed the laws of the commonwealth.”<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, by virtue of the fact that Jesus is said to have known God intuitively and to have taught the “means required” to attain this condition of mind, he is said, likewise, to constitute, in himself “the way of salvation” and to teach “ordinances leading men to salvation.”<sup>42</sup> As such, though “he also appears to have laid down laws in God's name, we must maintain that he perceived things truly and adequately;”<sup>43</sup> he taught no law but, instead, “freed

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<sup>37</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>38</sup> E.V.Prop.36.Schol.

<sup>39</sup> E.IV.App.

<sup>40</sup> TTP.4. Incidentally, Spinoza explains that “an enquiry as to what these means are, and what are the rules of conduct required for this end, and how there follow therefrom the fundamental principles of the good commonwealth and social organization, belongs to a general treatise on Ethics” — this seems to suggest that his *Ethics* is to be interpreted as his account of Divine Law.

<sup>41</sup> TTP.5.

<sup>42</sup> TTP.1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

[men] from bondage to the law.”<sup>44</sup> Adequate knowledge, intuitive knowledge, appears as the foil of law. If Jesus embodies and teaches the former, he has no relation to the latter.

We see, then, that the opposition between Moses and Jesus — *not*, mind you, “the doctrines held by some Churches about Christ,” concerning which Spinoza states “I freely confess that I do not understand them,” but some other Jesus, the Jesus that arises from Spinoza’s own interpretation of scripture, a “spinozist” Jesus — looks like this:

Moses	Jesus
Imagination	Reason and intuition
Uncertainty	Certainty
Theology	Philosophy
Laws	Eternal truths
The State (i.e. Stability)	Salvation

### C. Eternal Truth and Salvation at the Horizon of State, Displacing it

I would like, here, to press on the latter two distinctions. If eternal truth is set against the law and salvation against the State, two possible implications result. One, eternal truth and salvation are achieved “apart from the works of the law,”<sup>45</sup> so to speak, but not in opposition to it. In this sense do they operate *below the horizon of the State*. Two, eternal truth and salvation are conceived in opposition to the law, as incompatible with it and, therefore, as aligned with one another to displace it.

Spinoza *seems* committed to representing Jesus’s mission in keeping with the first of

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<sup>44</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>45</sup> Romans, 3:28.

these two interpretive options. For example:

1. When he speaks of the freedom from bondage to the law which Jesus is said to initiate, Spinoza contends that Jesus actually lent “further strength and stability to the law, inscribing it deep in their hearts.”<sup>46</sup>
2. He contends that Jesus taught “only universal moral precepts” and thus promised not material, but spiritual rewards:

“For Christ, as I have said, was sent not to preserve the state and to institute laws, but only to teach the universal law. Hence, we can readily understand that Christ *by no means abrogated the law of Moses, for it was not Christ’s purpose to introduce new laws into the commonwealth.* His chief concern was to teach moral doctrines, keeping them distinct from the laws of the commonwealth.”<sup>47</sup>

3. He holds that when they “revealed nothing beyond what was contained in the Law of Moses, the prophets stood in no need of a sign, for the Law was their assurance.”<sup>48</sup> The prophet flags his sign when a modification to the State, its laws, or its constitution is proposed. Spinoza then explains that the Apostles were “men of private station”<sup>49</sup> who acted for the most part “as teachers, not as prophets”<sup>50</sup> such that, in the production of scripture, no sign was displayed.<sup>51</sup> This is to say the the Apostolic mission was essentially apolitical. He contends, furthermore, that when the Apostles *did* flag signs and, in this manner, assume the prophetic role, “their signs were essential for the

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<sup>46</sup> TTP.4.

<sup>47</sup> TTP.5.

<sup>48</sup> TTP.2.

<sup>49</sup> TTP.19.

<sup>50</sup> TTP.11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

*conversion of the Gentiles to religion.*”<sup>52</sup> The Apostolic sign had as its intended audience men and women outside the jurisdiction of the Law, non-citizens. In consequence, it is implied, the Apostolic mission posed no threat to the State and in this respect, again, was apolitical in character.

- a. Still more troubling, Spinoza’s emphasis on the indispensability of the sign or wonder when alterations to the nature of the Law are proposed seems to imply that opposition to the State is simply illegitimate altogether. After all, Spinoza holds that: “The word miracle... means simply an event whose natural cause we cannot explain by comparison with any other normal event. I might indeed have said that a miracle is that whose cause cannot be explained on scientific principles known to us by the natural light of reason.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the miracle is that which we regard with *wonder* if, by the latter, we intend “the thought of anything on which the mind stays fixed because this particular thought has no connection with any others.”<sup>54</sup> This is only to say, however, that we wonder at that which we fail to understand, for “all things are united through Nature” and “confusion arises from mind’s having only partial knowledge of a ... unity composed of many constituents;”<sup>55</sup> it is the “fictitious, the false, and other ideas [that] have their origin in... certain sensations that are (so to speak) fortuitous and unconnected.”<sup>56</sup> If there is neither sign nor wonder that is anything other than an illusion, then legitimate opposition to the State is likewise an illusion.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> TTP.6.

<sup>54</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.4.

<sup>55</sup> TIE.63.

<sup>56</sup> TIE.84.

For these reasons, it would appear that Spinoza is committed to representing Jesus and his Apostles in an apolitical light. It follows that the eternal and saving truths they are said to have taught — i.e. philosophy — exists below the horizon of State and poses no threat. Spinoza’s account of Jesus and his followers is consistent, in this sense, with the two fundamental propositions he claims to defend throughout the *Theological Political Treatise*. Namely, that “the individual citizen can say and communicate to others what he thinks” and that he can do so “without infringing the right and authority of the sovereign, that is, without violating the peace of the commonwealth”<sup>57</sup> — i.e. that the “freedom to philosophise”<sup>58</sup> is a private freedom the exercise of which infringes on no sovereign right.

Nonetheless, it is my view that this result is rather deceptive. Let us admit, in the first place, that Spinoza’s claim to the effect that free expression does not violate the peace of the commonwealth may be true, but is *necessarily so* only in a very specific sense. Freedom of thought and speech, on his account, arises from the fact that “no one is able to transfer to another his natural right or faculty to reason freely and to form his own judgment on any matters whatsoever, nor can he be compelled to do so.”<sup>59</sup> If men are so constituted that they *cannot* transfer the right to form judgments and to express them, any effort to force such a transfer is the equivalent — if I may borrow Spinoza’s deliciously sarcastic turn of phrase — of a bid to make tables eat grass.<sup>60</sup> The power to suppress this freedom simply lies beyond the State and *to that extent* outside of its right.

Spinoza’s claim to the effect that the exercise of this freedom infringes not on the right of the State and in this sense violates not the peace of the commonwealth is, therefore, a formal one.

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<sup>57</sup> TTP.20.

<sup>58</sup> Ep.30; Ep.38.

<sup>59</sup> TTP.20.

<sup>60</sup> TTP.4.

Formally speaking, the State has right neither over thought nor over its expression; if so, upon the free exercise of these faculties no right of State is infringed upon. Still, the unenforceability of restrictions on the freedoms of thought and speech does not make neutral vis-a-vis the State what people say to one another. It simply means that the State can interfere only at the risk of weakening its own position by displaying its impotence and thus undermining respect for the law in general.

With this in mind, let us observe how the three aforementioned items of evidence as to Spinoza's *apparent* representation of Jesus as offering salvation apart from the law but not in opposition to it; i.e. of Jesus and his followers — or philosophers more broadly — as essentially apolitical figures. In the first place, Spinoza explains that “Christ by no means abrogated the law of Moses, for it was not Christ’s purpose to introduce new laws into the commonwealth.” What does this suggest with respect to the manner in which “abrogation of the law” is to be interpreted? It seems that to abrogate the law is to “introduce new laws.” If no law is introduced, then no law is abrogated. Since, therefore, that freedom from the law which Jesus is said to have initiated is linked to moral principles and not law, it follows that Jesus abrogated no law.

This is evidently disingenuous or, at best, a half-truth. Yes, to introduce a new law is to abrogate an old one and to refrain from the one is of necessity to do the same with respect to the other. But to annul a law is *also* to abrogate it. This form of abrogation, Spinoza hints at but does not openly address. In the fourth chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, after attesting to the manner in which Jesus lent “further strength and stability to the law” by freeing his listeners from its bonds, he goes on to say that “Paul, too, appears to be making the same point in certain passages, namely, in his Epistle to the Romans, chapter 7:6 and chapter 3:28.”



He then abruptly transitions to a discussion of the manner in which Paul adapts his mode of exposition to accommodate his audience by speaking of God in anthropomorphic terms, as if that was what he had been speaking of all along. What does Paul teach in these two passages? The abrogation of the law:

1. In Romans 7:6, Paul states that we are now “*discharged from the law*, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”
2. In Romans 3:38 he holds that “a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Now, Spinoza does return to the second passage, interpreting it by equivocation; faith justifies apart from the law without abrogating it. He does not, however, interpret the first passage, which is unambiguous. There is no sense in which one can be “discharged from the law” without proposing that the law is null, thus abrogating it not by introducing a new law but by denying the force and validity of the old.

The same implication arises from another passage from Romans which Spinoza later quotes parenthetically. In chapter thirteen of the *Theological Political Treatise*, he quotes Romans 13:8 to justify the claim that “obedience to God consists solely in loving one's neighbour;” this verse teaches that “he who loves his neighbour in obedience to God's command *has fulfilled the Law*.” There is an important distinction to be made between observing the law as it is actually formulated and respecting the end it was designed to serve. If one is said to have fulfilled the law simply by loving one's neighbor, it can mean nothing other than that the law *as actually formulated* has been abrogated. We see, then, that Spinoza has given us to understand that while Jesus introduced no law of his own, by proclaiming its moral truths the Christian

teaching *did in fact* involve an abrogation of the Law. Proof items one and two as to the supposition that the eternal truths and the salvation which Jesus is said to have shared — which, by implication, *philosophy and philosophers*, spread — operate below the horizon of the State are seen, in this manner, to fall short of their mark.

As for proof item three, I propose two counter arguments. Both require reading against the grain of the text — which, as I have already indicated in the first chapter of this study, I regard as an interpretive necessity. In the first place, the Theological Political Treatise, on the whole, is designed to make the philosopher appear as benign as possible insofar as the stability of the State is concerned. Yet, over and again, we have observed that the philosopher is actually a rather subversive character. I would suggest that the same dynamic is at play here. Spinoza puts special emphasis on the centrality of the sign or the wonder yet, apart from the sign or the wonder, he speaks of “certain and indubitable revelation.”<sup>61</sup>

If, by “certain and indubitable revelation,” we understand “sign or wonder,” then the consequences of the proof text hold — as I already indicated, the sign or the wonder is anything but certain or indubitable; on the contrary, it is altogether uncertain and that is why Spinoza links it so intimately to Mosaic prophecy or (as I have interpreted it) Spinoza’s exemplar for the ideology of the State. Sign or wonder, supplying no certainty, will be unable to legitimate opposition to the State, which means that no such opposition is legitimate. Thus, appeal to signs and wonders immediately serves the exoteric goals of the text. Doing so allows Spinoza to bracket the subversive force of the Apostolic message so far as he has represented it; it is relegated to the private sphere and denuded of political significance. It is, therefore, to read along the grain of the text or, in other words, inadequately.

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<sup>61</sup> TTP.16; 19.

If, however, we take seriously Spinoza's claim that certain and indubitable revelation *does indeed* legitimate opposition to the State and decouple it from, or question, the *example* he uses — namely, the sign or wonder — then we arrive at a quite different result. I contend that if the example supplied is inconsistent with the principle which it is posed to exemplify, the latter *does not* empty itself out into the former. The principle stands on its own and we interpret the example as a sort of trap or screen set for the casual reader so as to distract him and let him infer what is least subversive. In our case, it is that the apostles were politically neutral insofar as they operated below the horizon of the state. The more careful reader, however, will read against the grain of the text and infer that certain and indubitable revelation — *reason and intuition*, philosophical certainty, or the teaching of Jesus as we have interpreted it above — *do* constitute a legitimate threat to the sovereignty of the State. This means that the philosopher is not, in fact, the neutral and apolitical figure Spinoza *seems* to represent him as but, instead, a deeply political figure operating not below the horizon of the State but — according to the measure of his certainty, in direct opposition to it.<sup>62</sup>

In the second place, let us consider Spinoza's conclusion to the argument in which the disjunction in question appears. After speaking of the relationship between sure signs and resistance to the State in chapter nineteen of the *Theological Political Treatise*, emphasizing that only sure signs legitimate opposition, he explains that:

“This point is likewise made manifest by the fact that Christ also bade his disciples not to fear those who kill the body. *If this command had been laid on every man, no state could continue in existence...* Thus it must be granted that the authority which Christ gave the

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<sup>62</sup> On the role of miracles in relation to political resistance, see Rosenthal, M.A. 1999. “Toleration and the Right to Resist in Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: The Problem of Christ's Disciples.” *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*. Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 111-132. Cf. Rice, L.C. 1999. “Spinoza's Account of Miracles.” *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*. Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 25-44.

disciples was a unique occurrence, and cannot be regarded as an example for others.” Again, read superficially, what Spinoza seems to be suggesting is that the disciples are distinguished from other men insofar as they had been instructed by Jesus not to fear death; by virtue of this instruction and only by virtue of this instruction was their opposition to the Law justified. We, however, who have not been so instructed can claim no such right — so Spinoza appears to hold.

There are two reasons to call this interpretation into question. First, let us recall who Jesus is for Spinoza. On my interpretation, Jesus is — for Spinoza — a prophet only insofar as he is a philosopher first and foremost. Jesus embodies the mind of God in the sense that he perceives eternal truths intuitively. In this respect, as I noted earlier, was God “revealed to the Apostles through Christ.” When, therefore, we read of Jesus directing his disciples not to fear death, his instructions must not be interpreted as if they arose from the prophetic *imagination* and, in this manner, as if they were adapted, with a greater or lesser degree of certainty, to the exigencies of time and place. They must, rather, be interpreted as reflective of an eternal truth and, in this respect, as addressed to all men in all times: no man ought fear death.

Furthermore, Spinoza presents us with *just this teaching* in the *Ethics*. In the sixty-seventh proposition of part four, he argues as follows:

1. Pain is the transition from a state of greater to a state of lesser power.<sup>63</sup>
2. In respect of the mind, pain is a diminishment in the power to think or understand.<sup>64</sup>
3. Therefore, active states of mind — i.e. states of mind expressive of the mind’s

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<sup>63</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3.

<sup>64</sup> E.III.Prop.11.

own causal power<sup>65</sup> — cannot involve the experience of pain but only pleasure.<sup>66</sup>

4. Active states of mind arise from adequate ideas; that is, from the exercise of reason.<sup>67</sup>
5. Therefore, reason likewise cannot involve the experience of pain but only pleasure.
6. Fear involves pain.<sup>68</sup>
7. Therefore, “he who is guided by fear... is not guided by reason.”<sup>69</sup>
8. It follows that “a free man, that is, he who lives solely according to the dictates of reason” is a man who is not guided by fear of death but, rather “thinks of death least of all things”<sup>70</sup>

A free man is not motivated by the fear of death.

Moreover, as Spinoza explains in the fifth part of the *Ethics*, our freedom from the fear of death is proportional to our knowledge. Insofar as the essence of the mind consists in knowledge,<sup>71</sup> he argues, the more that it knows according to reason and intuition, to the second and third kinds of knowledge<sup>72</sup> — that is, the more he knows, for “knowledge” of the first kind is nothing other than opinion or imagination<sup>73</sup> — which endure eternally,<sup>74</sup> “the less it fears death.”<sup>75</sup> Death, in other words, “is less hurtful in proportion as the mind’s clear and distinct

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<sup>65</sup> See. E.III.Def.1-2.

<sup>66</sup> E.III.Prop.59.

<sup>67</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

<sup>68</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.13.

<sup>69</sup> E.IV.Prop.63.

<sup>70</sup> E.IV.Prop.67 & Dem.

<sup>71</sup> E.II.Prop.11.

<sup>72</sup> E.II.Prop.40.Schol.2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> E.V.Prop.23 & 29.

<sup>75</sup> E.V.Prop.38.

knowledge is greater.”<sup>76</sup> While, therefore, it may be the case that one has yet to attain that condition in which “that that part of [the mind] that we have shown to perish with the body” is of “no account” at all “compared with that part of it that survives,”<sup>77</sup> the fear of death diminishes progressively. “In this life,” moreover:

“We mainly endeavor that the body of childhood, as far as its nature allows and is conducive thereto, should develop into a body that is capable of a great many activities and is related to a mind that is highly conscious of itself, of God, and of things, and in such a way that everything relating to its memory or imagination should be of scarcely any importance in comparison with its intellect.”<sup>78</sup>

Not only can we progress toward that condition of mind in which death ceases altogether to inspire fear, but we “mainly endeavor” to do so. All of us do; this is not a special instruction bestowed by Jesus upon his immediate disciples alone but, instead, a universal instruction delineating the human project in its entirety.

If the imperative to fear not death is indeed “laid on every man” we arrive at an interesting result. As Spinoza indicates, to eradicate altogether this fear is to ensure that “*no State could continue in existence.*” If, therefore, it is the human vocation to progressively eliminate the fear of death, it is likewise the human vocation to progressively eliminate the State by abrogating the fundamental psychological mechanisms whereby it operates. The State is allied with death; to forget death, to take up a “meditation of life,”<sup>79</sup> to act, to live, to desire good, is to be absolved of the State. By desiring “for mankind the good that he desires for

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<sup>76</sup> E.V.Prop.38.Schol.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> E.V.Prop.39.Schol.

<sup>79</sup> E.IV.Prop.67.

himself”<sup>80</sup> is, therefore, to erode the State at its very foundations.

Before proceeding to conclude the present section in its entirety, let us briefly summarize the subsection at hand. We set out to examine in greater detail Spinoza’s account of the opposition between Mosaic teaching vis-a-vis law and the State along with the stability it supplies on the one hand and, on the other, Jesus’ teaching vis-a-vis eternal truth and salvation so far as each are represented in the *Theological Political Treatise*. I suggested that two possible interpretations of this opposition obtain. One, it designates a simple distinction of jurisdictions that neither overlap nor come into conflict; on this interpretation, the teachings of Jesus operate below the horizon of the State. Two, it designates a definite antagonism whereby the teachings of Jesus entail the displacement of the State.

Three items of evidence were identified in favor of the first interpretation. One, that Jesus’ teaching is said to inscribe in the hearts of men a respect for the Law. Two, Jesus is said not to abrogate the Law because he introduces no new law. Three, his teachings and those transmitted via his disciples constituted no threat to the Law because they were either introduced along with legitimating signs — with a Gentile audience at that — or constituted not prophecy but simple moral instruction.

My response to this argument began with the contention that Spinoza’s proposal to the

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<sup>80</sup> E.IV.Prop.69.Schol. Incidentally, one might also point out that, in the same scholium, Spinoza interprets the story of the fall of man in consequence of having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. In the text of the Bible itself, God promised Adam that “when you eat from it you will certainly die.” There is surely a long tradition of interpretation as to the meaning of this threat. Maimonides, for example, explained that this death is the transition from a strictly intellectual condition in which man knows only truth and falsehood, knowing not of good or evil (see *Guide for the Perplexed*.I.2). The notion that man in a free condition knows not of good and evil is certainly consistent with Spinoza’s viewpoint (cf. E.IV.Prop.69). However, he forwards a slightly different perspective; it is less that eating from the Tree of Knowledge will introduce death in one form or another, but rather that “as soon as he should eat of it he would straightway *fear death instead of desiring to live*.” The fall of man is his fear of death. It is the teaching of Jesus, he goes on to explain, which releases from *this* fear.

On the basis of this reading, we might also add and re-interpret Maimonides’ reading of the verse “you shall be like *Elohim*, knowing good and evil” — that is, as rulers judging as to good and bad and “not knowing or discerning the true and the false.” To be in a condition of rule is the consequence of fearing death. The State is the consequence of the fall of man.

effect that freedom of thought and speech infringe not the right of the sovereign is technically true insofar as it lies outside the capacity of sovereign power adequately to police such freedoms without undermining its authority by failure to enforce its policies. That such freedom can slowly erode the foundations of the State nonetheless is not excluded.

I then went on to point out that Spinoza's contention as to the abrogation of the Law which Jesus is said not to have advocated insofar as he introduced no laws is a half-truth. The Law is abrogated not only by introducing new laws, but also by annulling old ones. On the basis of Spinoza's backhanded references to Romans 7:6 and 13:8 it is demonstrated that he indeed regarded Jesus as a renegade in this respect.

Finally, I pointed out that signs legitimate, for Spinoza, insofar as they allow for the determination of the "sure" revelation. Signs, however, convince only to the extent that they evoke wonder, which is a form of confusion and not surety; therefore can the sign certify no surety. Reason and intuition alone do so. Furthermore, we observed that the particular surety which Jesus is said to have imparted to his disciples — freedom from the fear of death — constituted no special dispensation, but rather a universal instruction which Spinoza himself extends to us in several different places throughout the *Ethics*. The existence of this particular freedom was shown, furthermore, to admit of degrees and, furthermore to stand in negative correlation with the existence of the State.

#### **D. Section Summary**

Spinoza's fundamental aim in writing the *Theological Political Treatise* is to produce a work of political philosophy. However on point his interpretation of scripture may or may not be, it is without doubt theoretically motivated. Commensurate with this view of the text in its



entirety, it seems to me appropriate to suggest that in speaking of “Moses” and “Jesus” we are better off setting aside the assumption that Spinoza aspired to describe these figures as they may truly have been or even as they are depicted in scriptural texts. Rather, as I suggested at the outset, the figures of Moses and Jesus best construed as exemplars of two trajectories of moral instruction.

The distinction between these two characters lies at the intersection between:

1. Reason and imagination.
2. Theology and Philosophy
3. Ethics and politics.

Moses, as I indicated, is represented as aligned with imagination, with theology, and with politics *qua* statecraft. Jesus, in contrast, is represented as aligned with reason, with philosophy, and with ethics. We can, I would suggest, look past the names and the personages to which they are appended and observe simply the theoretical opposition.

Outwardly, Spinoza goes out of his way to leave the impression that Jesus and his disciples, unlike Moses and the other prophets, were essentially apolitical. Looking past the names to observe the theoretical content they bear, this implies that that reason, philosophy, and ethics are likewise apolitical phenomena, that the philosopher poses no threat to the State by thinking and teaching as he does. This construction of the distinction between Moses and Jesus fits nicely with a popular position adopted by many commentators on Spinoza’s work to the effect that the *Ethics*, Spinoza’s philosophical masterpiece, aims at *private* virtue while his politics, as Hasana Sharp expresses it, “only at ersatz freedom in the form of obedience to the most basic moral precepts.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Sharp, H. 2013. “*Violenta Imperia Nemo Continuit Diu*: Spinoza and the Revolutionary Laws of Human Nature.”

By reading between the lines of Spinoza's carefully constructed veil, we observe that the philosopher so far as he is represented by the figure of Jesus, is anything but an advocate of private virtue. He operates not below the horizon of the State but, on the contrary, against it. Jesus' teaching — that is, philosophy — fomented an abrogation of the Law. It does so, however, *not* by the introduction of new laws but by placing itself in opposition to law as such. The eternal truths of philosophy are inconsistent with the form of law; to attain to its freedom is to be discharged from the law and absolved of the State embodied therein. To arrive at philosophical salvation and thus to regard oneself *sub specie aeternitatis* is to fear not death and, therefore, to dissolve the affective foundations of the State.

We observe, furthermore, that philosophical anti-authoritarianism, the anarchic subtext of the *Theological Political Treatise*, is by no means the private affair of the solitary sage. It is anti-statist and in no manner apolitical. On the contrary, Jesus attracts to himself a community of disciples who become, in turn, his apostles, spreading his teaching and extending the reaches of the community. The Christian veneer of this story, so far as I am concerned, is utterly irrelevant. Behind the figure of Jesus, we discern the philosopher, behind the circle of disciples we discern the formation of rational community, behind the diffusion of Apostolic teaching, we discern the incremental dissolution of the State in favor of an altogether different mode of political organization, the basic unit of which is neither the isolated individual nor the nation, but the rational community. In this diffusion, then, we observe what might, after Spinoza's locution, be called "reason's rebellion."<sup>82</sup> It is a form of social and political organization which:

1. Is grounded not in passive emotions like fear, but in active states of mind and active

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See also Dobbs-Weinstein, I. 1999. Rereading the Tractatus theologico-politicus In Light of Benjamin's "Theologico-Political Fragment." Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize. Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 67-90.

<sup>82</sup> TTP.15.

emotions.

2. Displaces the State *neither* by evoking indignation *nor* by provoking the sort of rebellions which are primarily inspired not by any positive or constructive objective, but by the negation of something else and which, to that extent fail more often than not to achieve any desirable result. That is, a form of social and political organization which is a positive objective in itself and which erodes the State by its own incremental development.

## II. A Return to the Rational Foundation of “State:” The Political Community

In the foregoing section we saw that the philosopher operates not below the horizon of state, but *against it*, thus fomenting the rebellion of reason and instituting a new form of political engagement the basic unit of which is the rational community. Let us now consider the organization this rational community and its own tendency, which runs exactly contrary to the tendency of the State — grounded as the latter is in passive conditions of mind and reactive emotions. In asserting, in other words, that there is a significant distinction to be made between politics and statecraft, let us turn from the negative — our critique of the State form — to the positive: Spinoza’s account of the alternative.

To begin with, let us examine together two passages to which I have previously referred but not at once.

1. In the seventh chapter of the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza remarks that “everyone would rather rule than be ruled.” He cites Sallust’s first speech to Caesar to the effect that “no one willingly yields sovereignty to another” and concludes that “it is therefore evident that an entire people will never transfer its right to a few men or to one

man if they can reach agreement among themselves and if they do not allow... quarrels... to reach the point of civil strife.”<sup>83</sup>

2. Later in the same chapter he response to criticism on the part of those who think of common folk with special contempt, “restrict to the common people the faults that are inherent in all mankind,” and thus suppose them incapable of self-governance when, in fact “all men share in one and the same nature” and “it is power and culture that mislead us.” <sup>84</sup>

By comparing these two passages, we infer that common people, all of us, are indeed capable of self-governance. In other words, we are capable of reaching agreements among ourselves and preventing quarrels from festering to the point that they lead to civil strife. As such, the people “will never transfer its right” unless compelled to do so; unless that is, there is a corruption of power whereby force replaces intercourse. But *on what grounds do people govern themselves* without transferring their natural rights and externalizing their sovereign powers?

#### **A. The First Covenant Establishes a Rational Community but not a State**

With the foregoing question in mind that I would like to revisit a topic the discussion of which I began in chapter two above. Namely, the distinction between the first and the second covenants contracted by the ancient Hebrews upon their liberation from slavery. As I indicated there, Spinoza explains that after their liberation, “being bound by no covenant to any mortal man” the Hebrews “regained their natural right over everything that lay within their power, and

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<sup>83</sup> TP.7.5. See also TP.8.12, where he repeats the notion without citation in support of the contention that “most aristocracies were once democracies.” When a people in search of new territories “has found them and cultivated them,” he says, it “retains as a single body an equal right in government, because no one willingly grants sovereignty to another.”

<sup>84</sup> TP.7.27.

*every man* could decide afresh whether to retain it or to surrender it and transfer it to another.”<sup>85</sup>

Upon Moses’ suggestion, however, all “equally and with one voice” declared that “whatever God shall speak, we shall do” and thus promised to transfer “to God all their natural power of self-preservation — which they probably thought they themselves had hitherto possessed — and consequently all their right.” In this way, they agreed “to obey God absolutely in all his commands and to acknowledge no other law but that which he should proclaim as such by prophetic revelation.” In making this promise, however, nobody was “named as a mediator;” they did not “transfer their right... to any mortal man.” Rather was it “God alone... who held sovereignty over the Hebrews.” This covenant, therefore “left them all completely equal, and they all had an equal right to consult God, to receive and interpret his laws; in short, they all shared equally in the government of the state.”<sup>86</sup>

Now, if it is the case that “*every man* could decide afresh” as to the fate of his natural right, and if the first covenant “left them all completely equal” such that all retained “an equal right to consult God,” it seems to me that when Spinoza contends that the covenant was contracted “*nullo expresse mediatore*,” without articulating a mediator, he intends not only the sort of mediation that Moses would later supply, that of the singular man, but also the sort of mediation represented by the sovereign council, however inclusive. This is to say that when Spinoza speaks of the equality of “all” and the right of “all” he means *each*. As of the first

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<sup>85</sup> TTP.17. For the next several paragraphs, all quotations are derived from this chapter unless otherwise specified.

<sup>86</sup> For an interesting and rather divergent interpretation of the relationship between the first and second covenants, see Levene, N.K. 2004. *Spinoza’s Revelation: Religion, Democracy, and Reason*. New York: Cambridge U. Press. pp. 189-201. Levene views the pact with God as essentially unnatural and involving real obedience. I dispute this claim; it seems to me that Spinoza wishes to represent this pact as involving natural reason and, therefore, free necessity but *not* obedience in any meaningful sense of the word. Obedience can *only* mean submission in spite of, or at least external to reason. For more on the general topic of contracts with God or otherwise, see James, S. 2012. *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise*. Oxford: Oxford U. Press. pp. 248-251; Gatens, M. & Lloyd, G. 1999. *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*. London: Routledge. chs. 4–5; Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit; Rosenthal, M. ‘Two Collective Action Problems in Spinoza’s Social Contract Theory’, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (1998); Uyl, D. 1985. “Sociality and Social Contract: A Spinozistic Perspective.” *Studia Spinozana*, 1.

covenant, no collective right, no corporate political or spiritual body, stood between the individual Hebrew and his or her God. *Each* had retained the authority to consult God.

It is in *this sense* that Spinoza regards the first covenant as merely *akin* to a democracy but not one in point of fact. It has often been suggested that he intends, by his comparison of the first covenant to a democracy, his later assertion that the state Moses left to posterity “could be called neither a democracy nor an aristocracy nor a monarchy, but a theocracy.”<sup>87</sup> I.e. the first covenant was only akin to a democracy because sovereignty had actually been transferred to God and not to the corporate body of the people.<sup>88</sup> This is a manifest error. The first covenant was merely akin to a democracy because the supposed transfer entailed in its constitution created, in the first place, no corporate power to mediate between God and man. Thus, contends Spinoza:

“Although the Hebrews [transferred] their right to God, this transference was *notional* rather than practical; for in reality... they retained their sovereignty absolutely until they transferred it to Moses, who from then on remained an absolute ruler, and through him

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<sup>87</sup> TTP.17. Uyl, D. 1999. “Power, Politics, and Religion in Spinoza's Political Thought.” *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*. Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 141-42.

<sup>88</sup> The theocratic character of the Israelite state arose from the fact that Moses “appointed no... successor” (see Smith, S.B. 2003. *Spinoza's Book of Life: Freedom and Redemption in the Ethics*. New Haven: Yale U. Press. p. 133). It was expressed, according to Spinoza, in three ways:

1. First, the royal seat of government was the temple, and it was only in respect of the temple that all the tribes were fellow citizens, as we have shown.
2. Secondly, all their citizens had to swear allegiance to God, their supreme judge, to whom alone they had promised absolute obedience in all things.
3. Finally, when a commander-in-chief was needed, he was chosen only by God.

In all three respects, mechanisms of mediation and submission are assumed. The temple was manned by a priestly class. The oath of allegiance was mandated for *citizen-soldiers*. Thus does Spinoza state that:

“All men between the ages of twenty and sixty were ordered to bear arms and to form armies recruited only from the people, *which swore allegiance* not to the commander-in-chief nor to the high priest, but *to their religion and to God*. They were thus called the armies and hosts of God, and correspondingly God was called by the Hebrews the Lord of Hosts.”

Allegiance has already been inserted into a particular institutional architecture within which obedience is already distributed among the appropriate authorities. Finally, though the election of commander in chief be made by God, it is, as Spinoza notes, a choice that is mediated by the high priest, who also had “the right to interpret the laws and to deliver God's answers.” Though, again, this took place only at the bequest of “the commander-in-chief or the supreme council or similar authorities, and not whenever he wished, like Moses,” the people as individuals or a whole were, in any case excluded. We see, then, that the theocracy carried with it authoritarian structures foreign to the first covenant.

alone did God reign over the Hebrews.”<sup>89</sup>

This is an important admission, for it suggests that as of the first covenant the spiritual *community* of Israel amounted to no State at all.

If each individual has the right to consult God and receive the law according to his own understanding, then none has the authority to coerce any other to observe God’s law according to his own understanding. Common ideas and a common system of behavior could arise, then, only insofar as consultation with God is understood to function as an equivalent to the exercise of reason. For, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, we agree to the extent that we are rational and disagree, differ, struggle with one another, insofar as we are not. This first covenant emerges, therefore, as a collective promise to live under the guidance of reason *only*. It is not a political contract of the sort we considered in earlier chapters because the exercise of reason and the human capacity for rational cooperation as opposed to reactive conflict is assumed such that — and this is even more important — right is not actually transferred but, instead, retained *individually*. The first covenant is merely akin to a democracy because it constitutes neither sovereign nor sovereignty. It is unlike a democracy because democracy is indeed organized around the principle of sovereign power and differs from monarchy and aristocracy only insofar as this power is incarnated differently, so to speak; it is vested in the *corporate body* of “*the people*.”<sup>90</sup>

We observed in Jesus an example of the anti-authoritarian individual *qua* philosopher and, to a degree, the form of an anti-authoritarian, or anti-Statist, community in his circle of disciples. However, the operation of sovereign power is supposed in its positive exception. The

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<sup>89</sup> TTP.19.

<sup>90</sup> See Yaffe, M.D. “Body and the Body Politic in Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise. In *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*. Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 159-190.

displaced is supposed by the phenomenon of displacement. In the first covenant, however, we observe the formation of a whole political community in which sovereignty plays no role at all, a political community that is not a State. In this sense, it might be suggested that the circle of disciples — as *Spinoza* construes them — represent a revival of the first covenant and that the implied trajectory of their labor has its end the restoration of that general political condition that obtained among the ancient Hebrews before they were beset by the fear of God, before they retreated before the tremendous responsibility of freedom, and actually transferred their rights to Moses, thus producing sovereignty and laying the groundwork for the State he went on to construct.

If indeed the first covenant involved no transfer of sovereignty such that the political body it constituted amounted to no State but, on the contrary, a sort of rational community, and if the ancient Hebrews or their reprise in the circle of disciples functioned, nonetheless, as a community, what enabled them to do so? We have already seen that a State organized around the constitution of sovereignty has its foundation inadequate ideas and reactive feelings like hope, fear, reverence, and so on, the manipulation of which lend to the State its stability; i.e. its capacity to maintain harmony by force, however tenuous that harmony ultimately be. The political community in which sovereignty is not an organizing principle also has — as I indicated in the first chapter above — its affective foundations. Namely, feelings of religion, piety, honor, and “strength of mind.” These affections, I passed over in the first chapter of this study and it is now time to consider them in greater detail.



## B. The Conatus Argument

As Spinoza understands it, the political community is grounded in rational self-interest which is, in turn, grounded on the conative principle. Let us then have a brief look at the conatus doctrine. Spinoza's argument for it runs as follows:

“Particular things are modes whereby the attributes of God are expressed in a definite and determinate way (E.I.Prop.25.Cor.), that is (E.I.Prop.34), they are things which express in a definite and determinate way the power of God whereby he is and acts, and no thing can have in itself anything by which it can be destroyed, that is, which can annul its existence (E.III.Prop. 4). On the contrary, it *opposes* everything that can annul its existence (E.III.Prop.5); and thus, as far as it can and as far as it is in itself, *it endeavors to persist in its own being*.”<sup>91</sup>

The doctrine is derived from four propositions which are best grouped into two pairs. The first, E.I.Prop.25.Cor. and E.I.Prop.34; the second, E.III.Prop. 4 and E.III.Prop.5. In relation to these two pairs of propositions, there are three prevailing patterns of interpretation of interpretation bearing on the derivation of the conatus doctrine. Let us review them.

### 1. Matheron's Account of Conatus: Emphasis on Pair One Over Pair Two

At the very outset of his analysis, Alexandre Matheron<sup>92</sup> contends that, while the conatus doctrine as it appears in E.III.Prop.6 is the point of origin for the whole of Spinoza's theory of passion, his politics, and his moral philosophy, “this point of departure is itself the culmination of the first two books of the *Ethics*.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> E.III.Prop.6.Dem.

<sup>92</sup> Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et Communaute Chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

Matheron explains that the conatus doctrine is based on two fundamental principles:

1. “Individuality... possesses an irreducible reality.”
2. “Everything is intelligible.”

This means that every individual essence is both real and intelligible. It therefore presents itself in two ways:

1. “Since the order of knowledge is modeled on that of being... each individual is conceived independently of the other and is made the object of a distinct definition.”
2. “Since the order of being is modeled on that of knowledge... the individual is nothing other than the ontological transposition of its own definition.”

This, so Matheron contends, implies the identity of the intelligible and the real. If the introduction of this distinction is deemed acceptable and the identity of the intelligible and the real admitted, Matheron explains, E.III.4-5 pose no real interpretive difficulty.

1. E.III.Prop.4, according to Matheron, affirms that The reality of X must follow from its intelligibility, and X is intelligible only if it does not contradict itself. Thus is the reality of X likewise not a contradiction, it does not annihilate itself.
2. E.III.Prop.5, according to Matheron, simply identifies the sort of external cause which might make something disappear. “Not just anything,” he says, will do so. Rather, X with A nature will be destroyed by Y with B nature “only insofar as the two natures, A and B, are *logically incompatible*.” That is, when a subject possessed of natures A and B would be self-contradictory and, therefore, contradict likewise E.III.Prop.4. Again, if the intelligible and the real are identical, the real entities X and Y are incompatible to the extent that the nature or

definition — the intelligible form — of the one, A, is incompatible with that of the other, B.

As Matheron goes on to explain, however, the passage from E.III.Prop.5 to E.III.Prop.6 is less easily accounted for. Does the fact that nothing can destroy itself necessarily imply that anything strives to conserve itself, to resist that with which its nature is incompatible? Yes, Matheron proposes, if the things in question *act*:

“If it is in the nature of something to produce certain effects, it is certain that these effects will agree with its nature and, consequently, tend to preserve it: non-self-destruction becomes self-preservation. If its nature is to perform certain actions, it is certain that it will oppose everything which excludes its nature: logical contradiction becomes physical conflict.”<sup>94</sup>

To demonstrate that, in fact, all things are active, Matheron turns to Spinoza’s metaphysics.

He begins with Spinoza’s view, as expressed in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, that adequate definitions are necessarily genetic; “to know a thing is to know how it is produced.”<sup>95</sup> If, as Matheron contends, being and thought are identical, it follows that an “ontological transposition” can be proposed whereby the genetic definition of something “is the expression of the thing itself” such that each thing is both “a productive activity” and also “the result of this activity.”<sup>96</sup>

He then turns to E.I.Prop.16, which asserts that “infinite things in infinite ways” follow from “the necessity of the divine nature.” According to Matheron, the following

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 12; cf. TIE.92-95.

<sup>96</sup> Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et Communauté Chez Spinoza*. p. 12.

problem arises: Spinoza justifies his proposition on the basis of his definition of God as “absolutely infinite;” it is true that an absolutely infinite thing must have an infinite number of properties, but not necessarily an infinite number of effects (or any effect). If the ontological transposition proposed in relation to Spinoza’s theory of definition be invoked, however, the problem disappears, for definitions must then be efficient causes; “all essences must actualize a certain force.” This means that substance must produce what is deducible from its essence, must exercise force.<sup>97</sup> In this manner, though it is the case that “modes without substance have no reality... substance considered independently of modes is still an abstraction... it exists concretely only as a self-producing all.”<sup>98</sup> If so, God’s essence is necessarily bound up with its expression as power<sup>99</sup> and each particular thing constitutes a finite expression of that power.<sup>100</sup>

“On these conditions,” suggests Matheron, “the second justification of conatus becomes just as understandable as the first.”<sup>101</sup> How so? It turns out, Matheron explains, that “an individual is nothing other than divine activity as it gives itself to itself.” This means that:

1. “When an individual essence exists in action, its logical consequences become its real effects. As its consequences cannot contradict its effects, its effects have the result of keeping it in existence.”<sup>102</sup>
2. “Since the essence of the thing is logically incompatible with the things that can destroy it, its real effects are actually incompatible with those that are born of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>99</sup> E.I.Prop.34

<sup>100</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>101</sup> Matheron, A. 1969. *Individu et Communauté Chez Spinoza*. p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

these things; it is opposed to these things physically and not only conceptually.”<sup>103</sup>

In other words, the conatus doctrine arises from Spinoza’s metaphysics. That is, as I have suggested, from the theoretical field which E.I.Prop.25.Cor and E.I.Prop.34 circumscribe. In this way, we observe that Matheron accounts for the conatus doctrine without resort to E.III.Prop.4-5; or at least not in any exclusive fashion. This is the strength of his argument and also its weakness, for Spinoza seems to insist that the second pair of propositions serve an important role.<sup>104</sup>

## **2. Bennett’s Account of Conatus: Emphasis on Pair Two Over Pair One**

Bennett dismisses the first pair of propositions forthright. “The demonstration,” of E.III.Prop.6 he says, “first sets the Spinozistic scene” and only “then proceeds to the *real* argument.” As he conceives it, in fact, this argument “uses only E.III.Prop.5;” according to him, the mention of E.III.Prop.4 is simply “otiose.”<sup>105</sup>

Otiose as it may be when inserted in E.III.Prop.6, E.III.Prop.4 — which affirms that “nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause” — is crucial for the demonstration of E.III.Prop.5. Let us, therefore, begin there. Spinoza supports E.III.Prop.4 by reference to no other proposition but, rather, on the basis of a logical deduction. The definition of a thing affirms its essence and does not negate it; therefore must its eventual destruction be attributed to something other than its definition or its

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> See Lin, M. 2004. ‘Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Desire: The Demonstration of III.P6’. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (1): 21–55.

<sup>105</sup> Bennett, J. 1984. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett. p. 242.

essence.<sup>106</sup> As Bennett points out, essence, here, refers not to the “whole nature” of that of which it is the essence, “but only the subset of its properties which are absolutely necessary and sufficient for it to be” what it is.<sup>107</sup> This is crucial.

Let us now proceed to E.III.Prop.5, which reads as follows: “things are of a contrary nature, that is, unable to subsist in the same subject, to the extent that one can destroy the other.” Why? Because the contrary would contravene the preceding proposition; it would mean that by virtue of no external cause a subject could destroy itself. As Bennett interprets it, the mention of subjectivity is key, for it introduces into the proposition a useful, if problematic, ambiguity paralleling the distinction just made between the “whole nature” and the essence of a thing.

That two things are unable to subsist in the same subject, he explains, may mean:

1. That they they “cannot be instantiated by one thing.”<sup>108</sup> They cannot share the same *essence*.
2. That they they cannot both “be parts of some larger thing.”<sup>109</sup> They cannot constitute elements of the “whole nature” of any one thing.

Insofar as Spinoza construes E.III.Prop.5 as derivable from E.III.Prop.4 it follows, he contends, that the former ought to be interpreted as affirming option (1) and *not* option

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<sup>106</sup> As Spinoza notes in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, “the conception or definition of the thing must be such that all the properties of the thing, when regarded by itself and not in conjunction with other things, can be deduced from it (TIE.96).” The definition is that which indicates what a thing has. If it indicated that something had mutually exclusive properties, this would mean that the thing in question embodies a contradiction. If some definition entails a contradiction this simply means that it designates an impossible thing, for “a thing is termed ‘impossible’... because its essence or definition involves a contradiction.” The impossibility of a thing simply its non-existence.

<sup>107</sup> Bennett, J. 1984. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. p. 236.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 241. In this sense, E.III.Prop.5 is evidently derived from E.III.Prop.4. The essence or nature of each thing affirms and does not negate that thing. Therefore, two things that negate or destroy one another cannot subsist in or be instantiated by the same nature.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. In this sense E.III.Prop.5 implies more than what can be derived from E.III.Prop.4 and does not arise from it necessarily.

(2).

Granted that, according to Bennett, the demonstration of E.III.Prop.6 depends entirely on E.III.Prop.5, let us see how the two interpretive options bearing on the latter determine our reading of the former.

1. If E.III.Prop.6 follows from the first of the two interpretations of subjectivity bearing on E.III.Prop.5, it would run as follows: “since any thing must be of a contrary nature to whatever can destroy it, it must be opposed to any such thing” and this is what it means “for it to try to stay in existence.”<sup>110</sup>

According to Bennett, the conclusion is not implied by its premise. That two things are of a contrary nature means that they are *different*, not that they exert themselves *against* one another.

2. E.III.Prop.6 must, therefore, be derived from the second of the two interpretation of subjectivity bearing on E.III.Prop.5. So it runs as follows: if the inability to subsist in the same subject means an inability to constitute parts of the same whole without destroying one another, then those contrary entities indeed pose a resistance to one another.<sup>111</sup>

There are two problems with this interpretation as far as Bennet is concerned. First, it relies on a reading of E.III.Prop.5 which makes it inconsistent with E.III.Prop.4 though it is evident that a continuity among the three propositions under consideration is implied. Second, as Bennett suggests, this interpretation bears a significant scale restriction. E.III.Prop.6 is surely to be understood as suggesting that two incompatibles

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<sup>110</sup> Bennett, J. 1984. A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics. p. 242.

<sup>111</sup> This interpretation, however, Bennett considers “disgracefully bad,” especially insofar as it relies on an interpretation of E.III.Prop.5 which renders it discontinuous with E.III.Prop.4 contrary to its own demonstration which depends on this continuity.

cannot be part of the same universe, the universe constituting, as it does for Spinoza, a sort of individual.<sup>112</sup> Can they be part of the same natural or political ecosystem? The same neighborhood? The same Family? Perhaps only the same couple, if even a couple, a family, a neighborhood, a city, a state, and so on constitute individual wholes in the first place.<sup>113</sup> At any rate, the “whole” of which incompatibles cannot together constitute parts seems negligibly miniscule.

The fundamental problem with Bennett’s analysis is the distinction he draws, in E.III.Prop.4, between the essence of a thing and its whole nature. As Bennett presents it, the whole nature of a thing is a set of properties, some of which constitute its essence. The relation between whole nature and essence is, therefore, one of part and whole respectively. This distinction is what creates the problematic disjunction that appears in his interpretation of E.III.Prop.6. This relation, however, is poorly construed. An essence is not a property; it is, for Spinoza, that from which all the properties of a thing are deduced.<sup>114</sup> If so, the “whole” can mean only that which consists of the essence of a thing considered together with the properties which arise from that essence. But Spinoza, in E.III.Prop.4 is not talking about properties that arise from an essence; he is talking about the essence itself. Barring this distinction between part and whole, the interpretive disjunction that divides E.III.Prop.5 between the sense in which it is consistent with E.III.Prop.4 and E.III.Prop.6 cannot be sustained.

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<sup>112</sup> E.II.Lem.7.Schol.

<sup>113</sup> See Rice, L.C. 1971. Spinoza on Individuation. In *The Monist*. 5(4). pp. 640-659. See also Barbonne, S.L.. Spinoza on Community, Affectivity, and Life Values. PhD. diss., Marquette University, 1997. Rice directed Barbonne’ dissertation and both share the view that things like bodies politic do not count as individuals. This view is also reflected in the notes both contributed to Shirley’ translation of Spinoza’s *Political Treatise*, where they emphasize the importance of the modifier “*veluti* (as it were)” which Spinoza often appends to clauses suggesting that political cooperation involves the emergence of a “single mind.”

<sup>114</sup> TIE.96.



### 3. Viljanen's Account of the Conatus Doctrine: One Synthesis of both Pairs

Valtteri Viljanen has produced a uniquely valuable account of the conatus doctrine which attempts to synthesize both elements of Spinoza's argument in E.III.Prop.6; namely, the metaphysical content on the basis of which Matheron formulates his interpretation *together with* E.III.Prop.4-5, which Bennett attends to. "An informative reading," he explains, "should give us a balanced view of the relationship that E.I.Prop.25.Cor. and E.I.Prop.34 have with E.III.Prop.4 and E.III.Prop.5;" thus is it, he continues "my contention that E.III.Prop.6.Dem is basically valid and contains no idle elements."<sup>115</sup> How so?

Viljanen opens his analysis more or less in the same fashion as Matheron: "A quick look at E.III.Prop.4 and E.III.Prop.5," he says, "reveals that they are based on Spinoza's theory of definitions and essences." That is, on the view that definitions are genetic, tracing the production that of the definiendum. Like Matheron, Viljanen explains E.III.Prop.4 as conveying the idea that a genetic definition "precluding the existence of the entity whose formula it is... would only imply that the definition is no true definition at all, making the definiendum a non-thing."<sup>116</sup> Thus, "including something destructive to the definiendum goes against the very idea of a proper definition." Accordingly, when E.III.Prop.5 speaks of the subsistence of two things in one "subject," Viljanen understands, by "subject," the genetic essence of the thing in question; i.e. "a thing as it would be constituted solely by its definable essence." On this reading, E.III.Prop.5 simply restates E.III.Prop.4: if things cannot destroy themselves because their essences or definitions — so far as they define a thing and not a non-thing

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<sup>115</sup> Viljanen, V. 2011. *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*. New York: Cambridge U. Press. p. 93.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95.

— cannot entail a contradiction, it follows that things which *do* contradict one another cannot be included in the same essence.

Viljanen then points to the theoretical difficulty which Matheron's two "fundamental principles are the answer. Namely, that there is a difference between logical and real opposition such that, "if E.III.Prop.5 is taken to mean that from no definition can items in logical contradiction be derived" and E.III.Prop.6 "obviously refers not to logical but to real opposition," it follows that "there is no way to extract the opposition thesis of E.III.Prop.6.Dem. out of E.III.Prop.5 alone."<sup>117</sup> Like Matheron, therefore, Viljanen must explain how logical opposition becomes real opposition. His method of doing so differs from Matheron's not so much in substance, but in its faithfulness to the structure of Spinoza's actual demonstration of E.III.Prop.6. Concerning the propositions from the first part of the Ethics, Viljanen summarizes his interpretation as follows: "taken together, 1p25c and 1p34 imply, in Spinoza's idiom, that things express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts... any singular thing expresses God's power, because singular things, while retaining what is characteristic of God's power, modify that power in a particular limited fashion."<sup>118</sup>

From these two propositions alone, we may infer "only that finite things are, in essence, dynamic causers;" this however, "is not enough to guarantee that they could not act self-destructively or restrain their own power, which would make them incapable of self-preservation."<sup>119</sup> Hence E.III.Prop.4, which establishes precisely this point. What

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p. 99.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

role, then, does E.III.Prop.5 play in E.III.Prop.6? Viljanen contends that when, in E.III.Prop.5 Spinoza speaks of subjecthood, he means to suggest that “a subject’s being involves not only instantiating a certain essence, but also being of a specific character;”<sup>120</sup> i.e. that to be is to have particular properties. If, by E.I.Prop.25.Cor. and E.I.Prop.34 it turns out that “that things are expressers of power”<sup>121</sup> it follows that “any subject has true power to *produce the properties or effects* derivable from its definition.” This converts “the exclusion of logical opposition amongst a subject’s essential effects or properties... into real impulsion against opposing factors, i.e. into striving to persevere in the kind of being determined by the subject’s essence alone.”<sup>122</sup>

In this manner, we see that Viljanen adopts the same basic theoretical schema as Matheron. However, his contribution lies in having taken seriously Bennett’s insistence on the importance of E.III.Prop.4 and especially E.III.Prop.5. That is, in showing how these make for Matheron’s “ontological transposition.”

#### **4. A Proposal Based on the Negation of Neutrality**

Building on some elements of Matheron’s and Viljanen’s argument, I would like to propose a simplified alternative by drawing on my earlier comments<sup>123</sup> concerning Spinoza’s view as to the impossibility of metaphysical neutrality.

I concur with Viljanen and Matheron that Spinoza’s demand for genetic definitions — that is, his conviction as to the contention that a thing is adequately defined only when its cause

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 101.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>123</sup> See chapter two.

is given,<sup>124</sup> when its affirmative essence is given<sup>125</sup> — implies that logical contradiction and real contradiction coincide such that a self-contradictory thing implies a self-contradictory essence, which implies, finally, a self-contradictory definition. Or, in other words, something that designates an impossibility, something that cannot be.<sup>126</sup> Thus, if a thing is negated or destroyed, as E.IV.Prop.4 suggests, it follows that this must have come about by dint of some external cause, from the definition of something other thing.

I reject Bennett's contention that E.III.Prop.5 proves only that things of a contrary nature are simply different from one another but not necessarily opposed. On the contrary, I hold that difference implies opposition for Spinoza on the basis of what can be described as the non-neutrality principle. I spoke of this principle already in chapter two; there, however, I let the question stand as to whether something can *actually* be neutral because it had no practical consequences. Here, I would like to argue that, in fact, it cannot. As I noted in the aforementioned chapter, Spinoza summarizes the axiom missing from the fourth part of the *Ethics* as follows: "nothing will follow" from the nature of the neutral thing "which serves to preserve our nature; that is, by hypothesis, which serves to preserve the nature of the thing itself."<sup>127</sup> There, Spinoza appeals to E.III.Prop.6 to demonstrate the absurdity of this result; obviously, we cannot take this proposition as given, for it is precisely what is in question. I think, however, that the same result can come via another route. If the neutral thing produces no effects tending to preserve its nature, much less does it produce effects that serve to destroy its

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<sup>124</sup> TIE.92, 96; E.I.Prop.11.Dem.2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.93.

<sup>126</sup> E.I.Prop.33.Schol.

<sup>127</sup> See Akkerman, A. 1980. *Studies in the Posthumous Works of Spinoza: On Style, Earliest Translations and Reception, and Modern Edition of Some Texts*. Ph.D. Dissertation, U. of Gronigen. p. 192. This dissertation proposes the following text for the missing axiom: "from the nature of a singular thing which is neither good nor evil, nothing can follow which aids the preservation of our nature." Curley cites this proposal in his translation of the *Ethics*.

nature; by E.III.Prop.4, this is absurd. Therefore, it either produces effects that neither preserve nor destroy its nature (neutral effects) or it produces no effects at all.

If we suppose that the thing in question produces neutral effects, we run into a problem. E.I.Ax.5 holds that “things which have nothing in common with each other cannot be understood through each other; that is, the conception of the one does not involve the conception of the other.” That is, by E.I.Ax.4, the one has no causal impact on the other.<sup>128</sup> In other words, to assume that two things have *no causal impact on one another* is to assume that they have nothing in common. That two things have *nothing* in common, however, means either that they are different attributes of substance or modalities of different attributes of substance; for to share an attribute is to share some things in common — as Spinoza says, “all bodies agree in certain respects”<sup>129</sup> and, presumably, all thoughts likewise. In other words, the neutrality of effects, is true only between attributes and never within any one attribute. Since any reasonable reading of E.III.Prop.4-6 assumes we are considering effects within any one attribute, it follows that there are no neutral effects.

This leaves us with the possibility that a neutral thing produces no effects at all. Spinoza explains in E.I.Prop.34 that “from the sole necessity of God’s essence it follows that God is self-caused and the cause of all other things.” That God or substance is self-caused follows from E.I.Def.3, which holds that a substance is that which is conceived through itself, and E.I.Ax.4, which holds that the conception of an effect involves conception of its cause; if God is conceived through himself, he must be his own cause. The self-causation of substance is taken, by Spinoza, to imply that substance affirms its essence in an unqualified fashion.<sup>130</sup> This unqualified

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<sup>128</sup> E.I.Prop.3.

<sup>129</sup> E.II.Lem.2.

<sup>130</sup> E.I.Prop.8.Schol.

affirmation is taken to imply, furthermore, that substance is infinite (E.I.Prop.8.Schol.1) and — given that “it is by no means absurd to ascribe more than one attribute to substance,”<sup>131</sup> and that “the more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes”<sup>132</sup> — that it expresses itself in an infinity of (by all possible) attributes<sup>133</sup> each of which will be modified in an infinity of ways.<sup>134</sup> From this consequence, it is inferred via E.I.Prop.5 — which denies that two substances can share the same attribute — that that there is only one substance<sup>135</sup> and via E.I.Def.3 and 5 and E.I.Ax.1 — which indicate that nothing exists but substance and modalities thereof<sup>136</sup> — that each existing thing expresses God or Substance<sup>137</sup> such that, God is the cause of all things<sup>138</sup> in the same way that he is cause of himself; “whatever exists expresses God’s power,”<sup>139</sup> which is his essence.<sup>140</sup> If, therefore, each thing expresses God’s infinite power and, as I have noted already, this power is modified in infinite ways, it follows, so Spinoza holds in E.I.Prop.36, that nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow. Therefore, if we construe the neutral thing as something which produces no effects, it cannot exist.

The neutral thing, therefore, produces neither positive nor negative effects. It does not produce neutral effects, for such things cannot exist. Finally, it cannot produce no effect at all, for everything that exists necessarily produces an effect. Therefore, Spinoza’s reasoning precludes the possibility of neutral things, of neutrality. As such, the differences in nature that

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<sup>131</sup> E.I.Prop.10.Schol.

<sup>132</sup> E.I.Prop.9.

<sup>133</sup> E.I.Prop.10.Schol.

<sup>134</sup> E.I.Prop.16.

<sup>135</sup> E.I.Prop.14.

<sup>136</sup> E.I.Def.3 & 5; E.I.Ax.1; E.I.Prop.15.

<sup>137</sup> E.I.Prop.15.

<sup>138</sup> E.I.Prop.16.

<sup>139</sup> E.I.Prop.36.Dem.

<sup>140</sup> E.I.Prop.34.

separate two things are never neutral. To be different in nature is necessarily to be in opposition. If, therefore, logical and real contradiction coincide such that no essence can contradict itself, it follows no two things of different nature can coexist in the same subject (E.III.Prop.5); their difference would imply opposition, contradiction, hostility, and so on; in short, it would imply self-destruction. The same goes for relations between things; each thing, in producing effects affirmative of its own essence, necessarily opposes effects that differ from these — effects that, never neutral, necessarily annul the existence of those effects from which they differ. Thus, the principle of non-neutrality assures the continuity of E.III.Prop.4-6.

Now, the crux of this argument is simply that it allows us to see that things which share a similar nature — share similar conative drives — produce similar effects, effects that do not conflict with one another, while things which have different natures, different conative drives, produce different effects, effects that conflict with one another. Or, perhaps more generally, two things exist — that is produce effects — in harmony to the extent that they share a similar nature or conative drive.

How does this help us to understand human phenomena? Spinoza sometimes speaks of “human nature” as something that distinguishes men in general from other sorts of things; for example, horses, fish, and birds.<sup>141</sup> Evidently, he does not mean, by “human nature,” some

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<sup>141</sup> E.g. Spinoza explains that “the emotions of animals that are called irrational... differ from the emotions of men as much as their nature differs from human nature. Horse and man are indeed carried away by lust to procreate, but the former by equine lust, the latter by human lust. So too the lusts and appetites of insects, fishes, and birds are bound to be of various different kinds. So although each individual lives content with the nature wherewith he is endowed and rejoices in it, that life wherewith each is content and that joy are nothing other than the idea or soul [*anima*] of the said individual, and so the joy of the one differs from the joy of another as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other (E.III.Prop.57).” Thus, for example, does he hold that “salvation is good for men, but neither good nor bad for animals or plants, for which it has no relevance (CM.I.6).”

On the basis of the same distinction does Spinoza differentiate between the sort of things which we may treat as objects and the sort of things which we must treat as subjects:

“Except for mankind, we know of no individual thing in Nature in whose mind we can rejoice, and with which we can unite in friendship or some kind of close tie. So whatever there is in Nature external to man, regard for our own advantage does not require us to preserve it, but teaches us to preserve or destroy it

universal essence; Spinoza recognizes only special essences. Each thing has its own essence or definition.<sup>142</sup> Rather, judging from his account of the constitution of individual bodies in the lemmas appearing in the second part of the *Ethics*, it seems reasonable to assume that this nature has something to do with general morphological similarities between human bodies and other sorts of bodies that naturally — for Spinoza at least — entail parallel similarities of mental structure.<sup>143</sup> It is in this sense (and only in this sense) that Spinoza can contend that all men “share in one and the same nature”<sup>144</sup> and that their “natural passions are everywhere the same.”<sup>145</sup>

If men share a common essence in *this* respect, what unites them and what separates them? It is a question of virtue. Spinoza holds that “virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is man's very essence, or nature, insofar as he has power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature;”<sup>146</sup> taken more generally, “virtue is *human power*”<sup>147</sup> to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of human nature as defined by the similarity that obtains between human bodies and between human minds. Men exist in harmony when they exercise virtue; that is, when each produces effects arising from the laws of his nature, a nature which more or less coincides with that of other men. In contrast, men exist in disharmony when they fail to practice virtue, when each produces effects otherwise than those deriving solely from his nature and, to that extent, from human nature — effects different

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according to its varying usefulness, or to adapt it to our own use in whatever way we please (E.IV.App.26).”

The point to be made here is that, while “man” may not exist as a universal type, human nature — whatever it may be — is an important category for Spinoza.

<sup>142</sup> E.III.Prop.57.Dem.

<sup>143</sup> For, as he insists, “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things (E.II.Prop.7).”

<sup>144</sup> TP.7.27.

<sup>145</sup> TP.5.2.

<sup>146</sup> E.IV.Def.8.

<sup>147</sup> E.IV.Prop.20.



from, inconsistent with, and therefore in conflict with it.

A man comes into conflict with others when the effects he produces cannot be explained solely through his own nature, when these must be explained by way of some other nature together with his own.<sup>148</sup> That is, when a man is dominated by some other nature and made to react to it, thus producing effects more or less foreign to his nature — and, to that extent, foreign to and in conflict with the nature of other men — effects of which he is not the adequate cause,<sup>149</sup> effects in respect of which he exists in a passive condition.<sup>150</sup> Thus, Spinoza explains, “insofar as men are subject to passive emotions, to that extent they cannot be said to agree in nature.”<sup>151</sup> As he goes on to say, “he who says that white and black agree only in the fact that neither is red” — ie. that two men agree insofar as neither produces effects arising from his nature — “is making an absolute assertion that white and black agree in no respect... For things that agree only negatively, that is, in what they do not possess, in reality agree in nothing.”

### **C. Rational Self-Interest and the Emergence of the Rational Community**

We have found that the human conative tendency is such that each man is at odds with himself and with others alike to the extent that he under the sway of a nature not his own and thus produces effects inconsistent with that nature, effects which differ from those which tend to preserve it and, to that extent, tend to destroy it. Entailed in this antagonism of forces, however, is an even stronger force for agreement, for harmony, and for mutual striving.

“Nothing,” says Spinoza, “can be evil for us through what it possesses in common with

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<sup>148</sup> E.II.Lem.3.Ax.1; E.II.Prop.16.Dem.

<sup>149</sup> E.III.Def.1.

<sup>150</sup> E.III.Def.2.

<sup>151</sup> E.IV.Prop.32.

our nature.”<sup>152</sup> Granting, therefore, that nothing is truly neutral for us, it follows that that is necessarily good which is in agreement with our nature and to the extent that it is.<sup>153</sup> This means that “the more a thing is in agreement with our nature, the more advantageous it is to us, that is, the more it is good.”<sup>154</sup> That is, the more it conduces to the enhancement of our power of activity.<sup>155</sup> As such, though “man is bound to be part of Nature and to follow its universal order,” it is nonetheless the case that “if he dwells among individuals who are in harmony with man’s nature, by that very fact his power of activity will be assisted and fostered.”<sup>156</sup> Generally speaking, this means that because “nothing can be more in harmony with the nature of anything than other individuals of the same *species*,” men are most advantageous to one another, other men foster best our power of activity; other men make us most virtuous.

Now, we have already seen that men disagree in nature to the extent that they harbor inadequate ideas and are assailed by passive emotions,<sup>157</sup> that so they differ,<sup>158</sup> come into conflict with one another,<sup>159</sup> and escalate their mutual antipathy.<sup>160</sup> When, on the contrary, we harbor adequate ideas and so experience active emotions,<sup>161</sup> when we live under the guidance of reason, the opposite is the case in all respects. Let us consider them one at a time. To the extent that men harbor adequate ideas and experience active emotions:

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<sup>152</sup> That is, because that is evil which causes pain, i.e. which checks our power of activity (E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.3). If the thing in question were to constitute, for us, an evil by virtue of what it has in common with our nature, this would mean that in our nature there is some self-inhibiting feature which, by E.III.Prop.4, is impossible.

<sup>153</sup> E.IV.Prop.31.

<sup>154</sup> E.IV.Prop.31.Cor.

<sup>155</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.2.

<sup>156</sup> E.IV.App.7.

<sup>157</sup> E.IV.Prop.32.

<sup>158</sup> E.IV.Prop.33.

<sup>159</sup> E.IV.Prop.34.

<sup>160</sup> E.III.Prop.43.

<sup>161</sup> For my analysis of the adequate idea, see chapter 2, note 46 above.

## 1. They Agree in Nature

To begin with, let us clarify what exactly is intended by “agreement in nature;” for though harmony is predicated on “agreement,” they are not the same thing. In E.IV.Prop.34.Schol. Spinoza explains that when two people “agree in nature” it means that “they both love the same thing.” According to E.IV.Prop.32.Dem. “things which are said to agree in nature are understood to agree in respect of their power” that is, by virtue of what they are and not by virtue of what they are not. In other words, we love the same thing insofar as we express the same of powers, are composed of the configuration of motions.

The “persistence in existing” of any passive emotion or inadequate idea, however, “is defined not by the power whereby we ourselves endeavor to persist in existing, but by the power of external causes compared with our own power;”<sup>162</sup> they are “related to the mind only insofar as the mind has something involving negation.”<sup>163</sup> No two things agree, no two things love the same thing, in respect of their relative passivity, in respect of their lack of virtue.<sup>164</sup> This, I have already discussed in chapter two.

Now, as I have already noted, Spinoza maintains that “virtue is *human power*, which is defined solely by *man's essence*.”<sup>165</sup> Virtue corresponds, in other words, to the realization of that which is human in man. The more, then, that “every man endeavors and is able to... preserve his own being,” to realize what is human in him and to resist the influence of external forces which modify his human essence or nature and render him

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<sup>162</sup> E.IV.Prop.5.

<sup>163</sup> E.III.Prop.3.Schol.

<sup>164</sup> E.IV.Prop.23.

<sup>165</sup> E.IV.Prop.20.Dem.

passive, “the more he is endowed with virtue.”<sup>166</sup> That is, the more he constitutes the adequate cause of that which arises in him and from him, the more he is active. If, moreover, “we are active only insofar as we understand,”<sup>167</sup> insofar as we exercise reason, it follows that the more we act in conformity with virtue thus understood, the more we act under the guidance of reason.

To act, therefore, under the guidance of reason, to be virtuous and, to that extent, actively to realize *human* power, is to be what one *is*. To act otherwise than by the guidance of reason, to lack virtue and fail to realize human power but, on the contrary, merely to respond to environmental stimuli, is to exist in a manner other than how one is. It is to be otherwise or, more precisely, not to be, to abide in a negation. Therefore, the extent to which one follows the latter path is the same extent to which one’s particular nature agrees not with that of other men — for, again, agreement is positive in character, arising from what we are and never from what we are not. In contrast, the extent to which one follows the former path is the same extent to which one agrees in nature with other men, to which he loves the same things as other men love.

## 2. They are Similar to One Another

In E.IV.Prop.33, Spinoza implicitly explicates “our own essence or nature” on the basis of E.III.Def.1-2 and not strictly on the basis of E.III.Prop.6-7. This suggests that our own essence or nature is that by virtue of which we constitute an adequate cause (E.III.Def.1) and, to that extent, of which we are active (E.III.Def.2); this is what is meant by our potency (E.III.Prop.6-7). This, he says, is to be distinguished from the essence of emotions. The

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<sup>166</sup> E.IV.Prop.20.

<sup>167</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

“essence of emotions” which is evidently distinct from “our own essence or nature” — lending further credence to my contention that this essence is *human* and that what makes for particular instances of the species falls outside the notion of essence so far as Spinoza develops it for the purposes of explicating the rational genesis of human community — is defined “defined by the potency, that is... the nature, of external causes as compared with our own power” or our essence.<sup>168</sup>

Spinoza postulates that “the individual components of the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected by external bodies in a great many ways.”<sup>169</sup> This means that “different bodies may be caused to move in different ways by one and the same body”<sup>170</sup> which means, in turn, that two different bodies can be affected in different ways at the same time by one and the same object. This, again in turn, means that, so affected, the bodies in question will experience distinct emotional phenomena in relation to said object; “what one man loves, another hates, what one man fears, another fears not.”<sup>171</sup> Thus is it the case that “in comparing different men we distinguish between them solely by difference of emotion.”<sup>172</sup> As such, “men... differ in nature insofar as they are assailed by emotions that are passive.”<sup>173</sup> We are distinguished from one another on the basis of the “essence of emotions.”

To the extent, then, that the “essence of emotions” is distinct from “our own essence,” are we not different, but similar, in respect of the former. If, as per the preceding item, to act under the guidance of reason and therefore according to adequate

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<sup>168</sup> E.IV.Prop.33.Dem.

<sup>169</sup> E.II.Post.3.

<sup>170</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Lem.3.Ax.1.

<sup>171</sup> E.III.Prop.51.Schol.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> E.IV.Prop.33.

ideas and active emotions is to act in keeping with “our own essence,” to realize that essence, it follows that when we do so not only do we agree in nature, but we possess the same nature. Or, to be less absolute, the extent to which we do so is the extent to which we are similar.

### **3. They Exist in Harmony with One Another**

E.IV.Prop.35 reads as follows “insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent only do they always necessarily agree in nature.” While Spinoza speaks of “agreement” here, it seems to me that he means something else than the sense in which he uses agreement in E.IV.Prop.32. There, agreement in nature seems to have less to do with what one does and more to do with what one is and, in consequence, what one loves. Here, so I shall explain, his emphasis is on action and its complementarity. I would suggest, therefore, that agreement in nature is, here, to be interpreted as harmonious coexistence.

Man, says Spinoza, is active insofar as he is guided by reason.<sup>174</sup> This means, Spinoza continues, that what follows from him insofar as he is guided by reason has “human nature” as its effective cause.<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, when man so guided judges something to be good or evil, when he loves it or hates it and, consequently, strives toward it or seeks to destroy it, he does so strictly in accord with human nature. He likewise judges correctly because that which we know insofar as we exercise reason we know insofar as we have adequate ideas<sup>176</sup> and, according to Spinoza, an adequate idea is

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<sup>174</sup> E.III.Prop.3.

<sup>175</sup> That is, because the activity of a thing is determined in relation to that of which it is the effective cause (E.II.Def.2).

<sup>176</sup> E.II.Prop.34.

necessarily true.<sup>177</sup> When, therefore, we act according to these judgments we “necessarily do the things which are necessarily good for human nature and consequently for every single man; that is... which agree with the nature of every single man.” In striving individually after what conduces to our nature insofar as it is human nature, we strive naturally toward what is good for everyone else. This means that solidarity with others is built into the very structure of *rational* self-interest. It is for this reason that Spinoza can assert that “there is nothing more advantageous to man for preserving his own being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason”<sup>178</sup> and each man is more advantageous to the extent that he is so guided and thus seeks his own own interest as dictated by human nature.<sup>179</sup>

This harmony, So far as Spinoza understands it, has as its basis the fact men living under the guidance of reason are similar and share the name nature; that is, the fact that they love the same things. Simply to love the same thing, however, does not seem to do away with conflict. On the contrary, it seems to guarantee that conflict will erupt. As Spinoza himself indicates, it would seem that “Peter hates Paul because he thinks that Peter possesses something that Paul also loves” which, paradoxically, would imply that they are harmful to one another by virtue of what they have in common. His response to this difficulty is twofold.

Spinoza explains that the aforementioned conflict between Peter and Paul does not, in fact, arise from the fact of their common object of love but rather, from the *difference* of their comportment with respect to it: “Peter has an idea of the loved thing as

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<sup>177</sup> E.II.Prop.41.

<sup>178</sup> E.IV.App.9; cf. E.IV.Prop.35.Cor.1.

<sup>179</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Cor.2.

now in his possession, while Paul has an idea of the loved thing lost to him.” Insofar as he loves the object in question, Paul enjoys it<sup>180</sup> and yet, insofar as it is lost to him, he regards this pleasure as being inhibited. By E.III.Prop.28, which asserts that we endeavor to remove what is painful, what inhibits pleasure. Therefore, Paul will endeavor to make it such that the object of his love is not lost to him, which means he will “endeavor to bring it about that [Peter] should not possess it.”<sup>181</sup> This, however, will mean he causes Peter pain, which will inspire Peter to hate Paul.<sup>182</sup> Seeing he is hated, Paul will then hate Peter in return;<sup>183</sup> consequently will they endeavor to destroy one another and a conflict has erupted. The origin of this conflict? The fact that the object of love is something that is not shared.

It follows that when I love most that which can be shared I shall not seek to deprive others of it; for the fact that they enjoy it does not inhibit my enjoyment of it, causes me no pain and inspires me to destroy nothing. In fact, their love will inspire me to love it more and, likewise, to love the person who loves it insofar as he loves it, thus escalating our condition of harmony. This latter insight I shall consider below. For the present, however, I wish to focus only on the idea of a shared good. Spinoza maintains, first, that “the highest good of those who pursue virtue is common to all, and all can equally enjoy it.”<sup>184</sup> How so? One, because only that is certainly good which conduces to understanding<sup>185</sup> and the “highest object that the mind can understand is God” such that

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<sup>180</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.6.

<sup>181</sup> E.III.Prop.32.

<sup>182</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.7.

<sup>183</sup> E.III.Prop.43.

<sup>184</sup> E.IV.Prop.36.

<sup>185</sup> E.IV.Prop.26-27.



understanding God amounts to the highest good.<sup>186</sup> Two, because the idea of any body actually existing necessarily involves the essence of god<sup>187</sup> — for particular things are inconceivable without God<sup>188</sup> — and this idea is necessarily adequate — for the essence of god is in this manner common to all things and knowledge of what is common to all things is necessarily adequate<sup>189</sup> — such that the very fact that we have ideas about actually existing things, ourselves and the things around us, means that we also have an adequate knowledge of the essence of God.<sup>190</sup> It turns out that knowledge of God, the greatest knowledge and the highest advantage, is also a good which each of us necessarily enjoys simply by virtue of being and does so, moreover, without inhibiting the enjoyment of others. It is a good which I am in no manner compelled to deprive others of and, consequently, a good which can give rise neither to jealousy nor reciprocal hatred, a shared good which gives no conflict.

Before proceeding to demonstrate how harmony grounded in the love of God escalates (and in doing so, examining the active structure of the first foundation of the “State;” i.e. the rational community that has no use for intimidation or for the sovereignty to which it gives rise) I would like first to show that by orienting rational desires toward a common good, by inspiring solidarity, the love of God also creates at least the negative conditions under which a non-proprietary attitude toward goods which cannot be shared is fostered. The simplest way to do that is to answer the following question: do those who love God, those who act under the guidance of reason, who entertain adequate ideas

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<sup>186</sup> E.IV.Prop.28.

<sup>187</sup> E.II.Prop.45.

<sup>188</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>189</sup> E.II.Prop.38.

<sup>190</sup> E.II.Prop.47.

and experience active emotions, feel either love or hate concerning anything else?

We have already seen in previous chapters why “hatred can never be good”<sup>191</sup> and, similarly, why “whatever we desire as a result of being affected by hatred is base.”<sup>192</sup> If a man who lives under the guidance of reason strives only toward that which is actually good, hatred is evidently inconsistent with his endeavor. Though love may be superior to hate insofar as, in any case, it involves the sensation of pleasure, of a relative enhancement of the power of activity, a passive experience it remains; like any other such experience, it is a confused or inadequate idea “whereby the mind affirms a greater or less force of existence of its body, or part of its body, than was previously the case, and by the occurrence of which the mind is determined to think of one thing rather than another.”<sup>193</sup> Love, like hate, is therefore a mode of experience which the rational man must ultimately shed.<sup>194</sup>

If that man who lives under the guidance of reason is inclined to “remove [such] agitation[s] of mind,”<sup>195</sup> proprietary consciousness necessarily dissolves. To begin with, if “envy is hatred itself,”<sup>196</sup> he shall not envy that which others enjoy or seek to appropriate it. Let us assume he enjoys some object. How does he comport himself with respect to it? He does not love it. When he deprived of it, therefore, he shall neither hate

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<sup>191</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.

<sup>192</sup> E.IV.Prop.45.Cor.2.

<sup>193</sup> E.III.General Definition of Emotions.

<sup>194</sup> See E.V.Prop.2-3. Cf. Spinoza’s remarks in KV.II.14:

“The foundation of all good and evil is Love bestowed on a certain object: for if we do not love that object which (nota bene) alone is worthy of being loved, namely, God, as we have said before, but things which through their very character and nature are transient, then (since the object is liable to so many accidents, ay, even to annihilation) there necessarily results hatred, sorrow, etc., according to the changes in the object loved.”

<sup>195</sup> E.V.Prop.2.

<sup>196</sup> E.III.Prop.55.Cor.Dem.

the man who took it nor long for its return.<sup>197</sup> Consequently, will he feel compelled to neutralize no sensation of pain by depriving it of he who now possesses it. In other words, the rational man, by virtue of the fact that he has needs, may endeavor to satisfy them using the goods at his disposal. He will aim to *possess* them; that is, to ensure his enjoyment of them. He will not, however, aim to become their proprietor; that is, he will not endeavor to deprive others of their enjoyment. On the contrary, he will even “endeavor to render back love, that is, nobility... in return for” the harm done to him.<sup>198</sup> He will seek to befriend the one who takes from him, and “all things... are in common among friends.”<sup>199</sup> In other words, he who lives under the guidance of reason regards even lesser goods, those which, strictly speaking cannot be common to all because they are finite, with a non-proprietary and more or less mutualistic attitude.<sup>200</sup>

Therefore, to the extent that men harbor adequate ideas and experience active emotions do they necessarily exist in harmony with one another. They aim to do only that which is good for human nature and, therefore, for each man. They value only the highest good and understand that this is a good that is necessarily shared. They adopt a non-proprietary and even mutualistic attitude toward lesser goods. It is in this respect that Spinoza can claim that:

“There is no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to man than a man who lives by the guidance of reason. For the most advantageous thing to man is that which agrees most closely with his nature... that is (as is self-evident), man.

But man acts absolutely according to the laws of his own nature when he lives

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<sup>197</sup> By longing, we understand “pain, insofar as it regards the absence of that which we love (.III.Prop.36.Schol.).

<sup>198</sup> E.IV.Prop.46.

<sup>199</sup> Ep.44.

<sup>200</sup> E.IV.App.28.

under the guidance of reason... and only to that extent is he always necessarily in agreement with the nature of another man”<sup>201</sup> such that he can support the contention that “man is a God to man.”<sup>202</sup>

This emergent divinity which is attributable to the man who endeavors to live by the guidance of reason, this harmony with which he exists relative to others and, more importantly (as we shall see shortly), which he promotes within his social and political environment, serves to displace gradually the contractual model of political community. As I noted earlier, Spinoza holds that people cede their natural rights, forge political contracts with one another only to the extent that they cannot manage to live in harmony together. The community of rational men necessarily does so; therefore, the community of rational men institutes no contract and creates no sovereign power, however democratically *represented*. With what is the political contract, the constitution of sovereignty, replaced? To answer this question, we shall first have to articulate the several mechanisms whereby the harmony we have described tends to escalate and expand.

#### **4. Their Harmony Escalates**

In further articulating the notion that “man is a god to man,” Spinoza says something further which bears special emphasis. I have already quoted in part the passage I have in mind, but will now do so in full:

“Nothing can be more in harmony with the nature of anything than other individuals of the same species, and so... there is nothing more advantageous to

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<sup>201</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Cor.1.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.Schol.

man for preserving his own being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason. Again, since among particular things we know of nothing more excellent than a man who is guided by reason, *nowhere can each individual display the extent of his skill and genius more than in so educating men that they come at last to live under the sway of their own reason.*”<sup>203</sup>

According to Spinoza, it is the special task of those who live under the guidance of reason to *educate* others, to extend the scope of the rational community and, in doing so, maximize the collective force of human nature. By virtue of which affective structures will the one who lives under the guidance of reason be motivated to undertake this task? To answer this question, it is necessary to begin with an exposition of Spinoza’s understanding of *ambition*.

Ambition in itself is not, for Spinoza at least, a particularly laudable affect. Insofar, he explains, as “the idea of any mode wherein the human body is affected by external bodies must involve the nature of the human body together with the nature of the external body”<sup>204</sup> it happens, when “the nature of the external body is similar to the nature of our own body,” that “the idea of the external body in our thinking will involve an affection of our own body similar to the affection of the external body” — we shall feel as we imagine that body to feel. In other words, we imitate emotions.<sup>205</sup> If, then, we love and hate as others do, we necessarily feel pleasure and pain accordingly. When, therefore, we endeavor to promote what we enjoy and to destroy what makes us suffer<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> E.IV.App.9. Cf. “since a perfect man is the best thing for us that we know of all that we have around us or before our eyes, it is by far the best both for us and for all people individually that we should at all times seek to educate them to this perfect state. For only then can we reap the greatest benefit from them, and they from us (KV.II.6).”

<sup>204</sup> E.II.Prop.16.

<sup>205</sup> E.III.Prop.27 & Schol.

<sup>206</sup> E.III.Prop.28.

we likewise strive to do what others “regard with pleasure” and to “shun doing” what others “regard with aversion.”<sup>207</sup> This effort, when it is “simply in order to please men,” is part of what Spinoza calls “ambition.”<sup>208</sup> We are “ambitious” when we align our affections with those of others.

We are also ambitious — and for the same reason — when we strive to bring it about that others align their affections with our own. How so? If we love or hate something and also imagine it to be loved or hated by someone else, “to the existing love” or hate “there is added a further cause whereby it is nurtured, and by that very fact we shall love” or hate more steadfastly the object of our love” or our hate.”<sup>209</sup> That is, our love or hate will progressively intensify. If to this we add the aforementioned contention that we endeavor to bring about what we love and destroy what we hate, it follows, contends Spinoza, that “everyone endeavors, as far as he can, that what he loves should be loved *by everyone*, and what he hates should be hated *by everyone*.”<sup>210</sup> Moreover, this desire will grow proportionately greater as the love or the hate that inspires it grows greater.<sup>211</sup> In this respect, as Spinoza indicates elsewhere, is ambition:

1. An “uncontrolled love or desire [for] popular acclaim”<sup>212</sup>
2. Hence “the desire whereby all emotions are encouraged and strengthened”<sup>213</sup> in an equally uncontrolled manner.

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<sup>207</sup> E.III.Prop.29.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.Schol.

<sup>209</sup> E.III.Prop.31.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.Cor.

<sup>211</sup> E.III.Prop.37.

<sup>212</sup> E.III.Prop.56.Schol.

<sup>213</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.43.Exp.

3. Therefore, a condition of ever-escalating fixation and, so, a kind of *madness*.<sup>214</sup> Far from promoting harmony, this madness encourages precisely the opposite. “While all strive equally [to bring it about that others should adopt his attitude to life],” says Spinoza, “they equally hinder one another,<sup>215</sup> and in all seeking the praise or love of all, they provoke mutual dislike.”<sup>216</sup> In what manner, then, shall ambition assist us in producing an account of the escalation of harmony?

Well, in the first place Spinoza holds that since a passive emotion is an inadequate idea, once we form a “clear and distinct idea of the emotion” it will cease to be passive.<sup>217</sup> In the second place, he holds that because “what is common to all things can only be conceived adequately,”<sup>218</sup> and “all bodies agree in certain respects,”<sup>219</sup> it follows — granting “nothing can happen in that body without its being perceived by the mind”<sup>220</sup> — that “there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception.”<sup>221</sup> This implies, as Spinoza goes on to explain, that “there is no emotion of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception.”<sup>222</sup> In other words, there is no passive emotion that we cannot transform into an active one arising from adequate ideas.

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<sup>214</sup> E.IV.Prop.44.Schol.

<sup>215</sup> That is, when each acts according to his particular nature. When, however, each acts under the guidance of reason and, therefore, according to human nature as such, the same result does not obtain.

<sup>216</sup> E.III.Prop.31.Schol. Cf. E.IV.Prop.32.Schol. where it is stated that “He who from emotion alone endeavors that others love what he himself loves and live according to his way of thinking acts only by impulse, and therefore incurs dislike, especially from those who have different preferences and who therefore strive and endeavor by that same impulse that others should live according to their way of thinking. Again, since the highest good sought by men under the sway of emotion is often such that only one man can possess it, the result is that men who love it are at odds with themselves; and, while they rejoice to sing the praises of the object of their love, they are afraid of being believed.”

<sup>217</sup> E.V.Prop.3.

<sup>218</sup> E.II.Prop.38.

<sup>219</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Lem.2.

<sup>220</sup> E.II.Prop.12.

<sup>221</sup> E.V.Prop.4.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.Cor.

The intensity of ambition along with the conflict to which it gives rise can be converted into an active intensity productive of confluence. The madness of ambition becomes another sort of madness, a blessed madness.

It seems to me that this blessed madness has two stages, corresponding to the two proofs which Spinoza supplies for the proposition that “The good which every man who pursues virtue aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind, and all the more as he acquires a greater knowledge of God.”<sup>223</sup> The first stage, is modeled after ambition of the less admirable sort. The second stage, however, has its own more strictly rational foundation.

Spinoza describes the first stage of this blessed madness in the second of his two proofs for the above-quoted proposition. In essence, he reproduces his account of ambition as it appears in E.III.Prop.31 and its corollary together with E.III.Prop.37. What changes is the object of love. In his account of mere ambition, the object of love is something “only one person can possess” — it is thus that the ambitious man is at odds with himself; he endeavors that others concur with his viewpoint and also fears precisely that, for he shall then have to compete for it.<sup>224</sup> That good, however, which the “man who pursues virtue aims at for himself” and consequently “for the rest of mankind” is one that “common to all, and all can enjoy it”<sup>225</sup> without inhibiting or obstructing the enjoyment of others. On the contrary; as we have already observed, knowing that others love and enjoy what we love and enjoy compounds and therefore intensifies that very love and that very enjoyment.

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<sup>223</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.

<sup>224</sup> See note 183 above.

<sup>225</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Dem.



Still, the desire to share the highest good which, on this account, the man who pursues virtue experiences is one that is fundamentally grounded in E.III.Prop.31, which itself relies on E.III.Prop.27. That is, on the principle of the imitation of emotions which, if anything, exemplifies human passivity and human reactivity. In this sense, what we appear to discern is an irrational architecture of motivation oriented toward a rational object. In other words, we seem to be speaking of an emergent rationality that has not yet arrived at its goal, about an enthusiast who treats the highest good — which he acknowledges as a common good — as if it were akin to other sorts of goods; namely, as if it were an external cause.

The second stage of this blessed madness, Spinoza describes in his first (and primary) demonstration of the proposition in question. Here, the proof rests on the contention already considered in the preceding two sections to the effect that men who live by the guidance of reason both agree in nature and necessarily exist in harmony with one another such that men who live so are most useful to one another.<sup>226</sup> If this is the case, we admit that the useful is the good,<sup>227</sup> and, again, that on the basis of rational self-interest the man who pursues virtue, “from the laws of his own nature, necessarily seeks... what he judges to be good,”<sup>228</sup> it follows that “we shall necessarily endeavor to bring it about that men should live by the guidance of reason.”<sup>229</sup> In other words, that they seek and enjoy the good which men who live by the guidance of reason likewise seek and also enjoy.

The good which men who live by the guidance of reason seek and also enjoy, so

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<sup>226</sup> E.IV.Prop.35 & Cor.

<sup>227</sup> E.IV.Def.1.

<sup>228</sup> E.IV.Prop.19.

<sup>229</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Dem.

Spinoza goes on to explain, is to understand.<sup>230</sup> Why? Because “the essence of mind consists in knowledge;”<sup>231</sup> that is, in conceiving the “idea of an individual actually existing thing.”<sup>232</sup> If, therefore, we admit that “desire is “man's essence,”<sup>233</sup> that “desire, insofar as it is related to mind, is the very essence of mind,”<sup>234</sup> and that from the nature of desire “there necessarily follow those things that tend to” preserve that of which it is the essence<sup>235</sup> — that is “those things that necessarily follow from its given nature”<sup>236</sup> — it turns out that the essence of the mind is to understand. If, in turn, “we judge a thing to be good because we... desire it,”<sup>237</sup> it seems that to understand is precisely that good which men who live by the guidance of reason seek and also enjoy. Therefore will such men endeavor to bring it about that all men understand.

Now, “there can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God.”<sup>238</sup> This means that “whatever is, is in God”<sup>239</sup> and whatever is, to that extent, constitutes not a substance in itself, but a mode of substance (i.e. of God).<sup>240</sup> This means, in turn, that “particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God.”<sup>241</sup> If so, “the essence of man is constituted by definite modifications of the attributes of God.”<sup>242</sup> Consequently, if “the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing

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<sup>230</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.

<sup>231</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Dem.

<sup>232</sup> E.II.Prop.11.

<sup>233</sup> E.III.Prop.9. Schol.

<sup>234</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.1.

<sup>235</sup> E.III.Prop.9. Schol.

<sup>236</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.Dem.

<sup>237</sup> E.III.Prop.9.Schol.

<sup>238</sup> E.I.Prop.14.

<sup>239</sup> E.I.Prop.15.

<sup>240</sup> Seeing as a mode is that which is “in something else and conceived through something else (E.I.Prop.5).

<sup>241</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>242</sup> E.II.Prop.10.Cor.

thing,”<sup>243</sup> it follows that the human mind is also constituted by “definite modifications of the attributes of God” — namely, the attribute of thought. This means that the human mind “is part of the infinite intellect of God.”<sup>244</sup> It is a mode of this intellect; it cannot be conceived without God. If so, it follows that that striving to understand, that good which men who live by the guidance of reason seek and enjoy, which they likewise “desire for the rest of mankind”<sup>245</sup> is also a striving to understand God. It follows, furthermore, that the extent to which one understands God, the extent to which he succeeds in living under the guidance of reason, is the same extent to which he will likewise *desire* “for another the good which he seeks for himself,”<sup>246</sup> namely, to understand generally and to understand God in particular.

We see, therefore, that the transformation of ambition from a passive and reactionary affective tendency productive of discord into a rational force productive of harmony and agreement takes place in two stages. In the first stage, a shift in the object of love takes place but the mode of relation to that object remains static; we act ambitiously with respect to a good that can be shared by all. In the second stage, a shift in the subject takes place whereby the desire to share a common good arises from the very nature of he who so desires to share. It is in this sense more strictly rational. It is also more rational in the sense that the object of love is found within its subject, not apart from it. One knows God by knowing himself. Thus conceiving its own power of activity, he experiences the concomitant pleasure, his own power is enhanced.<sup>247</sup> This means that

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<sup>243</sup> E.II.Prop.11.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.Cor.

<sup>245</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Dem.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> E.III.Prop.53.

not only does the endeavor to understand and, by extension, to understand God, constitute the highest good in itself, but it is also self-escalating; our power is enhanced not only by understanding, but also by knowing that we understand.<sup>248</sup> It is in knowing himself and God alike after this manner that he encourages others to enjoy the same good that he does, to enjoy with them a collective and progressive enhancement of power. He does so, moreover not by evoking “their admiration so that some system of philosophy may be named after him, nor to afford any cause whatsoever for envy,” not by “talking about the vices of mankind [and]... of human weakness,” but by dwelling “on human virtue, or power, and the means to perfect it, so that men may thus endeavor as far as they can to live in accordance with reason's behest, not from fear or dislike, but motivated only by the emotion of pleasure.”<sup>249</sup>

It is on the basis of this rational form of ambition or blessed madness that we can understand the affective foundation of the state — or, better, the rational community — mentioned in the first chapter of this study. To recap, though Spinoza makes note of several sorts of active emotions which I have not addressed, the following are those which are relevant most specifically to the formation of the community in question: religion, piety, honor, and nobility. There is another, but I would like to address these before arriving at it.

Each of these arises, after one fashion or another, from the blessed madness of a transformed sense of ambition; in fact, Spinoza's discussion of the first three takes place in the first scholium to E.IV.Prop.37. That is, as an explication of his doctrine of ambition transformed. “Whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as

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<sup>248</sup> E.III.Prop.58.

<sup>249</sup> E.IV.App.25.

we have the idea of God, that is, insofar as we know God,” says Spinoza, “I refer to religion.” Ambition transformed in the manner I have described involves precisely that, for it is the idea of the idea of God which drives the endeavor. “The desire to do good which derives from our living by the guidance of reason,” he continues, “I call piety.” The intention to share the idea of God, so far as Spinoza accounts for it, is precisely the desire to share universally the highest good. Thus does ambition transformed in the manner I have described — that is, the endeavor to educate others in the knowledge of God — imply piety. “The desire to establish friendship with others,” he calls “[a] sense of honor,” while the actual endeavor to make friends of them he calls nobility.<sup>250</sup> The desire for others to enjoy and together love that common good which every man who pursues virtue aims at is nothing other than the desire to establish friendship with them; in fact, this is how Spinoza summarizes E.IV.Prop.37 in his demonstration to E.IV.Prop.70. Thus does ambition transformed entail likewise honor and nobility. In this manner, we see that all those positive and active affections arising from adequate ideas of the self and of God which constitute the rational “foundations of the state” — that is, the free community — are reducible to ambition transformed. The aspiration to extend the circle of friends is what makes the difference between a rational individual and a rational community for it involves the production of harmony among men on a strictly rational basis.

We see, then, that the extent to which men live under the guidance of reason, to which they do

what follows not from their individual and particular nature — in other words, not from that in

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<sup>250</sup> E.III.Prop.59.

respect of which they are passive — but rather from their essence, from human nature, they agree with one another, are similar to one another, exist in harmony with one another, and escalate the degree to which they so exist both in intensity and scope. That is, they exist in ever greater harmony and endeavor to display “skill and genius [by]... educating men that they come at last to live under the sway of their own reason.”<sup>251</sup> In this manner the emergence and proliferation of the rational community, the collective of men and women who live under the guidance of reason, coincides with a condition of State in its progressive obsolescence. Men are everywhere the same, sharing a common essence which, properly cultivated, ensures — without coercion — sociable behavior. Men who can live in harmony with one another do not submit to being ruled. They cede no natural right. They make no political contract. They produce no sovereignty; they make no artificial god.

If, indeed, such men make no contract, what is to replace the force of contracts? A sense of gratitude. “Gratitude,” explains Spinoza, is the “eagerness of love, whereby we endeavor to benefit one who, from a like emotion of love, has bestowed a benefit on us”<sup>252</sup> and “free men,” he explains elsewhere, “are truly grateful to one another.”<sup>253</sup> How so? because, as we have already seen, they are truly advantageous to and are mutually motivated to benefit one another. The sense of true gratitude, Spinoza goes on to explain, replaces the contractual relationship that otherwise obtains: “the gratitude mutually exhibited by men who are governed by blind desire is more in the nature of a *bargain* or *inducement* than gratitude.”<sup>254</sup> The sense of gratitude functions as a foil to the bargain, to the contract. In this sense, it seems to me that conditions of rational and communalized gratitude likewise take the place of contractual relations whereby

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<sup>251</sup> E.IV.App.9.

<sup>252</sup> E.III.Definitions of the Emotions.34.

<sup>253</sup> E.IV.Prop.71.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.Schol.

neighbors are *induced*, via the sovereign they have made, by hope or by fear to practice the sort of reciprocity of which “social organization”<sup>255</sup> is constructed. In this manner does the rational community undertake “reason’s rebellion,” progressively undermining the State and displacing its mechanisms of control until it withers away.

### III. Conclusion

We opened this chapter with a proposition to the effect that while the contrary has often been suggested, reason and philosophical virtue are by no means apolitical features of Spinoza’s work. That the philosopher is not of the State does not mean that he is a private figure; it means only that political engagement is *not* synonymous with statecraft. The philosopher operates *not* below the horizon of State, but *in opposition to it* by progressively displacing its repressive institutions with free and rational communities.

The first stage of my demonstration involved a more detailed analysis of the opposition between Moses and Jesus than is often entertained. So far as I have been concerned, it ought not be supposed that Spinoza’s depiction of either figure is intended actually to circumscribe who he was or may have been. Rather, I interpret Spinoza’s use of these characters as a mechanism for representing two distinct forms of political organization. Moses is the exemplar of law and statecraft. Jesus is the exemplar of philosophy and community, not a solitary sage, but, instead, an active political force operating against the State form as embodied in the Laws of Moses. Reason cultivates harmony, law enforces it with fear. Reason, in turn, releases us from this fear and, in doing so, from sovereign power. This latter point, I shall explore in greater detail in the following chapter. For the present, however, this simply goes to show that the philosophical way

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<sup>255</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Schol.

of life advocated by Spinoza undermines the affective foundations of State power, displacing it with a less repressive form of social and political organization. The philosopher, so I concluded, foments “reason’s rebellion” neither by arousing indignation nor by practicing any sort of violence; on the contrary, he does so by encouraging adequate ideas and active emotions, by educating others in the cooperative affective structures constitutive of political communities organized around love.

Having illustrated the notion using the exemplars of Moses and Jesus, I then went on to examine the theoretical underpinnings of this form of political organization. To do so, I began by pairing two propositions considered separately elsewhere in this study which, together, indicate that State power is not predicated on the incapacity of people to govern themselves; this incapacity is the *consequence* of State power. In other words, the State generates its own necessity and justification, for it is only those incapable of governing themselves who cede their rights in the production of sovereignty. This result made way for the following question: *on what grounds do people govern themselves* without transferring their natural rights and externalizing their sovereign powers?

My answer to this question began with a re-visitation of the political covenant contracted by the ancient Hebrews so far as Spinoza represents it in the *Theological Political Treatise*. On my reading, special emphasis must be placed on the fact that Spinoza is careful to emphasize that *two* covenants were enacted, the second essentially abolishing the first. The second covenant, in which sovereignty was turned over to Moses in response to *terrible fear*, is that which constitutes the foundation of State together with all the passive feelings and inadequate ideas that entails. This covenant creates sovereignty. The first covenant, however, is of an altogether different character. To transfer rights to God alone while retaining the individual authority to consult the



Deity is really no transfer at all; the transfer is merely “notional.” This is why the original covenant is only akin to a democracy; democracy is still a form of sovereign power grounded in the *real* transfer of right. This covenant, then, necessarily involves common agreement to live under the guidance of reason. The first covenant, then, represents the acme of that rational community which the figure of Jesus was observed to exemplify.

Having examined the structure of the first covenant and, in this manner, demonstrated that the example of Jesus and his disciples — so far as Spinoza considers them — represents not simply an exception to the State, but a legitimate alternative to it, a counter-tradition of political organization, I proceeded to consider the theoretical mechanisms undergirding this tradition.

This began with a re-examination of the conatus doctrine, in which after reviewing other accounts I proposed that Spinoza’s rejection of metaphysical neutrality implies that difference is inseparable from antagonism such that, in affirming our essence or nature, we naturally agree with things that share a similar nature and come into conflict with or strive against things with which we do not share a similar nature.

Where men are concerned, insofar as they share common natural features and to that extent, agree more or less in nature, this was taken to imply that when we are the adequate cause of the effects we produce, when we are active, those effects agree with those produced by other men. When, however, we are not the adequate cause of the effects we produce, when we are passive and reactionary, when we produce effects that must be understood in relation to some other nature, then these effects differ from those which arise from the laws of human nature and, consequently, conflict with those produced by other men. This means that men are allied insofar as they are active and opposed insofar as they are passive.

This insight enabled us to examine the affective architecture of the rational community. While men who labor under the guidance of passive emotions and inadequate ideas disagree with one another, differ from one another, contend with one another, and escalate their mutual antipathy, the opposite is true in all respects for men who labor under the guidance of reason. That is, for men who act in expression of human essence.

As I indicated, men who live under the guidance of reason agree with one another insofar as they act out of virtue; they do only that which follows from human nature and, in this sense, realize human power. Things agree only according to their power, according to what they are, and not according to their weakness, what they are not. In this manner, those who realize human essence and human power necessarily agree with one another; they love and endeavor toward the same things and the same objectives. They are likewise similar to each other insofar as the properties of being which distinguish them are necessarily passive properties; by abolishing passivity, the necessary condition for difference is removed.

Most importantly, insofar as those who live under the guidance of reason are similar to and agree with one another, they live in harmony with one another. That is, they endeavor to do that which is good for human nature as such and, in this manner, what is good for each man. They can do so not simply because they love the same things, but because those who live under the guidance of reason necessarily love most that which is a common good and admits of no competition. Namely, God.

Guided by reason and possessed of the highest good, contention over lesser goods that are not so easily shared also fades away. This is not to say that the need for such things disappears, but rather, that the possibility of contention concerning common needs. A proprietary attitude toward material goods becomes untenable. The mutualistic perspective

which thus emerges makes for the possibility of harmony without force; that is, without the production of sovereignty, without the State.

Insofar as men who live under the guidance are similar to and agree with one another such that they live in harmony with one another, they likewise endeavor to extend the scope and intensity of this harmony. That is, harmony, or mutual love, necessarily escalates. This escalation of love and harmony is what I would propose as the properly Spinozist conception of what political revolution looks like.

My account of this escalation begins with the notion of ambition, whereby, according to Spinoza, each man endeavors that others think and feel, love or hate, as he does and feels his love or hate more intensely as they do. Construed as a passive condition, ambition produces strife. Aligned, however, with an appreciation not for temporal goods but rather the highest good — which, as I indicated above, is common to all men — ambition becomes religion, piety, honor, and nobility. It becomes, that is, the affective foundation of the rational community.

Thus possessed of the blessed madness that is ambition transformed, the rational community proliferates, facilitating cooperation and mutual solidarity without coercion. In this sense, the spread of the rational community progressively renders the State obsolete; for the State exists only insofar as such harmony is otherwise unachievable. That is, men have no longer the need to transfer right, to produce sovereignty, to rule and to be ruled. The necessity of a political contract disappears and it is replaced by the sense of gratitude. Mutual gratitude, then, serves the rational community in place of the contract; gratitude trumps the devil's bargain.

## **On the Ontology of Mutualism**

## **I. Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, I spoke of what I called a certain “mutuality of being” which arises from Spinoza’s conception of the self and consequent account of self-love on the one hand and the love of God on the other. To the extent, so I suggested, that there obtains an intersectionality of bodies and a corresponding intersectionality of minds, the individual self is inconceivable in isolation from other things — men in particular — and, ultimately, from the totality, or whole order, of nature. In the present chapter, I wish to elaborate further on this basic insight; I wish to explain, in other words, the ontology of mutualism.

To do so, I shall first have recourse to the work of Joseph Proudhon — in many respects the father of modern anarchism generally, but most especially of the mutualistic thread of anarchist thought. In particular, I shall attend to two of his more metaphysical propositions. First, that the individual is a group. Second, that society in general and political society in particular arise from the group-nature of the individual. I shall then attempt to articulate the centrality of these two notions to Proudhon’s broader political theory.

I shall then proceed to demonstrate in more exacting detail that Spinoza’s notion of finite modality in its relation to infinite modality represents a more philosophically robust account of the same basic intuition. This means, so I would like to suggest, that the Spinozist metaphysic constitutes a helpful framework for expanding on and deepening the libertarian political program of which Proudhon is a prime example. Spinozist mutuality of being gives rise, as I have tried to show throughout this study, to a mode of political engagement characterized by harmony and freedom, to a rational mode of life that precludes the production of sovereignty and, with it, the hierarchical relationships which sovereignty, even in its democratic form, entails. More importantly, by active affects like honor and nobility, religion and piety, and especially the love

of God, it supplies this political modality with a mechanism of self-formation.

## II. The Individual is a Group: Proudhon's Anarchist Metaphysic

“Every social theory,” explains Proudhon his *Philosophy of Progress*, “necessarily begins with a theory of reason and a solution of the cosmo-theological problem.”<sup>1</sup> In so many words, each social theory is built up from metaphysical premises stated explicitly or otherwise. It is, therefore, on the basis of its grounding principles that Proudhon opens his critique as to the nature of democracy so far as it has, in its modern revival at least, come to be. He holds that modern democracies are not all that different from the monarchies they displaced:

“Up to now, democracy has followed the forms of monarchic government, monarchic politics, and monarchic economics. This is why democracy has always been only a fiction, incapable of constituting itself. It is time that it learns to think for itself; that it posits the principle which is proper to it, and by affirming itself in a positive manner, that it carries to completion the system of social ideas.”<sup>2</sup>

Monarchic principles give rise to monarchic forms; democratic ideas grounded, therefore, in monarchic principles function, so Proudhon insists, as monarchies in disguise — or, to put it in less paranoid terms, as imperfect democracies. What are these principles that ground democracy on the one hand, and “monarchy” — i.e. overtly authoritarian government — on the other? So I shall demonstrate on the basis of Proudhon's text, they are as follows. The democratic principles are motion or becoming, plurality, and relativity, while the monarchic principles are stasis or being, simplicity, and absoluteness. “In order,” says Proudhon, paraphrasing Lemaire, “to

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<sup>1</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 2012. “The Philosophy of Progress.” Wilbur, S.P. trans. *The Libertarian Labyrinth*, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://library.libertarian-labyrinth.org/items/show/3123>. p. 31, n. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

democratize the human race it is necessary to demonarchize the Universe.” That is, to supplant stasis, being, simplicity, and absoluteness with motion, becoming, plurality, and relativity. Let us examine each in turn.

Proudhon’s first principle is movement; “movement exists,” he says, “this is my fundamental axiom.”<sup>3</sup> It is “to the mind,” so he explains, “what gravity is to matter.”<sup>4</sup> How so? Let us consider the matter in view of his response to Descartes’ most famous and certainly most notorious conclusion: *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. In the first place he explicitly treats his “*moveo*,” his “I move” as equivalent to Descartes’ *cogito*:

“To say how I acquired the notion of movement would be to say how I think, how I am.

It is a question to which I have the right not to respond. Movement is the primitive fact that is revealed at once by experience and reason.”<sup>5</sup>

Here, movement and thought are presented as if they enjoyed equal self-evidence; just as thinking is self-evident, so too moving. In fact, however, they are not equal; movement, for Proudhon, is more fundamental. Thus does he explain that:

“Descartes did not realize that his base, supposedly immobile, was mobility itself. Cogito, I think, these words express movement; and the conclusion [i.e. “therefore I am”], according to the original sense of the verb to be... is still movement.<sup>6</sup> He should have said... *ergo fio*, I move, therefore I become!”<sup>7</sup>

Against Descartes, who places thought at the foundation and deduces from the fact of thought the *being* of that which thinks, Proudhon locates his foundation in motion and deduces from the fact

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.17.

<sup>6</sup> Proudhon lists here the words denoting “being” in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Though he does not state as much, his point seems to be that *none are nouns* but, rather, *verbs*. As verbs they indicate an action and, to that extent, a sort of motion.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

of motion the becoming of that which moves. Indeed, he accounts likewise for thought itself as a species of motion: “every conception,” Proudhon maintains, “indicates an analysis of movement, which is itself still a movement.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, “just as Descartes could not doubt that he thought... for much stronger reasons, I cannot doubt that I move, since thought is only a form of movement.”<sup>9</sup> Movement, therefore, constitutes the epistemological foundation of things, the ultimate ground of knowledge.

Having discovered movement at the foundation of things, Proudhon goes on to deduce from his epistemological assumptions, a metaphysics of motion. “Nothing,” he says:

“Persists... everything changes, everything flows, *everything becomes*; consequently, everything remains and everything is connected; by further consequence the entire universe is opposition, balance, equilibrium. There is nothing, neither outside nor inside, apart from that eternal dance; and the rhythm that commands it, pure form of existences, supreme idea to which any reality can respond, is the highest conception that reason can attain.”<sup>10</sup>

From the principle of motion, in other words, we arrive, on the one hand, at a metaphysics of becoming, of existence in its totality conceived as a rhythm and a dance. On the other hand, we find that the becoming of all things implies “the negation every immutable form and formula... the negation of every permanent order, even that of the universe, and of every subject or object, empirical or transcendental, which does not change;” there remains “nothing fixed and eternal but the very laws of movement.”<sup>11</sup> When, in other words, movement is our first principle, all things persist not insofar as they are, but insofar as they become; this means that all things are

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



relative: “the truth in all things, the real, the positive, the practicable, is what changes [and undergoes] transformation.”<sup>12</sup>

“From the idea of movement,” continues Proudhon, “I further deduce... the concepts of unity, of plurality, of same and of other.”<sup>13</sup> How so? “Whoever says movement,” according to Proudhon, “says series.”<sup>14</sup> To be more precise, it is “a series in ensemble;”<sup>15</sup> that is, a singularity or oneness constituted in plurality, or a “unity of composition.”<sup>16</sup> When, therefore, we “conceive of movement as the essence of nature,”<sup>17</sup> we conceive it, for Proudhon, as one but not as simple; the “unity of all being,” he says, “is essentially synthetic.”<sup>18</sup>

This insight leads us to the core of Proudhon’s argument — or, at any rate, its most important element so far as I am concerned. Just, he says, as the idea of movement translates into the series, “so, in ontology, *it has as a synonym the group*,” says Proudhon; “being... is a group.” Thus, he continues:

“Everything that exists is grouped; everything that forms a group is one. Consequently, it is perceptible, and, consequently, it is. The more numerous and varied the elements and relations which combine in the formation of the group, the more centralizing power will be found there, and the more reality the being will obtain. Apart from the group there are only abstractions and phantoms.”<sup>19</sup>

If so, it follows that “*the living man*,” too, “*is a group*” in body and soul. “I no longer consider that self, what I call my soul, as a monad, governing, from the sublimity of its so-called

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

spiritual nature, other monads, injuriously considered material.”<sup>20</sup> Rather:

“The human soul is... a [sort of] fluid, formed from the combination of several others... which puts us, at a distance, in more or less intimate relations with our fellows, and by that communication” [the “act on one another, attract, repulse and combine with one another” such that their interaction] “creates superior groups, or new natures.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, by considering “each being only its composition, its unity” so as to “restore all to a single reason... the group” does it become possible to conceive man as a “fluid manifestation” that culminates in “the human group, Society.”<sup>22</sup> Proudhon’s “conception of being in general, and in particular of the human self” allows him to “to prove the positive reality, and up to a certain point to demonstrate the ideas (the laws) of the social self or humanitarian group.”<sup>23</sup> So far as he understands this reality and this law of the “humanitarian group,” it is this:

“Following the notions of movement... series and group, of which ontology is compelled from now on to take account... I regard society, the human group, as a being *sui generis*, constituted by the fluid relations and economic solidarity of all the individuals, of the nation, of the locality or corporation, or of the entire species; which individuals circulate freely among one another, approaching one another, joining together, dispersing in turn in all directions.”<sup>24</sup>

From this conception of the “humanitarian group” two results follow, the first of which I find more useful than the second. In the first place, because the fluid manifestation of man in the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 23-24, n. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

human group is a “diversified unity,”<sup>25</sup> it follows, for Proudhon, that “the revelation that I have of myself necessarily implies the one that I have of others, and vice-versa, or rather these two revelations amount to only one.”<sup>26</sup> In the second place, however, this Proudhon interprets this oneness as being realized not in the interplay of parts, but in the “decisive identity of me and not-me”<sup>27</sup> where the “not-me” is the “objective, organic, personal reality of the collective being,”<sup>28</sup> a being which:

“Has its own functions, *alien to our individuality*, its own ideas which it communicates to us, its judgments which do not at all resemble ours, its will in diametrical opposition with our instincts, its life.”<sup>29</sup>

Proudhon’s political ontology is not flat, but decidedly contoured in such a manner that I am both identical with the collective being of which I am a fragment and also alienated from it and, to that extent, alienated from myself.

At any rate, from the axiom of motion do we arrive at the inevitable becoming of things and to that extent, the notion of a “series in ensemble” by which Proudhon conceives unity in plurality. From the idea of unity in plurality, we proceed to deduce the ontological proposition that being, generally, is a group and that the fluidity — spiritual and physical — of human being in particular means that the living man is himself a group. He is embedded in human society, which is constituted by the fluid relations among men and — for Proudhon at least — then congeals, as it were, into a sort of collective alien-entity confronting each of its constituent parts.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 67-68.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 26, n. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

Setting aside, for the moment, the problem of alienation which Proudhon's analysis implies, let us attend to his belief that society is perpetually constituted from fluid, relative, and ever changing relations among men. If movement translates into the series and the series, in turn, translates into the group, the group, for its part, has its synonym in liberty:

“In the political order, the synonym of progress is liberty, that is to say collective and individual *spontaneity, evolving without obstacles*, by the gradual participation of citizens in sovereignty and government.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, from the axiom of motion, from becoming, from the series, from unity in plurality, from the fluidity of being whence we deduce that being is a group — by, in other words, “democratizing the universe” — we “democratize the human race,” for fluid being, *the mutuality of being*, the group, is its immediacy and its spontaneity, which constitute the meaning of social and political liberty,<sup>31</sup> of democracy in its purest form so far as Proudhon conceives it.

Before proceeding to examine mutuality of being in Spinoza, let us first consider its opposite in Proudhon, for in articulating that opposition, Proudhon actually speaks directly of Spinoza. By understanding the lens through which Proudhon viewed his predecessor we shall be better positioned to explain how he was misconstrued and, more importantly, how a Spinozist account of the mutuality of being enables us to discard the negative elements of Proudhon's theory while retaining the positive.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> I add, here, immediacy to spontaneity because elsewhere in the same text, when comparing democracy to absolutism, Proudhon comments that, contrary to the absolute sovereign, “the people [are] all... movement, are the incarnation of Progress. This is why democracy is averse to authority: it returns to it only by delegation, middle term between liberty and absolutism (ibid. pp. 12-13, n. 4).” Delegation, indirect participation in government, amounts to an attenuated or corrupted form of democracy, bearing absolutist elements.

As we have already noted, a democratic ontology so far as Proudhon conceives it arises from ideas of motion, becoming, plurality, and relativity. “Monarchic” ontology — again, so far as Proudhon conceives it — arises, in contrast, from ideas of stasis, being, simplicity, and absoluteness; that is, from diametrically opposing notions, for “the absolute, or absolutism is the affirmation of all that progress denies, the negation of all that it affirms.” Thus does it involve “the eternal, the immutable, the perfect, the definitive, the unconvertible, the undivided; it is, to use a phrase made famous in our parliamentary debates, in all and everywhere, the *status quo*;”<sup>32</sup> as I have already indicated: stasis.

The stasis of “the absolute or absolutism,” in turn, results from a certain “concentration” of being. “Why,” asks Proudhon, “is despotic government also called absolute?” It is because:

1. “It is in its nature to *concentrate*, either in a single man, in a committee or an assembly, a multiplicity of attributions, the essence of which is to be separated or seriated.”
2. “Once that concentration is carried out, all movement... becomes impossible in the State, and thus in the nation... [which then comes to be characterized by] universality, eternity and immutability.”<sup>33</sup>

Motion, as we have already discovered, presupposes a plurality of things. If, therefore, the absolute implies the negation of motion, it implies likewise the negation of multiplicity, a *concentration* of the many, a reduction of plurality and a diminished complexity.

Now, if to move is to become while to negate movement is to be, then the absolute,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 12-13, n. 4.

which is the utter negation of movement, is being as such; it is the “being of beings.”<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, if the negation of motion goes hand in hand with the concentration of multiplicity, the reduction of plurality, the absolute is not only most-being, but also being-most-concentrated; that is, being in which plurality or multiplicity is at an absolute minimum. In other words, the absolute is the most simple thing.

Thus does Proudhon distinguish the “notion of the one,” which — as we have already observed — he views as a unity in series and, in this sense the “condition of all reality and existence,” from the notion of the simple.<sup>35</sup> If the “one,” so far as Proudhon conceives it, is real and existing, the veritable “truth in all things,” it follows that the simple is “the false, the fictive, the impossible, the abstract.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, he concludes:

“From the idea of being, conceived as group, I deduce... that the simplistic, immutable, infinite, eternal and absolute god of the metaphysicians, not becoming, is not and cannot be; while the social being, which is grouped, organized, perfectible, progressive, and which by its essence always becomes, is.”<sup>37</sup>

The motionless, the concentrated, the simple, the absolute — i.e. the principle of absolutist, monarchic, or despotic ontology; in short, “the principle of authority”<sup>38</sup> — properly speaking, for Proudhon at least, is not the “*ens realissimum*,”<sup>39</sup> but the unreal *par excellence*.

Now, if “it is from this simplism that all of the alleged science of being, ontology, has

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

been deduced,”<sup>40</sup> it follows — again, for Proudhon — that the *alleged* science of ontology is a science of the unreal; it examines something that is not and thus contradicts itself. It is on the basis of this contention that Proudhon opens his critique of Spinoza. “Pure substance,” he says:

“Reduced to its simplest expression, absolutely amorphous, and which one could quite happily call the pantogene, since all things come from it, if I cannot exactly say that it is nothing, appears to my reason as if it was not; it is equal to nothing.”<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, if God be construed as the equivalent of pure substance: “God... is not, and cannot be... since the deprivation of all conditionality, or simplicity, far from indicating the highest power of being, marks, on the contrary, the lowest degree.”<sup>42</sup> God, being pure substance and — in Proudhon’s mind — a being necessarily simple and unmoving, is for that reason a non-entity; for all being is becoming.

Moreover, continues Proudhon, even granting the existence of an absolute, there remains the pressing — and longstanding — problem of the transition from its simplicity to the multitude of finite things:

1. “Is God, the substance-cause, simple or multiple? If he is simple *as Spinoza thought*, by what means, by what action, by what law, can he pass from his mode of metaphysical action to the mode of finite existence, and manifest himself physically by form, variety and succession, in space and time, without dividing himself? There is the crux of the difficulty. Spinoza did not, and could not, resolve it.”
2. “With regard to effects, God, simple and indivisible substance, cannot then be the cause of finished beings. If one supposes, in order to get out of that difficulty, that the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

other attributes of God, such as power and science, could change his original constitution, and divide that which is declared to be simple and indivisible, one falls into contradiction, and says that the God which one has declared to be simple would himself destroy the condition of his own existence."<sup>43</sup>

For Proudhon, God qua substance is not only indivisible, but also simple. For this reason, he contends, the many things, “finished beings” in Proudhon’s terminology, cannot arise from substance. In short, then, Proudhon’s criticism of Spinoza in particular would run as follows: there is no simple static substance, and even if there were, its existence would preclude the existence of finite things, of motion and change in general, which is absurd.

More broadly, if Spinoza’s conception of substance is regarded as involving the notion of absolute simplicity, it would follow that Spinoza’s system represents not the universe-democratized, but the very apex of absolutism. In Spinoza, we would find the most profound and most dangerous advocate of the so-called principle of authority, of monarchic or despotic — or, perhaps better put, totalitarian — ontology.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 28-29, n. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Incidentally, this result is made explicit in the work of Carl Schmitt, who, via Bakunin, was undoubtedly influenced by Proudhon’s political theology. We have already seen that Proudhon contends that “every social theory necessarily begins with... a solution of the *cosmo-theological problem* (see n. 124 above).” Bakunin simply elaborated on this fundamental principle, coining the term “political theology” in his tract “*The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International* (translated and published serially between 1886 and 1887 in the Boston-based Anarchist newspaper, *Liberty*. See Bakunin, M. 1886-1887. *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the international*. trans. Holmes, S.E. *Liberty: Not the Daughter, but the Mother of Order* 4(9) - 4(23))” and fleshing out the idea in later works such as *God and the State* (Bakunin, M. 1970. *God and the State*. Trans. P. Avrich. New York: Dover) and *Federalism, Socialism, and Anti-Theologism* (Bakunin, M. 1971. *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism*. In *On Anarchy*. ed. and trans. S. Dolgoff, 102-147. New York: Vintage). In spite of a longstanding tradition of dismissing Bakunin (see Marx, K. 2000. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. 2nd edn, ed. D. McLellan. Oxford: Oxford U. Press. p. 637. See also Thomas, P. 1980. *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 285. Cf. Berlin, I. 1978. *Russian Thinkers*. ed. Hardy, H. & Kelly, A. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 110), Schmitt held that Bakunin “was the first to give the struggle against theology the complete consistency of an absolute naturalism (Schmitt, C. 1985. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. G. Schwab. Cambridge: MIT Press. p. 64).”

In any case, Schmitt comments that “in Spinoza... the individual is nothing and the universe is the whole for him.” For him, this translates immediately into the view that the state becomes “the substantial bearer of all right (Schmitt, C. 2014. *Dictatorship*. Hoelzl, M. & Ward, G. trans. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 99.).” Thus, he explains:



To conclude this subsection, we find the following. Proudhon believes that every social theory presupposes and emerges from a solution to the cosmo-theological problem. He then distinguishes two fundamental principles; the democratic principle on the one hand, and the totalitarian principle on the other. So he holds, it has been customary to think and practice democracy on the basis of the totalitarian principle such that the latter predominates. In order, he says, to democratize human society, we must first democratize the universe; that is, the totalitarian principle must be displaced by the democratic principle.

The democratic principle takes motion as its foundation. On the basis of motion, it privileges becoming over being, ultimately denying the reality of the latter. From the establishment of motion and becoming, Proudhon goes on to elaborate their theoretical analogues. In the first place, the idea that unity — the very condition and truth of reality — is a series in ensemble. If unity is the condition of reality and it is a sort of coherent composite, it follows, for Proudhon, that being as such is a group, that the individual is a group. The human soul is constituted in and by its relations, thus giving rise to the ontological solidarity of the “humanitary group.” This solidarity born of spontaneous interaction, for Proudhon, is the meaning of liberty. On his account, however, this liberty is expressed in the production of a collective being, “society” viewed as a sort of composite and total individual, which operates

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“The idea of the relationship between *pouvoir constituant* and *pouvoir constitué* finds its complete analogy, systematic and methodological, in the idea of a relation between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. And even if this idea has been integrated into Spinoza’s rationalistic system... The people, the nation, the primordial force of any state – these always constitute new organs. From the infinite, incomprehensible abyss of the force of the *pouvoir constituant*, new forms emerge incessantly, *which it can destroy at any time* and in which its power is never limited for good. It can will arbitrarily. The content of its willing has always the same legal value like the content of a constitutional definition. Therefore *it can intervene arbitrarily*... It becomes the unlimited and illimitable bearer of the *iura dominationis*, which do not even have to be restricted to cases of emergency (ibid. p. 123).”

While, as we have already observed in closing the foregoing chapter, Schmitt apparently had a change of heart, here at least, he regards Spinoza as a crucial metaphysical contributor to the totalitarian idea. If the state is considered the analogue of *natura naturans* and the individual of *natura naturata* and we also imagine the latter to be negated in the former — which, I must note, I question — then the Spinozist metaphysics of state appear essentially totalitarian.

over and above — or, at any rate apart from — its constituent parts. This, of course, raises a question as to the real liberty of liberty; if *the* collective being, *the* group, is not beholden to that by virtue of which it is a group, in what manner does a society structured according to the so-called democratic principle differ from a society organized around a totalitarian principle?

In any event, we saw that the parallel notion, Proudhon's totalitarian principle, the principle of authority, takes stasis as its foundation. On the basis of stasis, it privileges being over becoming and to that extent — for Proudhon — the fictive over the real. From the establishment of stasis and being, Proudhon goes on to elaborate their theoretical analogues. In the first place, the idea that being in stasis entails a concentration of the multitude and, therefore, an emergent simplification of complexity. It is on from this equation of despotism and simplicity that Proudhon articulates his critique of Spinoza or spinozism. Spinoza, he presumes, adopts an absolutist ontology grounded in the negation of movement and the reduction of plurality into simplicity. Let us now proceed to demonstrate that this is simply not the case but, rather, that Spinoza's system is precisely mutualistic in character and, further, formulated in such a manner that the pitfalls into which Proudhon's ontology falls are easily evaded.

### **III. On the Mutuality of Being in Spinoza**

I shall begin my counter-narrative by dispelling Proudhon's assessment of Spinoza. I shall do so on the basis of two fundamental insights. In the first place, I shall point out that, for Spinoza, there is likewise no such thing as "being." In the second place, I shall point out that if, in a certain respect, substance, for Spinoza, is simple, it is by no means inert. Rather, its essence is power and all power is active.

From the necessary activity of substance, I shall then proceed to articulate, first, the relationship between motion and mutual articulation of individuality in Spinoza's work. I shall then explain, first, how the totality of kinetic interplay among individuals relates ultimately to substance, second, the relevance of the love of God considered in the preceding chapter to this relation and, finally, how introducing the love of God to the mutualistic notion of being enables us to avoid the totalitarian implications which Proudhon's own anti-authoritarian theory seems to court.

### A. The Status of "Being" in Spinoza

For Spinoza, there is no such thing as "being." From his earliest writings on, Spinoza reserved special criticism for the tendency toward abstraction<sup>45</sup> which afflicted medieval philosophy especially and which — though it had, by his time, made considerable critical headway — modern philosophy had not yet sufficiently distanced itself from.<sup>46</sup> While he considers a number of different sorts of abstractions which a variety of purposes,<sup>47</sup> it is the origin and status of universals in general, and 'transcendental' universals in particular, which concern us here.

In his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza offers a rather accessible example of the thought process whereby such terms are generated. Imagine, he suggests, a

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<sup>45</sup> Newlands, S. "Spinoza's Early Anti-Abstractionism." In *The Young Spinoza*. Ed. Melamed, Y. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Newlands, for example comments that while Spinoza's nominalism is not unique in itself, his novelty lies in the consistency with which he applied it. Spinoza, he says, "offers a challenge to his fellow nominalists. They claim to accept the mind-dependent, conceptualist status of universals and to heed the warnings against reifying them. And yet, in other domains, they tacitly accept the very same reification of abstractions. Spinoza's challenge is this: either reject all such reified abstractions, even if that means rejecting popular and entrenched views, or else admit to being inconsistent (Newlands, S. "Spinoza on Universals." In *Early Modern Theories of Universals*. Ed. Di Bella, S. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)."

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, CM.I.1, where Spinoza discusses the use of abstraction as a mnemonic device, for the purposes of organizing information, and for the purpose of comparison.

romance novel. If someone were to peruse but one such tale of love, the reader would “retain it very well,” would, for the most part, recall specific plot details, character names, and so on. For, in this case, the story “flourishes alone in his imagination.” If, however, the same individual were to read a number of other works “of the same kind... he will imagine them all together, and they will easily be confused.”<sup>48</sup> The particular features of any one such text will slowly merge, thus producing the abstract conception of a certain genre, the romance novel, and its tropes. To “know” the genre involves learned ignorance as to its particular instances.

Proceeding from this example, let us consider Spinoza’s mature treatment of the origin of universal terms. These, he says, originate as follows. “The human body, being limited, is capable of forming simultaneously in itself only a certain number of distinct images. If this number be exceeded, these images begin to be confused.”<sup>49</sup> When the capacity of the body is surpassed not completely, but “to the extent that the mind is unable to imagine the unimportant differences of individuals... and imagines distinctly only their common characteristic insofar as the body is affected by them... most repeatedly... The mind expresses this” by means of a universal term that can be predicated of an “infinite number of individuals.”<sup>50</sup> Hence terms such as “man, horse, dog,”<sup>51</sup> or, in our particular case, “romance novel,” “genre,” and so on.

When, however, “the number of distinct images which the body is capable of forming simultaneously in itself be far exceeded, all the images will be utterly confused with one another.”<sup>52</sup> When this occurs, “the mind will also imagine all the bodies confusedly without any

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<sup>48</sup> TIE. 82.

<sup>49</sup> E.II.Prop.40s1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

distinction, and will comprehend them, as it were, under one attribute.”<sup>53</sup> Namely, such transcendental terms as thing (*res*) and, most crucially for our purposes, being (*ens*), the “highest genus” under which “all the individuals in Nature without exception” are classified.<sup>54</sup> The transcendental term — being, thing — is, therefore, but a universal of universals.

Now, as Spinoza made abundantly clear early on, a fundamental ontological distinction is to be made between particulars and the abstractions to which they give rise. “Some things,” he argued in the *Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, “are in our understanding and not in Nature, and so they are also only our own creation.”<sup>55</sup> Such things, he said, are called “beings of reason (*entia rationis*).” Except insofar as it is conceived *only* as a mode of thought,<sup>56</sup> the *ens rationis* is to be considered *neither* a “being” nor even an “idea” in the proper sense, as it has no object *extra mentem*.<sup>57</sup> The *ens rationis* is, therefore, to be distinguished most definitely from the “real being (*ens reale*)”<sup>58</sup> which, alone, can properly be described as consisting in more than nothing. As the universal — and, by extension, the transcendental — constitutes *the* classical example of the thing conceived abstractly, it is, in Spinoza’s view, not a real thing. It follows that so far as “being (*ens*)” exemplifies the universal, it is, likewise, nothing; according to Spinoza *there is no such thing as “being.”* Consequently can the term ‘being’ describe neither God, who exists necessarily,<sup>59</sup> nor what proceeds from God and which, therefore, exists likewise.

It is with surprise and justified confusion that Newland arrives at precisely this result. “I do not know” he admits, “how to reconcile Spinoza’s claim that ‘being, thing, etc.’ are terms

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> E.IV.Pref.

<sup>55</sup> KV.I.10.

<sup>56</sup> CM.I.1.

<sup>57</sup> KV.I.6. Cf. CM.I.1.

<sup>58</sup> KV.I.10.

<sup>59</sup> E.I.Prop.11.

that ‘signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree’ with his own prolific use of such terms throughout the *Ethics*.<sup>60</sup> If, however, as Spinoza maintains in his *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, “a being of reason” — such as the notion of ‘being’ itself — is nothing but a mode of thinking, which serves the more easily to retain, explain, and imagine things that are understood,”<sup>61</sup> if, in other words, the ‘being of reason’ functions as an analogy, a mechanism of expression, a mnemonic device or, to condense all of these features into a single (if less exact) concept, as a pedagogical tool, and if being constitutes the exemplary instance of just such a tool, then the appropriate response to Newland’s confusion lies in the following question. What is the ‘thing understood’ which the term ‘being’ serves to render more easily retained, explained, and imagined? If an answer to this question can be supplied (and I think that it can) and if it also be recalled that the term ‘being’ operates within Spinoza’s own definition of God — God, he says, is “an absolutely infinite *being*,”<sup>62</sup> — then, I believe, we shall have come much closer to an adequate account not only of what God is, but of the significance of his immanent “being” vis-a-vis the political community.

We see, therefore, that Proudhon was wrong to characterize Spinoza as an advocate of being; that is the farthest thing from the truth. Wrong in this respect, we shall also discover that he was wrong to ascribe stasis to substance so far as Spinoza conceived it.

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<sup>60</sup> Newlands, S. “Spinoza on Universals.” In *Early Modern Theories of Universals*.

<sup>61</sup> CM.I.1. Spinoza’s deployment of the term “understood” is not incidental but, rather weighted. Understanding, as he says in the *Short Treatise*, is “purely passive; it is an awareness, in the soul, of the essence and existence of things; so that it is never we who affirm or deny something of a thing, but it is the thing itself that affirms or denies, in us, something of itself (KV.II.16).” The soul is not productive of its own ideas but “is changed in such a way that it receives... modes of thought, which it did not have before (KV.II.15).” The ‘being of reason’ functions, therefore, to render more intelligible what, in itself, is grasped inadequately. However, this is beside the point, for in any case, the event of understanding entails apprehension of an “essence and existence” and in examining the abstraction to which understanding has given rise, our interest lies not in the cognitive process but in discerning its ultimate object.

<sup>62</sup> E.I.Def.6.

## B. The Activity of Substance in Itself

While Proudhon indeed devotes considerable attention to the problem of divine simplicity, his real objection lies in the assumption that simplicity implies stasis and that Spinoza's conception of substance involves both. Rather, therefore, than addressing the topic of divine simplicity in Spinoza's work,<sup>63</sup> I think it prudent to proceed directly to the real issue at

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<sup>63</sup> A response to Proudhon's criticism of Spinoza insofar as it relates to the topic of simplicity revolves around the following question: are simplicity and indivisibility one and the same thing. Proudhon evidently assumes that they are. Judging from the standpoint of the medieval philosophies that he denounces, this is an appropriate judgment. Maimonides, for example, says the following in the fiftieth chapter of the first book of the *Guide*:

"If... you belong to those whose aspirations are directed to ascending to... gaining certain knowledge with regard to God's being one by virtue of a true oneness *so that no composition whatever is to be found in him and no possibility of division in any way whatever* — then you must know that He... has in no way and in no mode any essential attribute."

Rather, he explains in the following chapter, is God "one simple essence in which no multiplicity is posited." For Maimonides, in other words, denying divisibility of God is the equivalent of asserting His simplicity; that is, the denial of essential attribution. For Spinoza, in contrast, the two are distinct. Spinoza affirms the indivisibility of God but denies that indivisibility is incompatible with predication; a multitude of essential attributes can be predicated of substance without imputing divisibility to it. For him, the opposition between simplicity and composition is a false one. Something can be immune to decomposition and yet not simple; both qualities arise, in fact, from the very definition of substance.

This is not to say that Spinoza never entertained the idea that God is a simple being. In fact, he makes a case for the assertion in his *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, Spinoza counts three types of composition:

1. "That of two or more substances either of the same attribute... or of different attributes, as is the case with man."
2. That which arises "from the union of different modes."
3. That which "is not composition, but is only conceived by reason as if it were so, in order that a thing may thereby be more easily understood."

"Whatever is not a composition of the first two kinds," he says there, "must be said to be simple (CM.II.5)."

Now, reading this typology of composition with Spinoza's later work in mind, we see immediately that something is wrong. Here, he draws a distinction between things *actually* composed of two substances of the same or different attributes — things like man — and things "conceived by reason" alone to be so composed. That is, so he goes on to explain in the same chapter, things like God. The former, he implies, is a real composite, while the latter is not; it is *simple*. The rationale underlying this distinction, however, totally disintegrates in Spinoza's later work. He denies not only that there can be two or more substances of the same attribute (E.I.Prop.5) but, to begin with, that there can be two substances (E.I.Prop.14 & Cor.1). The first type of composition disappears entirely, leaving the second and the third. The second type, however, involves not the attribution of substance, but substance in its modality.

This means that the question of attribution is separated from that of simplicity. Substance can be multiple in respect of its attributes and simple in respect of its indivisibility. As we discover in the first part of the *Ethics*, each attribute, constituting the essence of substance (E.I.Def.4), is necessarily conceived through itself alone (E.I.Def.3) and through no other attribute. In this sense, while they are really distinct from one another, each expresses one and the same thing: substance (E.II.Prop.7.Schol). At any rate, substance is by no means simple in a straightforward manner, but expressed in by an infinity of attributes each expressed in an infinity of ways.

hand: does Spinoza's conception of substance imply stasis? I contend that this is not the case. If Spinoza denies the reality of being and, to that extent, the attribution of being to substance, it is implied that substance is characterized by a form of becoming. For the remainder of the present subsection I shall demonstrate this from the vantage of substance in itself. In the following subsection I shall proceed to examine the matter from the vantage of substance in its attribution which, in turn, shall position us to consider the kinetic constitution of individuality so far as Spinoza conceives it. It is this latter point by virtue of which I think that the strongest case for a mutuality of being in Spinoza can be made.

So, is substance inert? I think that an answer to this question must begin with yet another question: what is to be understood by the notion of substance in the first place? Judging only from its etymological structure, it would seem that substance is that which "stands under" and, in this respect, a thing *standing*, a thing in stasis. In my view, this result is rather misleading.

I would like to initiate our inquiry by pointing out a series of terminological equivalents — all grounded on the supposition that when Spinoza employs the word "or (*sive*)" in a phrase fitting the model "X, or Y" he intends to suggest that X and Y are synonyms — which shall, I contend, at least illuminate the theoretical field in which solutions are to be sought.

1. The being of a thing = its essence<sup>64</sup>
2. The essence of a thing = its nature<sup>65</sup>
3. The nature of a thing = its power<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> CM.I.6.

<sup>65</sup> PP.I.Prop.7S.L1; PPC.II.Prop.6s; PPC.II.Prop.15s; E.I.Prop.36; E.III.Prop.56; E.III.Prop. 57; E.IV.Def.8; E.IV.Prop.19; E.IV.Prop.33; Ep.54. From this, it follows, as Spinoza explicitly states elsewhere, that the definition of a thing = its essence (PPC.II.Prop.15s; E.I.Prop.33s1; CM.II.1n).

<sup>66</sup> E.V.Prop.25; E.I.Prop.17.Schol.. From this, it follows, as Spinoza explicitly states elsewhere, that the essence of



Thus do we arrive at the following sequence of equivalents:

4. The being of a thing = its essence = its nature = its power.<sup>67</sup>

Again, simply taking note of the synonymy of such terms does not, in itself, provide adequate grounds for deducing which, if any, is ultimately operative.<sup>68</sup> I maintain, however, that one *does* constitute the final term, that the others are interchangeable insofar as each denotes only the last.

In other words, I propose that by the terms ‘nature,’ ‘being,’ and ‘essence,’ Spinoza intends *power*.<sup>69</sup> Or, to reduce the case to the terms in which I find it most expedient to prosecute it:<sup>70</sup> the essence of a thing<sup>71</sup> is its power.

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a thing = its power (PCP.II.Prop.2.Schol.).

<sup>67</sup> It is noted that the equivalence of ‘definition’ with ‘nature’ (TIE.107; Ep.12) and ‘being’ with ‘reality’ (PPC.I.Ax.4; PPC.I.Ax.9; PPC.I.Prop.7.Schol.L1.proof; E.I.Prop.9; E.I.Prop.10; E.IV.Pref.; Ep.9; Ep. 63) could be included in this sequence so that both ‘definition’ and ‘reality’ could be included in the sequence of equivalents. The same goes for the term ‘perfection,’ which Spinoza defines in terms of reality (PPC.I.Ax.4; PPC.I.Ax.8; PPC.I.Prop.7.L1n2; E.I.Prop.11; E.II.Def.6; E.II.Prop.1.Schol.; E.II.Prop.43; E.II.Prop.49.Schol.; E.IV.Pref.; Ep.19), being (PPC.I.Prop.7.L1n2; CM.I.6; Ep. 36), essence (CM.I.6; CM.II.3; E.I.Prop.33; E.III.General Definition of Emotions; TTP.4; Ep.19), nature (E.I.App; TTP.4; TTP.6), and and power (E.I.App; E.III.Definition of Emotions.3.Exp.; E.IV.Pref.). However, I have chosen to leave out ‘definition’ and ‘reality’ so as to avoid digressing into a satisfactory account of these terms and ‘perfection’ because Spinoza considers it but another ‘being of reason’ (E.IV.Pref; Ep. 54) which he defines only in the stipulative sense.

<sup>68</sup> It could be admitted, of course, that in the ninth *Epistle*, Spinoza speaks of the equivalence of *substance* with being whereby — to the extent that the terms ‘substance’ and ‘God’ are used interchangeably — it is simply concluded that God is the final referent. However, it must be also admitted that our result in this case remains rather vacuous.

<sup>69</sup> As to what, in turn, is meant by power, that I shall come to shortly.

<sup>70</sup> Aside from the fact that, in any event, the conceptual equivalence of ‘being,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘essence’ has been established here, at least in outline, I can justify this reduction of terms on the basis of Spinoza’s more substantive treatment of ‘essence’ as a useful philosophical concern, in contrast to the terms ‘being’ which, as already noted, Spinoza rejects, and ‘nature,’ which he does not explicate in itself.

<sup>71</sup> Here, let us point out that the meaning of “essence” is not altogether clear and, attempt to supply an account of the notion so far as Spinoza understands it. Let us begin by examining the nature of an essence and, then, the relation obtaining between the essence of a thing and the definition thereof. Spinoza defines essence as follows:

“I say that there pertains to the essence of a thing that which, when granted, the thing is necessarily posited, and by the annulling of which the thing is necessarily annulled; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and, visa-versa, that which cannot be or be conceived without the thing (E.II.D2; Cf. KV.II.Pref.)”

It is, first, to be remarked, that Spinoza’s wording here is somewhat ambiguous. When he speaks of that which “pertains to essence” does he mean simply what it is to *be* an essence? Or, alternatively, is that which “pertains to” essence something other than that essence in itself? Furthermore, how are we to construe the relation which this locution designates in light of other similar locutions that appear throughout Spinoza’s work such as ‘expression,’ ‘constitution,’ and ‘involvement?’

Let us begin with the last of these questions. It is my view (and here, I am indebted to Sherry Deveaux’s excellent book: Deveaux, S. 2007. *The Role of God in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. London: Continuum International

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Publishing Group. See Ch. 6 in particular) that all such phrases indicate one and the same state of affairs. Thus, we find, for example, that:

1. Expression is interchangeable with constitution:
  - a. “By attribute,” Spinoza states, “I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as *constituting* its essence (E.I.Def.4).”
  - b. “By God” he continues, “I mean...substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which *expresses* eternal and infinite essence (E.I.Def.6).” Thus, when something constitutes the essence of a substance, it expresses the essence of that substance.
2. Expression is interchangeable with pertinence:
  - a. “By the attributes of God,” says Spinoza, “must be understood that which *expresses* the essence of the Divine substance (E.I.Def.) that is, that which *pertains to* substance (E.I.Prop.19).”
  - b. Here, Spinoza refers back to E.I.Def.4 but replaces ‘constitution’ with ‘expression.’ In turn, expression is treated as a synonym of pertinence. Thus, when something pertains to the essence of a substance, it expresses or constitutes it.
3. Finally, expression is interchangeable with involvement:
  - a. Spinoza states both that “the true definition of each thing *involves and expresses* nothing beyond the nature of the thing defined” and that “no definition *involves or expresses* a fixed number of individuals (E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2).” Involvement is, therefore, construed as synonymous with expression (It could also be noted that ‘involvement’ may also be considered synonymous with ‘containment.’ It is claimed that “the concept that we have of our thought *does not involve, or does not contain* the necessary existence of the thought (CM.I.Ax.10).” So, when one thing contains another, it involves it. I opt to leave this synonymy out of consideration for two reasons. First, the locution is rather peripheral, appearing *only* at this point in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. Second, the notion of ‘containment’ is evidently an analogical one and the reader can easily imagine instances in which one thing is contained another and does not ‘express,’ ‘involve,’ or ‘pertain to’ it in any meaningful way; the gift I give vis-a-vis the box in which I place it, for example)..

Thus, to express something — an essence, for instance — is also to constitute it, to pertain to it, or to involve it. Does this mean, however, that what expresses, constitutes, pertains to, or involves something *is* that thing? Is that which so “relates” to an essence nothing but that essence itself? I believe that this is, indeed, the case.

If an attribute expresses, constitutes, pertains to, or involves substance — and, so I have just indicated, it does indeed — and it be acknowledged that a relation of identity obtains between substance and attribute, it follows that to express, constitute, pertain to, or involve something is to *be* that thing. It would, then, follow in turn that the definition we have been examining determines not merely what “pertains to” essence as if what “pertains” is something other than essence but, rather, essence itself.

As noted above, Spinoza defines an attribute as follows: “that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence (E.I.Def.4).” This definition is later glossed as follows: “there can be nothing external to the intellect,” says Spinoza, “through which several things can be distinguished from one another except *substances or, which is the same thing, ... the attributes and the affections of substances* (E.I.Prop.4).” Setting aside what does or does not exist outside of the intellect, from here we clearly see that the attributes of substance are “the same thing” as substance itself. Likewise does Spinoza deploy the following locutions:

1. “God is eternal, *or* all God’s attributes are eternal (E.I.Prop.19).”
2. “God, *or* all of God’s attributes, are immutable (E.I.Prop.20).”
3. “By *Natura Naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature, *or* from any of God’s attributes (E.I.Prop.29.Schol.).”

Granting, again, the prior assumption that the word “or [*sive*]” denotes identity, God and his attributes are evidently construed as amounting to one and the same thing. Similarly, to the extent that ‘nature’ is equivalent — so I demonstrated transitively above — to ‘essence,’ ‘being,’ and so on, does the third passage propose the identity of God’s nature, the nature or essence of substance, with its attributes. *That* a relation of identity obtains between substance and its attributes is, therefore, simply beyond dispute even if the precise nature of this identity is the subject of a great deal thereof.

As such, to the extent that Spinoza’s account of the the relation between substance and attribute can be construed as emblematic of any relation in which expression, constitution, pertinence to, or involvement is in question — and I see no reason to doubt this — it follows that to express, constitute, pertain to, or involve

And what is the power of a thing? It is its causal effectiveness. Without venturing into an analysis of Spinoza's doctrine of conatus, which I have already addressed to an extent in an earlier chapter, let us point out that in his demonstration to E.III.Prop.7, Spinoza adopts power as an equivalent to conatus and designates both as the actual essence of things. If conatus is an endeavor to persist in being, so too power. Power in other words, is a sort of endeavor.

Conceiving of power as a sort of endeavor, we can link it to Spinoza's other, somewhat more oblique account of the essence of things. In closing the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza makes a claim which I believe shall supply us with the grounds for a reply to this question. He asserts that "nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow."<sup>72</sup> Stated affirmatively: all existing things have natures, essences, from which effects follow. Every essence is efficacious.<sup>73</sup> To be an essence is to produce or to operate as the adequate cause — as a cause, that is "whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived"<sup>74</sup> through [it] alone"<sup>75</sup> or, what is the same, through its "nature"<sup>76</sup> — with respect to certain effects. It is — where action is understood strictly in terms of adequate causation<sup>77</sup> — to be an active thing. In brief, if the

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something is, as I have suggested, to *be* that thing.

As noted above, the manner in which we are to construe Spinoza's — above quoted — definition concerning essence (E.II.Def.2) hinged on the precise sense in which the locution "pertains to" is to be interpreted. In consequence of the foregoing deduction it can be concluded that what "pertains to" an essence is nothing other than that essence itself; for, to pertain to something is to be that thing. Therefore, the passage in question operates *not* as a definition of what pertains to essence as if what pertains to essence distinct from it, but, rather, as a definition of essence in itself. The essence of something is that which, when given or conceived, the thing, likewise, is given or conceived. Or, in the contrapositive, the essence of something is that which, when *not* given or *not* conceived, the thing, likewise, is neither given nor conceived.

<sup>72</sup> E.I.Prop.36.

<sup>73</sup> That there could be an essence *not* of an existing thing evidently conflicts with our definition of 'essence,' If an essence is that which, when given, the thing of which it is the essence is given, what could possibly be meant by an essence of no given thing, the essence of nothing? Unless nothing is judged a thing, which is patently absurd, the essence of nothing is likewise nothing; hence, not an essence.

<sup>74</sup> Or, as the formula appears in the following definition, "understood."

<sup>75</sup> E.III.Def.1.

<sup>76</sup> Thus is it worded, again, in the definition that follows.

<sup>77</sup> E.III.Def.2. Several commentators have interpreted this, simply, as the definition of power in itself. See Della Rocca, M. 2010. Getting his hands dirty: Spinoza's Criticism of the Rebel. In *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide.*, eds. Y. Y. Melamed, M. A. Rosenthal, 168-191. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.

essence of a thing is its power and power is an endeavor and, to that extent a mode of action, then the essence of a thing is its activity; essence, adequate causation, and activity are coextensive.

Let us push the matter somewhat further by noting that, for Spinoza, there is a distinction to be made neither between being and having, nor having and exercising power. A thing *is* the power it has. Therefore is that power necessarily exercised.

A thing *is* the power it has. In the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza asserts that “the ability to exist is power” or the converse, that “to be able to not exist is weakness.”<sup>78</sup> To be able not to exist is not an ability but inability in the strictest sense; it is the negation of ability. In contrast, the fact of existence is not a “state,” not a passive condition of being antecedent to the changes which an existing thing may undergo over the course of its duration but, rather, precisely an ability. The ability, that is, to “persist in being” proper to “each thing insofar as it is in itself.”<sup>79</sup> If, therefore, non-existence is inability, the negation of ability, and existence is the capacity to persist in being, is the constitutive power of the thing which exists, its range of activity or adequate causality, then it cannot be that a thing *is* and subsequently *has* power. There obtains no distinction between being and having; a thing *is its power*.<sup>80</sup>

To claim otherwise would be to suggest that a distinction obtains between what *can be done* and what is *done in fact*, between what *may happen* and what *is happening* (or *does*

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<sup>78</sup> E.I.Prop.11.Dem.

<sup>79</sup> E.III.Prop.6.

<sup>80</sup> As Steven Barbone has pointed out (Barbone, S. L. 1997. Spinoza on Community, Affectivity, and Life Values. Ph.D., Marquette University; Barbone, S. L. 2002. What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza? In *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*. eds. O. Koistinen, J. Biro, 89-112. New York: Oxford U. Press; Barbone, S.L. 1999. “Power in the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus.” Bagley, P.J. ed. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 91-110) Spinoza, in fact, employs two terms, each of which has been translated into idiomatic English by the word “power” but which — albeit conceptually related — are not synonymous in the original Latin. These are *potentia* and *potestas*. The term ‘*potentia*’ so he argues, denotes “an active property or capacity (Ibid. p. 99)” internal to some object, which it exercises in order “to act or to operate (Ibid. p. 101).” In contrast, Barbone informs us, the term ‘*potestas*’ is said to denote external authority, command, or control (Ibid. p. 102); it pertains, in other words, to the actual effect which something has on other things.

*happen*), which is but another way of expressing the distinction between what is contingent and what is actual. This, however, would imply the reality of contingent things — that is, things merely possible but never actualized — which Spinoza expressly denies. Neither the contingent nor the possible, he asserts, consist in more than “a failure of our intellect.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the power with respect to which a thing *can*, or *is able* — its *potentia* — can be none other than the power with respect to which it *does* — its *potestas*. *Potentia* and *potestas* are one and the same thing viewed from two different perspectives:<sup>82</sup> from that of the actor and from the perspective of the acted-upon. There is, therefore, no difference between *having* power and *exercising* it; there is no store of power in excess of that force which is actually deployed.

As such, Spinoza conceives that power of which anything is constituted, its *conatus*, as an *endeavor* to persist in being.<sup>83</sup> Being is not a condition, but a practice, an activity and, as such, an application of force. A thing is inseparable, or rather, indistinguishable, from the power it exerts. Thus, concerning the supposed “distinction between things and the conatus by which they endeavor to persevere” does Spinoza express himself as follows:

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<sup>81</sup> CM.I.3. The possible, he says, is that of which an efficient cause is understood but not whether the latter is determined. The contingent is that to the essence of which we attend but not to its cause (CM.I.3), this being unknown (E.I.Prop.33.Schol. Alternatively, the contingent is that concerning the essence of which we know not whether a contradiction is involved (ibid.). Both, therefore, simply involve ignorance as to the cause or causes of some object of thought. Adequate knowledge of these causes, however, would yield affirmation either of its necessity or its impossibility, for, as Spinoza maintains:

1. “All things have necessarily followed from the nature of God (E.I.Prop.33.Dem., in reference to E.I.Prop.16).”
2. “All things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way (E.I.Prop.29)” so that:
  - a. If things were or were determined to act in a different fashion, God's nature, too, would be otherwise.
  - b. This different nature would, likewise have had to exist (E.I.Prop.33.Dem., in reference to E.I.Prop.11), thus amounting to another God, which is absurd (E.I.Prop.14.Cor.1).
3. Thus, “things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case (E.I.Prop.33).”

We conclude from this that if something is in fact it is by necessity and, if not, it is impossible; there is no thing which exists in a state either of contingency or possibility of being or doing.

<sup>82</sup> I have already discussed this in an earlier chapter.

<sup>83</sup> E.III.Prop.6.

“Motion has force to persevere in its own state. This force is surely nothing else than motion itself, the fact that the nature of motion is such as it is. For, if I say that in this body [A] there is nothing else than a certain quantity of motion, from this it clearly follows that, as long as I am attending to the body [A], I must always say that the body is moving. For if I were to say that it is losing its force of motion, I am necessarily ascribing to it something else beyond what we supposed in the hypothesis, something that is causing it to lose its nature.”<sup>84</sup>

The force of motion is nothing other than the event of motion itself. Likewise is, the power, the effective force, whereby a thing persists in being, produces and reproduces itself within its environment, reduces or fails to reduce other things to its own existential momentum, nothing other than the thing itself. Therefore, we find that the essence of a thing is that thing, its essence is its power, and that power is necessarily exercised. There is, to things, no neutral substratum; each thing coincides with the active expression of its power.<sup>85</sup> There is no being in excess of doing; or, as Spinoza suggests in E.I.Prop.28, a thing is said to “exist or be determined to act” interchangeably.

If this is true of things in general, is it equally true of God? When, in other words,

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<sup>84</sup> CM.I.6. Cf. “By conatus to motion we understand, not some thought, but that a part of matter is so situated and stirred to motion that it would in fact be going in some direction if it were not impeded by any cause (PPC.III.Def.3).”

<sup>85</sup> Here, we may point to an analogy in Nietzsche. Just, he asserts, as we are apt to separate “lightning from its flash” and to “take the latter... for the operation of a subject called lightning,” so:

“Popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed — the deed is everything (Nietzsche, F. 1989. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. New York: Random House. First essay, §13. Many instances of the same, or similar, expressions might be culled from Nietzsche’s published and unpublished work. A full account, however, would take us far astray of our present aims).”

Indeed, “the deed is everything” in the most literal sense, for being exceeds not power. As for the affinity between Nietzsche and Spinoza suggested here, the enthusiastic — if often qualified — reception of the latter by the former (Nietzsche, F. 1977. *Postcard to Overbeck*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books) is a fact which has only recently attracted attention.

Spinoza asserts that that “God's power is his very essence,”<sup>86</sup> can we take him at his word? I think that we can. To do so, it will be necessary to demonstrate the necessary intersection of this assertion with the definition<sup>87</sup> of God given by Spinoza at the beginning of the first part of the *Ethics* — again, that God is “an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.”<sup>88</sup> These two passages, which more or less flank the first part of the *Ethics*, lend it a dialectical circularity whereby the ultimate and implicit sense of the latter is expressed and realized in the former.

Let us first note, as A. R. Caponigri explains, that while it is Spinoza's definition of God which constitutes the centerpiece of his presentation so far as the definitions that precede it “prepare for it and are summed up in it” and “the two subsequent definitions follow from it and specify it,”<sup>89</sup> it is, in fact, his definition of substance that grounds the theoretical apparatus in its entirety. The elements of his definition of God are nothing more than that which, in analysis, he finds to characterize substance as such; thus Caponigri continues, is it “almost universally stated... that the basic idea in Spinoza's exposition is that of substance.”

Nonetheless, Caponigri continues, “weight must also be given to the fact that he starts with the definition of ‘*causa sui*.’”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, as he later goes on to assert, Spinoza proceeds on the basis of a “concealed” — or, perhaps better put, implicit — account of substance according to which it is defined as “that which is *causa sui*.”<sup>91</sup> If this, indeed, be the case, we would be compelled to reposition, as it were, the center of conceptual gravity at play in the *Ethics* and to

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<sup>86</sup> E.I.Prop.34.

<sup>87</sup> On the question of definitions, see appendix to this chapter.

<sup>88</sup> E.I.Def.6.

<sup>89</sup> Caponigri, A.R. 1963. *A History of Western Philosophy: Philosophy from the Renaissance to the Romantic Age*. Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame press. pp. 210-211.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Caponigri, A.R. 1963. p. 213.

suggest that Spinoza's definition of *causa sui* is well-placed, constituting, as it then would, the true crux of his speculative mechanism.

In any event, we see, first, that in the definition of God, it is the determination of substance that is operative and, second, that conceiving the latter involves elaborating its structural relationship with the notion of the *causa sui*. Thus, if headway is to be made in the path that leads from the definition of God to its essence, these two features of Spinoza's conceptual reticulation must be thoroughly explicated.

Let us start with the definition of substance. "By substance," says Spinoza, "I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed."<sup>92</sup> As many commentators have noted, this account is — for the most part — not original in itself but, rather, echoes a trope repeated innumerable times up to and including the Early Modern period. It is, however, distinct from its conceptual prototypes in important respects that demand explication. To observe how this is the case, let us avoid digression through the historical development of this notion<sup>93</sup> and attend, rather, to Spinoza's most immediate intellectual forbearer; namely, Descartes.

In his synopsis of the *Meditations*, Descartes appears to have determined substance in relation to a distinction between "impurity" and "purity," intending thereby the mereological difference between the composite whole really reducible to its parts and wholes the partition of which is merely ideal respectively,<sup>94</sup> and thus implying that "substance" in the proper sense is to

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<sup>92</sup> E.I.Def.3.

<sup>93</sup> For this, see Wolfson, H. A. 1934. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. Vol. 1. New York: Meridian. ch. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Descartes states that "body, taken in the general sense, is a substance, so that it too never perishes. But the human body, in so far as it differs from other bodies, is simply made up of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents of this sort; whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a *pure substance* (Descartes, R. 1984. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. Trans.



be conceived in terms of its indivisibility.<sup>95</sup> However, this account is not reproduced elsewhere. It is, furthermore, evidently deployed in service of a further distinction between the ephemeral and the sempiternal and, therefore, in support of Descartes' aborted design to demonstrate the immortality of the soul.<sup>96</sup> As such, it can, in my view, be safely ignored — at least for present purposes.

Proceeding, then, to Descartes' definition of substance as given in his replies to the second set of objections to the *Meditations*, we find that “this term applies to everything *in which* whatever we perceive<sup>97</sup> immediately resides, as in a subject, or to every thing *by means of which* whatever we perceive exists.”<sup>98</sup> Here, that counts for substance which functions as *either* the *substratum* in which some object of perception inheres *or its cause* respectively. The manifest distinction between these two constructions of the relation that obtains of a substance vis-a-vis those properties of which it is the substance is left undecided because both express, for Descartes, the same fundamental notion. This, we begin to infer from his subsequent assertion

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Cottingham, J.; Stoothoff, R.; Murdoch, D. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. p. 10).”

<sup>95</sup> Earlier in the same paragraph, he articulates the same distinction as follows “we cannot understand a body except as being divisible, while by contrast we cannot understand a mind except as being indivisible (ibid. p. 9).” Clearly, a distinction is to be drawn between “body” and “a body;” presumably it is that by the former Descartes intends extended substance.

<sup>96</sup> As Alan Nelson notes, the account serves primarily to suggest that “the mind... need not be (in fact is not) corrupted with the divisible human body (Nelson, A. 2014. Descartes' Dualism and its Relation to Spinoza's Metaphysics. In *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations.*, ed. G. Cunniff, 277-289. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press).” Thus does the quoted passage conclude “It follows from this that while the body can very easily perish, the mind [or the soul, for I make no distinction between them] is immortal by its very nature (ibid.).” Evidence that Descartes understood immortality to hinge on indivisibility can be gleaned from Descartes' second set of replies “the final death of the body depends solely on a division or change of shape. Now we have no convincing evidence or precedent to suggest that the death or annihilation of a substance like the mind must result from such a trivial cause as a change in shape, for this is simply a mode, and what is more not a mode of the mind, but a mode of the body which is really distinct from the mind. Indeed, we do not even have any convincing evidence or precedent to suggest that any substance can perish. And this entitles us to conclude that the mind, in so far as it can be known by natural philosophy, is immortal (Descartes, R. 1984. Author's Replies to the Second Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 109).” See Prendergast, T.L. 1993. “Descartes: Immortality, Human Bodies, and God's Absolute Freedom,” *The Modern Schoolman*. LXXI: 17-46; Fowler, C.F. 1999. *Descartes on the Human Soul: Philosophy and the Demands of Christian Doctrine*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. pp. 276-300.

<sup>97</sup> In the same paragraph, Descartes clarifies “whatever we perceive” as follows. “By 'whatever we perceive' is meant any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea (Descartes, R. 1984. Author's Replies to the Second Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 114, Def. 5).”

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

that “two substances are said to be really distinct when each of them can exist apart from the other.”<sup>99</sup> If such be the case, it is to be deduced that the defining characteristic of substance is its “existence apart.” Thus does Descartes express himself as follows:

1. In a later reply: “the notion of a substance is just this — that it can exist by itself; that is without the aid of any other substance.”<sup>100</sup>
2. And ultimately, in the *Principles of Philosophy*: “by substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.”<sup>101</sup>

Whether substance inheres in<sup>102</sup> or is caused by nothing but itself, it exists independently of all other things and it is precisely this independence of being, for Descartes, that makes it a substance.

Before explicating the significant difference differences which separate Descartes’ account of substance from Spinoza’s, let us first observe their similarity. According to the definition supplied by Spinoza and reproduced above, substance is that which “is in itself and is conceived through itself.” If we recall the so-called ‘causal axiom,’ which holds that “the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause,”<sup>103</sup> and note the customary assumption of functional equivalence, for Spinoza, between ‘knowledge’ and

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Def. 10

<sup>100</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Author's Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 159. Similarly, does he state on the following page that “it is of the nature of substances that they should mutually exclude one another (ibid).”

<sup>101</sup> Descartes, R. 1985. Principles of Philosophy, Part One: The Principles of Human Knowledge. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. Trans. Cottingham, J.; Stoothoff, R.; Murdoch, D. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. §51, p. 210.

<sup>102</sup> We see that Descartes continued to employ language suggestive of inherence as late as 1648; “As well as the attribute through which we specify the substance,” he says in his conversation with Burman, “we must think of the substance that supports or has that attribute (Descartes, R. Conversation with Burman. Trans. Bennett, J. Available from <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/descartes1648.pdf>).”

<sup>103</sup> E.I.Ax.4

‘conception,’<sup>104</sup> we infer that when he speaks of the latter in his definition of substance, causation is implied.<sup>105</sup> Spinoza’s definition of substance, therefore, gestures toward both features of independence as entailed in the Cartesian definition.

While the two accounts do not necessarily differ significantly in substance, so to speak, they diverge tremendously in the consistency with which they would be applied. Following the definition of substance Descartes supplies in his *Principles of Philosophy*, he introduces the following equivocation:

“There is only one substance which can be said to depend on no other thing *whatsoever*, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God’s concurrence.<sup>106</sup> Hence, the term substance does not apply *univocally*... to God and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures.”<sup>107</sup>

Though, by Descartes’ own admission, his definition strictly interpreted produces the conclusion that God is the only substance, he nevertheless upholds the Scholastic distinction between the

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<sup>104</sup> See Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984. p. 128; Della Rocca, M. 1996. Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza. Oxford: Oxford U. Press. p. 11; Jarret, C. "The Logical Structure of Spinoza’s Ethics, Part 1." *Synthese* 37 (1978). p. 29; Melamed, Yitzhak Y. "Spinoza on Inherence, Causation, and Conception." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012). p. 367; Wilson, M.D. "Spinoza’s Causal Axiom (Ethics I, Axiom 4)." Yovel, Yirmiyahu (ed). *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. Leiden: Brill, 1991. 133-160. p. 163, fn. 27. For an alternate view, see Morrison, J. 2013. "The Relation Between Conception and Causation in Spinoza’s Metaphysics." *Philosophers’ Imprint* 13. pp. 1-17.

<sup>105</sup> Of course, further discussion is warranted here insofar as the doctrine of *causa sui* is, therefore, implied in the very definition of substance. I shall, however, withhold comment until after other relevant matters have been addressed.

<sup>106</sup> That is, God’s *continuous* concurrence. As Descartes notes in the *Meditations*, “a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment — that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one,” and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light (Descartes, R. 1984. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 33).”

<sup>107</sup> Descartes, R. 1985. *Principles of Philosophy, Part One: The Principles of Human Knowledge*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. p. 210.

*ens increatum*, or *esse Dei*, and the *ens creatum*.<sup>108</sup> He maintains, in other words, that the *ens creatum* is, in some special sense, a substance though it ultimately falls short of his measure:

“In the case of created things, some... cannot exist without other things, while some need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist. We make this distinction by calling the latter ‘substances’ and the former, ‘qualities’ or ‘attributes’ of those substances.”<sup>109</sup>

Descartes retains the criterion of independence, but alters its sense by interpolating an implied term. That a substance must “depend on no other thing for its existence” means, in this modified case, that it must “depend on no other [*created*] thing for its existence.”<sup>110</sup> The formal structure of his definition undergoes no change while its terms are altered significantly in implicit content; the definition becomes ambiguous.

The boundary which Descartes draws between divine and mundane substances hinges, I submit, on a more fundamental distinction which, if it does not establish their real difference — and, indeed, it does not — it does distinguish the sense in which each constitutes a substance according to Descartes. In the *First Set of Objections* Johannes Caterus articulates two ways in which something can be said to exist from itself:

1. “In the first, positive, sense, it means 'from itself as from a cause'. What derives existence from itself in this sense bestows its own existence on itself.”

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<sup>108</sup> See, for e.g. Suarez, F. *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. Retrieved 08/29/2016 from <http://www.catedraldevalencia.es/castellote/d28.htm>. Disputatio 28, §14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> See Descartes’ letter of August 1641 to Hyperaspites, “nothing,” he says there “can exist without the concurrence of God than that there can be no sunlight without the sun. There is no doubt that if God withdrew his concurrence, everything which he has created would immediately go to nothing; because all things were nothing until God created them and lent them his concurrence. This does not mean that they should not be called substances, because when we call a created substance self-subsistent we do not rule out the divine concurrence which it needs in order to subsist. We mean only that it is the kind of thing that can exist without any other created thing; and this is something that cannot be said about the modes of things, like shape and number (Descartes, R. 1991. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 3. p. 193).”

2. “But in the second, negative sense, ‘from itself’ simply means ‘not from another.’”<sup>111</sup>

From the wording of Descartes’ definition of substance we see that it is ‘from itself’ in the negative sense; it depends on no other thing and is, therefore, ‘not from another.’<sup>112</sup> Caterus goes on to explain that this is “the way in which everyone takes the phrase [i.e. ‘from itself’]”<sup>113</sup> — whether in reference to God or otherwise. He assumes that Descartes understands it similarly and deploys this assumption in refutation of his correspondent’s claim that a thing which is *causa sui* will naturally endow itself with all perfections and, therefore, be infinite.<sup>114</sup>

As we know, however, this expectation is “spectacularly violated.”<sup>115</sup> In his reply to Caterus, Descartes, in fact, rejects the negative sense of the phrase ‘from itself’ and asserts that it “comes merely from the imperfection of the human intellect and has no basis in reality.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, he says, while “we can understand the phrase in the negative sense” when we ascribe self-causation to God — “in which case the meaning will simply be that he has no cause”<sup>117</sup> — the fact that:

“God derives his existence from himself, or has no cause apart from himself depends... on the real immensity of his power; hence... we are quite entitled to think that in a sense he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence

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<sup>111</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. First Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 68.

<sup>112</sup> Descartes affirms this in his replies to Arnauld’s criticism. “If a finite thing,” he states “is said to derive its existence ‘from itself,’ this can only be understood in a negative sense (Descartes, R. 1984. Author’s Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 165).”

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> I.e. Descartes’ argument in the third of his *Meditations*.

<sup>115</sup> Miner, R. C. 2002. The Dependence of Descartes’ Ontological Proof Upon the Doctrine of Causa Sui. *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 58: 873-86.

<sup>116</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Author’s Replies to the First Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 79. The extreme novelty of this position can be gleaned from Jean-Luc Marion’s discussion in chapter two of Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism, where he points out that Descartes, for “the first time, announces the hypothesis of a positive aseity” in an “astounding” series of texts, and notes, therefore, that in the sense Descartes intended it, the term *causa sui* essentially constitutes a neologism (Marion, J. L. 1999. *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*. Trans. J. L. Kosky. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. p. 116).

<sup>117</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Author’s Replies to the First Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 79.

that he derives his existence from himself in the positive sense.”<sup>118</sup>

In contrast to things created which may, in some limited sense — albeit one which has no real basis — be said to exist ‘from themselves’ in the negative sense, God is said to act with respect to himself as from an efficient cause, to exist from himself in the positive and, for Descartes, proper sense.

In the *Fourth Set of Objections*, Antoine Arnauld enumerates the many difficulties to which Descartes’ position gives rise. This, he does in two stages. First, he addresses the “manifest contradiction”<sup>119</sup> entailed, as he sees it, in the general thesis that something might constitute its own efficient cause.

On Arnauld’s analysis, effective causation implies two distinct but interrelated disjunctions:

1. A temporal disjunction: an efficient cause, in the normative sense, is prior in time to its effect. If the ‘effective causation’ operative in a thing which exists from itself is of this sort, the notion is patently absurd, for it involves conceiving “a thing's receiving existence yet at the same time possessing that existence prior to the time when we conceive that it received it...No one gives what he does not have” already.<sup>120</sup>
2. A disjunction of relative terms: “every cause is the cause of an effect,” he says, “and every effect is the effect of a cause. Hence there is a mutual relation between cause and effect. But a relation must involve two terms.”<sup>121</sup>

After articulating these general objections, Arnauld proceeds to supply three additional reasons as to why the positive sense of self-causation is especially problematic when it comes to “the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p. 80.

<sup>119</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Fourth Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 146.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 147.

<sup>121</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Fourth Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 147.

particular case of God.”<sup>122</sup>

3. Even granting Descartes’ argument from temporal concurrence, effective causation nevertheless implies a *temporal* present while, so Arnauld avers, “contained within the idea of an infinite being is the fact that the duration of this being is infinite.” It cannot, therefore, be thought ever to exist unless it is conceived always to have existed and eternally to exist such that “it is pointless to ask why this being should continue in existence.”<sup>123</sup>
4. Along the same lines, while Descartes’ argument from temporal concurrence dispatches with the temporal disjunction implied in effective causation — God can, in other words, constitute his own cause without *creating* himself — it suggests, nonetheless, that God “does in reality keep himself in existence”<sup>124</sup> or *preserve* himself. This, according to Arnauld, involves two difficulties:
  - a. Preservation, he says, is the “continual re-creation of something” and, therefore, “presupposes original creation.”<sup>125</sup>
  - b. Preservation implies potentiality, “whereas an infinite being is pure actuality.”<sup>126</sup> without any potentiality.
5. “We look,” Arnauld maintains, “for the efficient cause of something only in respect of its existence, not in respect of its essence.” Just as, he argues, inquiry as to “why a triangle has its three angles equal to two right angles” is answered not in terms of an efficient cause, but with the assertion “that this is the eternal and immutable nature of a triangle,”

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 148.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

so too, “if anyone asks why God exists... we should not try to find either in God or outside him any efficient cause” but answer, rather, that “it belongs to the essence of an infinite being that it exists.”<sup>127</sup>

The response to these criticisms revolves around the contention that while Arnauld’s assertions “can all be accepted if they are taken in the sense which *he* intends,”<sup>128</sup> this sense does not conform to that conception of the notion under examination under which Descartes operates. The crux of Descartes’ argument involves the contention that wherein essence and existence coincide, so too formal and efficient causality, whereby it is inferred that the latter is to be conceived, in this case, in a rather unique fashion.

“I never said,” he declares, “that God preserves himself by some positive force, in the way in which created things are preserved by him; I simply said that the immensity of his power or essence, in virtue of which he does not need a preserver, is a positive thing.”<sup>129</sup> It is, he says, “as positive as

can be” such that “the reason or cause why God needs no cause is a positive reason or cause.”<sup>130</sup>

By affirming the positivity of God’s infinite power, Descartes is freed to assert that “between ‘efficient cause’ in the strict sense and ‘no cause at all,’ there is a third possibility, namely the ‘positive essence of a thing,’ to which the concept of an efficient cause can be extended.”<sup>131</sup>

This claim enables Descartes to deflect each of Arnauld’s “blows”<sup>132</sup> rather deftly, the sequence of which I will recap in corresponding order.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. Author’s Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 162.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 165.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p. 167.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p. 162.



1. Priority in time “can be deleted from the concept while leaving the notion of an efficient cause intact... [for] the notion of a cause is applicable only during the time when it is producing its effect.”<sup>133</sup> Thus can the first of Arnauld’s disjunctions be parried.
2. While “a cause which is not distinct from its effects is not,” as Arnauld noted, “an efficient cause in the strict sense... it does not, however, follow that such a cause is in no sense a positive cause that can be regarded as *analogous* to an efficient cause.” This, asserts Descartes “is all that my argument requires;” and thus can the second disjunction be averted likewise.

Because Descartes maintains not that “God preserves himself by some positive force in the way in which created things are preserved by him” but that “the immensity of his power... in virtue of which he does not need a preserver, is a positive thing,” he “can readily admit that God is not the efficient cause of himself and that he *does not preserve himself* by any positive power or by continuously re-creating himself.”<sup>134</sup> Thus:

3. If God’s self-production is not continuous, it does not take place in a temporal present.
4. God does not, therefore, “preserve” or “re-create” himself such that his self-production presupposes neither original creation nor potentiality.

Finally, Descartes dispatches the fifth and last of Arnauld’s objections as follows:

5. “Although,” he says, “we do not ask for an efficient cause with respect to something’s essence, we can nevertheless ask for an efficient cause with respect to something’s existence; but in the case of God, essence is not distinct from existence; hence we *can* ask

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 167. This argument was already made in Descartes’ first replies (Descartes, R. 1984. *Author’s Replies to the First Set of Objections*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 78). Caterus had noted this fact (Descartes, R. 1984. *Fourth Set of Objections*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 147).

<sup>134</sup> Descartes, R. 1984. *Author’s Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 165.

for the efficient cause in the case of God.”<sup>135</sup>

Thus, concludes Descartes, “precisely because in the case of God there is no distinction between existence and essence, the formal cause will be strongly analogous to an efficient cause, and hence can be called something close to an efficient cause.”<sup>136</sup> In this manner, according to Descartes, can God be said to exist *causa sui*.

Thus must we likewise conceive substance as such if the general definition which Descartes supplies, based, as it is, on the negative sense of *causa sui*, amounts, similarly, to an “imperfection of the human intellect” that “has no basis in reality.”<sup>137</sup> As I noted above, however, Descartes does not go so far but, instead, deploys this “imperfect” account of substance so as to retain the scholastic distinction between things created and the creating God. Spinoza, in contrast, is more consistent on both accounts. Not only does he collapse the ideological distinction between divine and created substances, affirming what Descartes had seen and yet hesitated to acknowledge, but also — to the extent that this equivocation is made possible by Descartes’ persistence in avowing *causa sui* in its negative sense vis-a-vis things created — did so on the basis of a positive notion of substance in its self-causation.

Jean-Luc Marion has argued that while “Spinoza is generally credited with revolutionizing the definition of God,” his position is “probably not as radical as it at first appears”<sup>138</sup> because he “is no more the creator than the thinker of the *causa sui*.”<sup>139</sup> I grant that Spinoza cannot be credited with innovating this idea.<sup>140</sup> However, I contest the suggestion — if

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p. 170.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> See note 190 above.

<sup>138</sup> Marion, J. L. 2008. “The Idea of God.” In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Eds. M. Ayers, D. Garber. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. p. 280.

<sup>139</sup> Marion, J. L. 1999. *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*. p. 89.

<sup>140</sup> In support of this claim, Marion points to a passage in the TIE which runs as follows: “if something exists in itself, or, *as commonly said*, is a cause of itself, then it should be understood through its essence alone (TIE. 91).”

that is, indeed, what we are to understand here<sup>141</sup> — that he does not think from it but, rather, from the less extreme and more traditional conception of the *causa sui*; namely, the negative sense discredited by Descartes.

It is true that the sequence of formal deductions by means of which Spinoza arrives at the doctrine of *causa sui* produces, in essence, the following result. Substance cannot be the effect of any other thing; thus must it be the cause of itself.<sup>142</sup> It produces, in other words, a negative formulation and gives rise to the impression that Spinoza, indeed, conceived *causa sui* in negative terms.<sup>143</sup> In my view, however, this must be judged nothing more than an impression which belies his actual intention.

First we must not ignore the fact that Spinoza considered this sequence of deductions pedagogically necessary but essentially superfluous. “I do not doubt,” he writes in the scholium to Proposition 8, “that for those who judge things confusedly and are not accustomed to know

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Marion emphasizes the phrase “as is commonly said” and argues as to the implausibility of Spinoza’s having had anyone but Descartes in mind given the ubiquity of Cartesian ideas throughout the TIE (Marion, J. L. 2008. “The Idea of God.” In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. p. 280; Marion, J. L. 1999. *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*. p. 89). As textual evidence goes, I find this rather scant. However, that Spinoza had Descartes in mind — alone or in company with the scholastics — seems neither terribly controversial nor an obstacle to my interpretive objectives.

<sup>141</sup> Let it be noted that I believe this is, indeed, what Marion has in mind. For example, he accuses Spinoza of identifying the doctrine with the ontological argument (Marion, J. L. 1999. *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*. p. 89) traditionally conceived.

<sup>142</sup> Given, he contends, that a substance is “in itself and conceived through itself” such that it involves not the conception of any other thing, from the inverse of Axiom 5 — i.e. that things which “cannot be understood through each other have,” therefore, “nothing in common” — it follows that substances bear neither commonality (E.I.Prop.2) nor, by Axiom 4 — which holds cognition of an effect to involve cognition of its cause — causal relation (E.I.Prop.3; Cf. E.I.Prop.6). Substances are, therefore, not caused by other substances. If it then be considered axiomatic, first, that all things are either “in themselves or in something else (E.I.Ax.1)” and, second, that of all things, none are other than substances or the affections thereof — i.e. things “in something else (E.I.Ax.5);” namely, substance — it follows that there obtains nothing outside of substance. Thus, Spinoza argues, can substance be produced by nothing else (E.I.Prop.6.Cor.) whereby “existence belongs to the nature of substance (E.I.Prop.7),” and it is therefore self-caused (E.I.Prop.7.Dem.).

<sup>143</sup> This is, undoubtedly what Marion had in mind, as he cites, in support of his conception of Spinoza’s treatment of the *causa sui*, the following sources and no more: E.I.Def.1, E.I.Prop.7.Dem., E.I.Prop.24.Dem., and E.I.Prop.25.Schol. (Marion, J. L. 2008. “The Idea of God.” In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. p. 299, note 101). He does not, in other words, examine the relation between infinity and the *causa sui* as understood by Spinoza. This, as I will go on to suggest, leads to conclusions rather different than those at which he gestures.

things through their primary causes it is difficult to grasp the proof of Proposition 7.”<sup>144</sup> If, however, “men were to attend,” he continues, “to the nature of substance,<sup>145</sup> they would not doubt at all the truth of Proposition 7; indeed, this Proposition would be an axiom to all and would be ranked among universally accepted truisms. For by substance they would understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself.”<sup>146</sup> While, therefore, the architecture of Spinoza’s reasoning ends up producing a negative *formulation* of the *causa sui*, when the latter is deduced directly from his definition of substance it becomes evident that this formulation does not match his actual intentions.<sup>147</sup>

If Spinoza maintains that “every definition must be affirmative”<sup>148</sup> and he also regards the self-causation of substance as implicit in this definition, it suggests that self-causation is also conceived affirmatively and not by negation. Moreover, as I demonstrated above, by the essence which a definition is supposed to explicate, Spinoza understands the efficient cause of that which is being defined. As he notes in Epistle 60, the definition of God is no exception:<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2. Proposition 7 states that “existence belongs to the nature of substance.” The proof is rehearsed and elaborated in note 216 above.

<sup>145</sup> If, that is, they were to adopt his own definition of substance.

<sup>146</sup> E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2. Cf. Ep. 34 where it is stated that God’s “necessary existence must be concluded from his true definition.”

<sup>147</sup> That Spinoza acknowledged this sort of discrepancy between expression and intention can be illustrated as follows. Though he demands, for example, demands that “every definition must be affirmative,” he distinguishes, nonetheless, between mere verbal affirmation and affirmation truly conceived. “I am speaking,” he declares in qualifying the requirement, “of intellectual affirmation, disregarding verbal affirmation, which, because of poverty of language, may sometimes be expressed negatively, although understood affirmatively (TIE.96).” An important instance of something understood affirmatively but yet expressed negatively is the notion of in-finity. Because, he maintains, the inverse of this and other similar terms (“uncreated, independent... immortal, etc.) is “much more easily imagined,” it “occurred first to the early generations” who therefore expressed it in the positive, necessitating a negative formulation of the contrary (TIE.89).

<sup>148</sup> TIE.96.

<sup>149</sup> This, in fact, constitutes the basis for his critique of at least one of Descartes definitions. Here, I have in mind Marion’s assertion that Descartes entertained three distinct and less than reconcilable conceptions of God: infinity, *perfection*, and cause of self (Marion, J. L. 2008. *The Idea of God*. In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. p. 281). It is to be noted that R. Miner contests Marion’s assertion that ‘cause of self’ constitutes an independent basis, according to Descartes, for the proof of God’s existence. It is, therefore, to be inferred that he would, likewise, contest Marion’s claim that it constituted a separate conception of God if, as Marion claims, each proof for the existence of God supplies a corollary (ibid. p. 275-76) and distinct or even

“When I define God as a supremely perfect Being, since this definition does not express the efficient cause (for I take it that an efficient cause can be internal as well as external), I shall not be able to extract therefrom all the properties of God, as I can do when I define God as a Being, etc.”<sup>150</sup>

If Spinoza considers his definition superior to Descartes’<sup>151</sup> precisely because it, and not Descartes’, adequately expresses efficient causation, it stands to reason that the notion of the *causa sui* which he entertains and which he believes to be implicit in that definition is akin more to efficient than to formal causation — just as Descartes had conceived it in the first and fourth of his *Replies*.

We have seen that Spinoza supplies a demonstration as to the self-causation of substance though he considers it to be axiomatic granted the definition which he supplies; this procedure is repeated when he takes up the infinity of substance. “Since in fact,” he says, “to be finite is in part a negation<sup>152</sup> and to be infinite is the *unqualified affirmation* of the existence of some nature, it follows from Proposition 7 alone that every substance must be infinite.”<sup>153</sup> If the infinity of substance is implied by Proposition 7 and this proposition is, in turn, implied by the very definition of substance, it follows that the infinity of substance, according to Spinoza, is similarly implied by its definition. If, furthermore, this infinity is conceived in the positive or affirmative

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mutually contradictory conception of it (ibid. p. 278).

<sup>150</sup> Ep. 60. Spinoza’s reference is, of course, to E.I.Def.6.

<sup>151</sup> See the third of his *Meditations*.

<sup>152</sup> In what sense is finitude a negation and infinitude an affirmation despite the grammatical form of the term “infinite,” which appears to suggest the reverse? I would suggest that the author’s letter of June 2, 1674 to his friend Jarig Jelles may supply an answer. There he states that “it is obvious that matter in its totality, considered without limitation, can have no figure, and that figure applies only to finite and determinate bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure, thereby means to indicate simply this, that he apprehends a determinate thing and the manner of its determination. This determination therefore does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; on the contrary, it is its non-being. So since figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation, figure can be nothing other than negation” (Ep.50). In view of a totality, part thereof can only be viewed as a partial negation of the whole.

<sup>153</sup> E.I.Prop.8.Schol.1.

sense — and this is evident not only from Spinoza’s wording here, but also from the fact that he considers the term ‘infinity’ to be among those notions which are expressed negatively but properly conceived only in the positive<sup>154</sup> — it is plausible to conclude only that the self-causation of substance by virtue of which we are to infer its infinity is, likewise, conceived in the positive.

So as further to emphasize the positive character of Spinoza’s conception of the infinite, let us examine the notion in greater detail. Spinoza recognizes two senses in which substance may be considered infinite: infinity ‘in kind’ and ‘absolute’ infinity.<sup>155</sup> What is intended by the former can be inferred from its contrary. “A thing is said to be *finite* in its kind,” says Spinoza, when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature.”<sup>156</sup> In the contrapositive: that is infinite in its kind which *cannot* be “limited by another thing of the same nature.”

So far as infinitude *in kind* does not exclude finitude *of kind*, does not, in other words, entail the supposition that *all kinds* are predicated of that which is said to be infinite, Spinoza advances the additional notion of “absolute infinity” to designate that to the essence of which belongs “whatever expresses essence and *does not involve any negation*” — i.e. “infinite attributes.”<sup>157</sup> Because infinity of this sort constitutes the stronger notion, let us focus our attention there.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> See note 221 above.

<sup>155</sup> These terms appear in texts produced prior to the *Ethics* (the term ‘infinite in its kind’ appears in KV.I.9.2 and KVII.19.5, while the term ‘absolutely infinite’ appears in PPC.I.7.Schol, CM.II.3). However, it was not until writing the *Ethics* that Spinoza clearly spelled out what, precisely, they designate. Therefore, earlier sources will not, here, be considered.

<sup>156</sup> E.I.Def.2

<sup>157</sup> E.I.Def.6.Exp.

<sup>158</sup> More importantly, however, Spinoza’s deduction of infinity in kind vis-a-vis substance follows the same course of reasoning by which he arrived at the *causa sui* from Propositions 1-7 and not in the axiomatic fashion that emerged from his definition of substance alone. Thus, it likewise leans toward a negative conception of the topic while his account of positive infinity follows the axiomatic method and indicates a fundamentally positive conception. To illustrate this point, let us briefly rehearse Spinoza’s proof that substance is infinite in kind.

1. From E.I.Def.3 (“by substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself”) and E.I.Def.5

The attribution of absolute infinity to substance involves the claim that substance may, in the first place, be constituted by *more than one* attribute. It is precisely this implication that Simon de Vries questions in his letter of February, 1663, wherein he challenges his correspondent as follows. “You seem,” he says, “to suppose that the nature of substance is so constituted that it can have several attributes, which you have not yet proved.”<sup>159</sup> Spinoza’s initial reply, is rather lackluster<sup>160</sup> but a far more sophisticated response appears in the *Ethics*.

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(by mode I mean... that which is in something else and is conceived through something else Spinoza infers:

- a. “Substance is by nature prior to its affections (E.I.Prop.1).”
- b. Because there is nothing other than what is in itself or in something else (E.I.Ax.1), there exists naught but substances and modes thereof such that things can be distinguished only by virtue of the one or the other (E.I.Prop.4).
2. From 1a, it follows that substances cannot, in themselves, be distinguished on the basis of their modes. So, they must be distinguished by their attributes which cannot, therefore, be shared (E.I.Prop.5).
3. Because “a thing is finite only by virtue of being limited by another thing of the same nature (E.I.Def.2)” — i.e. a thing constituted by the same attribute — no substance can, therefore, limit any other substance. Hence, no substance can be finite; whereby, every substance is in-finite (E.I.Prop.8).
- a. Because this deduction does not preclude the existence of multiple substances, each constituted by a distinct attribute (or attributes), it demonstrates only that substance is infinite in kind.

Here, the infinity of substance — like its self-causation as demonstrated from Propositions 1-7 — is arrived at by *excluding* the contrary; i.e. the conditions of its finitude. A substance is infinite by default because it cannot be limited. In this sense, Spinoza’s conception of infinity in kind appears in the negative. It is, however, to be pointed out nonetheless that the above-quoted inference of infinity from “unqualified affirmation” appears precisely in a scholium to the deduction just rehearsed, thus suggesting that despite its negative formulation, a positive and affirmative conception was entertained.

<sup>159</sup> Ep.8.

<sup>160</sup> The question had been tackled in his *Short Treatise* in three distinct arguments; the first of these, however, is empirical and does not exclude the possibility that Spinoza’s premises are simply wrong. The third shows only that Nature, or substance, exists necessarily not that it is “perfect” in the sense that it bears an infinity of attributes, and the second is repeated in substance in Ep.9. There, his first argument reads as follows: “every entity is conceived by us under some attribute, and the more reality or being an entity has, the more attributes are to be attributed to it. Hence an absolutely infinite entity must be defined... and so on.” We may represent it in this way:

1. *If* X is conceived to have being *then* X is conceived under least one attribute.
2. *If* X is conceived to have more being *then* X is conceived under more attributes.
3. Therefore, *if* X is conceived to have infinite being, *then* X is conceived under infinite attributes.

The key to understanding this argument — and also why it is unsatisfactory — is simply to recognize its conditional character. It proves only that an absolutely infinite entity must be *defined* as one conceived under infinite attributes. That is, it secures the definition of an absolutely infinite substance; it does not prove that such a thing exists. If this is granted then, of course, an answer to de Vries’ query is easily deductible: because the existence of an absolutely infinite substance entails its being conceived under multiple attributes, it follows as a matter of course that one substance can be conceived as such. As de Vries indicates, however, Spinoza had succeeded in *proving* only that substance is infinite in kind, and had but *defined* infinite substance — a definition he merely elaborates in the argument reproduced here. Ignoring the suggestive equivocation between two senses of the term “infinite” — one proven and, then, deployed to give the appearance of having proven the other — Spinoza’s reasoning simply begs the question it purports to answer.

The same basic problem afflicts Spinoza’s second proof, which reads as follows: “the more attributes I attribute to any entity, the more existence I am bound to attribute to it; that is, the more I conceive it as truly

In essence, Spinoza demonstrates that as “an attribute is that which intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence”<sup>161</sup> it must, like substance,<sup>162</sup> be conceived through itself.<sup>163</sup> If the attributes of substance are conceived through themselves it follows from our earlier discussion that, like substances, they have nothing in common and can, therefore, share no causal relation whatsoever — they neither produce nor limit one another but express the “reality or being” of substance and, as it were, cohere in it “simultaneously.”<sup>164</sup> If, therefore, no reason obtains within substance by virtue of which it could not be constituted by multiple attributes and the nature of substance precludes that this reason be supplied by anything else, Spinoza suggests that the principle of sufficient reason<sup>165</sup> dictates that substance is *in fact* constituted by multiple attributes.

In fact, the same reason dictates that substance is constituted by an *infinite* number of attributes because it disallows the exclusion of *any* attribute, anything which “expresses essence and does not involve any negation,”<sup>166</sup> from substance. Thus is substance absolutely infinite and — to the extent that it is the attribution of substance which constitutes its reality or being such that “the more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes it has”<sup>167</sup> — possessed of infinite

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existent. The exact contrary would be the case if I had imagined a chimera or something of the sort.” We may represent it in this way:

1. *If* X is conceived under more attributes *then* X is conceived as having more being.
2. *If* X is imagined *then* X is conceived as having no being
3. Therefore, *If* X is conceived under more attributes *then* X is not imagined.

This argument simply assumes that X is conceived and not imagined under multiple attributes. If this is granted then, indeed, the more attributes it is conceived under, the more being it will have. If, however, it is not granted, the proof is inconclusive: X may have more being or, alternatively, it may have no being at all. The proof, again, simply restates the question. (See Donagan, A. 1989. *Spinoza*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. p. 78-79.).

<sup>161</sup> E.I.Def.4.

<sup>162</sup> E.I.Def.3.

<sup>163</sup> E.I.Prop.10.

<sup>164</sup> E.I.Prop.10.Schol.

<sup>165</sup> This is outlined by Spinoza in Proposition 11 (Della Rocca, M. 2008. *Spinoza*. Routledge Philosophers. Leiter, B. Ed. New York: Routledge).

<sup>166</sup> E.I.Def.6.Exp.

<sup>167</sup> E.I.Prop.9.



being or infinite reality.

If, therefore, it is granted that “the more reality... the thing expresses the greater the number of its properties,” there follows from the infinite reality of substance an infinite number of properties, “an infinity of things in infinite ways.”<sup>168</sup> As such, to the extent that the infinite attribution of substance necessitates its uniqueness and singularity,<sup>169</sup> whereby any conceivable mode<sup>170</sup> exists only through the one substance and “whatever is, is in God.”<sup>171</sup> If we regard the existence of anything in the positive, and the existence of God or substance encompasses an infinity of things, this existence is infinitely positive. If, therefore, the infinite being of God is infinitely positive, how can the cause by virtue of which it so expresses itself be any less so?

From this result — i.e. from the inference that God’s reality encompasses the infinite totality of things — Spinoza derives an important corollary which indicates yet another avenue by which to support the contention that Spinoza understood the self-causality of substance in the positive sense. It follows, he says, that “God is the *efficient cause* of all things that can come within the scope of the infinite intellect.”<sup>172</sup>

Let it be recalled that Arnauld had argued that God cannot constitute his own efficient

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<sup>168</sup> E.I.Prop.16 & Dem.

<sup>169</sup> E.I.Prop.14. See note 216 above for the reasoning which underlies this conclusion. Though medieval philosophy understood by the oneness of God both his simplicity and his singularity. Spinoza understands only his singularity (E.I.Prop.14.Cor.1). The reason for this is obvious; by ascribing simplicity to God in their conception of divine unity, medieval philosophers intended to negate the substantiality of his “essential attributes.” Thus, for example, does Maimonides maintain that “if... you have a desire ... truly to hold the conviction that God is One... you must understand that God has no essential attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes. Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts (Maimonides, M. Guide for the Perplexed, trans. Friedlander, M. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1904. Book I, ch. 50).” Spinoza explicitly rejects this view and, therefore, addresses the simplicity of God separately under the heading of indivisibility. I will address indivisibility as a feature of God’s being when discussing Spinoza’s arguments for the indivisibility of extension.

<sup>170</sup> I.e. “affections of substance, that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else (E.I.Def.5).”

<sup>171</sup> E.I.Prop.15.

<sup>172</sup> E.I.Cor.1.

cause because efficient causality implies both a temporal and an ontological disjunction between cause and effect. Descartes had contended that in at least one sense — i.e. the infinite power of God whereby he exists — neither disjunction is to be supposed while, yet, the idea of an efficient cause is maintained. From the corollary just quoted I believe it can be shown that Spinoza not only conceived efficient causality along the lines drawn by Descartes, but extended this conception to include *all* efficient causality. Just as he radicalized the Cartesian notion of substance by collapsing the distinction between the *ens increatum* and the *ens creatum*, so too does he push Descartes' already radical notion of efficient causality to further extremes.

If the being and reality of God encompasses the infinite totality of things such that there is nothing outside of God *and* God is the *efficient* cause of all such things — and, moreover, their efficient cause *by virtue of the fact* that they exist in and through him — it is evident that Spinoza assumes efficient causality can and must be said to take place within one and the same thing. Namely, God. Arnauld's assertion that efficient causality necessarily involves the ontological distinction between cause and effect simply cannot be sustained within the framework of Spinoza's system. Moreover, while Descartes had accepted the ontological disjunction in all cases of effective causation excepting that of God, Spinoza extends its rejection to any case whatsoever, for no thing is distinguished from any other thing "in respect of substance."<sup>173</sup> Thus each and every conceivable causal relation occurs without the supposition of any real ontological disjunction of terms.

From the infinity of substance, Spinoza derives its indivisibility for, he says, "a part of substance can mean only finite substance"<sup>174</sup> and thus a contradiction in terms.<sup>175</sup> To consider

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<sup>173</sup> E.II.Lem.1. There, Spinoza supports this claim on the basis of E.I.Prop.5, E.I.Prop.8, and E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>174</sup> E.I.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>175</sup> See also E.I.Prop.12 and E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

substance in any way actually divisible constitutes, therefore — as he says in the so-called “letter on the infinite” addressed to Lodewijk Meyer on the 20th of April, 1663 — “nonsense bordering on madness.”<sup>176</sup> While it is admitted that regard may be had “only to the essence of Modes and not to Nature’s order” whereby their duration may arbitrarily be delimited, perceived as greater or lesser, and divided into parts — conceived, that is, in temporal terms — such occurs only “in abstraction from Substance.”<sup>177</sup> Thus, according to Spinoza, is time “not an affection of things, but a mere mode of thinking... a being of reason”<sup>178</sup> or, more properly put, “a mode of imagining.”<sup>179</sup> Unless, therefore, we are to understand that Spinoza likewise considers effective causation a ‘mode of imagining,’ it follows that, like Descartes, he does not consider temporal disjunction among its essential features. Again, while Descartes had accepted the temporal disjunction in all cases of effective causation excepting that of God, Spinoza extends its rejection to any case whatsoever, for there obtain no *real* temporal distinctions at all.

Rather, substance and all its affections exist in eternity. Prop. 7 — that “existence belongs to the nature of substance” — follows (as I noted above) from the definition of substance<sup>180</sup> by E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2. The same proposition is later rephrased as follows: “*eternity* pertains to the nature of substance (as I have shown in Pr. 7).”<sup>181</sup> It stands to reason that inference of Prop. 7 from the definition of substance by E.I.Prop.8.Schol.2 extends likewise to its alternate locution. Thus the eternity of substance follows likewise from its definition.

Though the overt deduction of the *causa sui* from E.I.Propositions 1-7 produces a

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<sup>176</sup> Ep.12.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> CM.I.4. For more on Spinoza’s conception of time in its relation to infinity and eternity see Rudavsky, T.M. 2000. “Prelude to Modernity.” In *Time Matters: Time, Creation, and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press. pp. 149-174.

<sup>179</sup> Ep.12.

<sup>180</sup> See above.

<sup>181</sup> E.I.Prop.19.Dem.

negative *formulation* of the notion, its inference from the definition of substance — which itself is necessarily conceived in the affirmative — is decidedly positive in character. By formulating an explicitly causal definition of God, Spinoza consistently applies the principle of sufficient reason and excludes not from the existence of God the need for an effective cause. The positive infinity of substance as inferred directly from its definition, whereby its uniqueness or singularity is asserted — and, therefore, the collapse of Descartes' distinction between the *ens increatum* and the *ens creatum* — involves the exclusion of both ontological and temporal disjunction from the notion of effective causation. Moreover, this exclusion is extended to all instances of effective causation; it is not limited to the case of God as it is for Descartes.

It is for these reasons, pace Marion, that I can understand Spinoza to have conceived the causal relation of divine essence vis-a-vis divine existence in no less a positive fashion than Descartes. It is not the case that Spinoza “*in no way* addresses the... logical contradiction in the notion of a cause of itself;”<sup>182</sup> rather, his response — one analogous to but, in fact, more radical than the Cartesian — emerges from the architecture of his system. It is certainly indirect but can ‘in no way’ be said to have been omitted. It is in this and only this fashion that Spinoza ought be interpreted when he states, in his early *Metaphysical Thoughts*, “by life we for our part understand the force through which things persevere in their own being” and continues “the force whereby God *perseveres in his own being* is nothing but his essence, so that those speak best who call God ‘Life.’”<sup>183</sup>

In sum, we find the following. The fundamental characteristic of Spinoza's definition of God is the notion that God is *causa sui*. Everything else follows from that. If “a definition to be

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<sup>182</sup> Marion, J. L. 2008. The Idea of God. In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. p. 280. Cf. Marion, J. L. 2008. *On the Ego and On God: Further Cartesian Questions*. New York: Fordham U. Press. p. 178.

<sup>183</sup> CM.II.7.

regarded as complete... must explain the *inmost essence* of the thing”<sup>184</sup> and the essence, so to speak of this definition is the doctrine of self-causation, then the essence of God given by this definition is self-causation. If, in turn, Spinoza’s notion of the *causa sui* is positive and not negative, implying real and effective causation (that is, activity) and power is the equivalent of adequate causation or activity, it follows, indeed, that the power of God, like that of any other thing, is his essence. That is, E.I.Prop.34 arises necessarily from Spinoza’s definition of God; there is, to things, no neutral substratum; each thing coincides not only with the active expression of its power, but with the active expression of the power of God. Substance is by no means inert; substance eternally becomes in itself.

### C. The Indivisibility of Substance and the Relativity of Things

We have rejected the notion that substance, for Spinoza, is metaphysically inert — that power is the essence of substance, arising from its definition, and that power is necessarily active. In order to examine how this translates into his physics shall have first to consider another necessary implication of the definition of substance which I have already discussed in some detail in the preceding chapter; namely, its infinity and what follows from it.<sup>185</sup>

The infinity of substance involves, so Spinoza explains, its indivisibility. Substance, as we have already observed, is conceivable only as infinite. Therefore, can a part *of substance* “mean only *finite substance*,”<sup>186</sup> for “*all parts are finite*.”<sup>187</sup> This constitutes, of course, a

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<sup>184</sup> TIE.94. This locution appears in Spinoza’s first work and is not altered in any significant way throughout its several iterations in his later writings. Thus does he state in the first part of the *Ethics* that “the true definition of each thing involves and expresses nothing beyond the nature of the thing defined (E.I.Prop.8.Schol.)” and speaks of essence and definition interchangeably in E.I.Prop.33.Schol.1. In his epistles, likewise, does he state that the true definition “is concerned only with the essences of things or the essences of the affections of things (Ep.9) and that it “includes nothing other than the simple nature of the thing defined (Ep.34).”

<sup>185</sup> See chapter 5, n. 97.

<sup>186</sup> E.I.Prop.13.Schol.

contradiction in terms — it implies a sort of finite infinite — therefore, it is impossible.<sup>188</sup> If no conceivable part of substance obtains, it follows, according to Spinoza, that substance has no parts. Thus, he concludes, is substance *necessarily conceived as a continuous thing* and cannot be conceived otherwise.<sup>189</sup>

If substance cannot be conceived otherwise than as infinite and if the infinity of substance implies that it is expressed in all possible attributes in all possible modalities — an “infinity of things in infinite ways”<sup>190</sup> — whereby extension is not excluded from God’s nature<sup>191</sup> but, as one of its attributes,<sup>192</sup> constitutes the essence of substance,<sup>193</sup> it follows that the same is true of extension. The attribute of extension can be conceived only as infinite and as indivisible.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> KV.I.2.

<sup>188</sup> TIE.53.

<sup>189</sup> Ep.12.

<sup>190</sup> E.I.Prop.16.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.Prop.14.Cor.2. There, in fact, he refers to extensions as *either* an attribute *or* an affection of one. In the Scholium to Prop. 15, however, to asserts more conclusively that this corollary demonstrates that extension is an *attribute*. An adapted demonstration that such is the case can be derived from E.II.Prop.1 (which Spinoza recommends in E.II.Prop.2). It would run as follows:

1. Individual bodies are modes expressing the nature of God in a definite and determinate way (E.I.Prop.25.Cor)
2. Thus does there belongs to God an attribute through which these bodies exist and are conceived (E.I.Def.5).
3. Extension is, therefore, is among God’s attributes, expressing his eternal and infinite essence (E.I.Def.6).

<sup>192</sup> E.II.Prop.2.

<sup>193</sup> E.I.Def.4.

<sup>194</sup> Beyond the demonstration as to the indivisibility of substance given above, Spinoza also supplies two additional demonstrations, one on the basis of its independence and the other on the basis of its uniqueness.

1. Proof of the indivisibility of substance on the basis of its independence: In his *Short Treatise*, Spinoza invites us to consider a clock. A clock, he says, is not only “composed of many different wheels, cords, and other things” but, into them, meaningfully disassembled. “Each wheel, cord, etc.” taken separately, he continues, can “be conceived and understood one without another” on the one hand and, on the other “without the composite whole being necessary thereto (KV.I.2).” Each piece of the mechanism — and, more generally, the thing composed of different parts — exists *independently* of the whole and of the other parts alike. If, indeed, “the parts which compose a thing are prior, in nature at least, to the thing they compose (CM.I.16),” it follows that the latter necessarily depends upon them. As Maimonides had expressed it, “everything that is composed of two notions has necessarily that composition as the cause of its existence as it really is, and consequently is not necessarily existent in respect of its own essence, for it exists in virtue of the existence of its two parts and of their composition (Maimonides, M. 1974. *The Guide of the Perplexed*.II.Ax.21).” The composite whole is a dependent entity.

The priority of part to whole and, therefore, the dependence of the latter upon the former presents an immediate difficulty. In the preceding chapter we found that substance is defined as that which is in itself and conceived only through itself. We found that it is defined in terms of its *independence*. To

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conceive a thing which is necessarily independent and, yet, to do so in terms of part and whole which, with equal necessity, imply that it is a thing *dependent* evidently constitutes a contradiction in terms amounting, as Spinoza suggests, to “nonsense bordering on madness.” While “annulling our conception (Ep.12. Cf. E.I.Prop.15.Schol.)” of it, we at the same time, confirm it. Substance is not, on this account, a whole of parts but, rather, a continuous thing.

2. Proof of the indivisibility of substance on the basis of its uniqueness: A division or part of substance, he says, will either retain the nature of a substance or it will not. If so, it will constitute a substance in its own right. As a part however, it will then share the nature of its whole. Thus will two substances share one nature despite proof to the contrary (E.I.Prop.5). If not, then the reduction of substance to its parts entails the extinction of substance, its dissolution into non-substance, again, despite proof to the contrary (E.I.Prop.7 and E.I.Prop.11). Therefore, the division of substance neither retains nor fails to retain the nature of a substance. Since “all things that are, are either in themselves or in something else (E.I.Ax.1),” are substances (E.I.Def.3) or modes of substance (E.I.Def.5) and there is no other state of being that a division or part of substance might occupy, it follows that the division or part of substance is simply something that cannot be. Therefore, substance has no parts.

On the basis of his assertion as to the infinity of substance, Spinoza denies the divisibility of substance generally and extended substance in particular. He does so in two ways. In the first place, he elegantly demolishes the line of reasoning whereby the medievals had sought to demonstrate the absurdity of an infinite extension. To cite one of many possible examples, Maimonides adopts the impossibility of an infinite magnitude as a premise in his introduction to the second part of the *Guide* (*Guide for the Perplexed*.II.Prop.1). Shem Tov ibn Falaquera — among the first and most enduring commentators on this text — explains there that part of such a magnitude would “necessarily be equivalent to the whole;” for, he suggests, an aggregate of finite magnitudes does not an infinite magnitude make” — or, as Spinoza, expresses the matter: “it is as if, by simply adding circle to circle and piling one on top of another, one were to attempt to construct a square or a triangle or any other figure of a completely different nature (Ep.12).” A reconstructed version of the argument, therefore, runs as follows:

1. No infinite magnitude is composed of parts finite in magnitude.
  - a. Thus, if an infinite magnitude be composed of parts, each is infinite in magnitude.
    - i. Thus, is each *equivalent to the whole* of which it is a part.
2. Every part is of lesser magnitude than the whole of which it is a part.
  - a. Thus, no part of an infinite magnitude is a part.
    - i. Thus, no infinite magnitude is composed of parts.
3. Every magnitude is composed of parts (This premise is posited in the *Guide*.II.Prop.22).
  - a. Thus, no magnitude is infinite.

The conclusion derived follows, however, *only* if it is assumed that every magnitude is an aggregate.

With this in mind, Spinoza turns the argument on its head. The supposition “that material substance is composed of parts (E.I.Prop.15.Schol.)” cannot serve in a demonstration of its finitude; for, this is simply to define the infinite on the basis of the finite and, thus, to posit a conclusion as its own premise. He affirms that it is, indeed, absurd to suppose that “infinite quantity is measurable *and* made up of finite parts” — i.e. parts lesser in quantity than the whole of which they are a part. Yet, without the introduction of an invalid premise, Spinoza maintains, “no other conclusion can be reached but that infinite quantity is not measurable and cannot be made up of finite parts (ibid.).” As he goes on to note, this is precisely the position he has taken, such that “the weapon they aimed at us is, in fact, turned against themselves (ibid.).”

In the second place, Spinoza argues from the impossibility of a vacuum in Nature. Let us, therefore, examine this question first. Spinoza nowhere addresses it at length. He does, however, argue as follows in the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*:

1. What is inseparable from a thing pertains to its essence; what is not does not (PPC.II.Prop.2).
2. Sensible qualities may be removed from a body while yet it retains its essence (PPC.II.Prop.1).
  - a. Thus do sensible qualities of not constitute the essence of a body.
3. There is nothing to a body but its sensible qualities, extension, and the affections thereof (PPC.II.Ax.7).
  - a. Thus, if its sensible qualities be removed, there remains to a body nothing but extension.
    - i. Thus, if extension be removed from a body nothing of it will remain.
      1. Thus does extension constitutes the essence of a body (PPC.II.Prop.2).
4. A vacuum is extension without corporeal substance (PPC.II.Def.5).
  - a. Thus, “a vacuum is body without body, which is absurd (PPC.II.Prop.3.Dem.).”

The same is true of “corporeal substance insofar as it is substance”<sup>195</sup> or, more broadly, of “space,” which, for Spinoza as for Descartes, “is to be distinguished from extension only in thought; there is no difference in reality.”<sup>196</sup> In supporting this claim, Spinoza refers the reader to the second part of Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy* for further elaboration. Let us, therefore, examine this reference, as it yields several important insights.

“We often say,” remarks Descartes, “that one thing leaves a given place and another thing arrives there, even though the second thing is not strictly of the same size and shape; but in this case we do not say it occupies the same space.” By contrast, he continues “when something alters its position, we always say the place is changed despite the fact that the size and shape remain unaltered.”<sup>197</sup> Thus, argues Descartes, neither does the term place nor its corresponding term, space, signify “anything different from the body which is said to be in a place.”<sup>198</sup> The former simply “designates more explicitly... position.”<sup>199</sup> While, when speaking of the latter “it

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i. Thus is it a contradiction that there should exist a vacuum (PPC.II.Prop.3). There, he refers the reader to the second part of Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy* for fuller explanation. In said text, Descartes, first distinguishes between ordinary and proper senses of the term “empty (*vacuum*);” containing nothing sensibly perceptible and nothing at all respectively (PPC.II.Prop.17). Using the example of a vessel, he goes on to indicate the impossibility of conceiving a concavity apart either from the extension it contains or the substance that is extended. Thus, were the vessel *truly* emptied — were it to contain *nothing* at all — its sides would necessarily be in contact. This argument ultimately reduces to a simple and elegant deduction which Spinoza himself draws in the thirteenth of his *Epistles*: “the impossibility of a vacuum... clearly follows from the fact that nothing has no properties (Ep.13. Cf. PPC.II.Ax.1)” — and, therefore, no extension. “Space,” as Oldenburg wrote to Spinoza in July of 1663, “is a plenum (Ep.14).”

Having reviewed Spinoza’s refutation of the vacuum — or that, at least, which he adopts — let us observe its deployment in his second demonstration as to the indivisibility of substance. If, he says, “corporeal substance could be so divided that its parts were distinct in reality, why could one part not be annihilated while the others remain joined together as before? And why should all the parts be so fitted together as to leave no vacuum? Surely, in the case of things which are in reality distinct from one another, one can exist without the other and remain in its original state (E.I.Prop.15.Schol).” Because, however, “there is no vacuum in Nature... and all its parts must so harmonize that there is no vacuum, it also follows that the parts cannot be distinct in reality; that is, corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, cannot be divided (Ibid. Cf. E.I.Prop.13.Cor. Cf. Ep.35).” Thus is it, Spinoza exclaims “nonsense, bordering on madness, to hold that extended Substance is composed of parts or bodies really distinct from one another (Ep.12).”

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.Prop.13.Cor.

<sup>196</sup> PPC.II.Def.6.

<sup>197</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.14.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.II.13.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. II.14



is the size and shape that we are concentrating on”<sup>200</sup> — as Spinoza has put it, “by body we understand some quantity having length, breadth, and depth, bounded by a definite shape;”<sup>201</sup> i.e. a determinate volume. Thus, concludes Descartes, “when we say that something is in a given place, all we mean is that it *occupies* such and such a position relative to other things; but when we go on to say that it *fills up* a given space or place, we mean in addition that it has precisely the size and shape in question.”<sup>202</sup> This distinction between the occupation and the filling up of place or space, between position and volume, is indicated by a terminological distinction adopted from the scholastics between “external place”<sup>203</sup> and “internal place”<sup>204</sup> respectively.

Descartes’ conception of place, or “external place” as the case may be, as the location of a body vis-a-vis other things is rather significant if considered in terms of his view as to the indefinite — and certainly Spinoza’s as to the infinite — extension of the material universe.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>202</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.14.

<sup>203</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.13.

<sup>204</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.10.

<sup>205</sup> In Descartes’ first letter to Henry More — dated February 5, 1649 — he expresses himself as follows: “In my view it is not a matter of affected modesty, but of necessary caution, to say that some things are indefinite rather than infinite. God is the only thing I positively understand to be infinite. As to other things like the extension of the world and the number of parts into which matter is divisible, I confess I do not know whether they are absolutely infinite; I merely know that I know no end to them, and so, looking at them from my own point of view, I call them indefinite... To remove all difficulties here, I should explain that I call the extension of matter indefinite in the hope that this will prevent anyone imagining a place outside it into which the particles of my vortices might escape, for on my view, wherever such a place may be conceived, there is some matter. When I say that matter is indefinitely extended, I am saying that it extends further than anything a human being can conceive. Nevertheless, I think there is a very great difference between the vastness of this bodily extension and the vastness of the divine substance or essence (I do not say ‘divine extension’, because strictly speaking, there is none); and so I call the latter simply ‘infinite’, and the former ‘indefinite’ (Descartes, R. 1991. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 3. p. 364).” Descartes further explains this distinction to More in his letters of April 23, 1649 (Ibid. p. 373) and August, 1649 (Ibid. p. 381) respectively. See especially his second letter to More, in which he continues the same theme: “it involves a contradiction, that the world should be finite or bounded because I cannot but conceive a space beyond whatever bounds you assign to the universe; and on my view such a space is a genuine body. I do not care if others call this space imaginary and thus regard the world as finite; for I know what are the preconceived opinions that gave rise to this error (Ibid. pp. 374-75).” In my view, Alexander Koyre misconceives the matter when he states that, in this letter, Descartes “practically abandons his former assertion about the possibility of the world’s having limits (Koyre, A. 1957. *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. p. 123).” The notion of indefiniteness does not necessarily serve, in the first of Descartes’ letters to More, to designate a finite thing the boundaries of which are unknown. Rather, it serves to mark the distinction between what is ‘absolutely

To begin with, let us consider what follows from the assertion that the external place of a thing represents its relative position. “To determine the position,” he says, “we have to look at various other bodies which we regard as immobile; and in relation to different bodies we may say that the same thing is both changing and not changing its place at the same time.”<sup>206</sup> By way of example, he enjoins the reader to consider someone standing on a moving boat. Relative to other parts of the ship, her position is fixed while relative to either shore it is constantly changing. If, however, the motion of the earth is supposed such that neither shore constitutes a fixed position, the position of the woman on board is nonetheless determinable in relation to some point in outer space.<sup>207</sup> If, however, “the earth is a globe contained in a fluid and mobile heaven,”<sup>208</sup> all such points are, likewise indeterminate in character.

Those following in the Aristotelian tradition had skirted this result on the basis of cosmological doctrines that Descartes was unprepared to grant. On the one hand, Aristotle held that the universe is composed of a series of concentric spheres, of which the earth constitutes the

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infinite’ and what is not. As he remarks in the *First Set of Replies*:

“I make a distinction... between the indefinite and the infinite. I apply the term 'infinite,' in the strict sense, only to that in which *no limits of any kind* can be found; and in this sense God alone is infinite. But in cases like the extension of imaginary space, or the set of numbers, or the divisibility of the parts of a quantity, there is merely *some respect in which I do not recognize a limit*; so here I use the term 'indefinite' rather than 'infinite', because these items are not limitless in every respect (Descartes, R. 1984. Author's Replies to the Second Set of Objections. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 2. p. 81).”

The *indefinite* is that which is *infinite in some respect*; while, properly speaking, the infinite is that which is infinite in all possible respects. More precisely, as Descartes indicates in his *Principles of Philosophy*, the notion of an indefinite constitutes a mechanism via which to avoid “tiresome arguments about the infinite (Descartes, R. 1985. *Principles of Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. p. 201)” (such as that with More?), by treating something as infinite while refraining actually from ascribing infinity to it. “Things in which we observe no limits — such as the extension of the world... — should instead be regarded as indefinite” because we are finite beings and cannot grasp things infinite in any event (ibid. pp. 201-202).

Therefore, in ascribing contradiction to the notion that “the world should be finite or bounded,” Descartes does not retreat from any prior assertion as to the finitude of the material universe but, in his earlier and later letters alike, treats its extension as an indefinite — or a presumptively but not verifiably infinite — quantity. I readily admit that this is made rather less than crystal clear in the text of the letters — and it is possible that this is why More so evidently struggled with the positions taken therein — but I concede no substantial incoherence.

<sup>206</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.13.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.III.29.

center,<sup>209</sup> such that the whole — i.e. its extreme circumference<sup>210</sup> — is, likewise, spherical in shape.<sup>211</sup> On the other hand, he demonstrated that this arrangement is necessarily finite in character<sup>212</sup> such that nothing at all — not even a void — obtains external to its outer boundary.<sup>213</sup> Because it constitutes the absolute limit of space, the circumference of the universe serves as a non-arbitrary frame of reference possessed of a fixed center. Thus can axes converging on the earth be drawn, producing a natural system of coordinates within which the absolute position of all things can be determined; each thing retains its relationship to positions uniformly fixed for all observers.

While, indeed, Descartes supposes, with Copernicus, that “the whole of the celestial matter in which the planets are located turns continuously like a vortex with the sun at its center,”<sup>214</sup> the adoption of this heliocentric frame is but a matter of utility. It serves well for investigation into solar-system mechanics — as Descartes puts it, “this single supposition enables us to understand all the observed movements of the planets with great ease.”<sup>215</sup> The utility of a supposition does not, however, make it more than that. Moreover, research in different astronomical fields is better conducted on the basis of other suppositions<sup>216</sup> and I can

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<sup>209</sup> *Metaphysics*. 1073b1-1074a13.

<sup>210</sup> *On the Heavens*. 287b.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* 286b-287a.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* 271b-272a.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* 279a-b.

<sup>214</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*. III.30.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> In galactic and extra-galactic astronomy, for example, the sun is better treated neither as stationary nor as the center of the universe. Thus, for example, does Kant inquire as follows in *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. II.7: “if all planets and planetary systems acknowledge the same sort of origin, if the power of attraction is unlimited and universal, if the power of repulsion of the elements is similarly continuously at work, and if, in comparison with the Infinite, the large and the small are both small, should not the cosmic structures have acquired in a like manner an interconnecting relationship and a systematic coordination among themselves, as the celestial bodies of our solar system have on a small scale, like Saturn, Jupiter, and the Earth, which are special systems on their own and yet are linked together amongst themselves as parts in an even greater system (Kant, I. 2008. *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens or An Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Entire Structure of the Universe Based on Newtonian Principles*. Trans. Johnston, I. Arlington: Richer Resources

conceive no reason that Descartes would resist making them.

Thus, as I have indicated, does Descartes hold the boundary of the universe to be indefinite, or presumptively infinite, and likewise to be possessed of no determinate center. As Montesquieu put it, “everything is a sea... and the sea lacks even shores.”<sup>217</sup> This being the case, there obtains neither an ultimate frame of reference that is other than arbitrary nor any coordinate fixed in a determinate position from all possible perspectives. If, therefore, “there are no genuinely fixed points to be found in the universe,” Descartes concludes, “nothing has a permanent place except as determined by our thought.”<sup>218</sup> The place of each thing is altogether relative, being nothing more than a matter of perspective. It is for this reason that Spinoza holds the localization of extension to constitute a “grave error.”<sup>219</sup>

The relativity and, therefore, indetermination of place involves the same in respect of space. To observe how this the case, let us consider together three results at which we have already arrived:

1. A body is nothing other than extension, than a definite volume.
2. The definite volume of a body constitutes its space, or ‘internal place.’

By virtue of what, however, may we conceive of some extended region as a determinate volume, as a *distinct* space, in the first place if not by its perimeter or, to speak in more material terms, by its outer surface? Again, in what respect is such a surface to be conceived if we consider that:

3. Extended substance is a plenum.<sup>220</sup>
  - a. No body exists that is not surrounded immediately by at least one other body.

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Publications. p. 89)?”

<sup>217</sup> Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*.III.2. p. 629; here Montesquieu gestures toward Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.I.293.

<sup>218</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.13.

<sup>219</sup> TIE.87.

<sup>220</sup> See n. 322 above.

If, indeed, extended substance is a plenum such that there obtains not a vacuum, no body is separated from another by ‘empty’ space; the very turn of phrase constitutes — as we saw earlier — an oxymoron. As such, the ‘outer surface’ of a body constitutes not the relation of its internal place to a determinate non-place but, rather, to at least one other body.<sup>221</sup> This surface is, therefore, nothing more than its relative position or, in other words, its external place; as Descartes avers: “external place is rightly taken to be the surface of the surrounding body... or rather... the common surface.”<sup>222</sup>

In brief, a space is determined by virtue of its perimeter. Its perimeter is the surface it shares in common with those bodies that surround it; it is nothing more than the place or relative position of one body vis-a-vis the others. The space of a body is determined only by virtue of its place. If, therefore, the place of a thing is not absolute for Descartes — as it is for Aristotle — but strictly relative, so too its space. Nothing, except so far as we imagine it to be, is possessed of a determinate volume as its mechanism of determination is nothing more than a matter of perspective; there obtains in nature no determinate body in the terms here considered.

I submit that this line of reasoning one akin to it underlies Spinoza’s somewhat fragmentary account of extended substance as we have it in the imagination. Thus, in his June 2, 1674 letter to Jarig Jelles, does he express himself as follows:

“He who says that he apprehends a figure, thereby means to indicate simply this, that he apprehends a determinate thing and the manner of its determination. This determination therefore does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; on the contrary, it is its non-being. So since figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation, figure

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<sup>221</sup> I.e. in the event that one body be totally enveloped within another.

<sup>222</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*.II.15.

can be nothing other than negation.”<sup>223</sup>

To the extent, furthermore, that negation is “not anything positive,”<sup>224</sup> neither is determination nor the determined figure a thing positive<sup>225</sup> but, rather, a modification of thought — or imagining, as the case may be.

In line with his position on figure and its determination, Spinoza likewise denies the reality of boundary and limit. “Because, he says, “we are also accustomed to depict in our fantasy images of all the things that we understand, it comes about that we imagine non-beings positively as beings... Hence it comes about that we imagine as beings all the modes that the mind uses to negate, such as... extremity or limit, [and] boundary.”<sup>226</sup>

If there obtain neither figure nor determination, neither boundary nor limit, it follows likewise that the objectivity of measure, in general, is to be denied. Thus, in enumerating the “modes of thinking for explicating<sup>227</sup> a thing by determining it in comparison with another thing,” does Spinoza include “number (discrete quantity), and measure (continuous quantity).”<sup>228</sup> That is, number as an explication of discrete quantity and measure of continuous quantity. These notions, he explains, arise “from the fact that we separate the affections of substance from substance itself, and arrange them in classes so that we can easily imagine them as far as possible, there arises number, whereby we delimit them. Hence, it can clearly be seen that measure.. and number are nothing other than modes of thinking, or, rather, modes of

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<sup>223</sup> Ep.50.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. “‘Determinate’ denotes nothing positive, but only the privation of existence of that same nature which is conceived as determinate (Ep. 36).”

<sup>226</sup> CM.I.1. Cf. E.IV. Pref. where Spinoza speaks of “something involving negation, such as limit, [or] end.”

<sup>227</sup> Here, explication is to be distinguished from imagination only by virtue of the manner in which we conceive it. If a mechanism of explication is conceived to represent *not* a mode of thinking alone but also to correspond to something outside of the mind, it would by dint of this error, become a mode of imagining. A mode of explication is real only insofar as it is conceived as such.

<sup>228</sup> CM.I.1.

imagining.”<sup>229</sup>

If all these features that are conventionally attributed to things extended be viewed according to Spinoza’s suggestion, it follows that no fundamental organization can be attributed to extended substance. Thus does Spinoza express himself as follows in his *Metaphysical Thoughts*:

“What are opposition, order, agreement, difference? From our comparing things with one another there arise certain notions that are nevertheless nothing outside things themselves but modes of thinking... Such notions are *opposition, order, agreement, [and] difference.*”<sup>230</sup>

Things are neither opposed to nor even different from one another; neither are things ordered nor do they agree with one another. This, however, does not imply that the existence of things takes place according to the corresponding concepts. Thus does Spinoza ask Oldenburg “to note that I do not attribute to Nature... order *or confusion*. It is only with respect to our imagination that things can be said to be... well-ordered *or confused.*”<sup>231</sup> Simply because nature is not ordered does not mean that it is disordered or confused.

Such notions, he maintains elsewhere, stem, in fact, from the teleological misconception of natural phenomena. It is because men “hold it as certain that God himself directs everything to a fixed end,” he says, that they harbor “misconceptions about... order and confusion, beauty and ugliness, and the like.”<sup>232</sup> When men “become convinced that everything... is created on their behalf,” he continues, “they were bound to... regard as of the highest excellence all those

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> CM.I.5

<sup>231</sup> Ep. 32.

<sup>232</sup> E.I.App.

things by which they were most benefited.”<sup>233</sup> Thus:

“When things are in such arrangement that, being presented to us through our senses, we can readily picture them and thus readily remember them, we say that they are well arranged; if the contrary, we say that they are ill arranged, or confused. And since those things we can readily picture we find pleasing compared with other things, men prefer order to confusion, as though order were something in Nature... And they say that God has created all things in an orderly way, without realizing that they are thus attributing human imagination to God.”<sup>234</sup>

It is because we judge things from a certain perspective, our own, that we conceive them to be ordered, to agree, to be in harmony<sup>235</sup> or, alternatively, to be confused, to disagree, or to exist in opposition. Not one of these ideas, however, expresses adequately the phenomena which they purport to represent as they are in themselves. Thus, in respect of such notions in combination with those enumerated above, Spinoza concludes in this way:

“If anyone tries to explicate such things [i.e. substance] by notions of this kind which are nothing more than aids to the imagination,<sup>236</sup> he will meet with no more success than if he were deliberately to encourage his imagination to run mad. Nor, again, can modes of substance even be correctly understood if they are confused with such mental constructs... or aids to the imagination. For by doing so we are separating them from

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Spinoza critiques the notion of harmony as follows: “those [phenomena] that we sense through our ears are said to give forth noise, sound, or harmony, the last of which has driven men to such madness that they used to believe that even God delights in harmony. There are philosophers who have convinced themselves that the motions of the heavens give rise to harmony. All this goes to show that everyone’s judgment is a function of the disposition of his brain, or rather, that he mistakes for reality the way his imagination is affected (ibid.).” Here, of course, he speaks of musical harmony in particular. However, it seems evident to me that the notion extends to harmony of all sorts.

<sup>236</sup> I ought to be noted here that not all notions enumerated here count, for Spinoza, as “aids to the imagination.” Some, such as order and disorder, constitute, for Spinoza, simple errors. The general point stands, however things apprehended only by the intellect cannot truly be explicated by structures of the imagination.



substance... and in such isolation they can never be correctly understood.”<sup>237</sup>

Nothing exists in opposition to or in agreement with any other thing, nothing is different, nothing is ordered; likewise is nothing the same as any other thing, is nothing disordered or in confusion. These concepts reflect our own limited perspective and not the nature of things.

In sum, the infinity of substance implies that there is in nature neither part nor whole, that nature is indivisible and exists as a plenum. This implies that neither position nor place is absolute, but that each position is relative to every other position. This means that there exists neither boundary nor limit, neither figure nor determination nor measure. In consequence, nature is neither ordered nor confused. All things are relative; each intersects ultimately with every other and is inconceivable apart from the whole.

That, however, all things are relative does not mean that all things actively relate to one another. In other words, it does not mean that they interact and in so interacting, in constituting one another, intersect, thus forming a real mutuality of being. In the following subsection, we shall consider this matter.

#### **D. The Activity of Extended Substance**

Spinoza’s conclusion as to the fundamental indivisibility of substance generally and extended substance in particular — as, that is, to the absolute continuity of nature — enables him to sort conceptions of quantity into two categories. In the first place, quantity is conceivable “as represented... through the intellect;” i.e. insofar as it is substantial and, therefore, “infinite, one, and indivisible.” It is in this manner conceived truly. In the second place, it is conceivable

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<sup>237</sup> Ep.12.

“superficially;” that is, “as represented in the imagination.”<sup>238</sup> In this case, it will be seen as “divisible, finite, composed of parts, and manifold.”<sup>239</sup> That “we... frequently and readily”<sup>240</sup> view things according to the second perspective changes, for him, nothing; it is not, for all that, any less mistaken.

In fact, so Spinoza further explains, when we conceive extended substance as it is represented in the imagination, when we conceive it superficially, it becomes impossible to explain the most elementary phenomena; namely, the experience of motion. The infinity and consequent indivisibility of extended substance, according to Spinoza, is the necessary condition for the very possibility of movement; thus does it feed directly into an account of the activity of extended substance.

Spinoza’s position in this respect can be represented as arising from his reflections on what have come to be known as Zeno’s paradoxes. If, he says, someone divides the continuity of being into parts:

“He can never understand how an hour, for instance, can pass by. For in order that an hour should pass by, a half hour must first pass by, and then half of the remainder, and half of the half of what is left; and if you go on thus subtracting half of the remainder to infinity, you can never reach the end of the hour.”<sup>241</sup>

In brief, were time conceived as a quantity actually divisible, its passage would be inconceivable. Endless infinitesimals would divide each moment from the next, making transitions from the one to the other impossible. Therefore, he continues: “many who are not used to distinguishing mental constructs from real things have ventured to assert that duration is composed of moments,

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<sup>238</sup> E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>239</sup> Ep. 12. Cf. E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>240</sup> E.I.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>241</sup> Ep.12.

thus falling into the clutches of Scylla in their eagerness to avoid Charybdis.” Atomism, in other words, is likewise to be rejected, for “to say that duration is made up of moments is the same as to say that number is made up simply by adding noughts together.”<sup>242</sup>

The same problem applies, of course, to motion, as Spinoza indicates in his treatment of Descartes’ response to the paradoxes in question.<sup>243</sup> A body moving across one meter of space, for example, must pass through a half-meter and so on *ad infinitum*, thus negating the possibility of “local motion or movement of one part from one place to another.”<sup>244</sup> Conceived as anything other than a thorough continuity, extended substance is without motion and, likewise, without rest.<sup>245</sup> While it has been suggested that the absolute infinity of substance implies the negation of movement, for Spinoza it is the very fact on which the conceivable possibility movement is predicated.

So how, for Spinoza, do we arrive at this conception of motion from the absolute idea of substance generally and of extended substance in particular? In part, a reply to this question

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. This refutation of atomism is not entirely clear to me. In the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, however, he supplies — in interpretation of Descartes, of course — a more direct refutation runs as follows:

1. If an atom obtains, then it is an indivisible part of matter (PPC.II.Def.3).
2. Matter is nothing but extension (PPC.II.Prop.2).
3. Extension is infinitely divisible (PPC.II.Def.7; Ax.9).
  - a. Thus is matter not composed of indivisible parts.
  - b. Thus is matter not composed of atoms.
  - c. Thus there obtain no atoms.

<sup>243</sup> PPC.II.Prop.6.Schol. There, Spinoza supplies several examples; the one closest, however, to that reproduced above from Ep. 12 runs as follows: “was moving, we say that it did not stay in any place; but if he means ‘what place it has changed’, we say that it has changed all those places that he may wish to assign as belonging to the space through which it was moving. He will go on to ask whether at the same moment of time it could occupy and change its place. To this we finally reply by making the following distinction: If by a moment of time he means a time other than which there can be none shorter, he is asking an unintelligible question, as we have adequately shown, and thus one that does not deserve a reply. But if he takes time in the sense that I have explained previously (Le., its true sense), he can never assign a time so short that in it a body cannot occupy and change place, even though the time is supposed to be able to be shortened indefinitely; and this is obvious to one who pays sufficient attention. Hence it is quite evident, as we said previously, that he is supposing a time so short that there cannot be a shorter, and so he proves nothing.”

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> The two constitute, for Spinoza, reciprocal terms. To that only which exists under the *privation* of motion can rest be attributed; while that of which motion is negated is said to be at rest only improperly. Cf. Spinoza’s discussion of privation and negation in Ep. 21.

involves consideration of substance in its modality. Rather, however, than digressing into an extensive discussion of this topic, let us simply summarize the matter as follows.

We have noted on a number of occasions that Spinoza deduces from the self-causation and consequent infinity of substance that “from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways.”<sup>246</sup> Until this point, however, I have omitted Spinoza’s parenthetical explanation of the clause “there must follow infinite things in infinite ways,” which reads: “that is, everything that can come within the scope of infinite intellect.”<sup>247</sup> While there are many ambiguities to which this explanation gives rise,<sup>248</sup> I would like simply to attend to and build on the suggestion that the attributes of substance can be regarded as ideas from which other ideas are deductible.

Considered from this vantage, when in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza asserts that the mind “perceives some things, or forms some ideas, independently, and some ideas it forms from other ideas”<sup>249</sup> we can discern a form of the basic distinction between attributes of substance and the modalities thereof. Those ideas which the mind forms independently are the attributes of substance which are necessarily “conceived through themselves.” Those other ideas formed or deduced from the first are modalities of the attributes of substance, which are necessarily “conceived through something else.”

With respect to the idea of extended substance, Spinoza states in the same treatise that “the intellect forms the idea of quantity independently, without attending to other thoughts.”

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<sup>246</sup> E.I.Prop.16.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> For one, it suggests that the attribute of thought is uniquely comprehensive, constituting not only the mental parallel of extension, but of every other possible attribute.

<sup>249</sup> TIE.108.

“*Ideas of motion*,” however, it forms “only by attending to the idea of quantity.”<sup>250</sup> Motion (and, presumably, rest likewise), as he goes on to explain in the *Short Treatise*, “can neither be, nor be understood through itself, but only by means of extension.”<sup>251</sup> In fact, as Spinoza indicates later in the same text, “when we consider extension alone... we become aware of *nothing else in it except* motion and rest.”<sup>252</sup> And this awareness of ours extends beyond theory; we are impelled, Spinoza contends, to maintain “that all the effects which are seen to depend necessarily on extension” — that is, motion and rest — “must be attributed to this attribute.” Why? Because

“If the power to produce these did not exist in Nature, then... it would be impossible that these should exist. For if a thing is to produce something then there must be that in it

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> KV.I.9.

<sup>252</sup> KV.II.19. Cf. Ep.2 “extension is conceived through itself and in itself, but not so motion; for the latter is conceived in something else, and its conception involves extension.” As to the positive character of rest, Spinoza has the following to say:

1. “The same force that is required to impart fixed degrees of motion to a body that is at rest is again required for the withdrawal of those fixed degrees of motion from the same body, and for bringing it entirely to rest. Indeed, this can also be proved by experience, for we use about the same force to propel a boat that is at rest in still water as to halt it suddenly when it is moving. In fact, it would be exactly the same, were we not helped in halting the boat by the weight and resistance of the water displaced by it (PPC.II.Def.8.2).”
2. “Note that by force in moving bodies we here understand quantity of motion... But in bodies at rest, we understand by force of resistance the quantity of rest (PPC.II.Prop.22.Dem.).”

I take it that Spinoza has in mind Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy*.II.26-27. There, he states, in the first place, that “*no more action is required for motion than for rest*...we labor under a great prejudice in this, in that we judge that more action is required for motion than for rest. We have persuaded ourselves from the beginning of time that our body is wont to be moved by our will, of which we are intimately conscious, and to be at rest only because it adheres to the earth by gravity, the force of which we do not feel. Moreover, because this gravity and many other causes not known to us resist the motions we want to produce in our members, and cause us to become tired, we think that greater action or greater force is necessary to produce motion than to arrest it, taking action to be that tendency [*conatus*] which we use to move our members and, with their aid, other bodies. Nevertheless, we will easily set aside that prejudice, if we consider that we need *conatus* not only to move external bodies but often also to arrest their motions when they are not arrested by gravity or some other cause. For example, we do not use greater action to impel a boat at rest in standing water than to stop the same boat suddenly when it is moving, or certainly not much greater. For, one should measure the weight of the water supported by it and the viscosity [*lensor*] of the water, by which it could be arrested gradually.” In the second place he maintains that “*motion and rest are only different modes of the moved body*... here it is not a matter of that action which is understood to be in the mover, or in that which arrests motion, but of translation alone and of the absence of translation, or rest, it is clear that this translation cannot be outside the moved body and that this body is in one mode when it is translated and in another when it is not translated, or when it is at rest; with the result that the motion and rest in it are nothing other than two different modes.”

through which it, rather than another, can produce that something.”<sup>253</sup>

Motion and rest are not merely understood in reference to extension, but — if they exist at all — subsist necessarily in it. Thus does the pair constitute the infinite immediate mode of extension which, like the attribute itself, is infinite in its kind<sup>254</sup> and so exists only as a whole. That is, motion and rest are “in the whole, and must be in it, because there is no part in extension.”<sup>255</sup>

In this way, does Spinoza distinguish himself rather profoundly from Descartes who, as he notes in his May 5, 1676 letter to E.W. von Tschirnhaus, viewed extension as if it were, in itself, an “inert mass”<sup>256</sup> imparted with motion by an external cause; namely, God.<sup>257</sup> For Spinoza in contrast, the animation of extended substance simply “expresses,” or follows from, its “infinite essence.”<sup>258</sup>

In any event, we find that, for Spinoza, just as extension is not apart from but, like thought, expresses the essence of God or substance, so too are motion and rest not apart from

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<sup>253</sup> KV.II.19.

<sup>254</sup> KV.I.9. Cf. Ep. 64, where Spinoza replies to G.H. Schuller’s inquest as to the identity of the infinite immediate and infinite mediate modes: “the examples you ask for of the first kind are... in the case of extension, motion and rest.”

<sup>255</sup> KV.I.2.n.12.

<sup>256</sup> Ep. 81.

<sup>257</sup> PPC.II.Prop.11.Schol; PPC.II.Prop.12. This is why Descartes must, in Spinoza’s words, propose that “it is allowable for us to assume a hypothesis from which we can deduce, as from a cause, the phenomena of nature, even though we well know that they did not arise in that way (PPC.III.Intro. Cf. *Principles of Philosophy*.III.45, where this equivocation is deployed in service of scientific analysis despite profession of biblical literalism and, therefore, faith in the Genesis narrative)” and then go on to speculate, first, that “all the matter of which this visible world is composed was in the beginning divided by God into particles” and, second, that these “possessed in themselves the same amount of motion as is now found in the world and moved with equal speed (PPC.III.Post. Cf. *Principles of Philosophy*.III.46 and *The World*, ch. 6).” It is evident that by “possessed in themselves” Spinoza does not intend to suggest that Descartes believed matter, as such, to be animated but, rather, that motion was imparted upon it at the time of its creation, this constituting an event distinct, at least formally, from its coming into being. Thus does Descartes state in his October 1645 letter to the Marquis of Newcastle that “the only general cause of all the movements in the world is God. At the first instant of his creation of matter, *he began to move its various parts* in different ways; and now, by the same action by which he keeps matter in existence, he also preserves as much movement as he *then put into it*. (Philosophical Writings of Descartes. vol. 3. p. 275).” Here, the creation of matter is construed as taking place prior to its inaugural movement. See also *Principles of Philosophy*.II.36, where Descartes likewise speaks of the impartation of motion as distinct from the divine creation of matter.

<sup>258</sup> E.I.Prop.16.Dem. Though Spinoza infers from this that “God is absolutely the first cause (E.I.Prop.16..Cor.3),” he is not first in the sense that Descartes would have it, for, as Spinoza goes on to argue, “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things (E.I.Prop.18).”

extension. Movement is not imparted to matter by a God that stands above or outside of it, but follows from substance itself in its extended expression. Movement eternally and necessarily (if not absolutely) modifies, as a whole, the whole of extended substance. It is on the basis of this contention as to the identity of the infinite mediate mode that Spinoza can go on to formulate his position vis-a-vis the constitution of particular things.

We have already observed that, for Spinoza, all particular things are but relatively determined. With the introduction of motion and rest to our account of extended substance, we are enabled to conceive of this condition of relative determination as taking place in an interactive and a fluid fashion. To do so, it is necessary to examine Spinoza's account of bodies in the so-called "physical digression" that appears in the second part of the *Ethics*.

So as better to compose our thoughts in this respect, it is helpful first to establish a general theoretical architecture. I submit that there is to be found in Spinoza's physical digression, three distinction organizational tiers. These are:

1. **The element:** If I may borrow Gilbert Simondon's account of elementality, elements are "infra-individual" objects. They differ from "*true* individuals in that they do not have an associated milieu; *they can be integrated into an individual*."<sup>259</sup>
2. **The individual:** the individual, to again borrow from Simondon, is "a definite system of elements"<sup>260</sup> characterized by "internal consistency" and recurrent causality<sup>261</sup> within "a definite system of natural elements surrounding"<sup>262</sup> it, within an associated milieu.
3. **The ensemble:** is the associated milieu of the individual. While, in certain respects it itself constitutes a sort of individual, there is a difference; "we can identify [an]...

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<sup>259</sup> Simondon, G. 1980. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Mellamphy, N. trans. p. 37.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

individual when the associated milieu exists as a *sine qua non* condition of its functioning, and we can identify an ensemble when the opposite is the case”<sup>263</sup> — when, that is, “there is really no associated milieu.”<sup>264</sup>

Let us begin with the element. “Things,” contends Spinoza in his scholium to E.II.Prop.13, are “all animate, albeit in different degrees” and if they “are real,” they “have become such through motion and rest” alone.<sup>265</sup> How so? If it is the case — as we have already noted many times — that there obtains but a single substance, that all things that are, are in God and that “particular things are nothing but affections of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way,”<sup>266</sup> Spinoza cannot rely on Descartes’ contention that:

“A real distinction exists only between two or more substances; and we can perceive that two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other. For example... from the mere fact that each of us understands himself to be a thinking thing and is capable, in thought, of excluding from himself every other substance... it is certain that each of us, regarded in this way, is really distinct from every other thinking substance and from every corporeal substance.”<sup>267</sup>

For Descartes, the substantiality of things serves as the principle of their individuation. For Spinoza, however, that all things share in one and the same substance means that they are indistinguishable in respect thereof. Thus does he propose that “the being of substance does not

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>265</sup> KV.Pref.n.1.

<sup>266</sup> E.I.Prop.25.Cor.

<sup>267</sup> Principles of Philosophy. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. vol. 1. §60.



pertain to the essence of man; i.e. substance does not constitute the form of man”<sup>268</sup> or of anything else for that matter.<sup>269</sup>

If it is not by virtue of distinctions in substance that particular things are distinguished from one another, what gives rise to their differences such as they are? On what basis is one body — and, by extension, one mind, the idea of that body — differentiated from others? It has already been noted that, according to Spinoza, “we become aware of *nothing else in*” the attribute of extension “*except* motion and rest”<sup>270</sup> — these constituting, together, its infinite immediate modification. If indeed extension is expressed *only* in these terms, it follows that every extended thing exists in one such state or the other. “All bodies,” Spinoza holds as an axiom, “are either in motion or at rest”<sup>271</sup> and, when not at rest, “can move at varying speeds.”<sup>272</sup> It is on the basis of these differences in the rate at which they shift position, that the simplest “bodies are distinguished from one another.”<sup>273</sup>

If the essence of a thing, as I have noted before, is “that which, when granted, the thing is necessarily posited, and by the annulling of which the thing is necessarily annulled; or that

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<sup>268</sup> E.II.Prop.10. Spinoza demonstrates this proposition otherwise than I have suggested, but concludes the second of his demonstrations as follows: “this proposition is furthermore evident from the other properties of substance — that substance is by its own nature infinite, immutable, indivisible, etc., as everyone can easily see (E.II.Prop.10.Schol.).” I have simply taken up this suggestion and, so as more seamlessly to link the proposition to my analysis in the preceding chapter, have demonstrated it from the infinity and consequent uniqueness of substance. Cf. E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Lem.1.Dem. There, Spinoza demonstrates the same basic point again, only in specific reference to bodies and not “particular things” in general. He adopts an additional two lines of argument, each of which essentially parallels the tack I have adopted. Firstly, he argues from E.I.Prop.5 (that there cannot be two substances of the same nature — i.e. extension) and E.I.Prop.8 (that every substance is infinite in its kind); this is taken to imply that extended substance is one and infinite such that the multiplicity of extended things constitute only its modifications. Secondly, he argues from E.I.Prop.15 (that all things are in God), which rests upon the assertion that there obtains no other substance but God (E.I.Prop.14) whereby any conceivable thing can constitute nought but a mode thereof; if all such things are modifications of one substance they cannot, it is implied, be distinguished from one another on its account.

<sup>269</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>270</sup> KV.II.19.

<sup>271</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Ax.1. *Both* of these, as I have already noted, being seen to constitute positive expressions of divine power.

<sup>272</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Ax.2.

<sup>273</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Lem.1.

without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived,”<sup>274</sup> and it is “in respect of their motion-and-rest, quickness and slowness”<sup>275</sup> that bodies are distinguished from one another, that any one body is given or not given, it follows that the relative motion or rest of each such body is its essence. When, therefore, Spinoza states that, by the term “body” he understands “a mode that expresses in a definite and determinate way God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing,”<sup>276</sup> he can mean only the motive expression of extension. His definition of the body ultimately reduces to a statement concerning motion; the substantial essence is displaced by the kinesthetic.

As I indicated earlier, Descartes had understood the individuation of bodies to be self-evident; a body is individuated because it is a substance and a substance is, by its very nature, individuated for it is said to subsist through nothing other than itself. Accordingly, the motion of any given body is conceived in distinction from the particularity of its existence; a determinate body is, and only then is set into motion.<sup>277</sup> Such is not the case for Spinoza. For him, it is not bodies that move, but — if I may so articulate it — movement that ‘bodies.’

In this sense, we may — with a crucial emendation — join Warren Z. Harvey<sup>278</sup> in drawing an analogy from Spinoza’s grammar to his metaphysics. After the well-known locution of Novalis,<sup>279</sup> Harvey has described Spinoza as a “*noun* intoxicated” man.<sup>280</sup> We ought to recall,

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<sup>274</sup> E.II.Def.2.

<sup>275</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.Lem.1.

<sup>276</sup> E.II.Def.1.

<sup>277</sup> See n. 125 above. Cf. PPC.III.Post.

<sup>278</sup> Harvey, W.Z. 2002. Spinoza’s Metaphysical Hebraism. In *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy*. eds. Ravven, H.M & Goodman, L.E. Albany: SUNY Press. p. 110.

<sup>279</sup> Novalis had, rather famously, called Spinoza a “God-intoxicated man.” See his *Fragmente und Studien* 1799/1800 (HKA III, no. 562, p. 651).” He also stated, similarly, that “Spinozism is a supersaturation with the divine (Novalis. 1997. Last Fragments. In *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*. Trans. & ed. Stoljar, M.M. Albany: SUNY Press. §32).”

<sup>280</sup> Harvey, W.Z. 2002. Spinoza’s Metaphysical Hebraism. In *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy*. eds. Ravven, H.M & Goodman, L.E. Albany: SUNY Press. p. 110.

however, that:

1. There is no being, for Spinoza, in excess of doing, that a thing is said to “exist or be determined to act”<sup>281</sup> — so we discovered in the preceding subsection .
2. In his *Hebrew Grammar*, Spinoza actually maintains that “all Hebrew nouns... are derived from forms of verbs.”<sup>282</sup>

Thus do we find Spinoza’s alleged “noun intoxication” ultimately verbal in character; Spinoza was, rather, a “verb-intoxicated man.” For Spinoza, things there are not, but only active expressions of power. In the attribute of extension, the power of God is expressed in the form of motion. To the extent then, that the essence of each thing is its power, the essence of each extended thing is a constitutive motion, a kinetic force which “is surely nothing else than [the] motion itself.”<sup>283</sup> It is not that things move in space, but the force that space, that extension, *is* that is expressed in particular movement.

Insofar as the basic condition of extended being (or, rather, extended becoming) is motion, insofar as the elemental body is its constitutive force, two related results obtain. In the first place, it follows that all individual things ultimately intersect or overlap in an active and fluid fashion. That is, the existence of the one is inseparable from that of the whole.

In the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains that:

1. “All things that follow from the absolute nature of any attribute of God... are eternal and infinite.”<sup>284</sup>
2. “Whatever follows from some attribute of God, insofar as the attribute is modified by a modification that exists necessarily and as infinite through that same attribute, must also

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<sup>281</sup> E.I.Prop.28.

<sup>282</sup> *Hebrew Grammar*. ch. 8.

<sup>283</sup> CM.I.6.

<sup>284</sup> E.I.Prop.21.

exist both necessarily [i.e. as eternal] and as infinite.”<sup>285</sup>

Therefore, something that exists neither as eternal nor as infinite can follow neither from the absolute nature of one of the attributes of substance nor from any modification thereof which “exists necessarily and as infinite.” Therefore, explains Spinoza,

“It must have followed, or been determined to exist and to act, by God or one of his attributes insofar as it was modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence [which] must also have been determined by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and again this last... by another, and so *ad infinitum*.”<sup>286</sup>

Expressed in terms of extension, the same reasoning appears in E.II.Lem.3:

“A body in motion or at rest must have been determined to motion or rest by another body, which likewise has been determined to motion or rest by another body, and that body by another, and so *ad infinitum*.”

In brief, the motion of any one thing is inseparable from that of the whole, for, as I noted above, motion and rest exist, for Spinoza, not in a part of extended substance — substance has no parts — but in the whole thereof. In other words, the relativity of all things which arises from the infinity and consequent indivisibility of extended substance is actively expressed in the fluid intersection of all movement. Moreover, if it is motion that individuates and motion is imparted to things within the frame of the total activity of extended substance, it follows that individuality is not a feature intrinsic to bodies but, on the contrary, one that is imparted to them. The constitutive act or vector that the elemental body is, is communicated and, therefore, takes on meaning only within active relations among bodies.

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<sup>285</sup> E.I.Prop.22.

<sup>286</sup> E.I.Prop.28.Dem.

Furthermore, this nexus of actions is in perpetual flux. “All the ways in which a body is affected by another body,” says Spinoza:

“Follow from the nature of the affected body together with the nature of the body affecting it, so that one and the same body may move in various ways in accordance with the various natures of the bodies causing its motion; and, on the other hand, different bodies may be caused to move in different ways by one and the same body.”<sup>287</sup>

If it is movement that bodies and that movement is necessarily communicated among bodies, among, that is, the interplay of motive forces, then it is the case that the assumption of a different state of motion is tantamount to the assumption of a different nature. Thus, the body which is determined to move in a fashion other than that which it had before been is, in fact, a *different* body. This passage, therefore, indicates not merely the variability of motion that arises from an interaction of bodies each independently determined, but an infinitely complex, infinitely extensive, and, therefore, infinitely fluid causal field within which these elemental bodies continuously determine one another, within which their nature is ever in flux according to their kinesthetic variations. Thus is the existential condition of elements of motion; that is, of elemental bodies.

Let us now consider the existential condition of individuals. The element of motion lacks both internal consistency and recurrent causality; its nature is externally determined and, for the most part, in perpetual flux as it new conditions of movement. As noted earlier, however, the element of motion functions as an “infra-individual” object which can be integrated into a *true* individual; it can enter into the constitution of a kinesthetic essence, an individual composed of elemental motions. Let us consider the genesis of such composites so far as Spinoza

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<sup>287</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.3.Ax.1.

understands them:

“When a number of bodies... form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together to form one body or individual thing which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies.”<sup>288</sup>

While simple bodies are distinguished only in respect of their relative velocity, there is something more to the composite body or synthetic individual. The kinesthetic essence of the synthetic individual involves an “unvarying relation of movement.” It involves, that is, not simply the motion of bodies in a certain direction at a certain pace, but, rather, the perseverance of a certain *pattern* of motion and rest amongst its constituent bodies. In other words, the kinesthetic individual is a definite system of kinesthetic elements characterized by internal consistency.

If the simple body is to be individuated solely in terms of its vector quantity, it is likewise to be understood as a thing possessed, so to speak, of no interiority. The kinesthetic essence of a simple body is best interpreted in terms of its inertia; it is the force whereby motion simply perseveres “in its own state”<sup>289</sup> until otherwise determined.<sup>290</sup> It is in itself only to the extent that it progresses toward something else.<sup>291</sup> The same is not the case for bodies composite, for the

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<sup>288</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.3.Def.

<sup>289</sup> CM.1.6.

<sup>290</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.3.Cor.

<sup>291</sup> It is important to qualify the suggestion here proffered that the simple body progresses “toward something else.” In making this statement I intend not necessarily to imply that said body progresses toward anything as if toward a goal. It is arguable that Spinoza’s theory of conatus involves a sort of teleological principle — despite his emphatic rejection of teleology in general (E.I.App.) — insofar as things strive to persevere (E.III.Prop.4-7). They do not, however, strive *in order to* persevere; rather, they persevere in striving. The striving of things is, as I indicated above, akin to an inertia. In Speaking of progression toward some other thing, I intend — here, at least — only a descriptive account of the event of motion. What moves does so along a certain trajectory and, to the extent that, for

kinesthetic individual.

The kinesthetic individual is a definite system of kinesthetic elements characterized by recurrent causality; it is oriented with respect to itself and continually reproduces itself in the relations which its constituent elements bear with respect to one another. It is constituted not simply by a sum vector quantity, but by the relation obtaining between and among vector quantities. The synthetic or individual body enjoys an interiority distinct from its exteriority; changes in the latter do not immediately translate into changes in the former. Thus, argues Spinoza:

1. “If certain bodies composing an individual thing... change the existing direction of their motion but in such a way that they can continue their motion and keep the same mutual relation as before, the individual thing will likewise preserve its own nature without any change of form.”<sup>292</sup>
2. “The individual thing so composed retains its own nature, whether as a whole it is moving or at rest and in whatever direction it moves provided that each constituent part retains its own motion and continues to communicate this motion to other parts.”<sup>293</sup>

So long as an “unvarying relation of movement,” so long as as the same “union of bodies”<sup>294</sup> or “relations of movement”<sup>295</sup> are maintained among the bodies of which the whole is composed, the direction in which they move or the speed at which they do so is immaterial. Likewise is the speed or the direction of the whole itself a matter of indifference. What matters — for the constitution of the composite individual — is the interior concinnity of the whole; only when this

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Spinoza, space is a plenum, always toward one thing or another.

<sup>292</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.6

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.Lem.7.

<sup>294</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.3.Def.

<sup>295</sup> E.II.Lem.3.Def.

changes does a shift in the nature of the synthetic body itself take place.

Still, the relative functional isolation of the kinesthetic individual, its interior orientation, does not mean that it stands apart from its environment. On the contrary, it is because the kinesthetic individual is internally consistent and because it is causally recurrent that it can and, indeed, does, assume and carry with it an associated milieu. In other words, it is in consequence of these two characteristics of the kinesthetic individual that it can be integrated into a broader ensemble without losing, thereby, its particular character. For, just as the kinesthetic element can be integrated into a kinesthetic pattern, thus constituting the kinesthetic individual, so too can the latter be integrated into a still more comprehensive kinesthetic pattern, the kinesthetic ensemble. Thus, contends Spinoza:

1. Because the “union of bodies” that constitutes the individual thing “is retained in spite of the continuous change of component bodies,” the individual thing likewise retains its nature. Thus, theorizes Spinoza: “if from a body, or an individual thing composed of a number of bodies, certain bodies are separated, and at the same time a like number of other bodies of the same nature take their place, the individual thing will retain its nature as before, without any change in its form.”<sup>296</sup>
2. For the same reason, “If the parts of an individual thing become greater or smaller, but so proportionately that they all preserve the same mutual relation of motion-and-rest as before, the individual thing will likewise retain its own nature as before without any change in its form.”<sup>297</sup>

Here, we see that neither is the individual thing impermeable nor is its outer boundary fixed. So long as the total proportion of motion-and-rest is preserved, one body may, on the one hand, host

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<sup>296</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.4.

<sup>297</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.5.



innumerable other bodies in perpetual flux while retaining its own nature. On the other hand, it may accumulate or shed its constituent bodies and, therefore, expand or contract accordingly while, again, remaining the same in respect of the whole.

Likewise, insofar as the composite body is individuated on the basis of this proportion or pattern, is “another individual thing” equally conceivable which is composed not of simple bodies “distinguished from one another only by motion-and-rest and speed of movement,”<sup>298</sup> but “of several individual things” — that is, several bodies complex in themselves — “of different natures.” Similarly, “if we go on to conceive a third kind of individual thing composed of this second kind” and, ultimately “continue to infinity, we shall readily conceive the whole of nature as one individual whose parts — that is, all the constituent bodies — vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole.”<sup>299</sup> Thus is the individual body incorporated, in turn, into a series of ensembles, each more comprehensive than the next; the individual body, in other words, is only relatively individuated.

In Epistle 32, Spinoza represents the relation as follows. Oldenberg, his correspondent, is instructed to consider a fluid like blood. On the one hand, the many particles of which it is composed “adapt themselves to one another... so as to be fully in agreement” and thus constitute “one single fluid.” In this manner, each constituent particle amounts to a part of the whole.<sup>300</sup> On the other hand, “insofar as we conceive the particles... as different from... in respect of shape and motion, to that extent we regard them each as a whole, not a part.”<sup>301</sup> The status of individuation, of self-enclosed wholeness is, therefore, relative to the perspective of the hypothetical observer. Thus, is the blood itself regarded as a whole only to the extent that “we

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<sup>298</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.7.Schol.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

imagine that there are no causes external to the blood which would communicate new motions to the blood, nor any space external to the blood, nor any other bodies to which the parts of the blood could transfer their motions” — if we imagine, in other words, that the blood undergoes no changes “other than those which can be conceived as resulting from the existing relation between the motion of the blood” itself and also of its parts.<sup>302</sup> “But since,” continues Spinoza, “there are many other causes which do... modify the laws of the nature of the blood and are reciprocally modified by the blood, it follows that there occur in the blood other motions and other changes, resulting not solely from the reciprocal relation of its particles but from the relation between the motion of the blood on the one hand and external causes on the other” such that “the blood is accounted as a part... a part of the whole universe, and as agreeing with the whole and cohering with the other parts.”<sup>303</sup> The concatenation of elements and individuals, of nested ensembles, ultimately constitutes itself in nature as a whole, the so-called “face of the universe” or infinite totality of substance in its finite modality. The ultimate ensemble of kinesthetic individuals has no associated milieu but is the milieu or absolute causal frame for an infinite number and variety of kinesthetic permutations and determinations, for the eternal fermentation, as it were, of kinesthetic essence. Motion and rest exist or express themselves in the whole of nature. In the end, they cannot be divided into parts; they can be understood only as an infinite whole.

While it may be that the individual or even the sub-ensemble is possessed of a definite surface of certain dimension and density<sup>304</sup> according to the particular nature of that kinesthetic pattern of which it is constituted, it is, for the same reason, a fundamentally neutral boundary designating no final border. If, therefore, the individual *exterior* is an ambivalent thing that is,

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.3.Ax.3.

by its very nature and definition, subject to perpetual fluctuation, the same follows for the individual *interior*. The distinction between that which is within and that which is without is but relatively determined. The individual — its scope and its extent — is an ever negotiated quantity. Thus, states Spinoza in his November 1665 letter to Oldenberg, “all bodies are surrounded by others and are *reciprocally determined* to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way.”<sup>305</sup> While “the same ratio of motion to rest” is “preserved in them taken all together, that is, in the universe as a whole,” it is by virtue of the infinite potency of the latter that its parts are “compelled to undergo infinite variations.”<sup>306</sup>

Moreover, this reciprocal determination of bodies, of constitutive movements, takes place at every conceivable level of organization. To articulate the matter, again, in Simondon’s terms, the mutual determination of bodies, so far as Spinoza represents it, is both *abstract* and *concrete*. What is the difference between the two? According to Simondon:

“In the abstract... object each structure performs only one essential and positive function that is integrated into the functioning of the ensemble: in the concrete... object all functions performed by the structure are positive, essential, and integrated into the function of the ensemble; the marginal consequences of the functioning that are eliminated or attenuated by correctives in the abstract object become positive stages or aspects in the in the concrete object; the functioning scheme incorporates the marginal aspects; the consequences that were uninteresting or harmful become functional links.”<sup>307</sup>

Without entering into the question of technicity as understood by Simondon and, furthermore, translating this passage into our own conceptual framework, we may rephrase the matter as

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<sup>305</sup> Ep.32.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. The precise nature and process of such variations will later be considered; there remain, however, several matters yet demanding further consideration.

<sup>307</sup> Simondon, G. 1980. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. p. 16.

follows. An individual body or a sub-ensemble of individual bodies is regarded in the abstract when only the motion-and-rest of the whole, or its sum kinesthetic function, is conceived as integrated into the infinite totality of motion-and-rest, into the face of the universe. An individual body or a sub-ensemble of individual bodies is regarded in the concrete when all motion and all rest of which it is constituted is conceived as integrated into the infinite totality of motion-and-rest, into the face of the universe. That is, when each constitutive individual of the sub-ensemble, when each constitutive element of the individual, is conceived as integrated, again, with the infinite totality of motion-and-rest or into the face of the universe.

For Spinoza, both modes of organization are true of bodies in nature. We have already seen that the motion-and-rest of elemental the body is integrated into the kinesthetic pattern that constitutes the individual body. Yet, we have also seen that, with respect to the latter, it is the total pattern of motion-and-rest that matters, not the particular element of motion or rest. Thus can it shed or accumulate elemental bodies, elemental motions, without undergoing an alteration of its nature. This means, in turn, that as much as the elemental body or motion is integrated into the individual and, ultimately, into the ensemble, it also bears relation to other elements, to other individuals, and to other ensembles; it enjoys — potentially at least — a multivalent status of integration. The same is naturally true of the individual vis-a-vis the sub-ensemble and the sub-ensemble vis-a-vis the infinite totality of motion-and-rest. While it may be that, with respect to any one sub-ensemble, the individual body is integrated abstractly, with a view to one — or, at any rate, a limited number — of its motive properties, while the same may be true of one sub-ensemble with respect to some other, more comprehensive sub-ensemble, the face of the universe, *the ensemble par excellence*, is integrated concretely. Motion-and-rest obtain of the infinite totality of things as a whole, each modality of motion, each modality of rest, is ultimately

explicated in view of the whole.

In this manner, we find that the dynamic quality of the extended, or spatial, plenum is preserved at the macro level and is not restricted to relations that obtain between elemental bodies or forces. As the elemental body is an ambivalent thing perpetually determined from within the relations it sustains with other such bodies, so too the composite body. Boundaries between bodies thus blurred, things conceived as permeable and intersecting atmospheres of force or motion, we see that extension is not *populated*; things in space, there are not. Rather is space conceived as an intensive quantity of variable and ever shifting kinesthetic density. The finite thing, in this sense, constitutes a determinate ‘part’ of extension only in abstraction as its distinction from other ‘parts’ is but a matter of the relative density or rarity of kinetics forces within the extended plenum or totality of such forces. Thus does the interplay and causal exchange of things finite reflect the characteristics of the infinite essence or power that they modify. In other words, the relativity of all things is not static, but very much active, arising as it does, from the reciprocal constitution of kinetic forces, their interaction, their intersection and, as such, their dynamic mutuality of being.

#### **E. Subsection Summary: Refuting Proudhon’s Assessment of Spinoza**

In section one, we considered Proudhon’s account of the ontology of mutualism generally and, more specifically, attended to his rather vehement rejection of Spinoza’s metaphysical system. As he understood it, this system represents the very opposite of everything he sought to establish. To be clear, let us briefly summarize, once again, what exactly Proudhon thought. A generation before Bakunin’s oft-recalled but seldom read discussion of “political theology” and over a century before that more widely recognized form which Carl Schmidt gave it, Proudhon

proposed the correspondence of social theory and the so-called “cosmo-theological problem.” His theory, in this regard, began with a distinction between two principles. On the one hand, the “democratic” principle; on the other, the “totalitarian” principle. The meaning he ascribes to these opposing principles is, for our purposes here, best represented as follows:

<b>Democratic Principle</b>	<b>Totalitarian Principle</b>
Motion	Stasis
Becoming	Being
Complexity	Simplicity
Groups	Individuals
Relativity	Absoluteness

So far as Proudhon interprets Spinoza’s response to the “cosmo-theological problem,” the latter falls resolutely within the conceptual framework of the totalitarian principle. So far, however, as I have interpreted him, this is least of all the case.

In the first place, I argued that, for Spinoza, the notion of being represents nothing more than an elaborate abstraction. Just as Nietzsche explains that each concept originates through our equating what is unequal,<sup>308</sup> so too his predecessor holds that the concept of being represents the same on the grandest scale. Properly speaking, being in general, the *ens commune*, is but a mode of thinking, not an adequate account of things that are. If, therefore, substance is most real and being is precisely the opposite, if the notion of substance, to that extent, by no means overlaps

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<sup>308</sup> See his *On Truth and Lies in the Non-Moral Sense*.

with that of being, by which means or within which frame are we to conceive it?

As I went on to explain, Spinoza understands things in terms of their power; that is, in terms of their causal effectiveness. This constitutive power or causal force of a thing, in fact, is identical with the thing itself. To draw on Spinoza's analogy to motion: as the force of a motion is indistinguishable from the motion itself, so too is the power of a thing whereby it endeavors to persist in existence indistinguishable from the thing itself. Thus is the existence of a thing conceived as a mode of *ability* and this ability identified with its power: as Spinoza put it, "the ability to exist is power." Existence, therefore, emerges as an act; indeed, he uses the terms interchangeably, referring to the way in which a thing is said to "exist *or* be determined to act." As I noted elsewhere in this chapter, all nouns, for Spinoza, are ultimately derived from an original verb form. All things are deeds and there is no being in excess of doing. In this sense, the power of a thing is no quality which it has and subsequently exercises; the thing coincides with the exercise of its power.

Building on this account of the nature of things, I proceeded to consider the case of the divine thing. Is the nature of substance other than the power of substance. In other words, is there indeed a sub-stance grounding all things or, rather, an expressive power? To put it in the terms in which I addressed the matter: is the essence of God or substance its power and, if so, in which manner?

I addressed this question by supposing that its answerability hinges on the degree to which Spinoza's definition of God yields immediately his assertion in E.I.Prop.34 to the effect that God's essence is his power. If, in other words, a definition determines the essence of something, then the definition of God ought to determine the essence of God. If, in turn, it is the case that the essence of God is his power, it must follow that the definition of God determines

the power of God. So far as I considered it, the definition of God was taken to explicate what, in fact, follows necessarily from the definition of substance. This meant that the equation in question — i.e. between E.I.Def.6 and E.I.Prop.34 — is to be transposed to an equation between E.I.Def.3 and E.I.Prop.34.

As I went on to indicate, E.I.Def.3, Spinoza's definition of substance, is ultimately built up from the principle of self-causation. In this sense, the *causa sui* functions as the very crux of Spinoza's speculative mechanism. The question then became this: in what fashion does Spinoza understand this notion of *causa sui*? The deduction and formulation of this principle, so far as it takes place in the *Ethics*, gives the appearance of a negative conception thereof — i.e. the view that God or substance cannot have been caused by anything else, *ergo* he is his own cause — and seems, therefore, to exclude the supposition that God functions as his own *effective cause*. Yet, as I demonstrated at length, it Spinoza evidently conceived the principle in positive terms; God functions as his own effective cause and affirms his own being in an unqualified fashion.

The essence of substance is the principle of *effective* self-causation. The effective self-causation of substance, by implying unqualified self-affirmation, furthermore, implies the absolute infinity of substance. If, therefore, the definition of God is simply this — absolutely infinite substance — it follows that the essence of God is the principle of *effective* self-causation. This means, in turn, that the essence of God is an act or expression of power, for power is nothing other than causal effectiveness. Therefore is the essence of God the power of God. For Spinoza, substance, God — contra Proudhon — is not being-inert but eternally becomes.

After having established the *metaphysical* activity of substance, I went on to address its expression in the necessary activity of physical substance; that is, extended substance. This involved two related inquiries. On the one hand, an extensive examination of the inevitable



relativity of things that arises from Spinoza's contention as to the infinity of extended substance. If extended substance is truly infinite, then it is likewise indivisible and can be comprehended only as a whole. The infinity and indivisibility of extended substance, so I went on to explain, implies the indeterminacy, the relativity of position or place. Insofar as space, or volume, is determined only in relation to the positionality of the surfaces of the body in question, it follows that space is likewise indeterminate or relative. Consequently does Spinoza dismiss notions of figure, of boundary, of limit or measure and, to that extent, order and confusion; each of these notions represents nothing more — so he holds — than a mode of imagining. All extended things are indeterminate; all extended things exist relatively to one another.

Having demonstrated generally the relativity of extended being as conceived by Spinoza, I went on to suggest, more precisely, that the relative being of all things is expressed *actively* through a process of reciprocal determination in a field of motion. In the first place, I pointed out that it is Spinoza's view that the infinity and consequent indivisibility of substance is that theoretical ground on the basis of which motion is conceivable in the first place. In elaborating his reply to Zeno's paradoxes, Spinoza holds that were extended substance divisible it would be impossible to conceive progressive movement; all things would necessarily subsist in a condition of eternal stasis — as Zeno contends they do. It is because extended substance exists in continuity that motion is in any fashion possible.

That motion is possible, however, does not mean that it real, that it obtains in fact. Spinoza deduces the fact of motion, again, from the absolute infinity of substance. From the infinitude of God's nature there necessarily arises an infinity of things in infinite ways, there necessarily arises everything that can fall within the conception of an infinite intellect — i.e. everything which does not constitute a contradiction in terms. If so, that we conceive in

extension nothing other than motion and rest, neither of which are self-contradictory principles and neither of which necessarily contradicts the other, it follows, so I contended, that extension is necessarily modified by motion and rest. Thus, contra Descartes, who held that matter is inert in itself and has motion imparted to it from without by God — a position he was by no means alone in adopting, appearing, as it does, in innumerable cosmological arguments from antiquity through the Middle Ages — Spinoza holds that motion arises necessarily from the nature substance in its extended expression; it is *inherent* to extended substance.

That motion and rest are inherent to extended substance enables Spinoza, first of all, to conceive the reciprocal determination of all things as taking place in an inter-active and a fluid fashion. It allows him, second of all, to develop a notion of individuation whereby — again, contra Proudhon — the individual is very much a group. To begin with, in explicating the so-called physical digression that appears after E.II.Prop.13, I distinguished — drawing on Simondon's work — three organizational tiers: the element, the individual, and the ensemble.

Spinoza claims that insofar as there is but a single substance of which all other things are either attributes or modes, no one extended thing is differentiated from any other by virtue of substance. Rather, one extended thing is distinguished from others in virtue of differences in their relative velocities, differences in their relative speed and direction of motion. It is on the basis of these variations of rest and relative velocity of motion that elemental bodies are distinguished from other another. If the essence of a thing is that which, when granted, the thing is granted and which, when absent, the thing is absent, and if, furthermore, the essence of a thing *is* that thing, it follows that the essence of the elemental body is its relative velocity and, furthermore, that it *is* its velocity. The elemental body is a modality of the motion or rest of extended substance. In this sense, as I suggested, it is not bodies that move but, as it were,

movement that bodies.

From his theory of the movement that bodies, we found, Spinoza develops an account of individuation based on the principle of the kinesthetic essence. The individual is constituted from a pattern of motion established among elemental bodies. That individual, in turn, is subsequently integrated into an ensemble of individuals characterized by its own unique pattern; the latter are likewise integrated into still more comprehensive ensembles and so on until the infinity totality of motion and rest is conceived. Thus, does the “whole of Nature” emerge as “as one individual whose parts — i.e. all the constituent bodies — vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole.”<sup>309</sup> That is, an absolute ensemble in which sub-ensembles, individuals, and elements are integrated *both* abstractly vis-a-vis one another and concretely vis-a-vis the infinite whole. All things in nature are reciprocally determined through an interactive process of kinesthetic determination that finds each integrated thoroughly with all. The individual, the ensemble, and the ensemble of ensembles, is, by virtue of this process of kinesthetic mutual determination very much a group. In fact, to conceive of any one thing apart from all the others is literally impossible; the determination of the one ultimately intersects with the determination of every other. Moreover, above the elemental tier, each thing is, at any rate, a group insofar as the kinesthetic pattern of which it is constituted is nothing else if not a group of elements or less comprehensive individuals as the case may be.

In this manner, we observe that the ontology of mutualism which Proudhon outlines is by no means foreign to Spinoza’s system. Substance is not inert, but characterized fundamentally by the relation of efficient causality which it exercises with respect to itself. This efficient causality takes the form of motion and rest arising necessarily from the expression of substance

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<sup>309</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.7.Schol.

as an extended thing. From perpetual variations in the motion and rest of extended substance, the relativity of all things, their intersectionality of being, and their group-identity is actively expressed through the exchange and integration of the motive forces that constitute all things and bind them together.

#### **IV. Moving Beyond Proudhon: Mutualism of Being, the Love of God, and the Love of Man**

In making his case for the link between metaphysical ground — the principle of motion, or the “democratic principle” — and its social or political consequences, Proudhon builds from the analogy he draws from the movement and consequent plurality of things to the notion of the group. Nothing, he holds, exists apart from the group; naturally, the same applies to “the living man” in body and in soul. So far as the latter is concerned, Proudhon maintains that the human soul is a sort of fluid intermingled with others, a fluid existing, therefore, in a natural condition of communication that it lends itself to the formation of “superior groups, or new natures;” i.e. the so-called “humanitary group.”

The same or a similar thought can be derived from Spinoza’s theory of individuation. As I indicated in the preceding chapter, “the order and connection of ideas,” according to Spinoza, “is the same as the order and connection of things.”<sup>310</sup> Therefore, if:

1. “Every individual thing, i.e., anything whatever which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and this cause again cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another

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<sup>310</sup> E.II.Prop.7.

cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so *ad infinitum*.”<sup>311</sup>

It follows that:

2. “The idea of an individual thing existing in actuality has God for its cause not insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is considered as affected by another idea of a thing existing in actuality, of which God is the cause insofar as he is affected by a third idea, and so *ad infinitum*.”<sup>312</sup>

As, in the being of each thing, the causal force — expressed, as I have gone to great lengths to explain, in motion through a process of kinesthetic individuation — of all other things is implicated such that all bodies ultimately intersect in a process of fluid mutual or reciprocal constitution, so too the ideas of those bodies. Each idea ultimately overlaps and intermingles with every other idea. For Spinoza then, as for Proudhon, the mind or the soul is very much a “fluid manifestation.”

As I see it, however, important differences arise when it comes to accounting for the transition from this fluid manifestation of the human mind to the formation of the social or the political group. To be more precise, I think that Proudhon’s story is deficient in two respects. In the first place, it seems to me that Proudhon makes a rather precipitous jump from the basic constitution of the human mind and the human body to the emergence of the so-called “humanitary group.” He fails, in other words, to make a necessary detour through the growth of social affects from the fundamentally inter-active character of human-being. Negligent in this manner, it is difficult to discern how Proudhon explains why human bodies accumulate in the fluid production of groups with other men and not things in general. Why, in other words, do human bodies and human minds not compose themselves in community with other sorts of

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<sup>311</sup> E.I.Prop.28.

<sup>312</sup> E.II.Prop.9.

things? Why human community?

In the second place (and, as I see it, in consequence of the first) he also leaps from the claim that, owing to our constitutive fluidity whereby we “circulate freely among one another, approaching one another, joining together, dispersing in turn in all directions” — whereby, in other words, we are free — to claims concerning the identity of the individual and the collective. Namely, to claims whereby the individual, “the me,” and the collective “the not-me,” are identical. If, as he contends, this “not-me” has its own functions, ideas, and judgments — its own life — *alien to our individuality* and, yet, we are identical to it, it follows that we are alien to ourselves. In short, the condition of liberty and its negation coincide; the democratization of the universe cannot be distinguished from its totalitarianization. Or, at any rate, making the distinction becomes extremely difficult.

As I interpret his work, Spinoza falls prey to neither of these deficiencies. In the first place, he accounts for the transition from fluid or multivalent determination to the emergence of human society and political community precisely by passing through the formation of human affective relations. More precisely, while — acknowledging the anachronism of saying so — Spinoza is evidently in agreement with Proudhon as to the fluid and relative character of individuality, unlike Proudhon, he supplies theoretical resources for distinguishing the fluid and relative determination of human bodies and, consequently, of human minds from the same sort of determinations so far as they take place among other sorts of things. In other words, while refraining from assertions as to the absolute distinction of humankind from other kinds — found, in other words, no special kingdom of man within the kingdom of nature — he explains how human affect differs from the affections of other sorts of things and, consequently, how uniquely human communities take shape.

In the second place, having taken human affect into account, Spinoza is positioned to treat of the relation between the individual and the collective in a manner that does not functionally reduce the former to the latter. As I see it, he accomplishes this feat through his exposition of the intellectual love of God (so far as I have interpreted it); it is in this love that real regard for self and real regard for the other essentially coincide without negating one another.

Let us begin with the first difficulty. In what respect does the fluid and relative determination of the human body and the human mind alike differ from that of other sorts of things such that we form community with other men and not — or, at least, less so — with animals and plants, for example? We already know that, in general, the individual body is a group of elemental bodies or, to be more precise, a pattern that arises from their concinnity of motion which serves to distinguish the individual in question from other things — be they individual or elemental. Now, in principle, these patterns of motion establish distinctions among things both horizontal and vertical in character. Horizontal distinctions arise simply from the fact that two or more patterns of elemental motion are not the same. Pattern  $\uparrow\uparrow\downarrow\downarrow$ , for example, differs from pattern  $\uparrow\downarrow\uparrow\downarrow$  though both contain the same number and also the same types of elements; namely, upward and downward motions in a linear sequence. Vertical differences arise from distinctions of complexity. The pattern  $\downarrow\wedge\rightarrow\nearrow\uparrow\swarrow\leftarrow\searrow$ , for example, is more complex than either the first or the second pattern; it comprises both lateral and diagonal motion even if a linear sequence is preserved. In any event, it is Spinoza's view that these vertical distinctions, distinctions of complexity, account for the fact that a body may not only be different from others, but also of a superior or inferior in rank:

“Ideas differ among themselves as do their objects... one is more excellent and contains more reality than another, just as the object of one idea is more excellent than that of

another and contains more reality.”<sup>313</sup>

The more complex the pattern by virtue of which a body or an ensemble is constituted — that is, the more attributes or properties of motion it comprises — the more reality it has. For, by E.I.Def.4, the more attributes or properties a thing has, the more reality or being it has.<sup>314</sup> In turn, the more reality a thing has, the more perfection it has; for “by reality and perfection I mean the same thing.”<sup>315</sup> The more complexly patterned body is superior in rank; the body less complexly patterned is inferior in rank.

The notion of rank, however, is perhaps less than felicitous; it gestures toward the sort of cosmic aristocracy or teleological order of things which Spinoza so strenuously resists throughout his work. Better expressed, the more complex, the more perfect, the more real a body the *more powerful* is that body. Thus, having described the basic constitution of bodies in general, Spinoza goes on to make more specific claims about the human body. If it is the case that:

1. By E.I.Ax.4, which holds that the idea of an effect involves an idea of the cause, it follows — or so Spinoza contends — that:
2. The order and connection of ideas (ideas of cause and effect) is the same as the order and connection of things (the causes and the effects themselves),<sup>316</sup> which implies, in turn, that:
3. “Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind is bound to be perceived by the human mind.”<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>314</sup> E.I.Prop.9.

<sup>315</sup> E.II.Def.6.

<sup>316</sup> E.II.Prop.7.Schol.

<sup>317</sup> E.II.Prop.12.



4. The human body “is composed of very many individual parts of different natures, each of which is extremely complex”<sup>318</sup> and which are, together with the body of which they are the parts, both “affected by external bodies in a great many ways”<sup>319</sup> and also move or affect “external bodies and dispose them in a great many ways.”<sup>320</sup>

Then, it is the case that:

5. “The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and this capacity will vary in proportion to the variety of states which its body can assume”<sup>321</sup> such that, if:
  - a. “The mind, insofar as it exercises reason, *cannot conceive any good* for itself except what is conducive to understanding”<sup>322</sup> it follows that:
6. “That which so disposes the human body that it can be affected in more ways, or which renders it capable of affecting external bodies in more ways, is advantageous to man, and proportionately more advantageous as the body is thereby rendered more capable of being affected in more ways and of affecting other bodies in more ways.”<sup>323</sup>
  - a. What so disposes man imbues him with “a greater... force of existence;” that is, more power.<sup>324</sup>

In the final passage, Spinoza speaks of good things. That is, things which “we certainly know to be useful to us.”<sup>325</sup> It is certainly the case that not all things are good; “the human body,” says Spinoza, “can be affected in many ways by which its power of activity is increased *or*

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<sup>318</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Post.1.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.Post.3.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.Post.6.

<sup>321</sup> E.II.Prop.14.

<sup>322</sup> E.IV.Prop.26.Dem.; E.IV.Def.1.

<sup>323</sup> E.IV.Prop.38.

<sup>324</sup> E.III.General Definition of Emotions.

<sup>325</sup> E.IV.Def.1.

*diminished.*”<sup>326</sup> Still, what strikes me, what I wish to emphasize, is that qualitative distinctions in the force of existence are linked to quantitative fluctuations in the degree of affectability. The more affective something is, the more powerful it is. Therefore, granted that human bodies are more complex than other sorts of bodies, they enjoy, in that respect alone, not only a different nature, but a “better” or more powerful one.

This distinction forms the basis of two intersecting inclinations. First, an inclination to form partnerships, affective relations, with other human beings. Second, a disinclination to forge affective relations with things non-human. Let us begin with the first of these.

In his scholium to E.IV.Prop.68, Spinoza — as I have noted previously — offers an interpretation of the fall of man. He expresses himself as follows:

“In [Moses’ narrative of the “history of the first man”] no other power of God is conceived save that whereby he created man; that is, *the power whereby he had regard only for man's advantage*... The story goes that when man had found woman, who agreed entirely with his own nature, he realized that there could be nothing in Nature more to his advantage than woman.”

Why? In the first place, because they are of a similar nature and, as I have explained in previous chapters, one thing is good for another to the extent that their natures are similar.<sup>327</sup> More specifically, it is because this similarity of their respective natures is such that the one constitutes an extremely complex stimulus field for the other; the relation between them can be such that a greater range of human attributes are called into activity than relations that might obtain human bodies or human minds and the minds and bodies of other sorts of things. Thus, in making his case for the contention that “Men... can wish for nothing more excellent for preserving their own

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<sup>326</sup> E.III.Post.1.

<sup>327</sup> E.IV.Prop.31 & Cor.

being than that they should all be in such harmony in all respects that their minds and bodies should compose, as it were, one mind and one body, and that all together should endeavor as best they can to preserve their own being, and that all together they should aim at the common advantage of all”<sup>328</sup> that, in other words, social and political organization is a human desideratum, Spinoza states that:

“We can never bring it about that we should need nothing outside ourselves to preserve our own being and that we should live a life quite unrelated to things outside ourselves. *Besides*, if we consider the mind, surely our intellect would be less perfect if the mind were in solitude and understood nothing beyond itself.”<sup>329</sup>

What I think is interesting about this passage is that the inter-activity of the mind, its stimulation, its being populated by many ideas — or not — is evidently regarded as an *independent criterion* militating toward sociality. It is not only that there are *things* we need which others enable us better to provision ourselves with; complexity of interactive relation is an independent need. This, at any rate, is the significance I ascribe to Spinoza’s use of the word “besides.” We need other people because they evoke in us more and more intricate ideas than other things can — this being the benchmark, so I indicated above, of human good.

As the individual body is more complex the more more constitutive bodies it comprises, as it is thus more powerful, so too the human ensemble. In this sense, the social advantage, so to speak, is not restricted to the relation that obtains between individuals. The social advantage represents a progressive accumulation of complexity; the concinnity of many human bodies is a profoundly intricate pattern of motion only partially represented by the force of law and custom. Thus, whether we interpret literally Spinoza’s contention that “their minds and bodies should

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<sup>328</sup> E.IV.Prop.18.Schol.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

compose, as it were, one mind and one body”<sup>330</sup> as many contemporary commentators have been inclined to do, or we agree with Barbone and Rice<sup>331</sup> that this and other instances of the same idea are emphatically figurative — modified, as they always are, by “as it were (*veluti*)” — we necessarily admit that the complexity of relations and of ideas that arise, the intelligence that is expressed within, the social environment is superior to that of the human individual as that of the human individual is with respect to individuals less complexly constituted. Society is the seat of intelligence and power not because functions as forceful individual over and above the individual, but because in and by it — and, moreover, to the extent that the complexity of relation is well distributed — the individual is more powerful, is more intelligent. Thus, to the extent that all things are driven to enjoy that which enhances their power of activity, is the the case that men are inclined — beyond and aside from the mutual provision of basic biological necessities — to enjoy the company of other men and to live in community with them.

Let us now consider the second of the two aforementioned inclinations; namely, human disinclination to join in community with other sorts of things. To be more precise, it is not so much that men are constitutionally disinclined to join in partnership with other sorts of things as much as these, for us, are, first of all, insignificant. The kinesthetic configuration of the non-human body is different than that of the human body. When, therefore, we are affected by a non-human body such that the idea of this affection involves an idea as to the nature of that body together with an idea as to the nature of our own,<sup>332</sup> the idea of that body in our thinking will *not* “involve an affection of our own body similar to the affection of the external body.”<sup>333</sup> In other

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Barbone, S.L. 1997. *Spinoza on Community, Affectivity, and Life Values*. Ph.D Dissertation, Marquette U.; Rice, L.C. 1971. “Spinoza on Individuation.” In *The Monist* 55(4). pp. 640-659.

<sup>332</sup> E.II.Prop.16.

<sup>333</sup> E.III.Prop.27.

words, we shall not imitate its emotions; we shall not feel in sympathy with it.<sup>334</sup> If, for Spinoza, empathy constitutes — so I have argued in earlier chapters — a social and political mechanism of prime importance, it is no mystery that men cannot — or, at any rate, ought not — exist in close relation to other sorts of things.

On the contrary, sympathetic or empathic relation to the non-human thing indicates, for Spinoza, a diminished condition of human power and human freedom — in this respect, it runs against our most basic instincts. As Spinoza explains elsewhere, it is not his view that the non-human thing (“beasts” in particular) is without feeling;<sup>335</sup> he holds all things to be animate<sup>336</sup> in degrees and, to that extent, to feel in some respect. It is simply that “the emotions of” such things “differ from the emotions of men as much as their nature differs from human nature.”<sup>337</sup> There is equine, insect, fish, and avian desire, but desire in none of these forms is akin to human desire.<sup>338</sup> Fishly desire, for example, secures to the fish its “sovereign natural right” to “inhabit water,” but likewise to “the big ones” the right to “eat the smaller ones”<sup>339</sup> and of man to eat both.

In this respect is “the requirement to refrain from slaughtering beasts... founded on groundless superstition and womanish compassion rather than on sound reason.”<sup>340</sup> Setting aside the question of Spinoza’s sexism,<sup>341</sup> this pernicious “superstition” is the belief that the nature of man and of animal — or any other thing non-human — are akin to one another such that an

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<sup>334</sup> E.III.Prop.15.Schol.

<sup>335</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.1.

<sup>336</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>337</sup> E.III.Prop.57.Schol.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> TP.16.

<sup>340</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.1.

<sup>341</sup> For this, see 2009. *Feminist Interpretations of Spinoza*. Gatens, M. ed. University Park: Penn State U.

advantage obtains for us “to be in close relationship”<sup>342</sup> with them. As Spinoza contends, however, this belief “indicates only imperfection” and consists in nothing “that expresses reality.” On the contrary, it is precisely the substance of “Adam’s decision and its execution,”<sup>343</sup> which took place when man “came to believe that the beasts were like himself” such that he “straightway began to imitate their emotions and to lose his freedom.”<sup>344</sup>

Whether or not we agree with Spinoza’s assessment as to the ethics of vegetarianism, we can derive the dialectical corollary to his assertion as to the human inclination to organize socially and politically. As power is enhanced parallel to the concurrent rise of complexity on the part of the kinesthetic essence of things and diminished along with the fall of complexity, man is inclined to engage himself such that the former and not the latter takes place. This, he accomplishes by endeavoring to immerse himself in a complex social or political environment and by abstaining from the sort of impoverished social or political environment that is the provision of relation with non-human things less able to interact in a sophisticated manner. Unlike Proudhon, therefore, Spinoza is able to explain why it is that, despite the fluidity of reciprocal determination among all things — man included — human beings tend to create human communities, human groups.

As for the second of the aforementioned deficiencies in Proudhon’s account, namely, the manner in which he identifies “the me” with the “not-me,” the individual with a collective that is

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<sup>342</sup> E.IV.Prop.37.Schol.1.

<sup>343</sup> Ep.19.

<sup>344</sup> E.IV.Prop.68.Schol. Incidentally, insofar as Spinoza compares the difference that obtains between men and animals to the difference that obtains between the philosopher and the drunkard (E.III.Prop.57) and, presumably, women as well — for Spinoza considers them weaker in “strength of mind and ability,” let alone of body, and therefore lacking equality of natural right vis-a-vis men (TP.11) — it would seem to follow that Spinoza would be hard-pressed to explain why philosophers ought not eat drunkards and men women. If there is “no small difference between” joy on the part of those weak of mind and body (E.III.Prop.57) — presumably, other affections likewise — and that of those of sound mind and body, who is to say that this difference is yet too small to justify the supposition that the former are the food of the latter by natural right?

alien to it and blurs thereby the distinction between the democratization of the universe and its absolute totalitarianization, I have already said that Spinoza's account of blessedness and the intellectual love of God supplies us with a more satisfactory result. So far as I understand it, this is the case in two overlapping respects. One, the power of the individual and his own peculiar freedom coincides, for Spinoza, with the power of the group such that the love which the he bears with respect to himself is inseparable from it. Two, the love which the individual bears with respect to himself is thoroughly integrated, through the medium of the "humanitary group," with the love which God bears with respect to himself; namely the parallel in thought to the so-called "face of the universe" which constitutes the infinite mediate mode of extension — if the latter are necessarily indivisible, so the former is not apart from the whole, but of it.

Power on the part of the individual and power on the part of the group coincide. As I have already suggested above, that is good or advantageous — that conduces to the enhancement of power — which disposes the human body such that it can be affected in more ways or which render it capable of affecting other bodies in more ways. Likewise, that is good or advantageous — that conduces to the enhancement of power — which disposes the human mind such that it can be affected in more ways or which render it capable of conceiving more ideas and of doing so in more sophisticated ways; "as the body is more capable of being affected in many ways, so the mind is more capable of thinking."<sup>345</sup> Friendship with other men — that is, life in society — accomplishes this generally insofar as that is necessarily good etc. which is "in agreement with our nature,"<sup>346</sup> and the more so the more it is in agreement with our nature;<sup>347</sup> in this respect,

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<sup>345</sup> E.IV.App.27.

<sup>346</sup> E.IV.Prop.31.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. Cor.

"man is a God to man,"<sup>348</sup> for men are most in agreement with each other and "except for mankind, we know of no individual thing in nature in whose mind we can rejoice, and with which we can unite in friendship or some kind of close tie."<sup>349</sup> I have already discussed this at length in earlier chapters. More specifically, the condition of friendship with other men and the endeavor to understand them, according to Spinoza, "is a much more excellent thing and worthy of our knowledge to study the deeds of men than the deeds of beasts"<sup>350</sup> — other men, being more sophisticated creatures, evoke for us more sophisticated ideas and, therefore, enhance the total activity of the human mind.

In this respect, the social condition is more than an instrumental good. While Spinoza often remarks to the effect that men "can much *more easily* meet their needs by mutual help and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces,"<sup>351</sup> which suggests that community, that political organization, is but a more efficient way of accomplishing survival tasks which, in one degree or another, we can perform for ourselves and in isolation, this is only a small part of a far more comprehensive, if understated, idea. Namely, that social and political engagement is a good in itself; the formation of friendship is an immediate and necessary condition for realizing the full range of human properties so far as Spinoza conceives them. In this sense, the social or political condition is the very ground and foundation for realizing the human thing, for exercising human power — this is true whether or not by cooperation and mutual aid the organized community succeeds in feeding and defending itself. That is, whether or not the collective force of society as such is sufficient to ensure survival. Consequently, it seems to me that contemporary emphasis on Spinoza's notion of the "one mind and one body" as expressive

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<sup>348</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Schol.

<sup>349</sup> E.IV.App.26.

<sup>350</sup> E.IV.Prop.35.Schol.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.



of the power of the multitude is misplaced. The single-mindedness of the multitude in its collective action is only one element of its power and not, for that matter, the most important one. What is essential is the fact of human solidarity in itself as a field of power in which the individual and the group immediately coincide — apart from the effective telos of the group as a connative force in its own right.

If it is the case that realizing human essence on the part of the individual is contingent upon the condition of sociality — we must be of a human group to be what we are — it follows that the idea of the self is inseparable from the idea of the human group for the same reason that I have outlined in preceding chapters. Namely, that formulation of an adequate idea of anything demands, according to Spinoza, cognition of the causal forces which brought it to bear. If, for mankind, the those forces are inseparable from the community of men, it follows that the idea of any one individual — though in the end perhaps inseparable from the totality of nature so far as the human community is ultimately embedded therein — necessarily involves the idea of his or her community. Reflecting contentedly on the idea of oneself, on the condition of one's own power of acting and thinking, on the extent to which one has realized the properties of thought and deed constitutive of human nature, enjoying, in other words, the love of self that, for Spinoza, is blessedness, therefore, likewise involves necessarily the idea of the community which constitutes the causal framework for what one has become. In this respect, self-regard and regard all the others, for the collective, coincide without the latter operating as an alien force with which I am paradoxically identical and, to that extent, foreign to myself. I love the group insofar as I know and love myself, but I am never reducible to or identical with the collective as Proudhon seemed to believe.

This leads us to the second manner in which, by the notion of blessedness or the

intellectual love of God, Spinoza better integrates “the me” with the “not-me,” the individual with the collective, than Proudhon does. Namely, that self-love or blessedness is part and parcel of God’s love for himself — the love of self, the love of God, and the love of mankind cohere as one. I have already touched on this topic in the preceding chapter. However, I would like, here, to elaborate somewhat by drawing on the J.M. Beyssade’s argument to the effect that the infinite mediate mode of thought is God’s love.<sup>352</sup>

It is well known that, while Spinoza had identified the infinite mediate mode of extension he neglected to identify precisely the same for the attribute of thought. Throughout the vast literature on the subject, a number of proposals have been made. One of the more creative, however, is Beyssade’s; in somewhat elaborated form, it would run as follows:

1. Love is “pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause”<sup>353</sup>
  - a. Self-love is pleasure accompanied by the idea of the self as its cause.<sup>354</sup>
  - b. Self-love is a species of love.
    - i. Therefore, the idea of the self that it involves is one in which the self figures as an eternal cause.
2. “God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love.”<sup>355</sup>
  - a. God’s self-love involves an idea which God has of himself in which he figures as an external cause.
    - i. Thus does God have two ideas:
      1. That in which he regards himself, “his essence and... everything

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<sup>352</sup> Beyssade, J.M. 1994. “*Sur le Mode Infini Mediat dans le Attribut de la Pensee: De Probleme (lettre 64) un Solution (Ethique V.36)*. *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*. 184(1). pp. 23-26

<sup>353</sup> E.III.Prop.13.Schol.

<sup>354</sup> See E.III.Prop.55.Schol.

<sup>355</sup> E.V.Prop.35.

that... follows from” it<sup>356</sup> — this is the infinite immediate mode of thought.

2. That in which he “regards himself, accompanied by the idea of himself;”<sup>357</sup> i.e. as an external cause<sup>358</sup> — this is the infinite mediate mode of thought.

On the basis of E.V.Prop.36, its corollary, and its scholium, Beyssade goes on to explain that the intellectual love which the human mind bears toward God “is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself”<sup>359</sup> that such that “the love of God toward men and the mind’s intellectual love toward God are one and the same.”<sup>360</sup> That is, the love of self which gives rise to the intellectual love of God — so far as I explained in the preceding chapter — is part and parcel of the infinite love which God bears with respect to himself. Being infinite, however, this love is indivisible. This means that blessedness on the part of the individual, the intellectual love of God, is necessarily continuous with the totality of all that God loves in himself. In this respect, again, “the me” coincides with “the not-me” without being reduced to it. That my love is continuous with the love of God does not mean that I understand things as God does, for then I would be God; on the contrary, it means that the love which I bear with respect to myself is necessarily expressed in solidarity with all other things which God knows and loves in himself.

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<sup>356</sup> E.II.Prop.3.

<sup>357</sup> E.V.Prop.36.Dem.

<sup>358</sup> This, I would suggest, allows us correctly to interpret statement in KV.I.9, “As regards the Understanding in the thinking thing, this, like the first, is also a Son, Product, or immediate Creation of God, also created by him from all eternity, and remaining immutable to all eternity. It has but one function, namely, to understand clearly and distinctly all things at all times; which produces invariably an infinite or most perfect satisfaction.” Here, he speaks of not one, but two productions. God produces understanding, or the infinite mediate mode of thought. Understanding produces, in turn, “the most perfect satisfaction.” These are not one and the same. Rather, just God’s production enacts a thing distinct in some fashion from himself — the infinite immediate mode — so too does the production of the infinite immediate mode enact a thing distinct from itself. Namely, the infinite mediate mode which is God’s satisfaction with the idea he has of himself.

<sup>359</sup> E.V.Prop.36.

<sup>360</sup> E.V.Prop.36.Cor.

More precisely, it means that the love which I bear toward myself is necessarily expressed in solidarity with other people. Note, that Spinoza did *not* claim only that God loves that man who loves him, but that God bears love for men in general, that “insofar as he loves himself, loves mankind.”<sup>361</sup> As I explained in the preceding chapter and as I have also indicated in part here, I take it that this is due to the fact that the idea of the human individual necessarily involves the idea of the community which empowers it to realize its essential properties such that the love which anyone bears with respect to himself necessarily carries over to the community and, more broadly, to mankind in general. If the love of God and man’s own love of himself and of God are “one and the same,” it follows that God’s love of one man necessarily entails also love of the community of men as well. Again, the love of self, the love of community, the love of man in general, the love of God, and God’s love of himself coincide; the individual and the collective, the individual and, ultimately, the totality of things, are thoroughly integrated without the one being reduced to the other. Rather, this integration is expressed by the manner in which things generally, and men in particular, vary in infinite ways without imparting change to the whole,<sup>362</sup> by the manner in which the indivisible totality of things is infinitely complex and, in this respect, infinitely powerful.

In opening this section, I pointed out that in making his case for the link between metaphysical ground and its social or political consequences, Proudhon derives, from the intermingling of bodies, the intermingling of minds and, consequently, the democratic emergence of the human collective. I then indicated that a similar idea can be derived from the theoretical resources supplied to us by Spinoza. As I went on to explain, however, Proudhon’s account is deficient in two respects while, in these same respects, Spinoza’s is not. One,

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> E.II.Prop.13.Lem.7.Schol.

Proudhon leaps from the basic constitution of the human mind and the human body to the “humanitary group” without adequately explaining how or why it is that such minds and such bodies tend to aggregate in this manner in spite of the prevailing relativity of things. Two, Proudhon’s account of the organic constitution of the human collective seems to suggest that the individual is ultimately reduced to and identical with the group which, paradoxically, stands against it as an alien force.

I then explained that in Spinoza’s work we find these two difficulties resolved via the foundation of his theory of affect; namely, the idea of power of which we have spoken in earlier subsections of this chapter. Variation in the constitutive patterns of things establishes not only their difference, but also their relative rank; in other words, it establishes not only horizontal, but also vertical distinctions. The more complex a pattern, the more reality it comprises. In turn, the more perfection and, consequently, the more power. In other words, the relative power of things is a function of their constitutive complexity.

Correspondingly, that which disposes something to realize features of its constitutive complexity, its essential properties of motion and of thought, is that which empowers it. What empowers that thing is good and desirable; therefore do we seek out that which so provokes us to think and to do. This inclination to be provoked imparts to man an instinct to aggregate favoring human kind and distancing things non-human kind — it amounts to an independent criterion, apart from basic survival, militating toward social engagement. The human community, at its most basic, is an accumulation of complexity conducive to the stimulation and, therefore, the empowerment, of its members. Conversely, sympathy for — or, perhaps, better put, imagined friendship with — non-human kind, implies complexity diminished and, to that extent, a weakened condition on the part of man.

In this sense, we find that the power of the individual and the power of the group immediately coincide; in community with others, man realizes the essential properties of his nature. In this sense, conceiving the idea of himself and his own power, enjoying blessedness, is inseparable from conceiving the idea of the community and likewise loving it. The love of self and the love of other men necessarily coincide; *blessedness is a communal project*. Furthermore, as I went on to explain, this same love, in both fields of its expression — the individual and the collective — coincide, are thoroughly integrated with, the infinite love which God bears toward himself. The love of oneself, the love of other men, and the love of God, exist in a perfect and indivisible continuity. In this respect, the collective is not an alien force in which the individual is annihilated; on the contrary, the the collective is expressed in the infinite complexity of which the individual is a component and from which the individual immediately benefits.

## **V. Conclusion**

In opening this chapter, I proposed to examine in further detail the notion of a mutualism of being which had been touched upon in the preceding chapter, the notion of an ontology of mutualism. To do so, I first examined Proudhon's *Philosophy of Progress*. There, he outlines a link between politics and metaphysics which articulated in the distinction between a “democratic” principle arising from ideas of motion, becoming, and complexity or plurality on the one hand and, on the other, a “monarchic” or totalitarian principle arising from ideas of stasis or being, and simplicity. This distinction, so he argues, is realized in a sequence of existential analogues: the idea that unity is a series in ensemble and, consequently, that the individual generally — and the human individual in particular — is a group. The soul, he contends, is a fluid thing constituted in and by its relations. The reciprocal constitution of the human thing

through spontaneous interaction — through liberty — is what gives rise to the sort of solidarity which makes for the organization of “humanitary groups,” for society.

There were, however, several problems with Proudhon’s account, a response to which occupied us for the remainder of our chapter. First, Proudhon fails to account for the leap from the relativity of things, their mutuality of constitution, generally to the formation of human communities. Second, his account of the human community, of society, appeals to a collectivist conception whereby the individual is identified with the collective which functions, nonetheless, as an alien force — he is annihilative in the whole. This implies, as I indicated, that the supposed democratization of being doubles as its totalitarianization. Lastly — and this undoubtedly commanded the lion’s share of our attention — Proudhon claimed that Spinoza’s system constitutes the epitome of totalitarian metaphysics; essentially, that Spinoza stands for everything he, Proudhon, opposes.

I then went on to show that, contra Proudhon, Spinoza’s system is precisely mutualistic in character and, further, formulated in such a manner that the pitfalls into which Proudhon’s ontology falls are easily evaded. I began doing so by dispelling the notion that Spinoza is an advocate of “being,” for Spinoza, is a pure abstraction, allowing us to imagine something else but having no real existential analogue. Granted, however, that the term appears in one of Spinoza’s most important definitions in the *Ethics* — namely, his definition of God — we were then impelled to inquire after that real thing which the idea of being somehow helps us to imagine if not to understand.

I then went on to demonstrate at length that Spinoza’s definition of substance and his assertion that the essence of substance is power fundamentally overlap; the result being that, for Spinoza, substance is very much active and not at all characterizable by the notion of stasis. As I

presented the case, the fundamental characteristic of Spinoza's definition of God — and, to that extent, the essence of God — is that he is *causa sui*. It was then argued that Spinoza's notion of the *causa sui* is positive and not negative, implying real and effective causation (that is, activity). If power is the equivalent of adequate causation or activity, it follows that the power of God, like that of any other thing, is his essence. In this manner, we found that there is, to things, no neutral substratum; each thing coincides not only with the active expression of its power, but with the active expression of the power of God. Substance is by no means inert; substance eternally becomes in itself.

Having dismissed the essential inertness of substance, I went on to demonstrate the necessary relativity of things according to Spinoza, and also to emphasize the non-inertness of substance in its expression. I began by demonstrating that because the infinity of substance implies its indivisibility, that there is in nature neither part nor whole — that it exists as a plenum — it turns out that neither position nor place is absolute, but that each position is relative to every other position. The result, so I emphasized, is that there likewise exists in nature neither boundary nor limit, neither figure nor determination nor measure. Thus is nature neither ordered nor confused; all things in nature are relative; each intersects with every other and is inconceivable apart from the whole.

So I went on to argue, owing to the essential activity of substance, the relativity of all things is expressed — So far as Spinoza understands it — by their interaction. I began by pointing out that, according to Spinoza, it is the infinity and the consequent indivisibility of extended substance that make motion conceivable in the first place. I pointed out, furthermore, that — contrary to Descartes and, likewise the whole of the medieval philosophical tradition — Spinoza held the absolute infinity of substance to imply that motion is an inherent property of



extension and not something imparted to it from without. This insight positioned us to consider Spinoza's account of individuation so far as it takes place in the physical digression that appears after proposition thirteen in the second part of the *Ethics*. In essence, my account of Spinoza's theory emphasizes the idea that it is not bodies that move, but movement that bodies. In other words, that the essence of the thing extended is fundamentally kinesthetic in character; all things are reducible, in the case of the elemental body, to a particular velocity or, in the case of the individual and the ensemble, to a particular pattern of related velocities. Thus conceived, that all things are reciprocally determined within a field of motion that ultimately extends to the infinite totality of things, the so-called face of the universe. In this sense, the relativity of all things is expressed in and by their motive interaction.

With these theoretical resources, I proceeded to substantiate my earlier claim that Proudhon has misjudged Spinoza and that the ontology of mutualism which Proudhon outlines is by no means foreign to Spinoza's system. One, Spinoza rejects the notion of being. Two, because Spinoza considers power, or active causal force, to be the essence of substance, it turns out that substance is not metaphysically inert, but *becomes* eternally. Three, the infinity and eternal becoming of substance implies both the spatial relativity of all things and also that this relativity is actively expressed in motion through an infinite process of mutual or reciprocal determination — an intersectionality of being — that extends to their infinite totality. Three, this intersectionality of being implies group-identity insofar as the idea of the self necessarily implies the idea of the group whence the self arises.

Finally, I explained how Spinoza supplies a more adequate response to the aforementioned difficulties in Proudhon's account of the ontology of mutualism. First, I pointed out that variation in the constitutive kinesthetic patterns of things establishes distinctions not

only horizontal in character, but also vertical; enhanced complexity implies more reality, more perfection, and more power. To share in the complexity that other people represent constitutes, therefore, its own category of motivation driving us to form social bonds with other people, to accumulate complexity in human communities and driving us likewise to shun community with or sympathy for more simplistic forms of being.

In this sense, as I pointed out above, the power of the individual and the power of the group immediately coincide without the former being reduced to or annihilated in the latter. Blessedness turns out to be a communal project. Again, this blessedness or self-love, on the part of the individual, coincides with love of other men on the one hand and love of God on the other; the three exist in continuity with one another such that the collective never functions as an alien force acting above or against the individual but, on the contrary, is the immediate condition of his power and self-realization.

In this respect, we find that Proudhon was wrong. Spinoza's system, far from being the antithesis of a mutualist ontology, involves necessarily the essential features of such a theory. Moreover, his conception of this mutuality of being carries with it theoretical resources which allow us to explain the emergence of human solidarity and community on the one hand and, on the other, the means by which this solidarity can be conceived without implicitly transforming a metaphysics of democracy into a metaphysics of totalitarianism.

## Appendix: On Definitions

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes two general types of definitions.

1. Real definitions: those which serve “to explicate a thing whose essence alone is in question and the subject of doubt.” Since these explicate “a thing as it exists out-side the intellect,” they must be true if they are to function as definitions at all.”<sup>1</sup>
  - a. It is to this sort of definition that Spinoza refers when he states that “a definition to be regarded as complete, it *must explain the inmost essence* of the thing.”<sup>2</sup> This locution appears in Spinoza’s first work and is not altered in any significant way throughout its several iterations in his later writings. Thus does he state in the first part of the *Ethics* that “the true definition of each thing involves and expresses nothing beyond the nature of the thing defined”<sup>3</sup> and speaks of essence and definition interchangeably in E.I.Prop.33.Schol.1. In his epistles, likewise, does he state that the true definition “is concerned only with the essences of things or the essences of the affections of things”<sup>4</sup> and that it “includes nothing other than the simple nature of the thing defined.”<sup>5</sup>
2. Stipulative, or nominal, definitions: those which are “put forward simply for examination.” Since these merely explicate “a thing as it is conceived... or can be conceived” they need only be *conceivable* to operate as a definition.<sup>6</sup>

Though some have argued that the definitions with which Spinoza opens the ethics (his

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<sup>1</sup> Ep.9

<sup>2</sup> TIE.94

<sup>3</sup> E.I.Prop.8.Schol.

<sup>4</sup> Ep.9

<sup>5</sup> Ep.3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

definition of God included) are merely stipulative in character.<sup>7</sup> I concur, however, with Diane Steinberg in her view that, on the contrary, he must have considered them to be real, for “otherwise the *Ethics* would be a mere logical exercise and not,” as Spinoza evidently intends it to be, “a demonstration of the nature of things.”<sup>8</sup>

Steinberg offers no further support for her position; it may be recalled, however, that in the second scholium to E.I.Prop.8 Spinoza comments as follows:

“If men were to attend to the nature of substance, they would not doubt at all the truth of Proposition 7 [i.e. that existence belongs to the nature of substance] indeed, this Proposition would be an axiom to all and would be ranked among universally accepted truisms. For by substance they would understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself... because they are conceived only through themselves, their truth external to the intellect is only in themselves... So it must necessarily be admitted that the existence of substance is as much an eternal truth as is its essence.”

On this passage, Curley notes that “this shows clearly that Spinoza does not regard his definition of substance as nominal in the sense of being a report of ordinary usage.” It also shows, he says:

“That he does not regard his definition as nominal in the sense of being a stipulation about the use of the term. People have failed to define substance properly because they have failed to attend properly to the nature of substance. This certainly sounds to me as though he is thinking of his definition of substance as an account of the essence of

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Richard. 1954. *Definition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 157-58.; Delahunty, R. J. 1999. Spinoza. *The arguments of the philosophers.*, ed. T. Honderich. New York: Routledge. pp. 91-94. See also G.H.R. Parkinson’s comment in Spinoza, B. 1993. *Ethics*. Everyman paperback classics. Trans. A. Boyle and G. H. R. Parkinson. London: J.M Dent. p.260, note 1.; Hoffman, J., and G. S. Rosenkranz. 2008. *The Divine Attributes. Exploring the Philosophy of Religion.*, ed. M. L. Peterson. Malden: John Wiley & Sons. p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Steinberg, D. 2000. *On Spinoza*. Wadsworth Philosophers Series. Belmont: Thomson Learning, Inc. p. 15. See also Yovel, Y. 1989. *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*. Princeton: Princeton U. Press. pp.138-39; Harris, E. E. 1973. *Salvation from Despair: A Reappraisal of Spinoza's Philosophy*. International Archives of the History of Ideas., ed. S. Hutton. Vol. 59. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. pp. 21-22

substance as it is in itself, outside his intellect, as a definition which can be judged true or false by its conformity to the nature of that object.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus may we conclude, if only for the sake of argument, that Spinoza at least considered his definition of substance — and likely most, or even all, of the the definitions with which he begins the *Ethics* — to be real and not stipulative or otherwise nominal.

A real definition has, for Spinoza, certain fundamental characteristics. He rejects unequivocally the traditional Aristotelian method of defining things “*per genus et differentiam*.”<sup>10</sup> This procedure, Spinoza explains, is literally inconceivable. If it is true that it is only “through a definition consisting of genus and differentia that we can first get to know a thing perfectly,” he says, then “we can never know perfectly the highest genus, which has no genus above it.” If, therefore, the “highest genus, which is the cause of our knowledge of all other things, is not known, much less, then, can the other things be understood or known which are explained by that genus.” This procedure for definition, therefore, does not produce knowledge in Spinoza’s view but, instead, negates its possibility.

Definition *per genus et differentiam* is to be replaced, he says, by definition *per causam*. Thus conceived, a definition is a twofold procedure:

1. The definition of “every individual thing, i.e., anything whatever which is finite and has a determinate existence,” to the extent that it “cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence,”<sup>11</sup> must include include this, the “proximate cause” of its

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<sup>9</sup> Curley, E. 1986. Spinoza's Geometric Method. In *Studia Spinozana, Volume I: Spinoza's Philosophy of Society*, eds. E. Giancotti, A. Matheron and M. Walther. pp. 152-158. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. Cf. Bennett, J. 1984. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett. pp. 17-19; Garret, A. V. 2003. *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*. New York: Cambridge U. Press. pp. 144-80

<sup>10</sup> KV.I.7; Cf. Aristotle’s Topics, VI.4, 141b26-7.

<sup>11</sup> E.I.Prop.28.

definiendum.<sup>12</sup>

2. Insofar as “God is the efficient cause of all things that can come within the scope of the infinite intellect”<sup>13</sup> such that “a thing which has been determined to act” — or to be — “in a particular way has necessarily been so determined by God,”<sup>14</sup> must this causation be included in any conception or definition. Thing must be understood and, therefore, defined “through the attributes whose modes they are.”<sup>15</sup>

As Steven Nadler so elegantly put it, “every event in nature stands at the intersection of two causal nexuses: a ‘horizontal’ nexus within which a thing is temporally and causally related to (infinitely many) prior and posterior things; and a ‘vertical’ nexus within which a thing and its relationship to other things is causally related to eternal principles, culminating in Nature’s attributes.”<sup>16</sup>

Incidentally, this construction of the definition does allow Spinoza to retain the old terminology — albeit in modified form. As he comments in KV.I.7, the attribute operates as a sort of genus. It follows, then, that proximate causes along the ‘horizontal axis’ constitute, as it were, the differentia of the thing they produce vis-a-vis its causal genus. In this sense — though, indeed, he does not say as much — it appears that Spinoza simply uprooted the terms ‘genus’ and ‘differentia’ from their place in Aristotle’s *Topics* and reinterpreted according to claims made in the *Posterior Analytics* and *Physics* to the effect that to know something is to know its cause.<sup>17</sup> This lends a great deal of credence to Deleuze’s claim that Spinoza’s method is

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<sup>12</sup> TIE.96; Cf.TTP.4.

<sup>13</sup> E.I.Prop.16.Cor.1.

<sup>14</sup> E.I.Prop.26

<sup>15</sup> KV.I.7

<sup>16</sup> Nadler, S. 2006. *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge introductions to key philosophical texts. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. pp. 100-101.

<sup>17</sup> *APost.* 71 b 9–11; *APost.* 94 a 20; *Phys.* 194 b 17–20.

“thoroughly Aristotelian” despite the fact that he expressly rejects Aristotle’s procedure.<sup>18</sup>

There is some indication that, in his early work, Spinoza intended to restrict this procedure to “things which do not exist through themselves,”<sup>19</sup> thus excluding “self-subsisting being,”<sup>20</sup> the “uncreated thing.”<sup>21</sup> I am inclined, however, to agree with Garret<sup>22</sup> that this is not at all certain. Though, in his early work, Spinoza does hold that self-subsisting being must “*exclude every cause*,”<sup>23</sup> be self-evident or “known through itself,”<sup>24</sup> he uses the same sort of language in the *Ethics*, where it is evident that to “exclude every cause” means to exclude every *external* cause, which means, in turn, that the thing in question is its own cause and *thus* known through itself. In E.I.Prop.7.Dem., Spinoza asserts that because “substance cannot be produced by anything else... [it] is therefore self-caused.” I shall have more to say about this proposition below, but at this point we can simply accept it as evidence that excluding external causation implies, for Spinoza, self-causation and, therefore, that in both the early and the late works definition *per causam* applies to self-subsisting being.

Regardless, it is undoubtedly the case that his mature work reflects its unrestricted application. Thus, for example, does he state in a letter to to Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus, Spinoza states that:

“The idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause...when I define God as a supremely perfect Being [i.e. as Descartes defines God in his 5th meditation] since this definition does not express the efficient cause (for I take it that an efficient cause can

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<sup>18</sup> Deleuze, G. 1990. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. p.134.

<sup>19</sup> KV.I.7. Cf. TIE.96

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> TIE.96.

<sup>22</sup> Garret, A. V. 2003. *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*. pp. 144-80.

<sup>23</sup> TIE.96.

<sup>24</sup> KV.I.7.

be internal as well as external), I shall not be able to extract therefrom all the properties of God, as I can do when I define God as a Being, etc.”<sup>25</sup>

Spinoza articulates himself in nearly identical terms in his January 1666 letter to John Hudd.<sup>26</sup>

There must, he says, necessarily be a positive cause of *each thing*, through which it exists. This cause, he continues, must either be placed in the nature and definition of the thing itself (because in effect existence belongs to its nature or is necessarily included in it) or outside the thing. In the *Ethics* he articulates himself likewise. He explains, first, that “for each individual existent thing there must necessarily be a definite cause for its existence” and, second, that “the cause for the existence of a thing must either be *contained in the very nature and definition of the existent thing*... or must have its being independently of the thing itself.”<sup>27</sup> That to the nature of which existence belongs — i.e. substance<sup>28</sup> — is not excluded from the set of “individual things” for the existence of which there must be a “definite cause.” It is distinguished, as it were, only by the location of its cause: its cause resides in its own nature alone. Thus does Spinoza explain, in the second of his proofs for the necessary existence of God, that “for every thing a cause or reason must be assigned either for its existence or for its nonexistence... the reason for the existence of substance also follows from its nature alone.”<sup>29</sup>

In any event, we observe that definition *per causam* applies to substance and its modes alike. The difference is simply the *location* of the cause: does it lie within or outside of the definiendum?

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<sup>25</sup> Ep.60.

<sup>26</sup> Ep.34.

<sup>27</sup> E.I.Prop.9.Schol.

<sup>28</sup> E.I.Prop.7.

<sup>29</sup> E.I.Prop.11.Dem.2.



## **Conclusions and Parting Reflections**

## I. Our Findings Considered in Sum

Let us now take stock of what has been accomplished. At the outset, I noted that late twentieth century and millennial appropriations of Spinoza have tended to take the state for granted as *the* form of political organization *par excellence*. The political — in the form of the State — is conceived as a mediation between pre-political and ideal post-political conditions; it is regarded as a stage that carries within itself the affective mechanisms whereby nascent rational structures can be coaxed into fruition. In this way, the State is regarded as an institution that provides for its own “withering away.” Alternatively, the State is conceived as the only organizational framework for political expression. In this case, whether we look toward the radical or the democratizing commonwealth, the State subsumes the whole of the political and admits of no further horizon, post-political or otherwise. Either way, we found that the most recent wave of engagement with Spinoza’s work takes the State as a political form for granted; each reader proceeds from this fundamental assumption — that the State form overlaps the political as such — and interprets it after his own fashion. But the foundation is common throughout. I proposed to challenge this assumption. That is, to interpret Spinoza along anarchist lines.

To frame this challenge, I first reviewed anarchist reflection on Spinoza or on spinozism. Of those which ought to be taken seriously (i.e. excluding the anarcho-primitivists) I found that historical responses have been mixed. On the one hand, interpreting Spinoza along along Romantic lines — that is, as interpreting the absolute or the infinite as something to aspire toward, as an object of nostalgia, on the part of the finite — we found that thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin regarded Spinoza as an advocate of totalitarian government and rejected him on that account. However, there were other anarchist thinkers who regarded Spinoza from the same

basic point of vantage but arrived at markedly different results.

In the first place, I considered the writings of Moses Hess as an early advocate of spinozist anarchism. On his reading, the intellectual love of God constitutes an immanent mechanism for organizing human political communities that does not rely on the external coercion of the State. In the second place, I considered the work of Gustav Landauer who saw in the idea of substance-qua-spirit the ontological foundation of the ordered multiplicity. That is, the principle whereby the univocity of communal being expresses itself in a plenitude of distinct yet mutually coherent forms — be they institutional, aesthetic, or otherwise.

Finally, I considered the brief but theoretically significant remarks of Peter Kropotkin, who set aside Spinoza's metaphysics so as to emphasize the emergence of ethical ideas via affective relations. As he presents his case, what is mainly to be inferred from books three and four of the *Ethics* is that men become ethical through the internal force of their own rational interests and do not require the external force of the State to arrive at a moral condition. Kropotkin teaches, furthermore, that this condition is precisely that which elsewhere and with great care, he himself has identified as the tendency toward mutual aid — a tendency which constitutes a crucial element of his own philosophy of anarchism. As we saw, however, his fundamental critique arises from the supposed fact that while Spinoza theorizes ethical activity from an anarchist standpoint, he does not adequately determine the form or direction of that activity.

In brief, then, our historical analysis presented us with the following frame. An anarchist interpretation or appropriation of Spinoza must respond to the the question as to whether or not his metaphysics constitutes an ontology of despotism. An anarchist interpretation or appropriation of Spinoza will draw on the idea of community as a basic organizational structure

and regard the unity of substance as a mechanism for conceiving the unity in difference or plurality that forms the basis for libertarian social and political thought. Finally, an anarchist interpretation or appropriation will attend to the emergence of an ethic of mutual aide that will express itself through the unifying force of the intellectual love of God. For the most part, my constructive analysis of Spinoza — as I shall briefly recount in a moment — addressed these topics.

Before proceeding to this constructive account, however, it was necessary to address what seemed to me a more fundamental question. Anarchism, according to Peter Kropotkin, is “the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government,” under which harmony is “obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups... freely constituted for... for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.”<sup>1</sup> Alone, ideas like the community or mutuality of being, the affective tendency toward mutual aide, and the expression of both in the form of the intellectual love of God can contribute to the formulation of a philosophical anarchism inspired by certain spinozist elements. Without, however, a thorough critique of political coercion, these will remain spinozist elements of a philosophical anarchism that is that is not especially spinozist at its core. Therefore, if we wish to derive an anarchism — if I may borrow Hermann Cohen’s excellent turn of phrase — out of the sources of spinozism, it is necessary to identify in Spinoza precisely this: a vehement critique of coercive force as a mechanism for the production of social and political harmony. Prior to any elaboration of the positive and constructive elements which Spinoza’s work indeed contributes to anarchist theory, this problem — which, so far as I know, no prior radical

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<sup>1</sup> Kropotkin, P. “Anarchism.” In *The Essential Kropotkin*. Capouya, E. & Tompkins, K. eds. London: Macmillan Press. p. 108.

interpretation of Spinoza had even raised, much less addressed — had to be dealt with.

In brief, I responded to this difficulty in a twofold manner. In the first place, I contended — in the first chapter of this study — that, according to Spinoza the foundation of the political community is fragmented or, more precisely, split in two. There is what I referred to as its passive foundation on the one hand and, on the other, the active foundation. In brief, the active foundation of state is organized around active affects such as religion, piety, honor, and nobility. These are affects which characterize the life of reason; they arise from the rational individual considered as a cause of his own ideas and not in response to the influence of some other cause. Therefore, they arise from man considered as a free individual. In essence, the active foundation of the political community is one in which free association is the rule; men join together in solidarity for mutual aid and because doing so is, in itself and apart from any pragmatic concern, conducive to a way of life toward which all men naturally strive when not corrupted external causes.

The passive foundation of the political community, in contrast, is founded on passive affects. Principally, a mutual fear that seems to necessitate the production of mutual confidence arising from common fear of the sovereign, which commands a monopoly on violence. This relation to sovereign violence, which grounds the formation of the State, gives rise to further and equally passive affects. To wit: hope and wonder,<sup>2</sup> horror and veneration, reverence and devotion, humility and penitence. These are affects antithetical to the life of reason insofar as they constitute inadequate ideas. Thus, I found, “one should not look for the causes and natural foundations of the state in the teachings of reason.”<sup>3</sup> If so, and if freedom is the consequent of

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<sup>2</sup> Wonder, as I noted, is not properly speaking an affect according to Spinoza, but it is an inadequate idea that serves to inspire obedience to the sovereign.

<sup>3</sup> TP.I.7.

the life of reason, it follows that life under the passive foundation of the political community — life under the sovereignty of the State — amounts to slavery.

This insight lead me through some general reflections concerned with dispelling the myth of the paternalistic State and contending that — unlike real parents who desire only that their children become independent *through* a process of education that sometimes involves coercion — the State is designed to retain its subjects in a permanent condition of political minority. These reflections served as a bridge to later arguments involving the nature of the passive foundation of the State, to which I proceeded after making a case for taking seriously this breach in Spinoza's account of the ground of the political community. That is, I argued, these two foundations are mutually incompatible; neither can they be regarded together as the common ground of social and political organization nor can the one be reduced to the other. Rather, their tension stands and the one foundation must be conceived in opposition to the other.

In the second place, I demonstrated that the passive foundation of the political community falls prey to a series of structural contradictions. These set in motion a vicious cycle that progressively degrades the capacity for self-governance and necessitates the formation of institutions of an increasingly coercive character. I made my case in this respect first by drawing a distinction between Spinoza's general approbation of social and political organization — that is, human life in common — and the coercive or passive State as a specific modality thereof. While it is true that Spinoza can legitimately be regarded as an advocate of the latter insofar as it is a modality of the former, it must be recognized that he does so in an indirect fashion. Spinoza's emphatically favorable attitude toward social and political organization does not make him an advocate of the State as such. To support that sort of conclusion it is necessary to draw evidence from other sources.

So far as I presented it, such an argument would arise from three intersecting propositions. One, that reason and harmony are mutually implied; when the one is present, so too the other. Two, that reason dictates the negation of liberty if the alternative is disharmony. Three, that harmony of this sort, one that involves the negation of liberty, serves a pedagogical function. That is, it trains people to behave rationally and, in doing so, eventually leads them to reason.

I then brought these propositions together into a single comprehensive argument which ran as follows. Reason and harmony are mutually implied. Therefore, if the negation of liberty produces harmony and liberty produces the negation of harmony, reason and the negation of liberty are mutually implied. If there are irrational men, then the negation of liberty produces harmony and liberty produces the negation of harmony. There are irrational men. Therefore, the negation of liberty produces harmony and liberty produces the negation of harmony. Therefore, reason and the negation of liberty together with harmony are mutually implied. Reason and the negation of irrational men are mutually implied. Therefore, the negation of irrational men and the negation of liberty together with harmony are mutually implied.

Having presented the argument synthetically, I went on to critique its fundamental proposals sequentially. A careful reading of several propositions appearing in the fourth part of the *Ethics* allowed us to cast doubt on the notion that reason and harmony are mutually implied or, at least, on the universal scope of the proposition. So I argued, Spinoza demonstrates that reason implies harmony but *not* that the negation of reason necessarily implies disharmony. This means that reason and harmony are *not* mutually implied. Therefore, simply because something conduces to harmony does not mean that it conduces to reason.

I then went on to admit that it is incontestable that Spinoza chooses in favor of the

negation of liberty when disharmony is alternative. Such is the better of two evils which reason dictates. However, I argued, the alternative is a false one — or at least a misleading one. It implies that there are *only* two choices: coerced harmony, the State, and disharmony or barbarism. In point of fact, however, these are not the only choices; given another, better, option — the one which I present in my positive account of anarchism out of the sources of spinozism — Spinoza would not support the negation of liberty in the name of harmony.

Finally, I went on to consider the proposition that the State serves a pedagogical role. My analysis of this proposition took up the lion's share of the chapter as it is, by far, the most substantial argument in favor of the State as an institution tending toward or productive of human liberation. While in a handful of places, Spinoza indicates that this is precisely his attitude toward the State, I contend that when regarded from a systematic perspective, the position does not hold water. As I already indicated in chapter one, Spinoza considers power to be a corrupting force, manufacturing political minority; while the State is based on the supposition that the unruly masses must be restrained, the fact is that it is this restraint that makes them unruly, that cripples their capacity for autonomy. This is the case whether we regard as directly instructive the affections produced by the State or the (coerced) harmony they generate. Either way, passive affect is the ground and when this is the case, a fundamental problem arises.

There fundamental disjunction between matters of intellect or reason, adequate ideas and active emotions, and matters of passive experience and inadequate ideas. They observe different laws and follow mutually incompatible tendencies. To be more precise, because the mind is passive insofar as it has inadequate ideas and active only insofar as it has adequate ideas, having an inadequate idea cannot produce an active condition of mind. Only having adequate ideas will produce this result. On the contrary; the more inadequate ideas one has, the more one is subject



to passive states of mind and visa versa. Existence *qua* the production of effects is progressive in character; inadequate ideas and passive states of mind produce other inadequate ideas and passive states of mind.

I then go on to demonstrate that nothing, for us at least, is neutral and that things are good for one another insofar as they agree in nature or bad for one another insofar as they don't. While in some respects, the State produces similitude, it does so by coercive means, by producing inadequate ideas and passive emotions. This similitude, therefore, is only as able to produce agreement or harmony as an inadequate idea or passive emotion. The problem, however, is that the opposite is the case; things differ and fail to agree insofar as they conceive inadequate ideas and assume passive states of mind. Therefore, however much superficial similitude the State produces, ultimately, the differences it produces are the more significant.

By progressively producing inadequate ideas and passive states of mind — indeed, by organizing consent around them as I indicated in my discursus on nationalism and hatred as irrational political affects on which the state depends — the State therefore produces progressively greater differences within and between the masses and, to that extent, progressively greater disharmony. In brief, it does not improve us, but makes us worse, less rational, and less capable of realizing harmony on our own. Thus, does the state generate and expand its own conditions of necessity, the conditions under which repressive force is required if basic security is to be maintained. The State does not lead to reason, much less does it open up — as Matheron had suggested — to a post political condition of inter-human reason; rather, it seals off that horizon of possibility.

If, therefore, reason and harmony are not mutually implied and harmony that arises from coercion progressively undermines itself while, at the same time and in consequence,

necessitating a parallel enhancement of coercive force, we find that rational Statecraft is subject to a structural contradiction. The authoritarian principles on the basis of which the State is organized preclude the aim for which it is so organized; ostensibly, to facilitate human liberation. In this respect, Balibar was very wrong; the State does not democratize, but incrementally “despotizes” or “tyrannicizes,” or what have you.

In short, the State degrades us; it makes us stupid, base, and unfree. There is no path which leads through the State, as a mechanism for coerced harmony, to something better, to a condition of wisdom — or at least intellectual and political majority — nobility, and freedom. This being the case, the State cannot be tolerated. Revolution becomes a not simply a political or economic, but also a moral necessity. The moral necessity of revolution, however, raises its own difficulties, difficulties that I addressed in the third chapter of this study, with which my destructive analysis of the State ended and my constructive account of revolutionary anarchism out of the sources of Spinozism began.

I began the chapter with a review of the three senses in which — according to Arendt, whose work served as a point of reference for the studies of Spinoza which I examined later in the chapter — the notion of revolution can be conceived. One, that which is in revolution revolves. That is, it progresses in a cyclical fashion; revolution in this sense is characteristic of pre-modern political thought. Two, that which is in revolution revolts, or rolls over. That is, revolution involves a decisive and irreversible historical shift; revolution in this sense involves a linear conception of time and is characteristic of modern notions of the phenomenon. Three, that which is in revolution rolls along. That is, revolution involves not simply a decisive shift in history, but also involves a sort of socio-cultural current wherein political subjectivity is shaped. This too is an element of modern revolutions.

Having reviewed revolution in its three senses, I went on to consider three distinct evaluations of the role that revolution plays in Spinoza's thought. According to one view, revolution plays no meaningful role therein. Spinoza is skeptical as to the wisdom of radical regime change and, so it was argued, lacked a robust conception of time in its linearity. As such, while it might be argued that Spinoza shared with Machiavelli a conception of the cyclical evolution of political regimes, he would — according to this interpretation — neither have been able to theorize modern revolutions from a temporal standpoint nor, even barring that difficulty, have been inclined to validate them. Instead of revolution, this interpretation favors an account of Spinoza's political philosophy that aligns it with reformism.

According to a second interpretation, Arendt's claim to the effect that a revolution is far more than a successful revolt is to be taken seriously. If a revolution is more than a revolt, it follows that Spinoza's reticence when it comes to radical regime change cannot be regarded as decisive. To proceed in this manner would be to elide the distinction between revolution and revolt. It was argued that stress ought to be placed on the revolutionary process of shaping political subjectivities and coordinating inter-est, or being among, in the public sphere; this process is one which can undoubtedly be discerned in Spinoza. To the extent that it counts as revolutionary, so too can Spinoza be regarded as an advocate of revolution. As I went on to emphasize, this conception of revolutionary spinozism is deeply wedded to the process of democratization first articulated (as I have already noted) by Etienne Balibar. It is, therefore, inseparable from the State as *the* form of political organization.

According to the third and final interpretation, what is decisive is less what Spinoza personally approved or disapproved of. Rather, what matters is what nature dictates. Here, differentiating between revolt and revolution is not particularly important. Neither is the

temporality of modern revolutions in comparison to ancient and medieval notions of anacyclosis. It is not a matter of judging as to whether regime changes tend, on the whole, to improve conditions. Nor is it a matter of recognizing the contours of a newly formed body-politic. All that matters is the determination of those conditions under which the laws of human nature dictate that a people will rise up against its rulers and overthrow them. In short, when the governing regime is unduly repressive such that the fear it imposes outweighs the hopes it may inspire or encourage, the affective foundations of consent are disrupted. Fear is transformed into indignation and obedience into resistance. Whether such resistance produces results harmful or beneficial is irrelevant; nature dictates it and it is rightful as such.

My reaction to these three accounts of revolution according to Spinoza framed my argument for the following chapter. Roughly, it ran as follows. It is correct to emphasize Spinoza's reticence as to the wisdom of radical regime change. Whether revolutions are reducible to rebellion or not, they are inseparable from regime change. Therefore, Spinoza's concerns as to the time frame of revolution cannot be dismissed. Still, I argued, it is incorrect to distinguish reform from revolution; reform is simply revolution in increments. It is also progressive in character; both arise from and are guaranteed by the force of *conatus*. If the former is admitted then necessarily the latter. Furthermore, it is wrong to suppose that Spinoza upheld a cyclical view of time over and above its linear format; Spinoza advocated a view of all things — socio-political relations included — from the vantage of eternity. Spinozist revolution is necessarily a revolution *sub-species aeternitatis*.

Insofar as revolution is conceived *sub-species aeternitatis*, it is rational in character. A such, while passive feelings like indignation may account for acts of rebellion or resistance to tyrannical regimes, while natural right as defined by the laws of human nature may validate them

in principle, natural right does not negate our capacity for evaluating human phenomena.

Inadequate ideas and passive affects may explain some of these phenomena, but this does not mean that all of them are good for us or that we ought lend them our approval. What sense is there in lending approbation to a resistance movement which we know will inevitably result in the production of a regime even more repressive than the one it overthrew because it is built on inadequate ideas and passive or reactionary affects? None. Therefore, the only resistance movement, the only revolution, we ought approve is the one conducted under the auspices of reason and on the foundation of active affects.

That does not mean, however, that we must lend tacit, if provisional, approval to any State regime and submit it to a democratizing process that never emerges, *can never emerge*, from the repressive foundations that I have already described. On the contrary, the revolutionary task is the progressive displacement of the State with something better. In other words, it is concerned not with the negative task of dismantling the state, but with the positive task of creating modes of political engagement which render the State obsolete. That is, revolution concerns the emergence of rational community which I considered in the fourth chapter of this study.

Broadly speaking, chapter four was dedicated to articulating the nature of the active foundation of the political community first raised for consideration in the first chapter of this study. It began with an argument to the effect that philosophy, or reason, does not operate below the horizon of the State but in active opposition to it. This, I demonstrated, first, by comparing the figures of Moses and Jesus. As I presented it, Mosaic prophecy is said to involve and, to that extent, uncertainty. It is expressed in the form of law on the one hand and the sovereignty of the state on the other. Jesus' teaching, in contrast, is said to involve reason and intuition and, to that

extent, certainty. It is expressed in the form of eternal truths and salvation. On the basis of this comparison alone, however, we were left with some ambiguity as to the precise relation between Moses and Jesus or, more generally speaking, the State and philosophy. Does the latter operate below the horizon of the former or on it and against it?

While at a superficial level it appears that Spinoza holds that philosophy operates below the horizon of the State, that it is fundamentally apolitical and poses no threat to authority, I took the position that a more critical approach is warranted. In the first place, Spinoza does not so much demonstrate that philosophy is *not* a threat to sovereign authority as much as that efforts to suppress the freedoms of thought and speech constitute a *greater* threat thereto than a more laissez faire attitude.

More importantly, we found that while Spinoza makes the outward claim that Jesus' teaching involved the propagation of moral precepts and not the abrogation of the law, careful reading indicates otherwise. As Spinoza represents it, a law is abrogated only when it is replaced by another law; since Jesus taught no law neither did he abrogate any. This is evidently a half-truth; a law also is abrogated, when it is not fulfilled; to displace the law as formulated with the moral teaching it is understood to embody is also an act of abrogation.

Moreover — again outwardly — Spinoza seems to indicate that only *signs* validate changes to the law, opposition to the State. This would mean one of two things. Either that no opposition is valid insofar as signs and wonders are not real, but imaginary, or that Jesus and the Apostles entertained no such opposition because they did not employ such techniques when addressing citizens of the Hebrew State. I argued, however, that the operational notion in Spinoza's argument is not the sign, but the idea of certainty. It is *certainty* that validates opposition and, as I have already pointed out, Jesus' teaching, or philosophy, is represented as

supplying, in the form of reason and intuition, precisely that. Furthermore, Spinoza takes special care to point out that freedom from the fear of death is a threat to sovereign authority and it is this fear, in the first place, which Jesus is said to have done away with and, in the second place, for which Spinoza himself provides the remedy in the fourth and fifth part of the *Ethics*. I found, therefore, that the philosopher is a figure that is naturally opposed to the State, who stands not below the sovereign horizon but militates against it.

If the philosopher operates against the State, however, he does so — as I already indicated in my summary of chapter three — not by directly dismantling it, not negatively and destructively, but by building something to displace it positively and actively. This positive displacement of the State already begins to surface in the relation between Jesus and his disciples; it is the rational community and the affective structures on which such community is based.

Having, therefore, demonstrated the anti-authoritarian character of reason, I proceeded to take the theoretical baton from Gustav Landauer and to elaborate on the nature of this subversive socio-political institution. I did so, first, by examining the difference between the two covenants at Sinai as represented by Spinoza. The first covenant, so he described it, involved a direct relation between the people and God whereby they transferred to him their natural right. In doing so, however, each individual retained his right to consult God. In effect, this means — so I argued — that the covenant represented a collective decision to live together according to the dictates of reason, to form a rational community in which harmony and agreement arises naturally from the free-necessity of the laws of human nature. In this form of political organization, there is no transfer of sovereignty; in this respect it is *akin* to democracy except that democratic mitigate but do not eliminate political alienation. In contrast, in the second

covenant, Moses mediates the relation between God and the people, absorbing the sovereignty exuded by the latter. As such, it sets in play the coercive relation between men on the basis of which the State takes shape. So I argued, the rational community as exemplified by but not restricted to Jesus and his disciples, revives the first and displaces the second covenant.

Having made this point and highlighted the political community whose organizing principle is not the transfer of sovereignty and the coercion that goes along with it, the coercion which gives rise to affective mechanisms of governance dependent upon inadequate ideas and passive states of mind, which, as I described in the second chapter of this study, produces a vicious cycle that erodes liberty, I went on to inquire as to the organizational principles of this community.

The affective foundations of the rational community — religion, piety, honor, and so on — are all grounded in the notion of rational self-interest which, itself, arises from the conatus principle. Therefore, I began my examination with an examination of that notion. After reviewing other interpretations of Spinoza's argument in favor of this idea, I proposed one which built upon earlier comments on my part as to the theoretical impossibility of neutrality. In essence, the transition from E.III.Prop.4, which asserts — I hold, on the basis of the claim that definitions necessarily describe real causal relations — that nothing destroys itself, to E.III.Prop.6, which holds that all things endeavor to persist, is provided for by E.III.Prop.5 which, on my reading, asserts that difference implies active opposition.

This leads to the conclusion that things exist in harmony with one another to the extent that they agree in nature and in conflict with one another to the extent that they disagree in nature. Agreement and disagreement in nature is determined, for members of the same species, in relation to the degree to which each party to a social relation exists in a state of activity or



passivity. That is, members of the same species which exist in a condition of activity — and, for humans, entertain adequate ideas — tend to agree, while members of the same species that exist in a condition of passivity — and, for humans, entertain inadequate ideas — tend to disagree. They live in harmony or conflict with one another accordingly. In other words, the extent to which men conceive adequate ideas and experience active emotions is the same extent to which they can govern themselves, maintaining peace and security without resort to coercive measures.

More broadly construed, men live in harmony when they love the same things. When men live according to the laws of human nature, conceiving adequately and feeling actively, so Spinoza argues, they love the same things. More importantly, what they love most, the highest good, is something that cannot constitute the object of contention: the love of God. Not only can it be shared, but it is best shared and when it is shared in being so shared, progressively erodes the proprietary relation to good in general. Mutuality of being breeds mutuality of love which leads to mutuality of property. Thus, as Moses Hess has suggested more than a hundred years ago, the love of God constitutes the affective foundation of the free and rational human community by orienting human desire in such a way that harmony is the result. If sovereign power is the object of need and, consequently, consent *only* when that is lacking, it follows that, because, under such conditions the need disappears, consent dissolves. The rational community supplies the exception to the State.

But, so I argued the rational community organized around the intellectual love of God does not *only* constitute the exception to the State. In chapter two, we saw that from inadequate ideas and passive states of mind arise more of the same, thus setting in motion a vicious cycle that destroys autonomous harmony and perpetually reproduces the affective conditions making necessary the State. The same is true in the reverse for adequate ideas and active states of mind;

they too produce more of the same. This likewise sets in motion a cycle that escalates such modes of being and, with them, the condition of harmony. Thus, the rational community organized around the intellectual love of God progressively erodes the foundations of the State, displacing it and rendering it obsolete. The positive exception to the power of the State constitutes in itself a revolutionary movement not by reacting to State power and endeavoring to destroy it, but by building other and better institutions of self-governance to replace it. These allow for the eventual elimination of mutual fear as a basic affective foundation for political organization; it is replaced with mutual gratitude.

Having thus concluded my account of the affective structure of the active foundation of the political community, I went on to elaborate its ontological ground. That is, I went on to consider the mutuality of being expressed in the collective love of God that, as we have seen, leads to a perpetual escalation of harmony and freedom. In doing so, I returned to the questions raised all the way back in my introduction to this study by Proudhon and Bakunin.

It may be recalled that Proudhon and Bakunin alike regarded the substance-mode relation as being characterized by subordination. The finite mode is subject to substance and yearns to realize its own annihilation in the totality thereof. This reading of Spinoza's metaphysics lead them to conclude that his system represents not an embodiment of, but the very antithesis of anarchism — Spinoza, they held, is the advocate *par excellence* of despotism. I opened the fifth and final chapter of this study with a far more extensive analysis of this viewpoint that included also Proudhon's positive account of his own metaphysics of mutualism.

Proudhon argues that to democratize humanity — that is, to realize anarchism — it is necessary to de-monarchize the universe. In brief, this means replacing the notions of stasis, being, absoluteness, the simplicity of the one, and slavery or subordination of the many —

characteristics of theory which Proudhon explicitly links to an interpretation of Spinoza — with the notions of motion, becoming, relativity, the plurality of the group, and the freedom of the many. Conceived in this way, he says, man becomes a fluid manifestation of becoming that culminates or expresses itself in society. In one respect, this account of results in a conception of the individual which substantially overlaps with that of the group or collective; the individual discovers the group in himself. Yet — and this is where, from my perspective, Proudhon's system tends to erode the liberty it creates — the identity of the individual and the group is such that, according to Proudhon, the former is subsumed in and alienated with respect to the latter.

The remainder of this chapter was spent refuting Proudhon's interpretation of Spinoza and showing that, on the contrary, not only is Spinoza's an ontology of mutualism of the sort to which Proudhon aspired, but a more comprehensive and liberatory one. For Spinoza, as I interpret him, the coincidence of the individual and the group is not predicated on the alienation of the former. Rather, the individual expresses substance immediately through its active process of self-production.

I opened my case by dispelling the notion that Spinoza ascribes to a conception of being and organizes his system around that idea. The having of a universal idea, he holds, is indicative of the mind's inability to comprehend the plenum of fine distinguishing features that separate one thing and the next. In other words, it is an inadequate idea of things. The idea of being, insofar as it encompasses and elides all differences, is the inadequate idea *par excellence* by means of which the totality of things is imagined but not conceived. In this respect, as I went on to indicate, the idea of being may be counted among the so-called "beings of reason," but it is not an idea that corresponds to any real thing. Far from an advocate of being, Spinoza denies that being exists at all.

As I went on to explain, however, a “being of reason,” according to Spinoza, *does* help us to *imagine* something. Discerning what, exactly the term — which, significantly, appears in his definition of substance — gestures toward allowed us to begin doing away with Proudhon’s supposition that substance is inert and to claim, on the contrary, that substance is fundamentally dynamic in character. This was demonstrated by way of an argument to the effect that the essence of substance is power and that power involves causal effectiveness or activity. In other words, a thing is its power and, as such, coincides with the activity of existing by virtue of which it constitutes itself. Being is a practice; there is no meaningful distinction between things and their endeavor to exist. Therefore, things have no neutral substratum.

As I went on to argue, this is true not only of finite things, but especially true of God or substance. I demonstrated how this is the case by showing that the operative feature in Spinoza’s definition of God is that God is *causa sui* in the positive sense. God, for Spinoza, is actually his own efficient cause; he affirms his own being in an unqualified fashion. Therefore to the extent that causal effectiveness is the meaning of power, the essence of God is his power. God or substance is by no means inert; rather, it actively produces itself and — so far as the unqualified affirmation of being implies that God expresses his being through infinite attributes modified in infinite ways — produces everything else in doing so.

Having demonstrated the activity of substance and rejected its stasis or inertness. I went on to demonstrate, first, that the infinity of substance implies the relativity of things on the one hand and their dynamic inter-relation and reciprocal determination on the other. The infinity of substance implies its indivisibility; the same goes, of course, for substance in its extended expression; extension is a continuity and no one thing is ever really apart from any other. It implies, moreover, that the space of any given body and its position with respect to any other

body is absolutely indeterminate, as external or final reference points are lacking. Thus disappear boundary, limit, measure, order, agreement, difference, and so on — all such notions are nothing more than “beings of reason” arising from anthropocentric and, so, teleological prejudices. Thus, distinctions among extended things is altogether relative.

Spinoza argues that the infinity and indivisibility of extended substance allow for the conceivability of motion; construed otherwise, Zeno’s paradoxes would be inescapable. As for motion itself, Spinoza regards it as inherent to the idea of extended substance. Since, from the necessity of God’s essence there must follow infinite things in infinite ways — or everything that is conceivable — and motion is conceivable through the idea of extension, it follows that the former must follow from the latter. By way of an extensive reading of the physical digression in the second part of the *Ethics*, the inherence of motion to extension was seen to imply the active and mutual determination of each thing in relation to every other thing in a fluid manner that ultimately extends to the pullulating totality of things, or the so-called face of the whole universe. The kinesthetic individual is thoroughly integrated within an infinite field of motion; it is perpetually determined within its fluid relations with other things.

We found, then, that Spinoza’s is no metaphysics of absolutism. On the contrary, Spinoza’s system satisfies the basic theoretical requirements of Proudhon’s ontological mutualism, or the metaphysics of anarchism. Again, it emphasizes becoming, motion, plurality, and relativity. In fact, it does so in a manner infinitely more robust than Proudhon had himself contemplated.

Spinoza’s account provides for a response to difficulties which Proudhon did not consider. Proudhon and Spinoza alike hold that the fluid manifestation of the human body implies that the human mind is likewise fluid in character, determined within its multivalent

relations. From this condition of being, however, Proudhon deduces that human groups naturally tend to organize themselves insofar as the individual is, at any rate, already a sort of group. He does so, however, in an analogistic manner without actually explaining how or why that is the case. Spinoza, in contrast, does not leave open this theoretical gap. Moreover, the manner in which he construes the relation of human individuality to human collectivity is one in which — as I noted above — alienation re-appears and the boundary between anarchism and totalitarianism becomes rather blurred.<sup>4</sup>

While, for Spinoza, all things are equivalent vis-a-vis their relation to substance considered in itself; substance expresses itself univocally, things are unequal in respect of the comprehensiveness in which they command the field in which substance so expresses itself. That is, things are differentiated among themselves in respect of their relative degree of power; all things express the essence of God *qua* power, but some things have more of it than others. Considered in terms of the process of kinesthetic determination outlined in the chapter now being summarized, the differentiating factor among bodies and, by extension, minds, is their degree of complexity. Spinoza contends that the more complex a thing, the more comprehensive of reality it is, the more perfect it is, the more *powerful* it is. Thus, the indefinite endeavor to exist, implies a parallel endeavor to increase in complexity or, more broadly put, to operate within a complex environment evocative of all active properties to which the structure of a given body or mind might give rise. This implies, Spinoza argues, that men are inclined to form partnerships with

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<sup>4</sup> Recall that some of the original fascists were, if not overtly anarchists, indirectly affiliated with the movement. National syndicalism, the immediate ideological predecessor to fascism, grew, in part, from the *Circle Proudhon*. While most anarchists regarded the interpretation of Proudhon advocated by members of that group as a misrepresentation, we can at least say that misrepresentations arise from the texts they appeal to. Otherwise, they would not operate as representations (legitimate or not) at all. Moreover, it was the affiliation between nationalists and anarcho-syndicalists in Italy that immediately gave rise to the fascist movement. See Sternhell, Z.; Sznajder, M.; & Asheri, M. 1994. *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*. Princeton: Princeton U. Press; Sternhell, Z. 1995. *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Princeton: Princeton U. Press.

other equally complex entities, other men, and disinclined to form partnerships with less complex entities such as animals and plants. In short, the conative principle compounded with the power-complexity nexus explains the formation of human communities.

This result implies, so I argued, also a Spinozist response to the second difficulty unresolved by Proudhon. The realization of an individual human essence, its expression of power, coincides with his social and political condition; thus, the idea of the self is inseparable from the idea of the community. The self-love that Spinoza calls blessedness, therefore, coincides with love of the community without reducing the one to the other. If, furthermore, blessedness or self-love corresponds to the intellectual love of God and the latter is part of the infinite love which God bears toward himself, it follows that self-love is continuous with the love of all other men whom God likewise loves insofar as he loves himself. In brief, human solidarity, the continuity of the ego and the others, so to speak, takes place in a manner that does not involve alienation on the part of the former but, on the contrary, requires content self-possession on the part of the individual.

Thus, I concluded the final chapter of my study with the result that just as a careful and sensitive reading of Spinoza uncovers tensions in his writing which allow us to elaborate, from an *affective* standpoint, an anarchism from the sources of spinozism — a critique of the State form and a positive account of the affective foundations of non-authoritarian human community — so too, from an *ontological* standpoint, can we uncover the metaphysical foundation that grounds this condition. While Proudhon had denied this possibility and posed his own views in explicit contrast to Spinoza's, we found that Spinoza, indeed, supplies an ontology of mutualism that surpasses that envisioned by the French anarchist.

## **II. Parting Reflections**

It has been the general aim of this study to derive anarchism from the sources of Spinozism. In the most general terms, this involved articulating a Spinozist critique of the State form on the one hand and, on the other, a positive account of the non-authoritarian alternative from both affective and ontological standpoints. In closing, I would like to offer three general reflections derived from my findings in relation to the first of these objectives. I would like to emphasize (1) the necessary correlation of means and ends, (2) the necessary superordination of constructive over destructive activity in prosecuting any political aim, and (3) the necessary superordination of active over reactive affects. After doing so, I would like to offer a final and a somewhat speculative proposition relating to a question left open by my findings in relation to the second of these objectives. Namely, a partial elaboration of what the rational communities I have proposed actually look like and how they relate to one another.

### **A. General Reflections Arising from the Critique of Political Authority**

#### **1. The Necessary Correlation of Means and Ends**

Whether the reader finds my spinozist case against the State convincing or not, I believe that there is a more general insight to be derived from this critique that applies to any progressive or revolutionary cause. It is that there is a necessary correlation of means and ends. One finds at the end of one's endeavor what follows from the endeavor itself and not what follows from the intention that may have accompanied it.

By no means does Spinoza represent the foundation of the State as the consequence of some diabolical aim; for if it is the devil that deceives, who is it that deceives the devil?<sup>5</sup> Rather,

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<sup>5</sup> TP.2.6.



he holds that “the purpose of the State is... freedom.”<sup>6</sup> The sequence of decisions from which it arises are, presumably, aimed at increasing and not decreasing the scope of possible human freedoms. The problem is not one of intent. Rather, as we have already discovered, it is that the social and political mechanisms by means of which this purpose is supposed to be realized produce effects that tend in the opposite direction, progressively eroding and undermining every human quality which gives substance and meaning to the idea and practice of freedom. This is because the means — coerced harmony — are inconsistent with the ends to which they are put: the production of freedom.

Here, it is not a matter of moral justification. It is not argued that means fail to justify their ends, that means, from a moral standpoint, must be as just as the ends toward which they are directed. To construe the relation of means and ends in this way is to suppose that means can be inconsistent with the ends toward which they gesture and yet produce them all the same. In short, it is to ignore the law of cause and effect and to suppose that there is more perfection in the latter than there is in the former though “there must,” as Spinoza put it, “be at least as much perfection in the cause as in the effect.”<sup>7</sup>

Rather, it is argued, an effect is determined by its cause and arises only from what is present in the cause. In the production of social and political effects, it is not the aim or goal that constitutes the cause, but the strategy undertaken to realize aims and goals. A coercive cause cannot produce a liberating effect. On the contrary, coercion destroys liberty and can only produce effects which follow in suite; that is, an act of coercion however well-intentioned, can only lead to further instances of coercion.

Force creates the conditions under which further force is necessary so as to maintain order and

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<sup>6</sup> TTP.20.

<sup>7</sup> CM.I.2.

security. Force does not abolish States or supply the conditions whereby their foundations erode. Rather, force creates and perpetuates States. Force does not create freedom, but destroys it. Rather, it is through freedom and through freedom alone that freedom ensues. Means necessarily correspond to their ends, with or without justification. From a Spinozist standpoint, to construe the matter otherwise is not simply immoral, it is utterly absurd.

If, therefore, the aim of politics is freedom, the means *must* correspond to the ends. *Only* means conducive to freedom will produce ends or effects expressive of and likewise conducive to freedom. In other words, a violent revolution is by definition an unsuccessful one; the successful revolution is necessarily non-violent. The same goes, of course, for every movement of resistance, of protest, or of progress. More broadly, acts of resistance must always expand and never constrain the range of human freedoms; *that* is what makes them revolutionary or progressive in character.

To elaborate this point, let us consider two historical examples. One, the case of Gerrard Winstanley and his True Levellers, (or Diggers), to whom I referred at the outset of this study. His proclamation as to the immanence of the divine, the equality of all men, and the blasphemy implied by the rule of one man over another was *not* a declaration of armed conflict. Rather, it was the theoretical preface to his practical denunciation of the enclosure process, which any reasonably well-read radical will recognize as the ground of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation. That is, it served to explain "the Work we are going about." Namely, "to dig up Georges-Hill and the waste Ground thereabouts, and to Sow Corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows" so as to:

"Lay the foundation of making the earth a common treasury for all, both rich and poor, that every one that is born in the land, may be fed by the earth... not in-closing any part

into any particular hand, but all as one man, working together, and feeding together as sons of one father, members of one family.”<sup>8</sup>

Here, as I noted in my introduction to this study, the objective was realizing “the spirit of universal community and freedom.”<sup>9</sup> The obstruction to realizing that objective is identified as the process of enclosure whereby certain people are enabled to benefit from a common good while others are excluded from it and put, thereby, in a miserable and degraded position. The strategy was not to “dispossess the dispossessor,” as if shifting dispossession from one segment of society to another would lead to a better result than before. To put the matter in the terms Winstanley conceived it, this would merely perpetuate the same old blasphemy. Rather, the strategy was simply to abolish dispossession by working the land and feeding one’s fellow man. Here, the means of resistance correspond to their ends insofar as they immediately produce them.

Another, more recent example: Ghandi’s salt marches. Without delving deeply either into their broader historical background or their ultimate effects, let us simply point out the following. Salt, like water and air, is a basic necessity of life. In an era such as ours, when salt is cheap and plentiful, it is difficult to imagine a time when this was not the case; but indeed it was, until very recently, not. The British government had a policy, in the colonies, of placing high taxes on this essential commodity and, likewise, of prohibiting its private production. To do so was, in effect, to separate men from the fundamental conditions under which human life is possible; it was to place restrictions on the very right to be alive. In addition, of course, this policy, among others, was symbolic of the other repressive characteristics of British colonial rule.

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<sup>8</sup> Winstanley, G. 1649. “The True Levellers Standard Advanced: Or, The State of Community Opened, and Presented to the Sons of Men.” Retrieved 08/24/2016 from <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/winstanley/1649/levellers-standard.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Ghandi's strategy, however, was not to resist colonial power *in order* to live or *in order* to be free. That is, he did not undertake some action or another (violent or otherwise) unrelated to the practice of living and being free as a means of doing away with a perceived obstacle to life and freedom in the expectation that, in doing so, he and his people would *subsequently* be enabled to realize the prime objective of living and being free. Rather, Ghandi took up *directly* the task of living and being free, this being embodied, at that moment, in exploiting natural resources held in common (the sea) so as to produce an indispensable commodity: salt. Again, the means correspond to and immediately create the ends toward which they are directed.

To repeat, then, there is no use in waiting for the goals toward which we strive or in proceeding toward them by indirect means. On the contrary, these means have their own causal trajectories that do not necessarily lead in the direction or arrive at the destination we think sometimes imagine them to. Rather, from a spinozist perspective, it is the task of every progressive and revolutionary movement to produce directly the ultimate effects toward which it endeavors, the conditions of life toward which it aspires.

## **2. The Necessary Superordination of Constructive Over Destructive Action**

Practically, what does it mean to correlate means and ends and to produce directly rather than indirectly the conditions of life toward which one aspires? It is to place emphasis on positive and constructive activity over negative and destructive reactivity. Again, whether or not one finds plausible my broader claims about the nature and necessity of revolution, the more comprehensive insight stands. Progress is always a matter of what has been created and never a matter of what has been destroyed.

As I interpret it, it is Spinoza's insight that people tend, in contemplating what to destroy

and how, to imagine that the “*mahshava tehila* (the first thought)” and the “*sof maaseh* (final deed)” are really one and the same thing — that “*sof maaseh ala be-mahshava tehila* (the final deed arose in the first thought)” — and, likewise, that undesirable factual circumstances function as a sort of barrier between them, separating the thing from its inherent self-fulfillment.

Conceiving the matter in this way, it seems that all one has to do is remove the barrier and the thing comes to be of itself by virtue of its own internal causes and apart from those arising from the act of elimination. But this is a twofold mistake. One, “first thought” and the “final deed” are not one and the same thing, the latter does not come to be from the former but from the intervening causes. Two, these causes, the means, constitute their own positive reality that is subordinate neither to the motivations that may have set them in motion nor to the ends toward which these motivations aspire. The means stand alone and produce effects following from their own natural properties. Thus, destructive means have their own causal trajectory that is not identical to constructive means.

Constructive means involve the direct *production* of a certain set of desirable circumstances; conceiving them means thinking in terms of what is desired and how to immediately create the conditions for realizing that desire. Destructive means involve directly producing some other set of circumstances which are believed to produce indirectly the actual circumstances desired by eliminating intervening circumstances. The error lies in imagining that the actual set of circumstances created by the act of destruction does not have its own positive reality, that these will not produce their own effects which do not necessarily conduce to realization of the objective desire. Indeed, Spinoza holds that, for the most part it, is not only that these effect do not *necessarily* conduce thereto, but that they actively obstruct it, creating a new barrier to be overcome that may be more harmful than the first.

Thus, it is never the progressive task to do away with the undesirable in the expectation that doing so will allow the desirable to come to be. It is always to identify the immediately desirable circumstances, to directly produce those and, *in doing so* to displace the undesirable, undermining their condition of reality by creating a new reality.

### **3. The Necessary Superordination of Active Over Reactive Affects**

We are, today, operating within a deeply toxic political environment in which the most regressive attitudes are beginning to resurface with refreshed violence after several generations of relative dormancy. If the middle of the twentieth century can, from a politico-affective standpoint, be characterized mainly by the interplay of hope and fear interspersed by flares of anger, I think that hope has, by now, largely dropped from the landscape of our public discourse; what remains is fear and indignation. This is as true for voices on the “left” as it is for voices on the “right.” However legitimate, in principle, such feelings may be, it is not true — from a spinozist perspective — that anger is a gift or indignation a blessing.

We saw, over the course of my analysis of the structural contradiction of the passive foundation of the State that passive emotions and inadequate ideas only lead to more of the same. We found, furthermore, that things tend to escalate. “More of the same” does not mean a simple repetition; it means a repetition plus some, so that our ideas become increasingly less adequate and our feelings of anger, indignation, resentment, and so on, increasingly more intense. Consequence to this dual escalation there follows a progressive deterioration of our capacity for self-management or governance, of our capacity to be free, coupled with a parallel augmentation of coercive force to keep us in check. Our anger makes us stupid and slavish and does not equip us to create the changes we are striving for.

Thus, it is imperative that our progressive political and social movements set aside the prevailing tendency to appeal to the sense of popular frustration in the hopes that by fanning these frustrations sufficiently heated feelings of anger and indignation will impel the masses to react and rise up. It may be that this is the case, and it has certainly become the case in several places across the globe. But such reactive uprisings grow from regressive or, at least, counterproductive affective tendencies which, at best, serve only to do away with one cause for ire and animus without setting into play the alternate causes which could serve as the basis for something better. At worst, they set in play a sequence of events leading to something far worse. We must not contribute the poisonous vitriol that has come to characterize popular politics today.

The task, in spinozist terms, is to create a political discourse organized not around reactive affects, but active ones. Happiness, pride, the desire for friendship, the wish to live in community with others in a mutually supportive environment, and so on. Creating *that* actively and positively without waiting for the downfall of something else or wasting our energies endeavoring to make that happen; this is the task. The downfall will come, but only because progressive and revolutionary movements have created a reality that renders what came before obsolete.

## **B. A Speculative Proposition Relating to the Organization of Rational Communities**

From the foregoing, the impression could be given that what I derive from Spinoza's teaching is some sort of escapist communitarian attitude: what one ought not do is resist; rather one ought to live well with his companions and call that a revolution or a progressive movement. In the first place, I reply, first, with a question. Why must we assume that anger and indignation are the only truly revolutionary affects? If I hate, or feel anger toward that which destroys what I

love, if I am indignant when the object of my veneration becomes an object of disgust, why is it more revolutionary, more progressive, to let these feeling flow freely and to endeavor to destroy what I hate or what inspires me with indignation than simply to create that which gives me joy, that which I love, and endeavor to see it grow? This follows from what I have already said. In the second place, however, I think that what the objection is really driving at is this. Effective progressive and revolutionary movements are mass movements of necessity. If I am to focus on the creation of rational communities and to suppose that such socio-political formations have the power to displace the State form, there must be some way of treating them as a mass movement. But this appears inconsistent with the very idea of a community. Truly participatory and rational self-governance demands a degree of intimacy that can only be accommodated below a certain threshold of scale.<sup>10</sup> In other words, a political agenda focusing *exclusively* on the community as free institutional form runs the risk of falling into a regressive parochialism.

Without delving into the fine-grained details, let it be noted that anarchist theorists have, for generations resolved similar difficulties by reference to the principle of federation first introduced by Proudhon.<sup>11</sup> Indicating the idea in brief — and distinguished from the federal *State* — we may quote from a recently translated article, entitled simply “Federalism,” by James Guillaume dating from 1871. He write that:

“For federalism, there is no more nation, no more national or territorial unity. There is only an agglomeration of federated communes, an agglomeration which has for its determining principle only the interests of the contracting parties, and which consequently has no regard for the questions of nationalism or of territory.

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<sup>10</sup> That is to say, a megacity or urban belt cannot function as a community in any meaningful sense of the term.

<sup>11</sup> Proudhon, P.J. 1863. *Du Principe Federatif et de la Necessite de Reconstituer le Parti de la Revolution*. Paris: E. Dentu.



There is equally no more State, no more central power superior to the groups and imposing it them its authority: there is only the collective force resulting from the federation of the groups, and that collective force, which acts to maintenance and guarantee of the federal contract — a true synallagmatic contract this time, stipulated individually by each of the parties — this collective force, we say, can never become something prior and superior to the federated groups, something analogous to what the State is today to society and to the communes. The centralized and national State thus no longer exists, and the Communes enjoying the fullness of their independence, there is truly *an-archy*, absence of central authority.... The communes, while remaining absolutely autonomous, feel themselves, by the force of things, in solidarity; and, without sacrificing any of their liberty, or, to put it better, to better assure their liberty, they unite themselves tightly by federative contracts, where they stipulate all that which touches their common interests: the large public services, the exchange of products, the guarantee of individual rights, and mutual aid in case of any aggression.”<sup>12</sup>

In brief, the federative principles refers to the idea of a commune of communes whereby autonomous communities or municipalities cooperate in order to respond to ambitions of common concern. In a revolutionary context the federative principle “inverts the republican schema”<sup>13</sup> or — as Murray Bookchin notes in his presentation of the related theory of libertarian municipalism — this cooperative endeavor:

“Gains its life and its integrity precisely from the dialectical tension it proposes between the nation-state and the municipal confederation. Its “law of life”... consists precisely in

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<sup>12</sup> Guillaume, J. 2014. “Federalism.” Wilbur, S.P. trans. Retrieved 08/24/2016 from <http://blog.bakuninlibrary.org/category/federalism/>

<sup>13</sup> See chapter seven of Prichard, A. 2013. *Justice, Order, and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*. New York: Routledge.

its struggle with the state. The tension between municipal confederations and the state must be clear and uncompromising. Since these confederations would exist primarily in opposition to statecraft, they cannot be compromised by state, provincial, or national elections, much less achieved by these means.”<sup>14</sup>

The notion of federation is revolutionary, in other words, because it is the exception to statecraft, which declines as it grows. I do not want to digress further into a precise analysis of this general idea in all its details; that has been done elsewhere and, at any rate, its basic contours suffice for our purposes.

The speculative question I would like to pose, however, is this. If we have sought anarchism from the sources of spinozism and discovered a critique of the State on the one hand and a constructive alternative, the community, on the other, do we find any evidence of a federative principle which can be used to round out our presentation of a spinozist anarchism? I believe that we can.

In the ninth chapter of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza discusses the second model of aristocracy. This form of aristocracy, which he prefers, is one in which “sovereignty is held by several cities.” The fundamental laws governing their relation, so far as he represents them, run as follows:

1. The cities exist in such a fashion that none cannot subsist without the others nor secede without “causing considerable harm to them” and, likewise, to the collective as a whole.<sup>15</sup>
2. A supreme council consisting of representatives from the cities is to be convened<sup>16</sup> to

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<sup>14</sup> Bookchin, M. 1991. “Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview.” *Green Perspectives*, vol. 24. Retrieved 08/24/2016 from [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/ANARCHIST\\_ARCHIVES/bookchin/gp/perspectives24.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/ANARCHIST_ARCHIVES/bookchin/gp/perspectives24.html).

<sup>15</sup> TP.9.2

<sup>16</sup> TP.9.3.

deal with “common business.”<sup>17</sup>

3. “All the cities are to be bound together and united not as confederates, but as constituting a single state with this reservation, that each city holds that much more right over government than others as it exceeds other in power.”<sup>18</sup>
4. “The patricians of each city... have supreme right over their own city... and in that city’s supreme council, they have full power... to do everything they think necessary for the preservation and growth of their city.”<sup>19</sup>

In brief, these cities are linked by mutual need. Those matters pertaining to their mutual need are addressed in a supreme council possessing sovereignty over them insofar as these common matter are concerned. The relations of right among member cities on the council is commensurate to the degree of their power. Finally, each city has autonomous jurisdiction over its own affairs insofar as they do not conflict with the decisions of the general council.

Here, of course, Spinoza is talking about an aristocratic *State*. However, it seems to me that the basic relations among these more or less decentralized loci of political power can be adapted to other forms of governance. One, it need not be assumed that the separate communes in question be governed by patricians. Why not assume they are governed according to a roughly democratic mode of collective decision making? Two, it likewise need not be assumed that the city as a whole is governed by a strictly centralised power. Why not suppose, as political power within a given territory is distributed among separate cities, that likewise, within a city, it is distributed among neighborhoods or communities? Three, we need not assume that membership at higher order councils is made up of *representatives* from lower order councils;

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<sup>17</sup> TP.9.5.

<sup>18</sup> TP.9.4.

<sup>19</sup> T.P.9.5.

that is, individuals vested with the right to independently render decisions *on behalf* of their constituents. Rather, we can easily suppose that — since Spinoza already contends that higher order councils are “not to be summoned unless the need arises,”<sup>20</sup> such that its aims are known in advance and sub-councils can deliberate prior to the general meeting — members serve as *delegates* of the sub-councils entrusted *only* to voice the collective decisions thereof. Four, the claim that cities bear, on the supreme council, rights commensurate to their power seems rather inconsistent if it is already assumed that *no city can subsist* without the partnership nor secede without causing considerable harm to the other cities and to the partnership. If one particularly powerful city endeavored to dominate the council, the other cities could easily conspire to expel it, at which point the city in question would suffer more than the remaining confederated cities; it could not subsist, whereas they would merely be harmed. Thus, it seems to me that a plausible case can be made as to the more or less equitable relation of cities, thus pushing their relation closer to a confederation than to a state. The same could be said of the hypothetical neighborhood or communal councils from which the total governance of any one city arises.

Thus, we find that Spinoza’s second model of aristocracy can supply us with a model of nested councils ranging in scale from the neighborhood or local community to the city, to the broader region. Sub-councils need not be populated by patricians, but can be organized in an intimate, universally participatory, egalitarian and democratic fashion. These councils, in turn, may send *delegates* to higher order councils such that decisions as to the common affairs of the whole arise from and *only* from the collective will of the lower councils. Therefore, outside of common affairs, the community, neighborhood, city, etc. is thoroughly autonomous and as for common affairs, decisions take shape from below to above and not the reverse. Finally, on the

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<sup>20</sup> TP.9.6.

assumption that all participating communities, neighborhoods, cities, and so on, *actually* need to cooperate, no one socio-political unit is vested with right superior to any other and participates in the decisions of the whole *at will*. Membership in the confederacy is an elective affinity that can be broken if and when it serves the interests of the unit in question. Interpreted along these lines, we find that there takes shape a structure of governance roughly comparable to that indicated by the so-called federative principle.

In this manner, positioning the rational community at the core of any endeavor toward social and political organization does *not* imply a regressive or parochial retreat from the revolutionary horizon. The network of councils bound by elective affinities arising from mutual interests — material and spiritual — really does constitute an alternative to the State form, inverting it and allowing collective action take shape from local initiative. The collective will, in this respect, is not simply represented in a sovereign individual or body, but actively produced through the deliberative work of individual citizens and citizen groups at the grassroots level.

### C. Closure

With these considerations — the necessary correlation of means and ends, the superordination of constructive over destructive action and of active over reactive affects, and, finally, the proposal that a federative principle might be derived from Spinoza's account of aristocracy in its second form — I bring this study to a close. In the broadest sense, it is my hope that this labor of love constitutes a twofold contribution. One, to reintroduce a robust anti-authoritarian ethos into contemporary readings of Spinoza's work from a radical perspective. That is, to shed light on and denounce the lingering odor of the "special coercive force"<sup>21</sup> the

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<sup>21</sup> Lenin, V. 1917. "Class Society and the State." In *The State and Revolution*. Retrieved 08/20/2016 from

perfume of which, if in more or less vulgar forms, most twentieth century radical movements and thinkers could not resist and which they concealed behind the veil of the “withering” State, dictatorship, vanguard, and so on, that never managed to shrivel up entirely but revived itself furiously over and again. Two, to introduce Spinoza into the broader discourse of discourse on anarchism. Misinterpretation on the part of early proponents of the anarchist ideal served to place Spinoza on the outside of subsequent anarchist thought. This is an unfortunate misstep which, I hope, my work serves to correct. A solid and philosophically coherent philosophy of anarchism is demanded and Spinoza’s thought, I hope I have shown, supplies it.

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