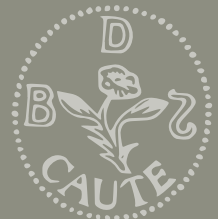


POLITICS, ONTOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE IN SPINOZA

Alexandre Matheron

Spinoza Studies



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Edited by Filippo Del Lucchese, David Maruzzella
and Gil Morejón

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Abbreviations

I. Works by Spinoza

All quotations from Spinoza's works in English are taken from Curley's two-volume *Collected Works of Spinoza* [CWS]; Latin quotations are taken from Gebhardt's four-volume *Opera* [G]. For each citation, we provide an internal reference to Spinoza's text using the conventions below, as well as a reference to the CWS volume and page number; when Matheron quotes Spinoza's Latin, we also provide the G volume and page number.

- Ethics* *Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata et in quinque Partes distincta)*. Roman numerals refer to Part number; Arabic numerals refer to Proposition number; further specifications follow the conventions below.
- CM *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts (Cogitata Metaphysica)*. The first Roman numeral refers to Part number; the second refers to Chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to line number.
- CWS *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Spinoza 1985–2016). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.
- Ep.* *Letters (Epistolae)*. Roman numerals refer to letter number. Spinoza's correspondent is given in square brackets.
- G *Opera* (Spinoza 1925). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.
- KV *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling)*. Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to section number.
- PP *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy (Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae)*. Roman numerals refer to Part number; further specifications follow the conventions below.

- TdIE* *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)*. Arabic numerals refer to the section numbers added by Bruder.
- TP* *Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)*. Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to paragraph number.
- TTP* *Theologico-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)*. Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to paragraph number.

- Alt. Dem. Alternative Demonstration
- App. Appendix
- Ax. Axiom
- Cap. # Chapter
- Cor. Corollary
- DA # Definition of the Affects
- Def. Definition
- Dem. Demonstration
- Exp. Explanation
- GDA General Definition of the Affects
- Lem. Lemma
- Post. Postulate
- Praef. Preface
- Prol. Prolegomenon
- Schol. Scholium

II. Other Works

- AT* *Œuvres de Descartes (Descartes 1964–76)*. Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.
- CSM* *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes (Descartes 1994–95)*. Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.
- DL* *The Discourses on Livy (Machiavelli 1998a)*. Roman numerals refer to Book number; Arabic numerals specify first chapter number and then page number.
- L* *Leviathan (Hobbes 1994)*. Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals specify first the paragraph numbers added by Molesworth and retained by Curley, and then page numbers.
- P* *The Prince (Machiavelli 1998b)*. Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.

- ST* *Summa Theologiae* (Aquinas [1911] 1981; 1882–). Roman numerals specify the Part; ‘q’ specifies the Question number and ‘a’ specifies the Article number.
- U* *Utopia* (More 2002). Arabic numerals refer to page number.

Notes on Translation and Acknowledgements

Though a few of Matheron's essays have been translated into English over the years,¹ we have chosen to re-translate all of them both for the sake of overall consistency and to correct some minor errors in the existing translations. Here we briefly discuss some technical matters of translation.

We strove to render everything using gender-neutral language as much as possible. For the most part, this has meant turning *homme* into 'human being', and utilising 'they' as a generic singular pronoun. We consistently make Spinoza's God an 'it', which is, incidentally, preferable on purely philosophical grounds: this language much better suits the radically non-anthropomorphic divinity of Spinozist metaphysics than 'he'. We similarly tend to treat 'the sovereign' as an 'it' rather than a 'he'. The major exceptions to this practice are as follows. 1. We have typically left quotations unchanged; so, when in the CWS Spinoza discusses 'man', for example, or when in *Leviathan* Hobbes talks about 'the liberty that each man hath', we tend to leave it as is. 2. While Spinoza's God may be radically non-anthropomorphic, that of his contemporaries and predecessors was certainly not; we often retain masculine pronouns for the God of Aquinas and that of Hobbes. 3. When the discussion specifically concerns a 'king', instead of a generic 'sovereign', we retain masculine pronouns. 4. Finally, of course, there are those passages that deal specifically with men and women in Spinozist anthropology, primarily in Chapters 16 and 17. Even there, we have only rendered *hommes* as 'men', rather than as 'human beings', when it was explicitly clear that men in particular were in question, and as opposed to 'women', *femmes*.

There is the well-known problem of how best to deal with *pouvoir* and *puissance*. These two French terms, which are broadly synonymous with Spinoza's Latin terms *potestas* and *potentia*, are really best rendered as 'power'

¹ See Appendix 2, below.

in English. (We considered, but ultimately rejected, alternatives such as ‘potency’ and ‘capacity’ for *potential/puissance*.) Our general practice is to provide the original French in square brackets for the first appearance of either term in each chapter, and again whenever the other term appears or when the sense is at all ambiguous. For instance, consider Chapter 18, on ‘The Right of the Stronger’: it should be clear to the reader that the initial discussion of Hobbesian power is a matter of *pouvoir*, whereas the subsequent discussion of Spinozist power is a matter of *puissance*. We have probably erred on the side of caution, providing the original French more often than is strictly necessary, especially in light of Matheron’s argument in Chapter 9 that the *potestas/potentia* distinction in Spinoza is less rigorous than is often assumed, and also because Matheron’s usage of the terms is typically quite clear and consistent. The obvious exception to this general practice is Chapter 14, ‘Spinoza and Power’: there, because Matheron uses both terms so often, it would have been extremely cumbersome to continually insert the French in square brackets; consequently, in that chapter we have elected simply to leave *puissance* and *pouvoir* in the original.

We occasionally provide other French terms in square brackets as well, in order to avoid confusion or ambiguity. For example, in Chapter 12 we do this to indicate that the word *droit* is sometimes translated as ‘law’ and sometimes as ‘right’.

Chapter 12 also presented some unique translation challenges, as in it Matheron critically discusses at length the different French translations of Spinoza’s Latin text. We translate the entire discussion into English, but also provide the French formulations in footnotes, so as to allow the reader to evaluate Matheron’s analysis directly.

We have consistently translated *passionnés*, which Matheron always uses to qualify human beings or individuals, as *subject to passions*. By contrast, we always translate *passionnell/passionnelle*, which Matheron uses to qualify desires, interpersonal relations, or affects, as *passional*; its proper contrast is ‘rational’. Thus, for example, the reader will find, on the one hand, ‘human beings subject to passions’ (*hommes passionnés*); and, on the other, ‘passional desires’ (*désirs passionnels*) as opposed to ‘rational desires’ (*désirs rationnels*).

We always translate the Gueroultian concept-phrase *substance à un attribut* as ‘substance having one attribute’. We never render similar but distinct formulations in this way; the reader can be sure that *having* one attribute expresses Gueroult’s idea. For example, by contrast, in Chapter 2, ‘substance considered under a single attribute’ renders *substance envisagée sous un seul attribut*. See Chapter 2, Note 2 for an account of what is at stake in this concept.

We occasionally modify translations of Spinoza's works, and we always indicate when we have done so. All translations of non-English writings where no extant English translation exists are our own.

Finally, anything in square brackets, either in the text itself or in footnotes below, is our own editorial addition. The only exception to this rule occurs when quotations already include square brackets.²

* * *

We would like to thank Pierre-François Moreau, Laurent Bove and Dave Mesing, without whom this project would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Carol Macdonald at Edinburgh University Press for her hard work and enthusiastic support throughout the process of producing this manuscript, along with the rest of the editorial team at Edinburgh involved in this project: Tim Clark, James Dale, Ersev Ersoy and Kirsty Woods. David Maruzzella would like to personally thank Michael Naas, Pascale-Anne Brault and Elizabeth Rottenberg for teaching me everything I know about translation, Bradley Ramos for being the ideal office mate, and Megan Pietz for everything else. Gil Morejón would like to personally thank Vilde Lid Aavitsland, Michael Peterson, Owen Glyn-Williams, Jacob Singer and William Meyrowitz. Any remaining errors are our own.

Alexandre Matheron died on 7 January 2020, days before we moved into the final stages of preparing this volume. We would like to dedicate it to his memory.

Filippo Del Luchesse
David Maruzzella
Gil Morejón

² For example: 'With these [demonstrations] I have explained God's nature . . .' (*Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 439).

A Revolutionary Beatitude: Alexandre Matheron's Spinozism

David Maruzzella and Gil Morejón

It is the strange fate of once-prolific philosophers to be treated, as Marx lamented of Hegel and Spinoza before him, like a 'dead dog'.¹ Indeed, it is even stranger, but perhaps not surprising, that the major figures in what has been called a 'revolution', or at least a 'renaissance',² in recent Spinoza scholarship are hardly known beyond erudite circles in their home countries. Skim through the bibliography of any major work on Spinoza in any language from the last fifty years, and one will always find the name of Alexandre Matheron, although his works have almost never been translated,³ and a broad appreciation of and engagement with his work is still to come in the English-speaking world.⁴ The new 'Spinoza Studies' series at Edinburgh University Press aims to remedy such conspicuous absences, making the work of important Spinoza scholars newly available for a wide audience. With the publication of this volume we are pleased to introduce a substantial collection of writings by the distinguished Spinoza scholar and historian of philosophy, Alexandre Matheron, to Anglophone readers for the first time.⁵

There can be no doubt that Matheron single-handedly made some of the most significant and profound contributions to Spinoza scholarship of the past 100 years. As Laurent Bove writes, 'Alexandre Matheron is known, by philosophers and historians of philosophy, as one of the greatest, if not

¹ Marx 1982: 102.

² Duffy 2009: 111.

³ Del Lucchese 2009b: 15; see Appendix 2, below.

⁴ See Barbone 2019.

⁵ See Peden 2014, which focuses on the importance of Spinozism for the revitalisation of rationalism in twentieth-century French thought against the phenomenological currents. However, as Peden himself admits, Matheron's work falls outside the scope of his aim, which means that Matheron's story still remains to be told.

the greatest, commentators on Spinoza's philosophy.⁶ His contributions are indeed so significant that Louis Althusser, who was slated to offer a course on Spinoza in 1971–72 for the *agrégation de philosophie*, decided at the last minute to lecture on Rousseau instead, explicitly imploring his students to read Matheron's massive 1969 study, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (*Individual and Community in Spinoza*); as he went on to explain, Althusser felt that, after Matheron's intervention, he would have little to offer beyond summarising the book's main points.⁷ In a retrospective overview of Matheron's work written on the occasion of the publication of his most recent book, *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique* (*Studies on Spinoza and the Philosophies of Early Modernity*), which collects the vast majority of Matheron's stand-alone essays and from which the essays translated here are drawn, Ariel Suhamy, *maître de conférences* at the Collège de France, wrote that 'if all Spinoza's works were to disappear from the planet, Matheron's works would happily take their place'.⁸ Étienne Balibar also speaks to the encyclopaedic scope of Matheron's work in an amusing anecdote. He recalls that on the day that he defended his habilitation thesis in 1993,⁹ Matheron said to him, 'you read Spinoza as if at every corner of the doctrine you wanted to uncover an *aporia* and prove that he had put himself in a contradictory situation in which he couldn't resolve his own problem, and that's wrong. That's wrong!' To this Balibar responded, 'Not everybody is as capable as you, knowing Spinoza entirely by heart and resolving any difficulty in his doctrine or in the interpretation of his work by finding in a remote corner of a text *the* phrase that resolves the contradiction.'¹⁰

Reading through the essays collected here, one cannot help but sympathise with Balibar's frustration: Matheron's approach frequently proceeds by identifying an *apparent* contradiction or *aporia* in Spinoza, and, instead of searching somewhere beyond the text, as it were, for its solution, or even, in a kind of deconstructive move, declaring its existence a condition of possibility or impossibility for its systematic coherence, seeks rather to locate and mobilise philosophical resources interior to the doctrine itself that neutralise and displace the contradiction. This in no way means that those who see conflicts and contradictions in Spinoza's texts are simply mistaken

⁶ Bove 2019: 325.

⁷ Althusser 2015: 45. For a more detailed account of Althusser's influence on the development of French Spinozism in relation to Matheron's work, see Del Lucchese 2009b: 11–13.

⁸ Suhamy 2011.

⁹ Balibar 1995.

¹⁰ Balibar 2005b: 395.

or myopic, but rather that the *true problems* only arise once these apparent inconsistencies are reformulated on the basis of the authentic Spinozist problematic.¹¹ But as Matheron himself says in a 1972 review of the first volume of Gueroult's studies on Spinoza, 'how are we to reconstitute problematics if not on the basis of the exact knowledge of systems?'¹² Matheron's approach is thus located at the crossroads of the systematic reconstructions of Gueroult and the orientation towards *problematics* that has come to characterise French rationalism from Bachelard to Deleuze.¹³ And yet Matheron is equally concerned with Spinoza's continuing relevance for political philosophy, the conditions for the possibility of the historical emergence of Spinozism, and erudite matters of translation and philology.¹⁴

At the limit, Matheron's readings suggest that there simply are no contradictions in Spinoza's doctrine.¹⁵ Through his comprehensive and meticulous analyses, such aporetic moments in the philosopher's corpus seem to dissolve into the systematic consistency of purely immanent rigour. This is not to say that Spinozism is unproblematically complete and consistent, the realised dream of absolute idealism, but rather that Matheron reveals that its seeming lacunae and inconsistencies are not insoluble contradictions or mere oversights. And Matheron always begins within these tensions, at the very heart of these Spinozist problematics, as if he were drawn to their complicated necessity in just the same way as Spinoza himself. As Filippo Del

¹¹ See, for example, 'The "Right of the Stronger": Hobbes contra Spinoza', included in this volume as Chapter 18.

¹² Matheron 1972: 199.

¹³ See Maniglier 2012.

¹⁴ See, for example, 'Women and Servants in Spinozist Democracy', included in this volume as Chapter 17, where Matheron reverses a long-held belief in Spinoza scholarship, based on what he demonstrates to be a translation error, which consisted in the textually unsubstantiated claim that Spinoza considered professions related to 'vices', such as the sale of alcohol, to be the kind of 'servile' occupations that constitute grounds for formal exclusion from political participation. Matheron's careful analysis of Spinoza's Latin reveals that he means just the opposite: servility does not have anything to do with a moral judgement, but involves a relation of dependence; pub owners and wine sellers must count among those who are *included* in Spinoza's ideal polities, not among those ruled out from participation. See also Del Lucchese 2009b: 15.

¹⁵ In this way Matheron's interpretation stands in sharp contrast with that of one of his predecessors, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, who, in his *Introduction à l'histoire de la philosophie* (1956), after introducing the basic tenets of Marxist philosophy, goes on to distinguish between the conflicting idealist and materialist tendencies in Spinoza's thought. As Matheron says in the interview in Appendix 1 below, such a 'distinguishing' approach to the history of philosophy had no real interest for him.

Lucchese says, it is rare to encounter a commentator who deeply identifies with the doctrine they study, and precisely this is true of Matheron.¹⁶

Alexandre Matheron, born in 1926, began his academic career at the University of Algiers, where he taught from 1957 to 1963. He then moved to Paris, where he worked on his doctoral theses on Spinoza at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) with Martial Gueroult as his sponsor.¹⁷ From 1968 to 1971, he was an assistant professor at the University of Nanterre in Paris; from 1971 until his retirement in 1992, he was a professor at the École normale supérieure at Fontenay/Saint Cloud. But retirement hardly put a stop to his philosophical and scholarly productivity; for many years afterward, he conducted public seminars on Spinoza, and continued to write, publish and present his original research.

Matheron's first book was *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (1969), a monumental study of the *Ethics* that was published in Pierre Bourdieu's influential series *Le sens commun* at Les Éditions de Minuit, and which Antonio Negri once called the most adventurous and fruitful of all the attempts at a structural analysis of the text.¹⁸ *Individu et communauté* was among the very first sustained readings ever to insist on the centrality of political questions to Spinoza's philosophical project, and to argue for the novelty of Spinoza's political thought, which had often been seen either as a liberal contractarianism or a wayward variant of Hobbesian absolutism. Indeed, of the three great French studies on Spinoza that appeared at the end of the 1960s, the Marxist Matheron's was by far the most political and politically minded; although Gilles Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy* was crucial for how post-war French philosophers reconceived politics through Spinoza, in itself it was hardly a political text, and Gueroult's two-volume study on the philosopher is almost obsessively apolitical. One can compare Matheron's first book with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*,¹⁹ but rewritten on entirely Spinozist bases: it expounds a rigorous synthetic logic of progressive composition and organisation, starting from the *corpora simplicissima* of extended substance and terminating in the transindividual eternal life of the beatific community of Spinozist sages, passing through the

¹⁶ Del Lucchese 2009b: 9.

¹⁷ The fact that Gueroult was Matheron's sponsor at the CNRS should not lead one to overestimate the former's influence on the latter. See Matheron's reflections on their relationship in the interview with Bove and Moreau in Appendix 1, below.

¹⁸ Negri 1991: 245, Note 8.

¹⁹ Sartre [1960] 2004.

alienation endemic to political society as it naturally arises among human beings subject to passions and the gradual development of the powers of reason from within those social forms. 'Beyond the "bourgeois" liberal State and the transitory stage of reasonable interhuman life', Matheron declares, what the Spinozist sage wants is 'to establish a *communism of minds*: to make all of Humanity exist as a self-conscious totality, a microcosm of the infinite Understanding, within which each soul, while remaining entirely itself, would at the same time become all others'.²⁰ Pierre-François Moreau describes the text as having a double task, which we might even call dialectical: on the one hand, that of deciphering the passions that drive human behaviour in the political *Treatises* as being essentially those whose genesis is analysed in the *Ethics*, and on the other hand, that of showing that the key to understanding these passions lies in the social formations and political institutions whose natures are analysed in the *Treatises*.²¹

Two years later, Matheron published *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (*Christ and the Salvation of the Ignorant in Spinoza*) (1971) in Gueroult's series *Analyse et Raisons* with the publisher Aubier-Montaigne, a book which, like Gueroult's two-volume study, has long been out of print and is nearly impossible to find today. This book is devoted to unravelling some of the most difficult tensions in Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which lie precisely at the point of articulation between politics and theology. The initial question that animates the text also gives it its title: how is it possible for Spinoza to consistently hold in the first *Tractatus* both that the ignorant can achieve salvation by mere obedience, and also that salvation is a matter of knowledge and freedom? Or again: how can we reconcile Spinoza's absolute rationalism, which is clearly on display in his ruthless criticism of any possible knowledge of God through miracles, with his insistence that the truth of salvation by obedience cannot have been reached by reason, but only through revelation?²² Indeed, what, for Spinoza, was the meaning of Christ, that subversively unarmed prophet who, 'master par excellence in matters of the third kind of knowledge, was, among finite modes, the one through whose mind the Idea of God was manifest to the highest degree yet attained'?²³ Matheron refuses absolutely every easy resolution of these dilemmas, insisting on the consistency of Spinoza's thought and the simultaneously conceptual and historical necessity of these problems themselves. The

²⁰ Matheron [1969] 1988: 612.

²¹ Moreau 2011: 8.

²² See *TTP passim*, but especially IV and VII.

²³ Matheron 1971: 257.

result is an astonishing work of philosophical productivity, which elaborates concepts whose meaning extends well beyond the esoteric scope of its apparent focus; it is a text about historical contingency and necessity, about the concrete logics of ideological diffusion and relapse, about the power of the imagination and the interplay of complex social dynamics in the historical constitution of a truth that aspires to radical universality. As Negri puts it, in this work Matheron shows us how, for Spinoza, ‘the religious problematic of salvation is completely reinterpreted in light of this secular and materialist perspective of liberation’.²⁴

Apart from these two highly original and incisive monographs, Matheron has written over forty scholarly essays from the 1970s to the present day. Many of these were collected in an anthology entitled *Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle. Études sur Spinoza (Anthropology and Politics in the Seventeenth Century: Studies on Spinoza)* (1986); that collection was greatly expanded and revised twenty-five years later as the massive *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique* (2011). It is from these *Études* that the essays in the present volume were selected. In making our selection, initially based on that of Filippo Del Lucchese,²⁵ we strove to compile a representative sample of Matheron’s extremely broad research. We think that the volume succeeds in this regard, and that it thus constitutes an excellent introduction to Matheron’s work – a better introduction, perhaps, than either of his stand-alone monographs. The reader should be aware, however, that this volume leaves out fully half of the forty pieces gathered in the *Études*. And there are, in addition, a number of occasional texts that Matheron composed that are included neither in the *Études* nor in the present volume; for a complete list of Matheron’s published works, see the appended chronology.

We have chosen to organise the chapters in this volume thematically. The first set of essays is grouped under the title ‘Spinoza on Ontology and Knowledge’. They concern what might seem to be relatively traditional problems of metaphysics and epistemology: the inherently reflexive nature of ideas in Spinoza from his earliest to his most mature works (Ch. 1); the progressive development of Spinoza’s immanent metaphysics of power and its relation to physics (Chs. 2–4); and the notoriously difficult concepts of eternal life and the intellectual love of God in Part V of the *Ethics* (Chs. 5 and 6). Even at this ostensibly abstract metaphysical level, Matheron’s reading of Spinoza has important political overtones; as Matheron himself

²⁴ Negri 1991: 177 and 263, Note 24. Translation modified.

²⁵ See Matheron 2009.

notes in the interview appended to this volume, he thought that ‘Spinozist eternity prefigured the life of a militant, which seemed to me to be the best example of the adequation of our existence to our essence’.²⁶

The second, much larger, set of essays are grouped under the title ‘Spinoza on Politics and Ethics’. There is significant thematic overlap across nearly all of these chapters, but they can be provisionally broken into smaller groupings that share a specific focus. Chapters 7 through 11 involve Matheron’s reading of Spinoza’s injunction, in the first chapter of the *Political Treatise*, that we must ‘seek the causes and natural foundations of the state, not from the teachings of reason, but from the common nature, or condition, of men’.²⁷ As Matheron repeatedly emphasises, this means: *on the basis of passive affects*. Indeed in these chapters we find one of Matheron’s most original contributions, what he sometimes refers to as the ‘four fundamental affects’: pity, envy, the ambition for glory and the ambition for domination.²⁸ As he demonstrates, these all follow from the imitation of the affects, even in a hypothetical (and hyperbolic) ‘state of nature’, and give rise to each other in an endless cycle spurred on by indignation; and this, he argues, is itself sufficient to account for the *de facto* establishment of a democratic *imperium* and the formation of political society. This innovative reading allows Matheron to maintain that Spinoza develops a radically non-contractarian account of the genesis of the civil state, and without even needing to make recourse to any utilitarian calculus on the part of any individuals. But the crucial role played by indignation in this story also, as he is keen to emphasise, entails that there is something ineradicably evil (in Spinoza’s technical sense of the term) at the basis of all political societies, a normatively operative mechanism of repression and a social foundation of irreducible hatred, following Machiavelli and perhaps anticipating certain Nietzschean and Freudian insights. In this way, Matheron’s sober analyses might serve as a helpful corrective to those who see in Spinoza a purely affirmative politics of joyful becoming, untainted by any negativity.²⁹

Matheron’s analysis of the nature of Spinozist politics continues in the next few chapters, which deal with the ontological status of two particular

²⁶ Appendix 1, below; see Stolze 2015.

²⁷ TP I, 7; CWS II, 506.

²⁸ Spinoza himself typically writes about ‘Ambition’ [*ambitio*] without qualification; rigorously distinguishing between these two modalities of ambition is part of Matheron’s interpretative innovation.

²⁹ See Del Lucchese 2009b: 16. In this regard, Del Lucchese’s *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation* constitutes a profoundly Matheronian analysis (Del Lucchese 2009a).

and potentially surprising things: the state itself (Ch. 12), and holy Scripture (Ch. 13). Both of these, Matheron convincingly argues, qualify as individuals, in Spinoza's precise sense of individuality, assuming that certain important external conditions are met. And in affirming the ontological individuality of the state and scripture, Matheron recapitulates some important themes from his earlier monographs: they must each be understood as having their own proper *conatus*, and his analysis opens onto questions concerning the relative autonomy of social and ideological production and reproduction conceived as concrete historical processes. Next, Chapter 14, originally written for the journal of the French Communist Party, *La Nouvelle Critique*, recapitulates all these political reflections in a sweeping, speculative account that plays out the immanent genesis of political society, its attendant alienation, and the potential surpassing of the bleak horizons of the modern state-form by the powers of reason, all from the perspective of Spinoza's theory of power and in a more overtly Marxist vernacular than Matheron typically speaks.

The next few chapters bear on specific 'problems' in Spinoza's political and anthropological reflections. In these essays, Matheron takes up Spinoza's relation to the seventeenth-century theory of property (Ch. 15), the question of sexuality in his systematic philosophy (Ch. 16), and his excluding women and servants from participation in the democratic state he envisages (Ch. 17). Matheron cautions us not to move so quickly in condemning Spinoza on these matters from our own historical position, from which they may seem obviously regressive and indefensible, but also refuses to excuse his positions as mere 'products of their time'. Instead his analyses seek to explain how and why Spinoza saw these positions as genuinely consistent, if troubling, consequences of his philosophical approach to political and ethical life under conditions in which reason clearly does not have the upper hand over the passions, which so forcefully determine the desires and behaviour of the vast majority of human beings.

The remaining chapters might be described as comparative studies. In them we find Matheron contrasting Spinoza and Hobbes on the subject of the relation between power and right, in which he argues that Rousseau's famous critique of the 'right of the stronger' misses the mark in both cases but for opposite reasons (Ch. 18). And he also contrasts them on the subject of democracy, arguing that Hobbes' elaboration of the concept of authorisation in his account of the social contract, between *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, was designed to displace the theoretical primacy that his earlier work had unwittingly granted to democratic sovereignty – a primacy that Spinoza unequivocally affirms (Ch. 19). The last chapter (Ch. 20) constitutes a long

and complex argument for the theoretical novelty of Spinozist political philosophy, which, Matheron claims, is the first to escape the double bind of banal positivism and futile idealism that haunted all approaches from Saint Thomas Aquinas up through Hobbes. But this account has a historical-materialist twist: if, according to Matheron, Spinoza was able to circumvent this impasse in theory, it is only because the actual political practices of the Machiavellians (not, that is, the works of Machiavelli himself) had first made it possible to grasp the true nature of this problem.

The final text in our volume is an interview of Alexandre Matheron by two of his most prominent students, who today are major Spinoza scholars in their own right: Laurent Bove and Pierre-François Moreau. Their lively conversation spans from Matheron's own intellectual formation in the first half of the twentieth century to the major themes of his research and its influences, and will undoubtedly give the reader a sense of Matheron's remarkable humility and cheerful sense of humour.

This volume is, we hope, only the first of many that will bring Matheron's influential and excellent scholarship on Spinoza and early modern philosophy to an Anglophone audience. Matheron's work has been absolutely essential and formative for the entire development of what today is sometimes called French Spinozism; we are confident that, in the following pages, you will easily be able to understand why.

I

Spinoza on Ontology and Knowledge

Idea, Idea of the Idea and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and the *Ethics*

When we compare what Spinoza says about the relations between the idea and the idea of the idea in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* with what he says about them in Part II of the *Ethics*, we get the impression, at first glance, that there are a number of contradictions between these two texts.¹ Indeed,

1. In Paragraph 33 of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, Spinoza claims that an idea *can* be the object of another idea. With Propositions 20 and 22 of Part II, by contrast, he demonstrates that there is *necessarily* an idea of every idea. This, however, is not exactly an insurmountable contradiction. For, after all, what is necessary is *a fortiori* possible. And in order to prove, inversely, that the existence of an idea of the idea corresponding to each idea is not simply possible, but also necessary, we must presuppose the whole of Spinoza's ontology: the definition and the existence of God, the unicity of substance, the parallelism of attributes, etc. But none of this would have been available to readers of the *TdIE*: the goal of that work is, on the contrary, to lead readers, from wherever they might be, to the progressive discovery of the *premises* of Spinozist ontology, which consequently cannot be posited at the outset. Generally speaking, the mere absence of a claim found in the *Ethics* from the *TdIE* proves nothing.

2. There is, however, a more serious contradiction. In Paragraphs 33 and 34 of the *TdIE*, Spinoza insists that the idea of the idea is *something other* than the idea of which it is the idea. In the Scholium to Proposition 21 of Part II of the *Ethics*, by contrast, he demonstrates that the idea and the

¹ [Originally published as 'Idée, idée d'idée et certitude dans le *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* et dans l'*Éthique*', *Travaux et documents*, no. 2: *Méthode et Métaphysique*, Groupe de recherches spinozistes (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1989); republished in Matheron 2011. (See Appendix 2.)]

idea of the idea are in reality *one and the same thing*. And yet, this is perhaps not a formal contradiction either. For two things can be one under a certain relation, all the while remaining distinct under a different relation. And that this is the case here is confirmed by the very demonstration that Spinoza gives of the identity between the idea and the idea of the idea. The Scholium to Proposition 21, indeed, is based explicitly upon the Scholium to Proposition 7, where it was established that a body and the idea of this body are one and the same thing under two different attributes – which we can generalise by saying that an idea *and its ideatum*, each in its attribute, are the same thing. Now the ideatum of the idea of the idea, is indeed the idea, but it is the idea considered only under a certain aspect: it is the idea considered only in its formal essence, and not at all in its objective reality. Thus the idea of the idea, as is made clear in this same Scholium to Proposition 21, is identical (this time under the same attribute) to the idea considered as a ‘form of the idea’, as ‘a mode of thinking, without relation to the object’;² but it is not wrong to say that it is distinguished, at least by a distinction of reason, from the idea considered in its representative content, or from the idea to the extent that it is the ‘objective essence’ of something. Moreover, the doctrine of the identity of the idea and the idea of the idea (in the same way, moreover, as that of the identity of the idea and its ideatum) is only laid out in the scholia, which leads us to a more elevated level of ‘intuitive science’ than that of the rest of the *Ethics*: if we consider only the *propositions* of Part II and their demonstrations, absolutely nothing yet allows us to decide if the series of ideas and that of the ideas of ideas (or the series of ideas and that of bodies) are one and the same series, or two simply parallel but distinct series. We understand then that Spinoza did not – assuming (since this has not been proven either) that, beginning in this period, Spinoza had been in possession of, on this point, his definitive doctrine – give an account, in the *TdIE*, of something that in the *Ethics* would still be a bit esoteric with respect to the demonstrative apparatus properly speaking.

3. There is, however, an even more serious contradiction. In the *TdIE*, Spinoza indeed seems to say *that there is not even parallelism* between the idea and the idea of the idea. In fact, in Paragraph 34, he concludes his analysis of the relations between the idea and the idea of the idea by announcing two theses:

- Thesis number 1: ‘In order to know, it is not necessary to know that I know.’

² *Ethics* II, 21 Schol.; CWS I, 467–8.

– Thesis number 2: ‘In order to know that I know, it must first (*prius*) be necessary that I know.’³

Spinoza thus seems to say that it is possible to know without knowing that we know: he seems to think that we *first* (*prius*) know, and that then, depending on the case, we become aware of whether or not we know; that we *first* have a true idea, and that then, depending on the case, the true idea of this true idea does or does not make an appearance. Now, in the *Ethics*, Proposition 43 of Part II is formal: whoever has a true idea *knows at the same time* that they have a true idea; it is thus not possible to know without knowing that we know, and the knowledge of knowing is strictly contemporaneous with knowledge itself. Is the contradiction not blatant this time?

Perhaps not, in spite of everything. In fact, concerning thesis number 1, we could note that Spinoza actually *does not say* that it is possible to know without knowing that we know. All that this thesis means, if we put it in context, is that our knowledge of what the nature of a thing is does not depend in any way, with respect to its content, on premises taken from the knowledge of what the nature of our knowledge of this thing is. Taking the example given by Spinoza in this same Paragraph 34, all that I can ever understand of the essence of Peter will come to me exclusively from my true idea of the essence of Peter, without my true idea of my true idea of the essence of Peter ever being able to afford me any complementary information on this point; for the idea of a thing and the idea of this idea have two different ideata, and an idea, generally speaking, will never lead us to know anything other than its own ideatum. Put differently, epistemology is not a part of science. But this does not necessarily mean that it is possible that we can know without knowing that we know: what is established is that if this is impossible, it is not because of a so-called logical dependence of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea; but perhaps it is impossible for other reasons. Simply put, in the *TdIE*, Spinoza does not weigh in on the question and does not even pose it, whereas in the *Ethics* he will respond to it negatively.

Under these conditions, concerning thesis number 2, we might, if need be, think that the adverb *prius* has a purely logical signification, and not at all a chronological one. This thesis might, if need be, mean: ‘In order to know that I know what a thing is, it is necessary that I know what this thing is, and that I know it by means of knowledge that does not depend at all upon any knowledge of knowledge whatsoever.’ And, to be sure, it *also* means this. But ultimately, the fact remains that there would be something artificial about reducing it to this: this would be to force the meaning of the

³ *TdIE*, 34; CWS I, 17.

words a bit. And anyway, this reduction is ruled out by what immediately follows.

Indeed, in Paragraph 35, Spinoza applies what he has just said to the problem of *certainty*. He says: 'From this it is clear that certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself' (put differently, the idea); and he clarifies: 'i.e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence (*modus, quo sentimus essentiam formalem*) is certainty itself.'⁴ Spinoza does not demonstrate this explicitly: he simply says that it is obvious based on the preceding. Now, if we accept that the idea and the idea of the idea are necessarily contemporaneous, we do not at all see how this conclusion would be immediately clear: all that we could immediately conclude from the preceding is that there are ideas, ideas of ideas, ideas of ideas of ideas, etc., in our mind, and that certainty is situated at one of these levels; but there would not be any reason, it seems, to identify it more specifically with the idea rather than with the idea of the idea – or, if there is such a reason, we would not see it at first glance. Whereas, by contrast, if we accept that there is a *chronological* anteriority of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea, then, as a matter of fact, this localisation of certainty at the level of the idea directly and immediately follows from the conjunction of theses 1 and 2.

Indeed,

1. let us suppose that certainty is situated at the level of the idea of the idea, and not at the level of the idea. And let us accept that it is possible to have a true idea before having the true idea of this true idea. In this case, we would be able, *in a first moment*, to know, for example, that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles, but without yet being certain of it: we would be able to, put differently, represent to ourselves the triangle as necessarily having the sum of its angles equal to two right angles, with the demonstration complete and perfectly understood, but we might ask ourselves if the impossibility of thinking the contrary truly proves that the contrary is impossible in itself. And this would only be, *in a second moment*, after the appearance of the idea of the idea, that is to say, after an epistemological examination of our idea of the triangle would have made us understand that it possesses all of the characteristics of a true idea, that we would become certain that the sum of the angles of the triangle is equal to two right angles and it is impossible that it be otherwise. But if this were the case, it is clear that the passage from the first moment to the second

⁴ *TdIE*, 35; CWS I, 18. The Pléiade edition, following Koyré, translates this as: 'the way in which we sense [*sentons*] the formal essence'.

moment would have afforded us new knowledge *concerning the triangle*: to learn that a thing is in conformity with the idea that we have of it is to gain access to information relative to the thing itself, and not to its idea. Now *this would be in contradiction with the first thesis*: it is impossible that my true idea of my true idea of the triangle would afford me any information whatsoever about the triangle, because the triangle is not its ideatum: all that this allows me to know is the nature of my true idea of the triangle, and its nature such as it already was before I even knew in what it consisted. Thus, in reality, the only new thing that my idea of the idea makes me understand is that my idea of the triangle, and it alone, made me understand by itself that the sum of the angles of the triangle can only be equal to two right angles. But then,

2. since our true idea of the triangle did not change between the first and second moment, we have to admit that, from the first moment, before the appearance of the idea of the idea, it already made us really understand, by itself, and itself alone, that the sum of the angles of the triangle is really equal to the sum of two right angles. For if this was not the case, *this would be in contradiction with the second thesis*: we would have a true idea of a true idea that would teach us that we knew from the first moment what in reality we did not yet know, and consequently, by giving us false information, would not be true. Thus, we must indeed conclude that our true idea, from the first moment, *really involved, on its own, certainty at its own level*.

But this quasi-immediate demonstration, if I have reconstructed it correctly, clearly presupposes the possibility of a distinction between two successive moments, and consequently the possibility of a chronological anteriority of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea. Is not the *TdIE*, this time around, in contradiction with the *Ethics*, which affirms, on the contrary, the impossibility of such an anteriority? No, in fact, it is not. And what proves this is that in the *Ethics* itself, *immediately after* having demonstrated with Proposition 43 that the idea and the idea of the idea are strictly contemporaneous, Spinoza gives us, in the Scholium to this same Proposition 43, a new demonstration of the identity between idea and certainty. And in this demonstration, which is nearly identical to the one in the *TdIE*, the word *prius* appears following an explanation intended to justify its use *in a chronological sense*. If there was thus a contradiction on this point between the *TdIE* and the *Ethics*, there would also be a contradiction between two passages in the *Ethics* that immediately follow one another; this is hardly feasible. But in reality, there is no contradiction, as we will see by analysing these two passages.

First of all, Proposition 43 tells us that ‘He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing.’⁵ And the demonstration is strictly ‘parallelist’: it amounts to saying that, when we have an adequate idea, we necessarily have at the same time an adequate idea of this adequate idea, that is to say, an idea of the idea that makes us adequately know the truth of our true idea, and that consequently (‘since it is self-evident’) we are certain of this truth. This demonstration is perfectly convincing, and it establishes exactly what it is intended to establish. But this, however, is not the best possible demonstration, since it risks, precisely, making us think that certainty is situated *uniquely* at the level of the idea of the idea. Spinoza does not say this, since it would be false: he simply says that, if there is a true idea of the true idea, it is clear that there is also certainty (and we can understand by this that there is certainty *a fortiori*), without this sufficient condition being presented as being at the same time a necessary condition. But nor does he say explicitly that the true idea involves certainty *by itself*, insofar as it is an idea of the first degree, and that it is not the idea of the idea that renders it certain. And this is why, in the Scholium that follows, he feels the need to rectify this false impression.

In the first sentence of the Scholium of Proposition 43, Spinoza simply puts us on the path: ‘In II, 21 schol.’, he tells us, ‘I have explained what the idea of the idea is.’⁶ Since the Scholium in question had established that the idea of the idea is nothing other than the very form of the idea, it clearly follows that, even if we identify certainty with the idea of the idea, we must conclude all the same – since this is the same thing – that it is also identical with the idea. But this does not suffice; for, if we remained there, we might still think that certainty is identical to the idea considered only under its aspect ‘idea of itself’ (or reflexive idea), and not under its aspect ‘idea of something’. What follows sets things straight.

In what follows in the Scholium to Proposition 43, Spinoza in fact tells us that, independently of any recourse to parallelism, independently even of any recourse to a distinction of reason between idea and idea of the idea, the preceding proposition is obvious on its own: whoever has a true idea is, by this fact alone, certain of its truth. And though this is self-evident, Spinoza nevertheless gives us a *two-part demonstration* of it that very closely resembles the one that we can detect in the *TdIE*, simply with two additions. The first part of this demonstration consists in establishing, as in the *TdIE*, that, to the extent that there is certainty at the level of the idea of the idea,

⁵ *Ethics* II, 43; CWS I, 479.

⁶ *Ethics* II, 43 Schol.; CWS I, 479.

this certainty can consist only in the knowledge of the fact that the idea, by itself, insofar as it is as an idea of the first degree, already involves certainty at its own level. Simply put, Spinoza here adds two supplementary clarifications that had not appeared in the *TdIE*: he indicates, on the one hand, that we always have this knowledge, at least implicitly, from the mere fact that we have a true idea; and he explains, on the other hand, the reason for which we might have the illusory psychological impression of not having this knowledge, or of not having always had it – whereas, in the *TdIE*, by contrast, he did not explicitly eliminate the hypothesis according to which, in a first moment, we would not have really had this knowledge, the idea of the idea perhaps appearing after the idea. But, abstracting from these two clarifications, this first part of the demonstration is based upon a principle equivalent to the first thesis of the *TdIE*. As for the second part of the demonstration, it is absolutely identical to the one that we can detect in the *TdIE* and is based explicitly upon the second thesis. Let us take a look then at these two parts.

The first part consists in the statement and the demonstration of the following thesis: ‘For no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the highest certainty.’⁷ And this thesis is demonstrated in two steps.

In the first step, Spinoza tells us: ‘For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way.’⁸ Spinoza, it is indeed worth mentioning, does not yet tell us that the true idea is perfect knowledge of the thing; he simply tells us that the concept ‘true idea’ means the same thing, or *has the same content*, as that of ‘perfect knowledge’: when we think an idea is true, we think at the same time that it gives us knowledge of its ideatum that is lacking nothing, that it is knowledge that has no need to be completed by something else – and above all not by knowledge of knowledge (which is indeed equivalent to thesis 1). Now to know a thing perfectly, means, in particular, knowing that the real nature of this thing cannot be other than how we conceive it; for if we did not know this, our knowledge of the thing would precisely not be ‘perfect’: there would be something essential missing from it. From this we can in fact conclude that the concept of perfect knowledge implies the concept of *certainty*, and that consequently the concept of the true idea implies it as well. But this applies only, evidently, if there is indeed an equivalence between the concept of true idea and the concept of perfect knowledge. But is this equivalence really

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

justified? Yes, despite how it may appear. And this is what the second step shows.

In the second step Spinoza in fact tells us: ‘And of course no one can doubt this’ (that is, the equivalence between the concept of true idea and the concept of perfect knowledge) ‘unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, viz. the very [act of] understanding (*ipsum intelligere*).’⁹ Let us analyse this rather complex argument.

1. It is impossible to doubt that, generally speaking, ‘to have a true idea’ means the same thing as ‘to know perfectly’, *at least if we accept* that ‘to have a true idea’ means ‘to understand’; since it is evident, and everybody knows, that ‘to understand’ means ‘to know perfectly’. Consequently,

2. whoever has *such a particular true idea* can *only* doubt having perfect knowledge of the corresponding thing if they do not recognise this true idea for what it is, that is, as an act of intellection. For beginning from the moment that they think: ‘I understand this thing’, they will necessarily think: ‘I know this thing perfectly.’ But,

3. in reality, whoever has a true idea cannot completely overlook that it is an act of intellection (they know this implicitly, at least), for we cannot understand without being more or less conscious of understanding at the precise moment when we understand. And consequently, whoever has a true idea cannot truly doubt that they understand the thing perfectly, and thus cannot truly doubt being certain. However,

4. there are people who *doubt psychologically*, or who *believe they doubt*, that they perfectly know the thing of which they have a true idea. If this is the case, though they know that their true idea is an intellection, the doubt arises from what obscures or covers over this knowledge, or relegates it to the back of their mind, by an imaginative prejudice concerning the nature of the idea in general. That is, they have a true idea of their true idea, which made them understand it as being an act of intellection, but they have at the same time an idea of an imaginative idea that represents to them the idea in general as being something analogous to a picture on a tablet – because, in their mind, the imagination of the word ‘idea’ is associated with the imagination of a tablet, and because, in their body, the auditory image of the word ‘idea’ is associated with the visual image of a tablet. And since these two ideas are concurrent with one another, they doubt psychologically: they oscillate between two contradictory affirmations, according to whichever of these two ideas of ideas happens to prevail in their mind. And this is why it might be

⁹ Ibid.

the case that these people, *in a first moment*, ask themselves if this tablet that they have in their mind is truly in conformity with the original: this is exactly the type of question that we can ask ourselves of a tablet. But in reality, even in this first moment, it is never directly concerning their true idea that they pose this question to themselves: they pose it to themselves concerning the tablet that they imagine more or less vaguely and that they call 'idea', and they apply it to their true idea externally when they do not truly have it present in their mind – whereas on the contrary, when they truly think of it (when they pay attention to it), they cease to doubt. And consequently,

5. it is indeed clear that if, *in a second moment*, an epistemological reflection on the nature of their true idea allows them to eliminate their prejudice (by unknitting the associative link that unites the word 'idea' to the representation of a tablet), these people will know explicitly what they already knew implicitly. They will not need to acquire any new knowledge for this: simply, the disappearance of their prejudice (in their body as well as in their soul) will make what they already knew ('I understand this') pass to a more elevated degree of consciousness.

Thus, finally, the initial thesis is well established: whoever has a true idea knows that this true idea involves certainty at its own level; but on the condition that we clarify that this knowledge can enter into contradiction in our mind with imaginative prejudices that lead us to psychologically doubt it and that might even push it to the background of our field of consciousness, and that it is only with the disappearance of these prejudices that knowledge becomes explicit. But then can we immediately conclude that the true idea, by itself, really makes us certain? In the case where prejudices have disappeared, certainly. But in the case where they have not yet disappeared, it is less clear: if we only know implicitly, and by doubting it psychologically, that we are certain, can we truly say that we have already attained certainty? Can we be certain when we still doubt, psychologically, that we are certain? Yes, actually; and this is what the second part of the demonstration is going to show.

Spinoza formulates the *second part of the demonstration* in the following way:

And I ask, who can know that he understands some thing unless he first (*prius*) understands it? I.e., who can know that he is certain about some thing unless he is first (*prius*) certain about it?¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid. As a result, no doubt, of a typographical error, the Pléiade translation is incomprehensible here.

Now here thesis number 2 of the *TdIE* is reproduced verbatim, including the word *prius*, which is repeated twice: in order to know that we know, we must first know. That is indeed the same reasoning that we find here. Let us suppose, Spinoza says, that I first had prejudices about the nature of the idea and that I have now rid myself of them: I now know explicitly that my true idea is an intellection and that it thus involves certainty. This knowledge that I now have is clearly true knowledge. But it can only be so if my true idea is really an intellection, and if it thus really involves certainty. Now my true idea, in itself, has not changed between the moment when I fell victim to my prejudices, and the moment when I was delivered from them: what changed is only its imaginative context, with the disappearance of the associative link between the word 'idea' and the representation of a tablet; but, in itself, it remains what it was. We must thus accept that my true idea, in itself, already involved certainty at its own level before I even explicitly knew that this certainty was involved. From this it follows that it involves certainty by nature, insofar as it is an idea of the first degree, independent of what it might teach us additionally insofar as it is a reflexive idea.

Thus, in fact, I would not be able to know explicitly that I am certain if I had not *first*, literally, been certain. And in this way, we come to understand the word *prius*, including in a chronological sense. To be sure, *prius* also has a logical sense ('independent of any idea of the idea'); but at the same time it means: 'Even before the disappearance of the imaginative prejudice that gave me the illusory psychological impression of not knowing if I was certain or not, and whose dissipation gave me the illusory psychological impression that I am only just now beginning to know that I was certain.'

Thus, finally, there is not a contradiction between the *TdIE* and the *Ethics*. In the *TdIE*, Spinoza sticks to immediate appearances: he does not explicitly eliminate the hypothesis according to which knowledge of knowledge could be posterior to knowledge; perhaps, moreover, he still accepts it, but this remains undecidable. In the *Ethics*, by contrast, Spinoza demonstrates, based on his doctrine of parallelism (of which he could not in any case give an account in the *TdIE*), that when we know, we know that we know. But immediately afterward, the Scholium to Proposition 43 shows how it is possible, without compromising the parallelism in any way, to give an account of these immediate appearances that the *TdIE* stuck to: he explains *the reason for which* we can perfectly imagine ourselves to have first had a true idea and only later the true idea of this true idea. In reality, we have the idea of the idea from the beginning, since it is nothing other than the idea itself insofar as it necessarily reflects its own formal reality; but its degree of consciousness insofar as it is an idea of an idea was weaker

than its degree of consciousness insofar as it was an idea, because it runs up against the imaginative prejudices related to the nature of the idea in general; whereas, by contrast, when these imaginative prejudices are dissipated, its degree of consciousness insofar as it is an idea of the idea can become equal – or at least tends to become equal – to the degree of consciousness it has insofar as it is an idea. Put differently, the idea and the idea of the idea are indeed contemporaneous (since they are one and the same thing), but there can be a chronological delay [*décalage*] between the idea and the idea of the idea attaining their maximal degree of perfection; for the true idea of the true idea only attains its highest degree of perfection after the modification of the imaginative context of the true idea itself. And this is precisely why method always comes *after* science, even if it in turn allows science to progress.

Essence, Existence and Power in
Part I of the *Ethics*:
The Foundations of Proposition 16

Proposition 16, as Tschirnhaus writes in Letter LXXXII, is perhaps the most important in all of Part I.¹ But it is also the most paradoxical. Spinoza tells us that, to the extent that God is an absolutely infinite being, an absolute infinity of properties must be deducible from God's essence. And from this he concludes that God must produce in itself an absolute infinity of effects. But what right does he have to identify properties with effects? The fact that these both are two species of the genus 'consequence' proves nothing: the extension of geometers, for example, has an infinity of properties (all the properties of every conceivable figure), but it does not produce any effects! How then are we to justify this identification that Spinoza presents *ex abrupto* as obvious? Nothing encountered previously, it seems, would have prepared us for this.

And yet, yes. Many things, in fact, already would have prepared us for this. Not always in the form of demonstrations, but a whole series of indications that had as their guiding thread a common principle: the principle of the *total intelligibility of all of the real*, which organises the whole axiomatic of Part I, and which, if we deepen it, must entail as a consequence the necessity of a *total realisation of all of the intelligible*.

Some important suggestions already take us down this path, beginning with the first eight propositions, which are dedicated to the deduction of the properties of 'substances having one attribute' (I accept Gueroult's expression, on the condition that it means 'substances having one attribute and considered only under this attribute').² Proposition 7 is very important in

¹ [Originally published as 'Essence, existence and power in *Ethics* I', in Yirmiyahu Yovel (ed.), *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² ['substances à un attribut'. This phrase is how Gueroult translates Spinoza's *Substantia*

this respect, as well as the two Scholia of Proposition 8. Next, another suggestion can be glimpsed throughout Propositions 9 and 10, where Spinoza establishes the conceivability of his concept of God. Then the demonstrations of the existence of God lead us further and further following a very progressive order. Finally, the Scholium to Proposition 11 leads us to a fundamental intuition on the basis of which Proposition 16 becomes self-evident.

These are the four points that I wish to develop here.

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1. Proposition 7, as is well known, can be understood in a strong and a weak sense. In the strong sense, it *proves* the necessary existence of every conceivable substance. In the weak sense, by contrast, it merely states that, *if a substance exists*, it can only be the result of the existence that is involved in its essence. Taken in this weak sense, we can see that it is rigorously deduced from what precedes it, even if the two axioms that found it are not explicitly

unius attributi (E I, 8 Dem.; CWS I, 412; G II, 49). Gueroult argues that complex concepts can only be grasped on the basis of understanding the simpler concepts of their constitutive elements. By way of example he invokes geometric figures like triangles, whose constitutive elements are straight lines and angles. Similarly, he says, God can only be understood on the basis of the already-understood concepts of its own constitutive elements, and argues that these are substances having one attribute. Propositions 1–8 of Part I of the *Ethics*, according to Gueroult, ‘carry out the deduction of the constitutive elements of the divine essence, namely substances having a single attribute, [which are] the very attributes of God’ (Gueroult 1968: 109). Gueroult’s analysis of these propositions, so understood, are the subject of Chapter III of *Spinoza I: Dieu*; in the subsequent chapter he then synthetically constructs the concept of God as the union of these substances having a single attribute. This account is central to Gueroult’s interpretation, but few commentators have accepted it (see Smith 2014: 655–7).

Here and elsewhere Matheron takes up the idea of *substance à un attribut*, but always insists on its merely heuristic or inadequate character, since for Spinoza it is ultimately contradictory; the only consistent way to think substance is as constituted of an infinity of attributes, each of which is infinite in its own kind. Thus Matheron will often qualify his usage of substance having one attribute: it must be understood, he says, as meaning ‘substance *considered* under a single attribute’, that is, not as ‘substance really having only one attribute’. Matheron also suggests that it provides an appropriate way to understand how the idea of substance functions in Spinoza’s writings prior to the *Ethics*, but that by 1663 Spinoza definitively breaks with the idea of substance having a single attribute; he therefore claims that only the pre-*Ethics* Spinoza is ‘Gueroultian’ in this sense. See this volume, Chapters 2, 3, 4 and the Appendix. For further reading, see Smith 2014 and Deleuze 2004: 146–55.]

invoked in its demonstration: according to Axiom 3, if a substance exists, its existence must have a cause; according to Axiom 4, its existence must be deducible from the nature of its cause. Now, according to the corollary of Proposition 6, a substance cannot be produced by something other than itself; thus, if a substance exists, it must be the cause of itself, and consequently its existence must be deducible from its essence. Since this conclusion ultimately follows from the definition of substance alone and from the two axioms considered as self-evident, it is indeed a question of a necessary truth whose negation would imply a contradiction. We can then state it in the following form:

(P7-1) It is necessary that, if a substance exists, its essence involves existence. Put differently, it is impossible to conceive, without contradiction, of a substance that exists whose existence would not be implied in its essence.

But if we wish to take Proposition 7 in the strong sense, a supplementary intellectual effort is required. On the one hand, we must indeed understand that the only substances in question in this statement (as is indicated moreover by the word 'nature' which figures therein) are substances that *truly* have a *nature*, an essence capable of being conceived clearly and distinctly and whose definition does not contain any internal contradiction. On the other hand, we must make use of an implicit axiom, but one that no reader of Spinoza would refuse to grant him, and which Spinoza himself must have considered as a particularly trivial variant of Axiom 6 ('a true idea must agree with its ideatum'): since there cannot be a true idea without an ideatum that is at least possible, we must say that

(a) Anything whose essence is conceivable can be conceived without contradiction as existing, and therefore its essence does not exclude existence.

Whereby, once again, the deduction becomes rigorous. For if a clearly and distinctly conceivable substance had an essence that did not involve existence, we would be able to deduce from its essence alone, on the one hand (according to Axioms 3 and 4), that it will only exist on the condition of being produced by an external cause, and on the other hand (according to Proposition 6), that its production by an external cause is impossible. We would then be able to deduce from its essence alone that it does not exist, and consequently its essence would exclude existence. So if axiom (a) is

true, Proposition 7 is itself true in the strong sense, and we can formulate it as follows:

(P7-2) Every conceivable substance has an essence that involves existence.

It is clearly in this strong sense that Spinoza himself understands this proposition. But, at this point in the argument, it matters little in which sense readers take it. For, as we will see, it is always possible to move from the weak sense to the strong sense, and the passage will be undertaken more easily as soon as the conceivability of the substance 'God' will have been demonstrated beforehand. But while awaiting this demonstration, Spinoza gives us, all the same, in a scholium of a more elevated level than those of the propositions properly speaking, *another* much more intuitive demonstration of the necessary existence of every conceivable substance. And in so doing, he lays the foundation intended to prepare us for accepting the more intuitive of the four proofs of God's existence.

In fact, Spinoza lays down two foundations. The first is given beginning with the first Scholium to Proposition 8, whose object is to present a second proof for the infinitude of substance, one more intuitive than the demonstration by absurdity that had just been given. Now this proof amounts to saying that 'the finite is in reality a partial negation', whereas 'infinity is the absolute affirmation of existence'. But a partial negation is also a partial affirmation, that is, in opposition to the unconditional character of the absolute, a conditional affirmation. Let us leave aside for the moment the thesis, which is still a bit enigmatic, according to which there would be, *in the thing itself*, an affirmation by itself of its own existence. What is certain, in any case, is that this affirmation is *in the true idea* of the thing, since every idea, according to Spinoza, affirms its own content. Independently of the question of infinitude, Spinoza then admits that, in general, when we conceive of a thing whose essence does not exclude existence, the true idea that we have of it does not simply present itself to us as being just as capable of existing as not existing: it gives, all things being equal, preference to existing. It affirms either that its ideatum exists without restriction, or that it exists *unless* some well-determined obstacles prevent it from doing so. And then, according to Axiom 6, the true idea must agree with its ideatum, of which another variant could be:

(b) All that can be conceived as existing exists so long as no external obstacle prevents it.

Finally, there is still a third variant of this axiom that is found in the second Scholium to Proposition 8. In order to prove once again the necessary existence of every conceivable substance, Spinoza in fact relies upon the following considerations. According to Axiom 6 (even if it is not explicitly mentioned), every true idea must have a real ideatum outside of the understanding: either an existing thing, or at least a veritable essence. But an essence would strictly not have any reality, it would not be *anything*, if it was not itself contained in the nature of a really existing thing, through which it can be conceived and wherein it can potentially be actualised. And this existing thing, if it is not a substance, in any case is in a substance and is conceived through a substance. It is thus evident that

(c) For every conceivable thing, there necessarily exists a substance through which this thing can be conceived.

And since a substance can only be conceived through itself, it immediately follows that every substance of which we have a clear and distinct idea necessarily exists. With this marvellous proof, we have, at a glance, obtained all that we can from the simple consideration of substances 'having one attribute'. All that then remains is to prove the conceivability of the God of Definition 6 in order to establish its existence.

2. This conceivability, as we know, is what is demonstrated in Propositions 9 and 10. But Proposition 9 admits of two interpretations, which, far from contradicting each other, in fact complement each other. For, ultimately, Spinoza indeed says: 'the more each thing' – and not simply each substance – 'has reality or being, the more attributes belong to it' (or 'suit it'). And when he declares a surprising proposition to be 'obvious' it is usually an invitation to meditate on it.

To be sure, this proposition applies above all to substances. From this point of view, Gueroult is right, keeping in mind the rectification already indicated. We have, in the form of 'a given true idea', the idea of an absolutely infinite being, and it is a question for Spinoza of elucidating its internal constitution. Since this idea clearly represents to us a substance rather than a mode, and since the substance that it represents to us has infinitely more reality than a substance 'having one attribute' (or 'considered under a single attribute', which amounts to the same thing), the only means of conceptually matching all of its richness is to reconstruct its essence by giving to it an infinity of attributes. After which we will be able to continue to affirm, as soon as we consider it under one or the other of these attributes

taken separately, everything that the first eight propositions had already established.

But, that being said, the word ‘thing’ *also* applies to all things in general, including modes. Indeed, by the fact alone that we have an idea of God, we also have, in some sense, the intuition of what we might call the *ontological density* of things: we know, with complete certainty, that there is infinitely more in a thing than its actualised essence such as we would know it if our science was complete. We know, for example, that there is infinitely more in a body than a simple combination of movements and rest in extension, even if geometrical physics must be able to allow us to understand exhaustively all that happens therein. And how are we to reconcile this intuition with the total intelligibility of the real, if not by admitting that *one and the same thing* (a human being, an animal, a table, etc.) exists in an infinity of ways, under an infinity of attributes, and that this ‘infinitely more’ that is hidden *behind* its essence as we can conceive of it is nothing other than the infinity of all its other manifestations under all these unknown attributes?

It is true, however, that the use of the word ‘thing’ is only a simple suggestion, albeit a very discreet one, intended only to prepare the final intuition to which the demonstrative chain must lead us: what is essential, from the point of view of this argumentation itself, is the assignation of an infinity of attributes to a single substance. But for this same reason, we remain unsatisfied: we are convinced, but in the mode of ‘it must be this way because it could not be otherwise’. We are constrained to admit *that* the absolutely infinite being cannot be anything other than a substance consisting in an infinity of attributes, but we do not yet see *how* these attributes can be united. And this is why Spinoza is forced to *demonstrate*, with Proposition 10 reinforced by its Scholium, the non-contradiction internal to his definition of God, which nevertheless should have went without saying.

3. The existence of God can thus be proven. It is even done four times, if we add to the three demonstrations of Proposition 11 the one that figures in its Scholium. And we find again here the same gradation as before. These four proofs, though they are logically independent of one another, follow from one another as in a kind of rite of passage. Each one of them prepares us for the comprehension of the following one, and Spinoza’s approach, due to the usage of stronger and stronger variants of Axiom 6 – themselves obtained on the basis of axioms (a), (b) and (c) – becomes more and more intuitive.

The *first proof* does not explicitly presuppose anything other than Axiom 7 and Proposition 7, *even taken in the weak sense* (P7-1). Implicitly, it

presupposes axiom (a), as well as another axiom that we can also consider as a particular application of Axiom 6 (for the agreement idea-object indeed requires that every possible object can be made the object of a true idea). This other axiom would be the following:

(d) If p , it is possible to conceive of p (' p ' designating any proposition whatsoever). Or, which amounts to the same thing, if it is not possible to conceive of p , then not- p .

But if we take Proposition 7 in the weak sense, we must here make the small intellectual effort that we were refused when reading it. Spinoza, in fact, simply tells us: let us suppose that it is possible to conceive of God as not existing; its essence, then, according to Axiom 7, would not involve existence; and, according to Proposition 7, this is absurd. Now the absurdity is less evident according to (P7-1) than according to (P7-2). But it is indeed absurd. For if the essence of God did not involve existence, it would be impossible to conceive that its essence involved existence: even an infinite understanding would be unable to do so. It would then be impossible to conceive that God exists by means of an existence that would be involved in its essence. But the conceivability of the essence of God has now been established, and consequently, according to (a), God can be conceived as existing. We would thus have to admit that it is possible to conceive that God exists by means of an existence that *is not* involved in its essence; which, in fact, would be in contradiction with (P7-1). It is thus not possible to conceive that God does not exist; therefore, according to (d), God exists.

By contrast, if we take Proposition 7 in the strong sense (P7-2), we do not have any need to nuance Spinoza's demonstration: it is self-evident. But then the recourse to an argument by absurdity seems a bit unnecessary. And yet, it is not, since it responds to a very real difficulty. Indeed, we know from (P7-2) that every essence of a conceivable substance involves existence; but we now know the essence of God, and we actually conceive it; we would thus normally have to wait to be able to *read directly, in the very essence of God*, the necessity of its existence. But, at the point at which we find ourselves, we precisely cannot do this: we must accept, once again, *that* the existence of God must be able to be deduced from its essence, but without yet seeing *how* it is deduced from it. The logical constraint of Axiom 7 and of the obviousness mentioned in (d) were thus not so great that we could not stay on the right path while waiting for this difficulty to be overcome.

The *second proof for the existence of God* begins to overcome it, at least negatively. This second proof, explicitly this time, makes use of an axiom that is a much stronger variant of Axiom 6, which is obtained by putting together axioms (a) and (b):

(e) Everything whose essence is conceivable (i.e., is non-contradictory) exists so long as no external obstacle prevents it from doing so.

For something to not exist, in other words, it is insufficient that there are not reasons for it to exist: there must be positive reasons, internal or external to its essence, for which it does not exist. We must remedy the bad habit we have developed of asking ourselves: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’, as if nothingness were more intelligible than being. The right question, on the contrary, would be: ‘Why are there *only* certain things rather than everything?’ And the correct response, as we already know, will be that everything really does wind up existing.

The demonstration of this is immediate. If there were a substance other than God, its nature, as must always be the case for two substances supposed to be distinct, would be entirely different than that of God; we would thus not be able to deduce anything from it concerning God, neither its existence nor its non-existence, and, consequently, it would neither be able to make God exist (which we already knew) nor prevent God from existing. And since we also know that the essence of God does not contain any internal contradiction, God exists: God exists simply because *there is no reason for God not to exist*.

But how is it, precisely, that the absence of a reason for not existing would be *ipso facto* a reason for existing? We understand that it is the case, but why is it the case? If we dig deeper into this truth so as to uncover its foundation, another axiom then appears, which gives us the key to the response and introduces us in turn to *two other proofs for the existence of God*.

This axiom, an even stronger variant of Axiom 6, is obtained by putting together (c) and (e). From this combination, in fact, it immediately follows that, for any conceivable thing, a substance exists *through which* this thing is conceived and *in which* it will exist as soon as the obstacles that prevent it from existing will have disappeared. But this means that there is, *in* substance itself, a *tendency* to make this thing exist, a *striving* to make it exist. And this tendency can only be explained, according to Axiom 4, by the very essence of this substance, since nothing acts on it externally. Whence the very strong axiom, which, this time, remains implicit:

(f) For any conceivable thing, there exists a substance through which this thing can be conceived; and this substance, as a consequence of its own essence, tends to make this thing exist in itself.

From which it follows, by replacing ‘thing’ with ‘substance’ and by inverting the order of the two propositions, that *every conceivable substance, as a consequence of its essence, tends to exist and actually exists*. And this latter is the effect of the former: every conceivable substance, by its essence, eternally deploys a certain power to exist and eternally succeeds in doing so, its success being strictly co-eternal with its effort. But it also follows from (f) that every conceivable substance, to the extent that it tends to exist and does exist, tends to produce and produces all the modes that are conceivable through it.

Such is then, ultimately, the ‘affirmation of existence’ that Scholium 1 of Proposition 8 presented as being, *in the very thing*, the correlate *extra intellectum* of the existential affirmation contained in its true idea. This is what is going to explain, in the unique case of the only truly conceivable substance, the two final proofs for the existence of God, which the attentive reader would now be ready to understand.

4. These two final proofs rest upon an explicit principle and two implicit identifications. The explicit principle is, at bottom, a condensed form of all that we have just seen in detail: ‘to be able to not exist is to lack power; and on the contrary, to be able to exist is power [*pouvoir ne pas exister c’est impuissance; et au contraire, pouvoir exister, c’est puissance*]’. This is self-evident, Spinoza says. And indeed, the progressive passage from axiom (a) to axiom (f) shows us how the simple logical possibility of existing, which must be granted to everything whose essence is conceivable, really involves, in the very thing, a tendency to exist and consequently a certain power [*puissance*] to exist. But we must add, inversely, that the logical possibility of not existing does not mean that, in the very thing, this tendency is not absolutely invincible by nature and is thus accompanied by a certain lack of power to exist. To what extent, exactly?

The two implicit identifications respond to this. On the one hand, there is the identification of the causal power [*puissance*] of a thing with its degree of reality or the degree of perfection of its essence: since, according to Axiom 4, every effect is deduced from its cause, and since the consequences deduced from a principle are all the more ample the more content this principle has, it is indeed certain that, all things being equal, if two things produce effects, the one that produces more effects will be the one whose essence is richer. And on the other hand, there is the identification of the power to exist

with causal power in general, and consequently of *existence itself* with the *production of effects*: it is indeed certain that, all things being equal, a thing that does not produce any effects – not even the minimal effect that would consist in preserving itself in the same state as before – would not have any means of existing for even a single instant, and that, inversely, the things that produce the most effects have the most resources for persevering in their being. It is true that, in the case of *modes*, all things are not equal: since they are produced and maintained in existence by external causes, it is not immediately clear, for them, that existing is synonymous with producing effects (this will have to be proven, with Proposition 36); and since external causes can prevent them from producing effects or destroy them, there is also not a relation determined once and for all between their essence and their power. But Spinoza indeed clarifies that here he is only comparing *substances*, things that external causes can neither produce nor destroy, which exist necessarily through themselves or not at all, eternally or never: in their case, to exist is to produce effects without being subjected to them; there is thus indeed a strict correlation between their power to exist, their causal power, and the degree of perfection of their essence, quite simply because no other factor is capable of intervening.

But we see the objection against which Spinoza is arguing. Let us admit, we might say, that a substance has an essence that gives it enough power to continue to exist *as soon as it exists*; but still it must exist beforehand, and with an existence that does not have any relation with the production of effects since it is the condition of this latter. This objection, as Spinoza notes, always winds up absurdly presupposing that a substance was able to *come into* existence in the manner of a mode. But Spinoza could have already responded that, taken seriously, the objection is self-refuting. Let us suppose, in fact, that a substance exists at an instant t . Two hypotheses are then possible: either its essence grants it the power to continue to exist until a later instant $t+1$, or it does not grant it this power. In the first hypothesis, since its power will remain the same at $t+1$, and then at $t+2$, etc., it will never cease to exist after instant t . But since it would not have been able to exist at t if it had not already existed at a previous instant $t-1$, we understand in turn the *reason* for its existence at t : this reason is the causal power of its essence already actualised at $t-1$. And this goes for all the previous instants, *ad infinitum*, without there being an initial explainable instant. This substance has thus always existed and *we completely understand why*: it is always and only because of the power that it has from its essence alone. And consequently, since the extension of this power is deduced only from this essence, we must conclude that in reality the existence of the substance is independent of

time: it exists eternally due to the power that its essence eternally grants it. But then, we can no longer imagine that it does not exist: in the same way that what is deduced from an essence is deduced in every case, we would *still* have to conclude that it exists. As for the inverse hypothesis, it too, refutes itself: if the substance that exists at t did not have the power to exist at $t+1$, it would never be able to exist at any moment, its existence would be eternally impossible by itself, and its essence would certainly have to contain an internal contradiction.

It remains to be determined which are the substances whose essences reach the threshold of power necessary in order to exist. The two final proofs determine it with respect to God, and in turn all of the others. The third proof, both *a posteriori* and *ad absurdum*, which does not presuppose anything other than (P7-1), is once again intended to prepare the ground for the fourth. Since casual power, proportionate to the richness of essence, is the *sufficient reason* for the existence of any substance, it would be absurd that the only things that necessarily exist be 'finite' substances (finite with respect to the absolutely infinite), for God – having an infinitely richer essence, and consequently a power infinitely stronger than theirs – would have infinitely more reasons for existing. Thus, either no substance has enough power to exist and nothing exists, or God has enough power and exists. Now we exist, and consequently there exists at least one substance (ourselves or that of which we are a mode), which, according to (P7-1), must then exist necessarily. Thus, *a fortiori*, God exists necessarily.

As for the *a priori* proof, it enjoins one last intellectual experiment. Let us think of a substance considered under a single attribute. Its essence gives it, in a sense, an infinite causal power which, *if it allowed it to exist*, would in turn make it produce an infinity of things. But its power is infinitesimal with respect to that of an infinitely infinite substance; it has thus only one reason for existing and an infinity of reasons for not existing. And indeed, the modes that it would give rise to would not have any ontological consistency: the modes of an exclusively extended substance, for example, would be pure geometrical entities, hardly more than beings of reason, that is to say, almost nothing; since it is not possible to produce nothing, its separated existence would thus be in reality contradictory. Let us try then to hypothetically increase the power of this substance by making it produce, not other things – since it would have already produced them if it was able to do so – but the same things with more force, so as to increase their consistency. And to produce them with more force is to produce them *in yet another way*, that is to say, under another attribute. But the addition of a new attribute will only ever give us an infinitesimal increase of power: one new reason for existing,

and always an infinity of reasons for not existing. It is thus possible, hypothetically, to make the productive activity of substance grow in a *continuous* way, with each of its infinitesimal growths corresponding to the appearance of a radically new way of producing the same infinity of things; and the reasons for affirming its existence would increase proportionally. Absolutely infinite substance is, then, we might say, the integral of this process: the absolute causal power that produces the same infinity of things in every way conceivable, thus giving to each of them the infinite ontological density that they required in order to truly be *something*. God has an 'absolutely infinite power of existing': we thus have all of the reasons to affirm its existence and we do not have any reason to deny it, and thus God exists.

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On the basis of all of this, just as Spinoza wished, Proposition 16 becomes self-evident. Perhaps it even gives us the *true* definition of God, of which Definition 6, though it is perfectly rigorous, only sketched the contours. God, *by definition*, necessarily produces in itself an infinity of things, each in an infinity of ways: all conceivable things and in every conceivable way. God, as substance, is thus the productive activity immanent to all things, which gives rise to, inexhaustibly, all logically possible structures. Each of these structures that it gives rise to is a mode. Each of these perfectly determined ways that it gives rise to (by extending them, thinking them, etc.) is a substantial attribute. The set of attributes is thus strictly equivalent to substance and renders it totally intelligible, without any residue, since a productive activity considered independently of all *ways of producing* would not, strictly speaking, be anything. But it is the unity of the same productive activity across all of these attributes that solders them into a single continuous block and makes them, in fact, into one unique substance.

The subsequent propositions merely develop what this implies: the immediate infinite mode constituted by the totality of conceivable individual essences,³ the essence of each thing being the property, which God eternally has, of necessarily producing this thing sooner or later; the mediate infinite mode constituted by the eternal laws according to which all of these essences are effectively actualised, laws ample enough so that they can all be actualised without exception; and, internal to this mediate infinite mode, an infinite causal series of finite modes that determine each other to be actualised according to these laws. Proposition 34 summarises all of this by

³ On this point, see the rectification that I made in the final note of 'Remarks on the Immortality of the Soul in Spinoza' (Matheron 2011: 691, note 51).

explicitly identifying, without adding anything new, the power of God with its essence. And Proposition 36 clarifies, in conclusion, that each singular thing, to the extent that it is *God itself* insofar as it gives rise to this or that determinate structure, necessarily produces effects in the framework of this structure: for *all things*, ultimately, *to exist is to produce effects*. This leads us directly to the theory of *conatus*, which the entirety of Part I makes it possible to ground rigorously.

Physics and Ontology in Spinoza: The Enigmatic Response to Tschirnhaus

It is well known that in the seventeenth century, in the wake of the Galilean revolution, the question of the ontological foundations of physics was posed in a particularly acute manner.¹ And when they tried to address it, the majority of Spinoza's contemporaries found themselves confronted with a problematic that in the end came down to the following alternative: either the new physics was ontologically true, but then it would have to be possible to deduce it, at least in its most general statements, from principles drawn from a metaphysics; or else it could not be so deduced, but then the question of its ontological validity would remain suspended, or would have to be resolved negatively. For Spinoza, to be sure, the second solution was out of the question. But it does seem that he was initially tempted to opt for the first. In a note to the Preface to the second part of the *Short Treatise*, just after having said, in Paragraph 7, that bodies are modes of the attribute of *extension*, he deduces immediately, in Paragraph 8, that the individual essence of each body is characterised by a certain '[proportion] of motion and rest';² and he specifies in Paragraph 12: 'say of 1 to 3'.³ It is thus indeed a matter of a *relation*, in the strict mathematical sense, *between* a quantity of motion and a quantity of rest – whatever 'quantity of rest' might mean. And since the whole universe must be considered as a single individual, Spinoza will quite naturally come to say, in Letter XXXII, that the fundamental law of the physical world must be that of the conservation of the same relation *between* motion and rest at the level of nature as a whole (*servata semper . . .*

¹ [Originally published as 'Physique et ontologie chez Spinoza: l'énigmatique réponse à Tschirnhaus', *Cahiers Spinoza* 6 (1991): 83–109; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² KV II, Praef; CWS I, 96.

³ *Ibid.*

eadem ratione motus ad quietem). From which, one might expect, all physics would have had to follow.

But it is notable that, in the *Ethics* itself, Spinoza abandons this formulation. In the definition of the physical individual that he gives us after Proposition 13 of Part II, he simply tells us that an individual consists in a set of bodies that mutually communicate their motions ‘in a certain fixed manner’⁴ or ‘according to a certain law’ (*certa quoddam ratione*); but he does not tell us *what* this law is, nor even what type of law it is. It is true that, in Lemma 5, which follows this definition, he again takes up the expression ‘ratio of motion and rest’⁵ (*motus et quietis rationem*); but its sense is no longer the same as it was in the *Short Treatise*: it is no longer a matter of a relation *between* movement and rest, but of a relation *expressible in terms of movement and rest* that the constituent parts of an individual (*partes, Individuum componentes*) have *between themselves* (*ad invicem*) – which can be applied to any relation whatsoever between bodies, including non-mathematical relations. So that, when Spinoza tells us later, in the Scholium to Lemma 7, that the universe as a whole forms a single individual, one can no longer deduce what the fundamental law of the physical world is. And in fact, subsequently, although Spinoza was always interested in this kind of problem, *he simply never gives us his physics*.

Why is this? Spinoza, at the end of his life, was indirectly called on to answer this question. For his correspondent Tschirnhaus had just about posed it to him, in Letters LXXX and LXXXII, by contesting the validity of Proposition 16 of Part I of the *Ethics*. That proposition, recall, is as follows: ‘From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes’ (or infinitely many ways, *infinita infinitis modis*) ‘(i.e., everything which can follow under an infinite intellect)’.⁶ Spinoza had demonstrated this by saying that, from the essence of a thing, the understanding deduces the properties that must really pertain to this thing, and that these properties are more numerous as the thing itself has more reality or perfection; from which it follows that God, which is the substance consisting of an infinity of infinite attributes, must necessarily give rise, in each of its attributes, to the infinity of all conceivable modes. One would then have to conclude that, since extension is an attribute of God having bodies for its modes, all conceivable bodies would have to necessarily exist in it sooner or later. But Tschirnhaus claims that he does not

⁴ *Ethics* II, Def. after 13; CWS I, 460.

⁵ *Ethics* II, Lem. 5 after 13; CWS I, 461.

⁶ *Ethics* I, 16; CWS I, 424.

truly understand how it is possible to demonstrate *a priori*, based solely on the concept of extension, the existence of this infinite diversity of bodies. And this would obviously imply that the demonstration of Proposition 16 was not, according to him, truly convincing.

Now at first glance, this demonstration is surprising, because it is so elliptical: from the fact that a thing has an infinity of properties, one might ask, does it necessarily follow that it gives rise to an infinity of modes, that is, that it produces in itself an infinity of effects? What relations are there between property and effect, outside of their common belonging in the genus of 'consequence'? If, to every production of an effect, there corresponds a property in the cause (that of the power to produce this effect), the inverse is not true; a geometric figure, for example, has properties, but it does not produce any effects. This identification is in fact so surprising that Gueroult thought it possible to speak, on this point, of 'conceptual slippages',⁷ and to locate the fundamental difficulty of Spinozism at this precise juncture.⁸ And this is quite serious, since the validity of everything that follows in the *Ethics* depends upon it.

Curiously, however, it is not with regard to this point that Tschirnhaus makes his objection. And so, it is also not on this point that Spinoza responds to him, and thus he seems to avoid the real problem. In Letter LXXX, Tschirnhaus simply poses the question without specifying what, exactly, constitutes the difficulty in his eyes; Spinoza, believing understandably that this is *fundamentally* the source of his correspondent's difficulty, responds to him in Letter LXXXI that extension *such as Descartes conceived of it* (as an 'inert mass') would never, on its own, actually give rise to any body; but he does not say how one must instead conceive of it in order for that to become possible. Tschirnhaus, in Letter LXXXII, returns to the charge, but must alter the question: without contesting the identification of properties and effects, he affirms, based on his mathematical exploits, that, in general, from the mere definition of a thing considered in isolation (for example, that of a circle), one can never deduce more than one property; in order to deduce others, he declares, one must combine this definition with something else

⁷ ['crases de concepts'. The term *crases* is archaic. It refers to a kind of mixture, blurring, or blending, particularly with regard to the ambiguities or ambivalences of language, as in the French *liaisons* in which the clear distinction between two words is elided in their enunciation. In *Spinoza I: Dieu*, Gueroult dedicates one of the sections of the first chapter on the definitions of Book I of the *Ethics* to such 'crases', including the 'slippages' between the concepts of 'property' and 'effect', which Matheron picks up on here. See Gueroult 1968: 65–7.]

⁸ Gueroult 1968: 66–7 and 294–5.

(for example, with rays, secants, etc.). Spinoza, apparently relieved, has no trouble answering, in Letter LXXXIII, that this claim is perhaps correct for beings of reason such as geometric figures, but it is false for real beings; for example, he adds, merely from the definition of God as 'a being to whose essence existence pertains'⁹ (which itself is not, in reality, the *definition* of God, but only one consequence of this definition), I could deduce many properties: necessary existence, unicity, immutability, infinitude, etc. Thus one cannot reproach Spinoza for not having responded to Tschirnhaus' explicit objection; but since the properties deduced in this way are neither modes nor effects of God, nothing is resolved.

However, Spinoza does not ignore the real problem. Before giving this *ad hominem* response, he had said to Tschirnhaus: 'You ask whether a variety of things can be demonstrated a priori from the concept of Extension alone. I believe I have already shown clearly enough that this is impossible, and that therefore, Descartes defines matter badly by Extension, but that it must necessarily be explained by an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence.'¹⁰ Spinoza here certainly does not mean that he has finally given up on making extension a divine attribute; he means, on the contrary, that Descartes was wrong, not because he defined matter in terms of extension, but because he defined it *badly* in terms of extension: he defined it, in other words, in terms of extension considered in isolation, as a separate substance, in abstraction from its character as an attribute of God. Now we understand the principle of his response: the deduction of the infinite diversity of bodies is possible from the concept of *that infinite substantial attribute which is extension*, but not from the *mere* concept of extension (that which geometers use); in the concept from which the deduction must begin, it is the aspect 'infinite substantial attribute' that plays the key role. It is not *because it is extension* that extension gives rise to an infinity of modes; it is because it is an infinite divine attribute; the fact that it is extension simply lets us understand that the modes that it gives rise to are *bodies*. But then Spinoza adds: 'up till now I have not been able to set out anything concerning [these matters] in an orderly way'.¹¹ This implies that he ran up against difficulties, which were no doubt related to those which always prevented him from giving us his physics, and which obliged him to put off for later his definitive response.

Death prevented Spinoza from giving us this response, which I would like to try to reconstitute here. It would evidently consist of two parts.

⁹ *Ep.* LXXXIII [to Tschirnhaus]; CWS II, 487.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Upstream from Proposition 16, he would have needed to justify this proposition more precisely by taking on directly the question of the productivity of substance, without giving the impression of surreptitiously identifying properties and effects. Spinoza had the means to do this; but in order to do so, he would have had (this is the first difficulty) to rewrite for the sixth time the first propositions of the *Ethics*, in order to draw out from them more clearly everything that, within them, already tended towards the expression of an *ontology of power* [*puissance*]. Downstream from Proposition 16, he would have had to show what the consequences of this were in the particular case of extension and its modes, which is to say bodies; but this would have forced Spinoza (this is the second difficulty) to *redefine the status of physics*; for he was, it seems, on the way – but only on the way – towards overcoming the problematic of his contemporaries on this point: his philosophy gave him the means to demonstrate *both* that an ontologically grounded physics was possible, *and* that it could not draw its principles from metaphysics. This implies, as we will see, a singularly modern conception of science.

Let us address these two points in succession.

Towards a More Precise Elaboration of an Ontology of Power

We know that the first propositions of the *Ethics* went through five successive drafts: the *Short Treatise*; its first Appendix; a missing text which can be reconstructed on the basis of Letters II and IV; a first draft of the *Ethics* of which some traces remain in the correspondence; and finally the (provisionally?) definitive final draft. These successive reworkings have a logic. From one text to the next, the demonstrations become, not only less and less *ad hominem* and more and more rigorous, but also more and more direct: they tend – without, however, this development being completed – to lose what was convoluted and external to the processes characteristic of knowledge of the second kind, thereby gaining an intuitive purity. And what makes this progress possible is the increasingly explicit recourse to that which was, no doubt, from the beginning and beneath it all, the fundamental principle of Spinozism, but which would only be formulated clearly with the seven axioms at the beginning of Part I: the principle of *the total intelligibility of all of the real*. For, in Part I itself, on the margins of the demonstrative apparatus properly speaking, a certain number of statements go farther still in the same direction: sometimes simple suggestions, but also informal axioms that emphasise much stronger aspects of the same principle, and which themselves ground much more intuitive demonstrations for propositions already

proven elsewhere. The four proofs for the existence of God, in particular, follow one another as a kind of rite of passage.¹² Perhaps then we have here the elements for what could have been a sixth draft. And if we gather these elements together, we see that they converge on a solid justification of Proposition 16, which is at the same time, and indissolubly, a solid justification of the fourth proof for the existence of God given in the Scholium to Proposition 11; the two demonstrations, when fully explicated, coincide. We will try to show this briefly.

A. The necessary existence of any conceivable substance, already established by the reasoning that led to Proposition 7, constitutes the object of a more intuitive demonstration in the second Scholium to Proposition 8. At bottom, this demonstration relies on Axiom 6, even though it is not formally invoked. Since, according to this axiom, ‘a true idea must agree with its object’,¹³ one must admit that to any idea possessing the internal characteristic of a true idea (i.e., to any adequate idea), there corresponds, outside the intellect, a real objective correlate – either an actually existing thing, or at least a true essence. But an essence would have no reality, it would literally be *nothing*, if it were not itself included in the nature of a really existing thing through which it could be conceived. And this existing thing, according to Axiom 1, must be either a substance or a mode whose nature is included in that of a substance. We can thus state the following strong variant of Axiom 6:

(a) For any conceivable thing, there necessarily exists a substance through which this thing can be conceived.

From which it actually follows that, since a substance can only be conceived through itself, any conceivable substance necessarily exists.

B. The second demonstration of Proposition 11 is based on an informal axiom that universalises the principle of causality (already stated with Axioms 3 and 4) by extending it, not just to the existence of things, but also to their inexistence. In order for a thing to exist, there must certainly be reasons; but in order for a thing not to exist, it is not sufficient that there is not a special reason for its existence: *there must be attributable reasons* – internal

¹² I have developed this latter point at length in ‘Essence, Existence and Power in Part I of the *Ethics*’. [Included as Chapter 2 in this volume.]

¹³ *Ethics* I, Ax. 6; CWS I, 410.

(logically contradictory essence) or external (external obstacles) – *for it not to exist*; if there were not, it would exist. This also, at bottom, follows from Axiom 6. Suppose in fact that an infallible intellect conceived of a thing clearly and distinctly (which excludes any internal reason for it not to exist) and at the same time conceived clearly and distinctly that no external obstacle was opposed to its existence, while knowing moreover that there was *outside of it* no positive reason for it to exist; what would happen then is that this intellect *would purely and simply conceive* of this thing, nothing more. For to conceive of a thing, all things being equal, is to conceive of it as existing, and consequently, if nothing is opposed to it – which is the case here, by hypothesis – to affirm it; and so, following Axiom 6, it exists; its conceivability is, by itself, a positive reason for existing. The psychological difficulty, here, comes from the fact that we are in the habit of asking ourselves *why something exists rather than nothing*, as if nothingness were more intelligible than being. But this is a bad habit: nothingness, as such, is *not* intelligible. The total inexistence of everything would be totally unintelligible; and the inexistence of this or that thing is partially so, subject to further explications. In reality, we would thus have to ask *why certain things exist rather than everything*. And the answer, which Proposition 16 gives precisely, is that everything does wind up existing. We can thus state another strong variant of Axiom 6:

(b) Everything that is conceivable exists if no external obstacle prevents it from doing so.

From this Spinoza could once again have deduced that every conceivable substance necessarily exists, since the existence or inexistence of a substance does not depend on any external cause. In fact, from it he deduces directly (second proof) that God necessarily exists.

C. From the conjunction of (a) and (b), one clearly infers that, for any conceivable thing, there exists a substance through which this thing can be conceived and in which this thing will exist as soon as no external obstacle were to prevent it any longer. But this means that there is, *in* substance itself, a *tendency* to make this thing exist, a *striving* to make it exist: this is simply another way of saying the same thing. And this tendency can only be explained, according to Axiom 4, through the very nature of substance, since nothing acts on it from without. Whence a still stronger variant of Axiom 6:

(c) For any conceivable thing, there exists a substance which, by virtue of its own essence, tends to make this thing exist in itself and so has a certain power [*puissance*] to make this thing exist in itself.

From this Spinoza could once again have concluded, by applying it to the case where the thing in question is a substance, not just that any conceivable substance necessarily exists, but *for what internal reason* it necessarily exists; any conceivable substance, by virtue of its own essence, eternally tends to exist and to exist eternally *because it has enough power to exist*. Which he does in fact apply directly to the case of God.

For what we find here again, precisely, is the informal axiom that structures the last two proofs for the existence of God (Proposition 11, third demonstration and Scholium): 'to be able not to exist is to lack power, and conversely, to be able to exist is to have power'.¹⁴ From the *logical possibility* of existing (conceivability), one is in fact correct to affirm, given (c), a *power to exist*, and *vice versa*; this implies that, in the same way, the logical possibility of not existing is equivalent to a relative lack of power to exist.

Strictly speaking, however, this informal axiom only allows us to demonstrate the existence of God (rather than any other substance) if we adjoin to it two implicit identifications: that of the power to exist with causal power in general, and that of causal power with the richness of essence.

D. The first implicit identification – that of the power to exist with the power to produce effects, and consequently of *existence* with the *production of effects*, at least in the case of a substance – follows directly from the preceding. Let us apply formula (c) to the case of substance and to the case of modes successively. We obtain:

(d) If (and, of course, only if) a substance is conceivable, it has enough power to exist and, consequently, it exists.

(e) If (and, of course, only if) modes are conceivable through a substance, that substance exists and tends to produce these modes in itself.

But can one conceive of a substance without modes? No, certainly not. One can conceive of a substance without thinking of any of its modes, but one cannot conceive of it *as not having any modes*: a thinking substance that does

¹⁴ *Ethics* I, 11 Dem. 3; CWS I, 418.

not think anything is inconceivable, as is an extended substance that has neither motion nor rest. Consequently,

(f) A substance is conceivable if and only if modes are conceivable through it.

(g) A substance exists if and only if it has modes.

From (e) and (g) it follows that if (and only if) modes are conceivable through a substance, that substance tends in itself to produce *these modes* and to *have modes*. But the modes that it has are evidently those that it tends to produce, or some of them, since nothing could be introduced into it from the outside. This means that it has the *power* to produce them and that it actually produces them. Thus:

(h) If (and only if) modes are conceivable through a substance, that substance itself has enough power to produce modes (and, consequently, it produces them).

Now, from (d), (h) and (f), it follows that:

(i) A substance has enough power to exist (and thus exists) if and only if it has enough power to produce modes (and thus produces them).

Consequently, in the case of a substance, the *power to exist* is indeed equivalent to *causal power*: to exist is to produce effects.

E. Regarding the second implicit identification – that of causal power with the richness of essence – *in this sense*, it goes without saying. For, according to Axiom 4, every effect follows from its cause, and everyone admits (this is the very wording of the beginning of the demonstration of Proposition 16, which in itself does not pose any problems) that the richer an essence is, the more numerous are the consequences that follow from it. Thus, *if* a thing produces effects (which, we will see, is necessarily the case for a conceivable and existing substance), it will produce them all the more as its essence is richer. We must thus pose, in the case of a substance, the following two series of equivalents:

(j) The logical possibility to exist = the power to exist = causal power = richness of essence.

(k) The logical possibility to not exist = limitation of the power to exist = limitation of causal power = limitation of the richness of essence.

F. Now we will consider Proposition 9 by taking it *literally*: ‘The more reality or being each thing’ (each *thing*, and not just each substance) ‘has, the more attributes belong to it.’¹⁵ Of course, Gueroult is right to interpret this proposition as applying above all to substances: we have, as a ‘given true idea’, the idea of God as an ‘absolutely infinite being’ and, since it represents for us a being that has infinitely more being than a substance having one attribute,¹⁶ we must conclude that it represents a substance constituted of an infinity of attributes – a substance that, consequently, is conceivable. Logically, this is sufficient. But we can *also*, in order to render our demonstration more intuitive, take the word ‘thing’ in the strict sense, as applying to any thing in general, including finite modes. And then we will obtain something that interests us directly here.

In fact, from the mere fact that we have the idea of God, we have the intuition of what one could call the *ontological density of things*: we *know*, with complete certainty, that there is infinitely more, in a real thing that concretely exists, than its simple essence such as we could conceive it from a given substantial attribute, and that this would remain true even if our science was carried out completely. *We know*, for example (since our idea of God reveals to us the *lack of being* of everything that unfolds on the plane of a single attribute), that there is infinitely more, in a concretely existing body, than a simple combination of motion and rest in a substance that would reduce to pure geometric extension, even if we also know that geometric physics (if it were carried out completely) would have to allow us to fully understand everything that happens. But what is this ‘infinitely more’ that a thing must have in order to concretely exist, and which is concealed *behind* that which we can conceive? This question, at bottom, has been posed by all philosophers; and to answer it, they have invented, for example, the distinction between form and matter, or between essence and existence, etc.; or even, in the case of the Cartesians, between substance and its essential attribute, which in a certain way are the same thing and which in another sense are distinguished. But all these answers come down to saying that a real thing is identical with its own essence *plus something unintelligible* that is needlessly added to it. Now this claim is precisely what is prohibited by the principle of the total intelligibility of the real. How, then, can we reconcile

¹⁵ *Ethics* I, 9; CWS I, 416.

¹⁶ [‘substance à un attribut’. See above, Chapter 2, note 2.]

our intuition and this principle? The answer is clear: we must admit that one and the same thing, whatever it may be, exists in an infinity of ways, in an infinity of attributes, and that what hides behind its essences such as we can conceive it is nothing other than the infinity of all its other manifestations in all these unknown attributes – each of which is perfectly intelligible in itself through its corresponding attribute, even though we may not have access to that attribute. To exist concretely, then, is to exist in this infinity of attributes whose possibility we are able to conceive by our idea of God.

G. From this, we obtain a *simultaneous* justification of the fourth proof for the existence of God and of the demonstration for Proposition 16, which renders the latter as intuitive as the former.

Now, let us consider first of all a substance *in a single attribute*. Proposition 8 having established that it is *infinite in its own kind*, one must acknowledge, given (j), that its essence grants it a causal power which, *if it is sufficient to enable it to exist*, makes it produce an *infinity of things* – all those that are conceivable in this attribute. But, given (k), this causal power would not really suffice to enable it to exist, since it is infinitesimal in relation to that of an absolutely infinite substance: as long as the substance is considered *solely* in this or that attribute, its possibility of not existing (owing to that infinity of attributes that it lacks) is infinite in relation to the possibility of existing that its attribute grants it; the latter is thus annulled, and the former amounts to a necessity. For the modes that a substance with only one attribute would give rise to could not have any ontological consistency: the modes of a solely extended substance, for example, would be pure geometric entities, pure beings of reason, which is to say nothing real; and as it is not possible to produce nothing, the separated existence of such a substance is thus in reality contradictory.

Let us now try to increase, hypothetically, the power of this substance by making it produce, not other things (since it would already produce everything it could), but *the same things with more force*, in order to increase their ontological consistency. And to produce them with more force is to produce them *in still other ways*, which is to say in other attributes. It is evident, nevertheless, that if we add to it just one other attribute, this will only give it an infinitesimal increase of power, and consequently of the possibility of existing: there will only be two reasons to exist against an infinity of reasons not to exist, and its existence will remain impossible. And the same would go for adding a third attribute, a fourth, etc. But we see in this way (as soon as we surpass any number) that it is possible, hypothetically, to increase *continuously* the productive activity of substance, as one increases an algebraic

function, each attribute playing the role of a *differential of power*: to each infinitesimal increase of the power of substance corresponds the appearance of a new attribute, which is to say of a radically novel way of producing *the same* infinity of things. Now, to the extent that the productive power of substance is increased in this way, its possibility of existing is increased proportionally, since the modes that it gives rise to acquire more and more ontological consistency and thus proceed more and more towards the status of real things. Under these conditions, since we have the idea of an absolutely infinite substance, we can place ourselves immediately at the limit of this continuous increase. The substance consisting of an infinity of attributes is, one might say, the integral of the process:¹⁷ it has an absolutely infinite causal power, without any limitation, which enables it to produce the same infinity of things *in the infinity of all conceivable ways* (an infinity of things in an infinity of modes, *infinita infinitis modis*), and which in this way grants these things the *infinite ontological density* that they would need in order finally to be something real. It thus has, and given (j) and (k), an ‘absolutely infinite power to exist’, without any limitation, with all the possibilities of existing and without any possibility of not existing; and consequently it necessarily exists.

And in the same stroke, Proposition 16 is justified: not by another demonstration than the one Spinoza gives, but by this same demonstration *fully grasped* in light of what philosophers, perhaps getting ahead of themselves, might think. Spinoza, ultimately, thus did not confuse properties and effects; he established that God must have, in each of its attributes, the property of *necessarily having to produce everything that is conceivable in that attribute*, and that this follows immediately from its nature.

H. Under these conditions, in order to account for the production of bodies, the only thing that remains is to determine what becomes of this property in

¹⁷ On this analogy, see the remarkable article by Jean Bernhardt: ‘Infini, substance et attributs’ (Bernhardt 1978). Daniel Parrochia, who refutes it in a no less remarkable article (Parrochia 1989), simply shows that it is *nothing more* than an analogy. But this takes away nothing from its value, since, according to Spinoza himself (see below), the exercise of our intellect during our actual existence would be impossible if it were not accompanied by corporeal images and imaginative ideas logically tied together; it is thus not uninteresting to try to determine those that Spinoza might use (without, of course, confusing them with concepts!) in his own account and which *would be helpful for thinking*. Parrochia himself, moreover, doesn’t do anything more than this in his article (where he proposes models other than that of Bernhardt), and this is just as interesting *within these limits*.

the attribute of *Extension*.¹⁸ Now the answer is obvious: what individuates a body, according to the definition of the individual that follows Proposition 13 of Part II of the *Ethics*, can only be a certain combination of motion and rest: without movement, the physical universe would only be an undifferentiated block; without rest, it would be a pure fluidity without any internal articulation. And since this goes for all bodies without exception, one could indeed say that *motion* and *rest*, taken together, are strictly equivalent to the property that God has, considered under the attribute of *Extension*, of necessarily producing in itself all conceivable bodies. The existence of motion and rest thus follows immediately from the nature of the attribute of *Extension* (they constitute, as Letter LXIV indicates, the immediate infinite mode): in order for the infinity of all conceivable bodies to exist, there must be movement and rest, and this must be the case necessarily and eternally.

This is necessary, but is it sufficient? It is here, precisely, that Spinoza must have hesitated. For to pose this question comes down to asking *how*, exactly, motion and rest can give rise to all bodies rather than mere chaos. How, exactly, does their nature authorise the functioning of an infinity of relatively stable finite systems? How, exactly, are these finite systems mutually determined to appear and disappear in a series of causes and effects without any beginning or end? According to the principle of the total intelligibility of the real, all this must be deducible; and for this to be the case, motion and rest must evidently conform to certain *laws*. But which laws? It is not sufficient to observe experimentally that they do so in fact: if one wants to answer Tschirnhaus' question conclusively, one must explain for what reasons nature is subject to these laws rather than others. But is it truly possible to deduce *a priori*, from the mere nature of the attribute of *Extension* modified by motion and rest, *what the universal laws of the physical world must be?*

Now Spinoza himself implicitly responded to this question by giving up on deducing these laws. And in fact, Proposition 16, properly understood, must have logically led him to consider such a deduction as impossible. Which, in turn, must logically open onto a total re-examination of the status of physics.

¹⁸ In everything that follows here I repeat, with one important addition and many other less important ones, an unpublished talk given at the Université de Thessalonique in 1988. The first two paragraphs of this chapter also appeared there.

Towards a Redefinition of the Status of Physics

That an *a priori* deduction of the universal laws of the physical world is impossible for us follows from the preceding considerations. And incidentally, we are leaving aside the principle of inertia, which Spinoza thought could be demonstrated in Lemma 3 following Proposition 13 of Part II of the *Ethics*: its deduction can actually be considered immediate, insofar as it concerns the behaviour of each body taken in isolation, in abstraction from all others, and not the overall behaviour of a set or bodies or of the set of all bodies. But, with the exception of this principle, *the only thing* that the *Ethics* allows us to deduce *a priori* concerning the laws of nature is what Spinoza himself tells us at the end of the Appendix to Book I: these laws, he tells us, are ‘so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect’, and he immediately adds: ‘as I have demonstrated in P16’.¹⁹

To be precise, this is not exactly what had been demonstrated in Proposition 16, since it did not concern the laws of nature. Still, the fact remains that it is an immediate consequence of it: if everything that an infinite understanding can conceive must necessarily see the light of day, and if everything that sees the light of day is determined to exist according to certain laws, it must indeed be the case that these laws, one way or another, are compatible with whatever turns out to be their consequences. But it is not obvious that a system of laws, whatever it may be (whether it is a matter of Descartes’ laws, those of Huygens, etc.), would satisfy this condition. And yet it is here, outside of experience, that we find at our disposal the only criteria for testing its validity: from Spinozist ontology, we absolutely cannot deduce anything else. Consequently, if we want to deduce *a priori* the fundamental laws of nature, we would have to know first of all the infinity of all logically conceivable bodies, and then, from there, we would have to figure out what system of laws would suitably play the role of making possible the production of all these bodies. Now it is certain that such a deduction, if it is possible in principle, is inaccessible to our finite understanding in fact. Let us clarify each of these two points.

A. First of all, such a deduction is possible in principle. It is true that this claim seems debatable at first glance. Actually, one might object, it is impossible, in principle and not simply in fact, to determine what bodies are conceivable *before* knowing the laws of nature: the only conceivable bodies

¹⁹ *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 446.

are those whose functioning are authorised by the laws of nature, and consequently, by definition, the conceivability of a body is nothing other than its conformity to these laws. Which, in one sense, is perfectly correct. But one might be tempted to conclude that, from Spinoza's own point of view, there is *no reason* for the laws of nature to be these rather than others; no matter what supposed system of laws is given (provided, of course, that it is not contradictory), would it not satisfy the required condition? Does it not render intelligible everything that it enables to exist and unintelligible everything whose existence it excludes? Whence it would follow that the fundamental laws of nature are themselves a pure empirical given: a brute fact, a contingent fact without any possible justification, including any justification in principle. And yet, as one might suspect, this conclusion is false; it is false for at least two reasons.

In the first place, in fact, if it is true that the intelligibility of the physical world depends on the laws of nature, it is also true that these laws play a role at two levels: that of essences and that of existences. On the one hand, at the level of the immediate infinite mode,²⁰ it is the universal laws of motion and rest that, in the last analysis, must make it possible to understand the internal functioning of each body considered in itself, which is to say the *particular laws* according to which the parts of this body mutually communicate their motions; thus it is these laws, according to the Spinozist definition of individuality, which must make it possible to understand the *individual essence* of each body.²¹ And on the other hand, at the level of the mediate infinite mode,²² it is the universal laws of motion and rest that account for the interactions between bodies, for the manner in which they are mutually determined to exist and to cease to exist, and consequently for the infinite series of causes and effects that constitutes the very history of the universe;²³ thus it is these laws, ultimately, that account for the actualisation or the non-actualisation here and now of each corporeal essence. Now there is no guarantee that any system of laws whatsoever would authorise the actualisation of all essences that it would otherwise make it possible to conceive; and yet, we know *a priori* that the real system of the laws of nature *must* permit this actualisation, since everything conceivable must necessarily be realised. Under these conditions we see how we would have to proceed, supposing that we had at our disposal infinitely infinite time, in order to

²⁰ See *Ethics* I, 21; CWS I, 429.

²¹ See *Ethics* I, 25 and Schol.; CWS I, 431.

²² See *Ethics* I, 22; CWS I, 430.

²³ See *Ethics* I, 28; CWS I, 432.

determine *a priori* what the real laws of motion and rest are: we would have to review the infinity of all the apparently possible systems of laws and go over each of them twice. In the first pass, we would have to determine the infinity of all corporeal essences that the envisioned system of laws would make possible, which is to say the infinity of all combinations of motion and rest whose functioning the system authorises; we would simply eliminate the logically contradictory possibilities. Then, in the second pass, we would have to determine all the infinite causal series in which the remaining bodies could figure in conformity with this system of laws, and we would ask whether we could conceive at least one series in which *all* these bodies figure without exception; if we could not find any, we would eliminate the system of laws in question, for this would ultimately signify that it is in contradiction with the very nature of God. And the only thing left, at the end of this infinite analysis, would be a system of laws that would ensure the passage into existence of all the bodies that it rendered conceivable.

It is true that, at this point, the objection might resurface. In fact, there is no guarantee that we would not find *many* systems of laws, or even infinitely many systems of laws, that satisfy this condition; in that case, how would we determine which of them is the true one? Would we not again stumble upon an unjustifiable brute fact? But in reality – and this is the second reason for which the objection is not well founded – the response, from a Spinozist point of view, is obvious: since all these systems of laws would be equally conceivable, since there would not be any reason for any of them not to be the real system, one must quite simply conclude that they are *all real*, which is to say that they are all, each in their own sector, actually operative in nature. And since the unity of nature seems incompatible with the existence of many simply juxtaposed systems, one would have to admit that they are all, in reality, particular applications of *one* unique system, more fundamental, that it would certainly be possible to discover and from which it would then certainly be possible to deduce everything – if not, there would ultimately be something unintelligible in the real. Under these conditions, as soon as we have discovered this system and proven that all the others follow from it, we will have, at the same time, demonstrated *a priori* what the truly universal laws of motion and rest are.

Thus, ultimately, the laws of nature are indeed in principle deducible from the attribute of *Extension*. An ontologically true physics is consequently possible, and its actual theories, which take into account experimentally established facts, are well-founded approximations – or, from the point of view of the infinite understanding, consequences applicable only to this or that sector of the universe, at this or that scale, in this or that context, etc.

And nothing prevents us, in principle, from indefinitely closing the gap that separates our science from that purely deductive (and, to be sure, intuitive) science that is infinite understanding itself.

B. But, of course, such a deduction is not within the reach of our limited understanding; the ontological truth of physical theories will always remain relative, even if it is possible that they become less and less so. And yet, on this second point as well, an objection is possible. In fact, one might say, the above account perhaps constitutes a convenient way of proving that the laws of nature can be deduced, but it by no means reflects the real way in which God itself proceeds to their deduction; but, in order to know if our understanding is capable or not of performing this same deduction, one must determine if its finitude prevents it or not from performing it *as God performs it*; but the impossibility of doing something that is not even possible for God proves nothing. And in fact, it is indeed certain that God does not proceed in this way. Spinoza's God is not a Malebranchian or Leibnizian God whose only mark of distinction is that it pursues a Spinozist end; it does not give itself the *end* of producing in itself all that which is conceivable, and it does not selectively examine all possible systems of laws in order to retain that which appears to it as the *means* best suited for this end. For the systems of laws that do not enable the production of everything conceivable would be, in reality, logically contradictory, since the conformity of motion and rest to such laws would contradict the very nature of motion and rest insofar as they are necessary consequences of a divine attribute. And consequently, God cannot even take them into consideration: God does not form fictions, as Paragraph 54 of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* already indicated.²⁴ Since the real laws of motion and rest are the only ones that would be logically compatible with the nature of God, God conceives them directly and immediately, by the mere fact of conceiving of motion and rest, without having to examine any false hypothesis beforehand. But it seems that *we too* must be able to comprehend directly and immediately, through the nature of motion and rest alone, that which God comprehends directly and immediately through the nature of motion and rest alone. For there is no difference in nature between our understanding and the infinite understanding: our understanding is a *part* of the infinite understanding, from which it is only distinguished by its more reduced scope;²⁵ our concept of motion and rest is thus *the same* as that which God forms, and what God immediately perceives

²⁴ *TdIE*, 54; CWS I, 24.

²⁵ See *Ethics* II, 11 Cor.; CWS I, 456. And *Ethics* V, 40 Schol.; CWS I, 615.

therein must thus not escape us. So one might be tempted to conclude that, from Spinoza's own point of view, the ultimate laws of nature are immediately accessible to us, that moreover they have perhaps already been discovered and that, if we have not yet come to deduce them *a priori*, this is only due to a lack of attention. This, then, is the possible objection.

Now, in this objection, everything is true except the conclusion. And what makes the conclusion false is the fact that, in the human being, the understanding is never completely separated from the imagination. It is no doubt correct that, if it so happened that our mind were pure understanding, only its finitude would prevent it from immediately forming, based on the concept of extension, not only the concept of movement and rest, but also that of the true universal laws of nature. In this sense, absolute physical truth is infinitely close to us; we possess it, if you like, implicitly. But an invisible barrier separates us from it – and if we wanted to deduce it *a priori*, we would be condemned to the impossible procedure described above, for lack of anything better – because, precisely, our mind is *not* pure understanding. This is not an accident, nor even a handicap: as Propositions 14 to 23 of Part II of the *Ethics* show us, we cannot understand anything except through the intermediary of ideas of the affections of our bodies; and these ideas, as Propositions 24 to 31 show us, are necessarily inadequate. These imaginative ideas are, in a sense, infinitely valuable, since they are in us the very condition of all knowledge, and without them we would be totally unconscious. But this condition has its cost: what is adequate in us is inextricably mixed up with the inadequate, and the task of extracting the former from the latter is an endless task.

Let us be clear, for it is important to grasp both ends of the chain correctly. On the one hand, each of our ideas, considered in isolation and in its totality, is inadequate, for each of our ideas is *first of all*, and *directly*, the idea of an affection of our bodies, and all of our corporeal affections are explained at least in part by external causes whose mark they carry and whose idea is not in us. But on the other hand, as Propositions 38 to 40 of Part II show us, *there is always* (more or less so, depending on the case, but always) *something adequate in every inadequate idea*; so, to that extent, but only to that extent, we do indeed have adequate ideas. In the first place, there are, among them, *universal common notions*, that is, ideas of properties that are common to all bodies and which are equally found in the part and in the whole of each;²⁶ for when our body is affected by any external body whatsoever, these common properties, by hypothesis, indicate something in the

²⁶ *Ethics* II, 38; CWS I, 474.

unfolding and the nature of this affection; their ideas are thus included in our inadequate idea of the latter; and since, by hypothesis, these properties are entirely explained by the nature of our bodies alone (just as, incidentally, they are entirely explained by the nature of the body that affects us alone), their ideas, too, are explained by the nature of our minds alone; if consequently we manage to conceive them by distinguishing them from their context (which, to be sure, is not always possible), we would only be able to conceive of them adequately. There are also, in the second place, proper common notions, that is, the ideas of properties common only to our body and to certain external bodies by which it is usually affected, and which are equally found in the parts and in the whole of each of these bodies:²⁷ when our body is affected by one of these bodies, the overall inadequate idea of this affection contains in itself, for exactly the same reason and with the same reservations as in the preceding case, what makes us adequately conceive of the aforementioned properties. Finally, there are, in the third place, *the ideas that follow from these two sorts of common notions*.²⁸ But these latter ideas also do not escape the rule: each of them, taken on its own, is included in the imaginative idea of an affection of our body. Simply put, as Proposition 10 of Part V indicates, the corporeal affections in question, and consequently also their imaginative ideas, are arranged in an intelligible order: if our body is affected by an affection A whose aspect A' is explained by its nature alone and by an affection B whose aspect B' is also explained by its nature alone, and if there follows in it an affection C whose aspect C' is explained entirely by the conjunction of A' and B', there is, in our mind, the deduction of the adequate idea of C' from those of A' and B'; but the imaginative ideas of A, B and C, each taken generally, nevertheless remain inadequate. This certainly does not stop our true ideas from being purely intellectual, nor even from being eternally included in the eternal idea (an idea which, in a certain way, we *are*) of the essence of our body;²⁹ but their access to a conscious state, during our actual present existence, finds at once its condition of possibility and its limits in the imaginative context from which they are inseparable, and which itself expresses the *interactions* of our body and the external world. The idea of God itself, which is in no way imaginative, but which is adequate in us for the same reason that the common notions are, only becomes conscious in our mind under the same conditions.³⁰

²⁷ *Ethics* II, 39; CWS I, 474.

²⁸ *Ethics* II, 40; CWS I, 475.

²⁹ See *Ethics* V, 22–3 and 29; CWS I, 607–8 and 609.

³⁰ See *Ethics* II, 45–7 and 47 Schol.; CWS I, 481–3.

And so there is nothing shocking about the fact that it is always difficult to separate out the adequate from the inadequate. If our body were only capable of receiving a single affection at a time, and if our mind thus could only have one idea at a time, this separation would be quite simply impossible. We manage it all the better as our body is simultaneously affected in more numerous ways,³¹ and as we then have at our disposal a more varied imaginative field which renders our mind all the more capable, 'from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions'.³² But this does not resolve everything. For if it is true that we adequately conceive the properties common to all bodies, it is also true that we are not affected (far from it!) by all the bodies that exist in nature: we are only affected, at least in a minimally clear manner, by those that satisfy certain conditions of proximity and size. We thus always run the risk of incorrectly attaching to a universal common notion something that really pertains to this or that proper common notion, and, in this way, of mistaking something that only applies in a very limited domain for a universal law of nature. In general, when we adequately conceive two distinct things that, in fact, have never been dissociated in our imaginative experience, we irresistibly tend to think that they are indissociable, or even to confuse them. This kind of confusion is rectified little by little, by increasingly subtle experiences, undertaken in proper order under the direction of the intellect:³³ in this way our knowledge of natural laws is deepened. But what guarantees that this labour of discrimination, on any point whatsoever, could be accomplished once and for all? The question arises. And if it arises, it is not as a result of a simple lack of attention on our part: it is a consequence of the very nature of our mind, which is to be the idea of a body ceaselessly affected by other bodies.

Spinoza had, however, glimpsed all the implications as early as the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*; the errors that are most difficult to detect, he tells us in Paragraph 74, are those that are produced when what is in our imagination is at the same time conceived by us clearly and distinctly; for then, what we imagine tends to falsify the sense of what we otherwise understand, and what we conceive adequately lets us think that we also understand that which, in reality, we have only imagined.

Now the same also goes, even and we might say especially, for our idea of *extension*. We have, eternally, an adequate idea of extension as an attribute

³¹ See *Ethics* IV, 38; CWS I, 568.

³² *Ethics* II, 29 and Schol.; CWS I, 470–1.

³³ See *TdIE*, 103; CWS I, 42.

of God; but it is not clearly distinguished in our mind except by the mediation of the *common notion* of extension, which itself, like all the common notions, is at once and indissociably conceived and imagined, and which can only be conceived because it is at the same imagined. Whence it follows that our adequate idea of extension is at once overloaded and impoverished: overloaded, because under the influence of the imagination, we consider as pertaining to it that which, in reality, does not characterise it by nature; impoverished, because this imaginative overdetermination prevents us from perceiving everything that it truly contains.

This is, Letter LXXXI would have us believe, the fundamental error upon which all of Cartesian physics rests. Descartes' great error lay in that he considered extension, all things being equal, as being *at rest* – which followed, simultaneously, from the fact that he did not distinguish conceived extension from imagined extension, from the fact that it is impossible to imagine a substantial attribute in abstraction from all its modes, from the fact that the modes of extension always reduce to motion and rest, and from that the fact that it is easier to imagine a thing at rest (a single image will suffice) than it is to imagine it in motion (there must be many images). At that point, by applying the principle of inertia, which he otherwise conceived clearly and distinctly, Descartes accepted quite logically that extension could not itself give rise to motion, that motion was thus not a necessary consequence of its nature, and that consequently it could not be introduced into it except from without, which is to say by a transcendent God. From there we get, Spinoza tells us in that same Letter LXXXI, 'Descartes' principles of natural things', which are in reality 'useless, not to say absurd'.³⁴ Spinoza does not say more, but it is easy to see what he meant. In fact, from the moment that motion appears as something that comes to be *added* to extension by the will of God, the whole problematic of natural laws is distorted: then everything comes down to an interrogation concerning the requirements that God must satisfy in carrying out this addition; and when one thinks one has discovered them, one deduces what one considers to be *the* ultimate and definitive principles of physics (conservation of the quantity of motion, laws of impact, etc.). This approach is absurd in itself, and makes it possible to justify anything, including the worst errors; and it is an approach that, in the best case, which is to say supposing that the principles deduced in this way were in fact relatively correct (because one has, of course, already discovered them previously by other means), is totally useless and even detrimental, since science really has

³⁴ *Ep.* LXXXI [to Tschirnhaus]; CWS II, 484–5.

no need for it and because its sole effect is to absolutise these principles by excluding any possibility of expanding and deepening them.

Now Spinozism teaches us that Spinoza himself was not immune – and perhaps he was aware that he was not immune – to the criticism that he addressed to Descartes. How, according to his own principles, could he have been? And who would be? Spinoza, like everyone else, imagines that he conceives at the same time that he conceives. He is thus as far as anyone from having explored all the richness of his own concept of extension. If he grasped that motion was a necessary consequence of extension, the idea never came to him, for example, that extension itself might not necessarily be Euclidean: he never asked if our adequate idea of *Euclidean* extension, far from being a *universal common notion* of extension, was not on the contrary a *proper common notion*, applicable only to bodies that are usually in contact with us, and only insofar as they affect us in a perceptible way. However, he did possess the means to see this, as Paragraph 61 of the *TdIE* suggests.³⁵ When we ask ourselves, he tells us in that paragraph, whether what we conceive is not in reality a simple fiction, the best that we can do is deduce in the proper order everything that can be deduced: if the point of departure is false, its falsity will readily become apparent, for an absurdity will quickly come of it; if it is true, on the other hand, the deduction will be pursued indefinitely without ever opening onto any contradiction. Now it is in just this way that non-Euclidean geometries were subsequently discovered. But Spinoza himself did not pose the question because imaginative pseudo-evidence prevented him. Nor did he ask, for the same reason, whether the nature of extension truly implies that physical laws are the same at all scales, whether it truly implies that all bodies necessarily have to have a determined position and speed in each instant, etc. And if he had asked these questions, it would have been, at any rate, by means of accepting other pseudo-evidences. And this is how it will always be: we will never abolish the imagination, and so much the better!

To what extent, exactly, was Spinoza aware of this? It's hard to say. No doubt, he caught a glimpse of it, more or less; if not, nothing would have stopped him from elaborating, as he had initially thought it possible to do, a physics apparently based on his metaphysics. However, there is no doubt that he did not know it in a fully explicit way; if not, nothing would have stopped him from giving Tschirnhaus the answer that we have attempted to attribute to him. But the key is that his philosophy gave him, and still gives us, the theoretical means to know it: Spinozism, by elucidating the

³⁵ *TdIE*, 61; CWS I, 28.

reasons for this necessary contamination of fundamental physical concepts by the imagination (which is to say, ultimately, by the *interaction* between the object of knowledge and the observer), authorised at the same time putting the question off indefinitely. Spinozist ontology was thus not only, like many others were, up to the task of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century: it was conceptually on the same footing as all the subsequent scientific revolutions.

The Year 1663 and the Spinozist Identity of Being and Power: Hypothesis on a Development

Bernard Rousset entitled one of his last articles ‘The Implications of the Spinozist Identity of Being and Power’.¹ He showed, beginning with his major book, *The Final Perspective of the Ethics and the Problem of the Coherence of Spinozism*, to what extent the concept of this identity was at the very heart of Spinoza’s doctrine. But he also showed, beginning with this same work, that this concept did not simply arrive immediately in its fully articulated form, but rather that Spinoza progressively shifted from the language of participation to that of power [*puissance*]. Subsequently, in order to pinpoint this development more precisely, Rousset devoted many articles, always pertinent and lucid in my opinion, to determining the successive stages of the drafting of the *Ethics*. And his last book on Spinoza addressed the role played by Spinoza’s reading of the *Objections and Replies* to Descartes’ *Meditations*. In the present chapter, I will attempt to follow Spinoza’s reading of Descartes along the different paths that have since been opened, by situating myself, as it were, at their intersection. I will try to suggest that Spinoza was able to explicitly formulate this identity of being and power after a period of reflection on two of his own texts, which he undertook in 1663 – the first propositions of the *Ethics* and then Proposition 7 of the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* – and which led him to transform a proof for the existence of God, which has since disappeared from the text, into the one that is currently found in the Scholium to Proposition 11 of Part I of the *Ethics*.

* * *

¹ [This chapter originally published as ‘L’année 1663 et l’identité spinoziste de l’être et de la puissance’, in Laurent Bove (ed.), *Travaux et documents no. 8: La Recta Ratio: Criticiste et Spinoziste? Hommage en l’honneur de Bernard Rousset*, Groupe de recherches spinozistes (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999): 171–89; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

We know that the drafting of the first eight propositions of the *Ethics* contained at least five steps: Chapter II of Part I of the *Short Treatise*; Appendix I of the *Short Treatise*; the text sent to Oldenburg in 1661 and which it is possible to reconstitute from Letters II and IV; a first version of the *Ethics*, different than the final version, and which is known to us from Spinoza's correspondence with De Vries (Letter VIII from De Vries and Letter IX from Spinoza) dated February 1663; and finally the *Ethics* as we know it today.

We know what distinguishes the 1663 version both from the 1661 version and from the one that we know today. The four axioms of 1661 became, with some slight modifications, the first four propositions of the 1663 version and the final version. The final proposition of the 1661 edition (Proposition 8 today), had only one scholium, whereas the eighth proposition from 1663 has three: the current Scholia 1 and 2 (the beginning of Letter XII to Louis Meyer seems to indicate that they already had the same content), and a third scholium which then became the scholium to Proposition 10 – Propositions 9 and 10 thus did not yet exist. Lastly, with respect to the 1661 propositions, the 1663 definitions contained two very important and interrelated modifications.

Indeed, in the three versions prior to 1663, attribute is never distinguished from substance. In the 1661 version, substance and attribute were even *defined* in identical terms; there thus really were *substances having one attribute*,² and the pre-*Ethics* Spinoza was perfectly Gueroultian! Correlatively, God was defined in 1661, not as a substance, but as a 'being consisting in an infinity of attributes, of which each is infinite' – attributes that were thus themselves just as much substances with one attribute. It is true that in Chapter II of Part I of the *Short Treatise*, the essence of these substances did not yet involve existence; but in the Appendix and in the 1661 text substance involved existence; whence Oldenburg's worry in Letter III, where he asks Spinoza if, in believing himself to be able to prove the existence of God, he did not wind up proving an infinity of gods.

Spinoza clearly responded to this objection in 1663 by defining God for the first time as 'an absolutely infinite substance'.³ From which we can infer that the 1663 version *already* contained *the first proof for the existence of God as we know it*: it was important, in order to eliminate Oldenburg's objection, to prove the existence of God from out of *its own substantiality* and no longer from the substantiality of each of its attributes taken separately. As for attribute, it ceases, correlatively, to be purely and simply identified with

² ['substances à un attribut'. See above, Chapter 2, note 2.]

³ Ep. VIII [from De Vries]; CWS I, 192.

substance: if attribute is still defined at the same time as substance, it is distinguished from it ‘. . . in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance’⁴ – which no longer requires us to think (though there is still a certain ambiguity) that it constitutes the essence of substance *all by itself*.

It thus seems to us, beginning with the *Ethics*, that we must no longer speak, when considering these first propositions, of ‘substance having one attribute’, but rather of ‘substance *considered* under a single attribute’. But, whatever the case may be, this change of definition posed a problem, of which De Vries was not unaware. Indeed, De Vries objects to Spinoza in Letter VIII that he *presupposed*, in Scholium 3 to Proposition 8, that substance can have many attributes, but that Spinoza did not actually *prove* it. And Spinoza responds to him in Letter IX that he in fact gave two proofs. The first, which to this day is still found, in slightly different terms, in the scholium of Proposition 10, was the following: ‘. . . the more reality or being a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it’.⁵ But, since this axiom did not seem clear to De Vries, Spinoza ultimately decided to prove it himself. Whence Propositions 9 and 10. And, correlatively, a new definition of attribute, indicating even more explicitly that it is what the intellect conceives (truthfully, of course) as constituting the essence of substance, but *not necessarily as constituting it all by itself*.

The second proof, which has since disappeared, is what is of interest here. After having claimed that it is the proof he ‘judge[s] best (*palmariam*)’, Spinoza writes:

[. . .] the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it; that is, the more I conceive it as true.⁶

What clearly made it *palmariam* is that it tended to prove, no longer simply the possibility of a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, but its actual existence. It was thus obviously a question of an axiom intended to found a *second proof for the existence of God*. Why this second proof? And why did it disappear?

The reason for this second proof – as moreover with that of any other proof for the existence of God different than the first – seems to us to be the following: Spinoza, with Proposition 7 and in a second moment with

⁴ *Ep.* IX [to De Vries]; CWS I, 195.

⁵ *Ep.* IX [to De Vries]; CWS I, 195.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Scholium 2 to Proposition 8, demonstrated, before even making known the essence of any substance whatsoever, that every conceivable substance, solely by virtue of it being a substance that is conceivable, *must have* an essence that involves existence: this must be so because it cannot be otherwise. But it is clear that, as soon as we consider a substance under any one of its attributes, it is impossible to *read directly*, in its essence such as we conceive it, this necessity of existing: we know, *in abstracto*, that a thinking or extended substance *must* exist necessarily because it is a substance, but we can indeed conceive of an infinite extension or infinite thought as not existing: we can only, in this examination *in concreto* of its essence, consider its existence as possible. Now the first proof for the necessary existence of God does not in any way allow us to fill in this gap, and this for the very reason that made it logically advantageous: because it is founded *only* on the substantiality of God and its conceivability, independent of any examination of what makes up the specificity of its essence.

It is thus on the basis of such an examination that the second proof tries to accomplish a direct reading of the necessity of existence in the very essence of God, and this time of God alone. For if it is true that the concept of substance that we have considered under a single attribute only contains the affirmation of a merely possible existence, it is also true that 'possible' for Spinoza means 'necessary if . . .' and 'impossible if . . .'; and as soon as we have understood that this substance *might* have other attributes, we begin to see what this must mean: 'necessary if it has other attributes, impossible if it is reduced to a single attribute'. Let us then verify this by giving other attributes to it: the existence involved in its concept will be affirmed as many times, and thus all the more strongly, as we conceive it under more supplementary attributes (or as we conceive of it having these attributes, even if we do not know them). And we then understand retrospectively why we conceived of it *in concreto* as merely possible: the attributes that we attribute to it are so many reasons for affirming its existence, but those that we do not attribute to it indicate the insufficiency of these reasons. Now, since we can always attribute others to it, indefinitely, it is certain that, if we proceed in this way, the *force* of our affirmation itself will increase indefinitely, but without ever becoming sufficient because there will always remain an infinity of supplementary attributes that we *could* attribute to it. But, since *we have* the idea of God, we can pass immediately to the limit: if we attribute to it the infinity of all the conceivable attributes, we will have all the reasons to affirm its existence without any reason to deny it, the force of our affirmation will thus become invincible, and its existence will then be affirmed absolutely, that is, as necessary.

This proof, according to Spinoza, would have to be convincing, since to every true idea there must correspond, outside the understanding, a real ideatum. But something is still missing in order to make it completely intuitive, in order to make it, no longer the application of the result of the process that unfolded in our understanding to this object, but a direct reading of the thing itself. What is, in fact, in the very nature of this real object, the correlate *extra intellectum* of the force of the affirmation involved in the concept that we have of it? This correlate, in the definitive version of the *Ethics*, will be shown by the fourth proof for the existence of God (the Scholium to Proposition 11): this will be the *power* [*puissance*] (power to exist, which is at the same time causal power) that the nature of substance involves. This fourth proof is, of course, not included in the 1663 version, nor is the third proof, which is only its *a posteriori* counterpart: otherwise this would have been the one that Spinoza considered *palmariam*. It thus replaced the 1663 proof because it was better. Certainly we would also be able to show that the current second proof is equally derivable, in another way, from the 1663 proof, and thus also did not exist at this time. But we only wish to consider the *development that led Spinoza from the second proof of 1663 to the fourth proof (and thus also the third) of the definitive version.*

When and how was this passage carried out in Spinoza's mind? My hypothesis is that it occurred, if not actually in 1663, then at least at some later point following the reflections that inspired Spinoza as a result of his own work during a period from the end of April to the beginning of August 1663. That is, during the fifteen days he devoted to the writing of the first part of his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*,⁷ and, more precisely still, at the moment he set to work on Proposition 7.

* * *

We know that Proposition 7, devoted to the second Cartesian proof *a posteriori* of God's existence, and whose wording reproduces that of the third proposition of the geometric synopsis cited at the end of the *Reply to the Second Set of Objections* ('God's existence is still demonstrated from ourselves, who have in us the idea of God, insofar as we exist'), is the only place

⁷ Letter XV to Louis Meyer from 3 August 1663 tells us both that the *Principia* were at the press at this date and that Spinoza wrote the first part in fifteen days. (*Ep.* XV [to Louis Meyer]; CWS I, 215–16.) And Letter XII from 20 April 1663, also addressed to Louis Meyer – who must have himself pushed Spinoza to publish the *Principia* and to re-write its first part – did not yet contain any allusion to this subject. (*Ep.* XII [to Louis Meyer]; CWS I, 200–5.)

where Spinoza is clearly opposed to Descartes. Its articulation is quickly followed by a scholium in which he denounces the absurdity of the Cartesian demonstration, and at the end of which he announces another possible demonstration. In order to obtain this demonstration, he first demonstrates two lemmas: the first is ultimately intended to prove (with its corollary) that what exists necessarily is supremely perfect, the second establishes that what has the power to preserve itself necessarily exists, and the proof properly speaking follows from their conjunction and some rather Cartesian considerations, but among which the presence in us of the idea of God no longer comes into play.

I. Lemma 1 is formulated as follows:

The more perfect a thing is by its own nature, the greater and more necessary is the existence it involves; conversely, the more necessary the existence it involves by its own nature, the more perfect it is.⁸

Everything here thus rests on two presuppositions: there are, on the one hand, different degrees of perfection, that is to say, of reality (note 2 that follows this lemma will explicitly identify these two notions); and, on the other hand, different degrees of necessity, which, in the course of the demonstration, will then be identified with degrees of possibility. The first presupposition, which was practically a commonplace in the seventeenth century, was the object, a bit earlier in the *Principia*, of Axiom 4 ‘taken from Descartes’, which reproduced textually Axiom 6 from the geometric argumentation from the *Second Set of Replies*.⁹ The second, stranger at first glance, can be explained, it seems, in the following way: we must first of all accept that the necessity of existing that the essence of a thing involves can be not only absolute (if existence is deduced from its essence alone), but also conditional (if we can deduce from the essence that it will necessarily exist if and only if certain well-determined conditions are met); we must also accept that this necessity of existing can be more or less conditional depending on whether the nature of the thing submits its existence and the continuation of its existence to a more or less narrow dependency on the circumstances;

⁸ *PP* I, 7 Lem. 1; *CWS* I, 251.

⁹ We know that Part I of the *Principia* relies on eleven axioms, of which the first three are Spinoza’s, and of which the other eight reproduce eight of the ten axioms of the geometric argumentation of the *Second Set of Replies*. The two eliminated axioms are the ones that the Scholium to Proposition 7 critiques.

and we must finally accept, as Spinoza himself thinks and as he perhaps believes he is able to make Descartes say, that the conditional necessity thus defined is quite precisely identified with the possibility to exist or to not exist; whereby, indeed, it amounts to saying the same thing, that for two things, A and B, where the nature of A makes its existence less dependent on circumstances than the nature of B, that the essence of A involves an existence relatively 'more necessary' than the essence of B (the expression 'the necessary existence it involves', or even, 'existence involved', without any qualification, being reserved for the case of absolute necessity), and that A has more possibilities to exist and less possibilities to not exist than B.

It remains to be demonstrated that the degree of necessity or of possibility of existence is measured by the degree of reality or perfection of essence, and *vice versa*. But, as in any case where it is a question of proportionality, it suffices to demonstrate the proposition directly, and the reciprocal proposition will in turn go without saying. In order to do so, making recourse to a line of argumentation familiar to Descartes and to his contemporaries, Spinoza takes the imaginary example of a thing A having 10 degrees of perfection. The essence of A, like that of any conceivable thing, involves, of course, a certain possibility (or relative necessity) of existing, whose affirmation is implied in the concept that we have of it. Let us suppose now that we were to take away 5 degrees of reality from it. It is certain, Spinoza says – *and here is the crux of the proof* – that incrementally during this diminution we will conceive of A as *participating more and more in nothingness*. For it is equally certain that 'we can affirm no existence of nothing'.¹⁰ Thus, at the end of the process, the substitution (in some sense) in the concept of A of 5 degrees of nothingness for 5 degrees of being will have proportionally diminished the affirmation of existence that it contained: we will have denied A as much possibility of existence as we will have taken from its perfection. And we can generalise on this basis: if we diminish infinitely the quantity of reality or of perfection of A until we render it null (which would happen if its concept was contradictory), its existence becomes impossible; and inversely, if we increase it infinitely until supreme perfection, deprived of all participation in nothingness (which would happen if A was God), its existence becomes absolutely necessary – or purely and simply necessary, without any possibility of not existing. Thus, indeed, the more reality or perfection a thing has, the more it has, by nature, the possibility of existing, and the less it has the possibility of not existing: the direct proposition is established, from the Cartesian point of view at the very least.

¹⁰ *PP I*, 7 Lem. 1; *CWS I*, 251.

But, for the new version of the second Cartesian proof for God's existence, Spinoza needs only the reciprocal proof. Since it is obvious, Spinoza then simply says that it follows from what preceded it. And in fact, it is clear that if a thing A, supposed hypothetically to have by nature more necessity or possibility of existing than B, was at the same time less perfect or as perfect as B, it would have both more (hypothetically) and less or as much (according to the direct proposition) possibility or necessity of existing than B. It is thus a waste of time to fuss over it: it suffices, for the purpose of the demonstration of Proposition 7, to proceed as before by taking the necessity of existing to the absolute, and we thus obtain absolute perfection. Whence the *corollary to Lemma 1*: '... whatever involves necessary existence' (that is to say, here, absolutely necessary, without its being made relative by 'more' or 'less') 'is a supremely perfect being, or God'.¹¹

Now, for our purposes, an important point deserves to be noted here: Spinoza, from the purely Cartesian point of view where he tries to situate himself, *had in reality no need of Lemma 1 in order to establish this corollary*. The best proof of this is that, in the demonstration of the reciprocal proposition of Lemma 1, he also invokes, in addition to the direct proposition (which would have been sufficient by itself), Axiom 6 taken from Descartes, which has the same content as Axiom 10 from the *Second Set of Replies*. And this axiom too would have been sufficient by itself. Here is how it is formulated:

Existence – either possible or necessary – is contained in the idea, or concept, of every thing [. . .] *Necessary existence, in the concept of God, or of a supremely perfect being (for otherwise he would be conceived as imperfect, contrary to what is supposed to be conceived); but contingent, or possible, in the concept of a limited thing.*¹²

Now, on the basis of this, Spinoza could indeed have demonstrated the corollary without recourse to the lemma: since, for Descartes, there only are two kinds of conceivable beings – God and limited things – it immediately follows from Axiom 6 that a being that exists necessarily can only be God.

So why then Lemma 1? Was it because Spinoza wanted to give a more precise justification for the formula 'for otherwise he would be conceived as imperfect' contained in Axiom 6? To some extent this was clearly the case. But if this had been the only reason, it would have been more logical to give this justification following this axiom, as Spinoza had himself done for *all of*

¹¹ PP I, 7 Cor.; CWS I, 252.

¹² PP I, Ax. 6; CWS I, 243.

the other axioms taken from Descartes – questions of length do not come into play here, since the justification of Axiom 9 was longer than, and the justification of Axiom 10 just as long as, Lemma 1. And anyway, in the demonstration of Proposition 5, that is to say Descartes' *a priori* proof, the same Axiom 6 is used alone without any problem; and if there is indeed, in the scholium that follows, a kind of justification of the relation between God's perfection and the necessity of its existence, it consists only in a very elliptical (and without citation) reference to the justification, albeit completely different, that Descartes himself had given (the only one, moreover, that he had ever given) at the end of the *First Set of Replies*, to which we will return shortly.

Spinoza thus must have had another reason for giving this quite unhelpful justification, and for giving it precisely at this point. Now, taking into account the respective dates of Letter IX and the hasty drafting of the first part of the *Principia*, the reason seems clear to us. Namely, at the moment he was going to broach the difficult question of reworking Descartes' second *a posteriori* proof from a strictly Cartesian point of view, Spinoza, prompted perhaps by De Vries' interrogations, *at the same time* reflected upon the means for establishing more solidly, *a parte rei* and no longer on the basis of the necessity of our understanding alone, what he had posited axiomatically in order to found (at least according to us) his own second proof for the existence of God in 1663. If we take the two informal axioms invoked in Letter IX together – the one that ultimately needed to be demonstrated ('the more reality or being a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it') and the one that ultimately disappeared ('the more attributes I attribute to a being, the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it') – we get the following formulation: 'the more reality or being a being has, the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it', which is precisely equivalent to the first part of our Lemma 1 (direct proposition), the one whose demonstration is the most detailed and the most precise.

With this in mind, everything becomes clear. Since if it is true that Descartes would probably not have had anything to add to this demonstration, it is also true that he would have hardly needed, in order to establish the conclusion, to pass through the consideration of an infinite series of degrees of perfection going from nothingness to God: his ontology, on the contrary, admits of radical discontinuities between the few kinds of beings contained therein. Spinoza, by contrast, at the point where he was in his argumentation in the *Ethics* in 1664, might have found this line of argumentation particularly appropriate. He knew that a substance considered under a single attribute *had* to exist necessarily because it was perceived as substance; he also knew that the examination *in concreto* of the particular nature of each

attribute considered in isolation would not allow us to read in it the necessary existence that it *had to* nevertheless include on account of its substantial character; he knew in addition that it was always hypothetically possible to attribute more attributes to substance (always more, indefinitely); and finally, he knew that the limit towards which such an accumulation tended was the absolutely infinite being of which we already had a clear and distinct idea (the one which, precisely, had made possible this indefinite growth). And in fact, if we replace ‘degrees of perfection’ with ‘substantial attributes’, the demonstration of Lemma 1 retains a sense, which is certainly no longer Cartesian, but is at least apparently Spinozist. The notion of ‘degrees of necessity’ even loses its somewhat artificial character when we apply it to these attributes, of which each one involves necessary existence in one sense without involving it in another sense, and whose accumulation tends precisely to reduce this paradox. We can thus imagine that Spinoza is led here, without any commitment on his part since he was treating Descartes’ philosophy and not yet his own, to a sort of intellectual experiment intended to test the validity of the approach that he would undertake in the first draft of the *Ethics*. It is not surprising that he would be led here from Part I of the *Principia*, where his project of re-founding Cartesianism, more radical there than anywhere else, afforded him an exceptional margin of freedom.

But this experiment, precisely because it had been undertaken here in full force, *could not but appear to him ultimately as an error*. We saw, indeed, that the demonstration of Lemma 1 relied completely on the key notion of *participation in nothingness*: it alone seemed able to found *in the very things* the greater or lesser force of the affirmation of existence involved in their concept. Now if this notion had meant something for Descartes, it no longer means anything for Spinoza. It is only meaningful, in reality, from the perspective of a philosophy of eminence: there, in fact, to say that creatures participate in nothingness – as a sort of middle term, as Descartes said, between God and chimera – amounts to saying that their own perfections, eminently contained in God in all that they have that is positive (in the ‘most excellent’ way, Descartes again says), are only in them in a degraded form that determines their lack of being. But, in Spinoza, nothing is lacking in being. Since the drafting of the *Cogitata* (which is without a doubt older, even predating the drafting of the *Short Treatise*), nothingness, far from affecting things themselves, is merely one of those ‘beings of reason’ that we project imaginatively on them when we deprive them of something by comparing them to other things.¹³ Beginning with the *Short Treatise*, in any

¹³ CM I; CWS I, 301.

case, the perfections of things are formally in God just as they are formally in themselves, since it is *the things themselves* that are themselves formally in God. And the application of this key notion to substance considered under only one or considered only under some of its attributes, although each attribute contains *all of the being* in the genus of being that it defines, must have, no doubt, as soon as it was put down on the page, seemed completely absurd to Spinoza: the very crassness of its Cartesian formulation must have made him immediately feel its inanity. The intellectual experiment in question, when carried out in full, thus in all likelihood served as a *catharsis* for Spinoza: he had to, from that point on, find another way to directly read the necessity of existing in the very essence of substance.

Now Spinoza *also* found this other way as a result of his reflection on Proposition 7. But this time it was by way of Lemma 2.

II. This second lemma is formulated as follows: ‘the nature of one who has the power of conserving oneself involves necessary existence’¹⁴ (the word ‘necessary’, outside of the context of Lemma 1, is always employed in the absolute sense). The crux of this proof is constituted by a simple reference to Axiom 10 taken from Descartes, which reproduces, with a slight modification, Axiom 2 of the *Second Replies*. Axiom 10 is formulated as follows: ‘no less a cause is required for preserving a thing than for first producing it’.¹⁵ But the rather long justification that Spinoza then gives for it (and which we will come across again, with regard to its fundamentals, in the corollary to *Ethics I* Proposition 24 as well as in Paragraph 2 of Chapter II of the *Political Treatise*) was quite different than the one that Descartes gave for it. Descartes’ Axiom 2 was justified by its first sentence: ‘There is no relation of dependence between the present time and the immediately preceding time, and hence no less a cause is required. . .’.¹⁶ Spinoza, far from founding his Axiom 10 on the independence of the parts of time, founded it, quite the contrary, on the immutability of essences! The essence of a thing, he explained by taking the example of the thinking thing that we are, remains eternal no matter what happens to it, whether the thing exists or not. Thus, if it does not involve necessary existence, it will not involve it any more when the thing exists than when it did not yet exist: the necessity of existing that this thing will happen to have at a given moment will not come to it from its own nature, but from elsewhere. Whence it follows that, from the mere fact that a given

¹⁴ *PP I*, 7 Lem. 2; *CWS I*, 252.

¹⁵ *PP I*, Ax. 10; *CWS I*, 245.

¹⁶ *AT VII*, 165; *CSM II*, 116.

thing exists, it does not necessarily follow that it will continue to exist thereafter: in order to assure this continuation, an external force as great as the one that had presided over its birth will be required. Leaving aside for the moment this external force, and taking into account that a thing has an essence if and only if it is conceivable (which makes its existence possible), this explanation of Axiom 10 can be formulated as follows:

(a) For any x , if x is conceivable¹⁷ and if the essence of x does not involve necessary existence, it is not necessary that, if x exists, x will never cease to exist.

The demonstration of Lemma 2 proceeds on this basis. As it is rather elliptical, let us first explain a point that remains implicit. From (a), we can immediately infer:

(b) For any x , if x is conceivable, then, if it is necessary that (if x exists, x will never cease to exist), the essence of x involves necessary existence.

Under these conditions, let us suppose that a certain being has the power to preserve itself. This amounts to saying, Spinoza begins by declaring, that it also has 'the power to create itself'. But since this Cartesian notion of self-creation, though it can be reinterpreted in Spinoza's terms, poses, at first glance, huge problems, and since these problems had indeed been posed by the authors of the *Objections*, Spinoza prefers to fall back on a more 'widely accepted' interpretation, and adds: 'i.e. (as everyone will readily concede), it requires no external cause in order to exist; rather, its own nature alone will be a sufficient cause of its existing'.¹⁸ To say that such a being has the power to preserve itself is thus equivalent to saying, at least minimally, that it has by nature a power such that, if it exists, it will maintain itself in existence by its forces alone, without any external support or whatever else might happen to it. But then, if it exists, by what sort of existence will it maintain itself by its forces alone? By that which, to be sure, is involved eternally in its essence. But this cannot be a question of a merely possible or contingent existence. For then, according to (a), it would not be necessary that, if it exists, it would never cease to exist. Which Spinoza says is 'contrary to the hypothesis' (to

¹⁷ This is an indispensable qualification. Since if we omit, in the formulas that follow, the expression 'if x is conceivable' (and thus possible), they become false and can give rise to an enormous sophism.

¹⁸ *PP* I, 7 Lem. 2 Dem.; *CWS* I, 252. Translation modified.

the hypothesis according to which it has the power to preserve itself). It is indeed evident that:

(c) For any *x*, if *x* is conceivable and if the essence of *x* involves a power such that (if *x* exists, *x* will maintain itself in existence by its forces alone, without any external support and whatever may happen to it), then it is necessary that (if *x* exists, *x* never ceases to exist).

Thus, according to (c) and (b),

(d) For any *x*, if *x* is conceivable and if the essence of *x* involves a power such that (if *x* exists, *x* will maintain itself in existence by its forces alone, etc.), then the essence of *x* involves necessary existence.

And since the antecedent of (d) is equivalent to saying that *x* has the power to preserve itself, Lemma 2 is demonstrated: if a being has the power to preserve itself, its nature involves necessary existence.

Now there was indeed another way of establishing a link between absolute perfection and necessary existence. Descartes himself had taken it up, the one time when he had seriously attempted to establish the necessity of this link instead of simply proclaiming it, that is, at the end of the *Replies to the First Objections*. There, indeed, after having claimed that ‘possible existence, at the very least . . . belongs [to God], just as it belongs to all the other things of which we have a distinct idea’, he added:

Next, when we attend to the immense power of this being, we shall be unable to think of its existence as possible without also recognising that it can exist by its own proper power; and we shall infer from this that this being does really exist and has existed from eternity, since it is quite evident by the natural light that what can exist by its own power always exists. So we shall come to understand that necessary existence is contained in the idea of a supremely powerful being.¹⁹

In this way the link that it was hardly possible to establish directly between supreme perfection and the necessity of existing is established through meditation, by way of the intermediary of the notion of omnipotence and, more precisely, the notion of the *power to exist*: the essence of a supremely perfect being involves this particular perfection that is omnipotence, which itself involves this particular form of power that is the power to exist by its

¹⁹ AT VII, 119; CSM II, 85.

forces alone; thus, for a reason analogous to the one that Spinoza invokes here (but which Spinoza explains with *much greater precision*, since what seemed to Descartes 'quite evident by the natural light' is only evident if we add 'if it exists', and the final step – the one expressed in our formula (b) – remained to be taken), it involves necessary existence. Étienne Gilson strongly insisted on the novelty of this conception of God, in which he sees what was likely the source of Spinoza's conception of God.²⁰ But perhaps it would be better to say that the source here is not Descartes himself, but *what Spinoza had already done to Descartes* by way of the labour of critical reflection and re-elaboration that Spinoza undertook on Proposition 7. The best proof of this is that *before* undertaking this labour, when he was still working on Proposition 5 (the *a priori* proof), he had indeed evoked in passing (without citing it), in the scholium that followed, the text of the *First Set of Replies*, but without seeing its potential upshot.

As it was, however, this Cartesian development now appeared to Spinoza as still being insufficient. For God, in Spinoza, is not *defined* as the supremely perfect being, but as the absolutely infinite substance. We can certainly say that the first of these two definitions admits a Spinozist sense that makes it equivalent to the second; but we must then agree to calling the 'perfections of God' the attributes of God such as Spinoza defines them. Now, if omnipotence is indeed one of the perfections, among others, of Descartes' God, it is in no way an attribute of Spinoza's God: it must be divided up among all the attributes of God (equally, since they are all infinite each in their own kind); and, in the same gesture, among all of the modes of each of these attributes, since each mode of an attribute is *substance itself* insofar as it is affected, under this attribute, by this or that particular modification – each finite mode obtaining thus a certain power that must be *a part* of the omnipotence of God. Let us go further: the power to exist by its own forces (or power to preserve itself) is, in Descartes, absolutely unified with divine omnipotence. It is the privilege of God because it is the power of self-creation, and thus of creation; finite beings, or at least if we do not adopt a purely occasionalist interpretation of Descartes, can indeed have this or that sort of power (power to think, force of movement or rest), but they do not have by themselves *any* power to exist. And yet, if we follow to the end the logic of this redistribution of the omnipotence of God among all the attributes, and through them among all of their modes, do we not *also* have to apply it to God's power to exist? Would not then each thing have to receive its part of the power to exist, certainly not by its forces alone, but at least *in part* with the help of its

²⁰ See Gilson 1952: 224–33.

own forces? Furthermore: since creation now becomes the immanent production of modes by God, what difference would we still be able to perceive between this latter and the (necessarily immanent) self-production of God by God, and consequently between God's power to exist and its own causal power? And, in the same logic of redistribution, would not this identification of two powers have to be valid *for all things without exception*? But this certainly leads us far away from Descartes, and *nothing* in Descartes could have suggested this to Spinoza.

What, however, might have suggested this to him, or at least put him on the path, was the last stage of his work on Proposition 7: a convergence, which would hardly have been difficult to effectuate, between the approaches that he had respectively followed in the two demonstrations of Lemmas 1 and 2. In the demonstration of Lemma 1, he had attempted to establish at all the levels of reality, unsuccessfully it is true, a link of proportionality between degrees of reality or perfection and degrees of possibility or necessity of existence. In the demonstration of Lemma 2, he had succeeded in finding (with more precision than Descartes), but only at the level of God, a relation of implication between the absolute power to exist and the absolute necessity of existing; and everybody would agree, in one form or another, that absolute power was in turn involved in the absolute perfection of God. Then it would have been sufficient for him, and he could not fail to notice this, to utilise at all other levels of reality this intermediary discovered at the highest level, in order to make the demonstration of Lemma 1 valid: if each degree of reality determines a certain degree of power, and if each degree of power determines a certain degree of possibility or of conditional necessity of existing (since a thing has more possibility of existing, and less possibility of not existing, and a less conditional necessity of existing, insofar its own forces play a greater role in maintaining it in existence), the link sought after is established for any being in general. And we obtain thus the *a parte rei* equivalent of the necessity *a parte intellectus* on which the second proof for the existence of God in 1663 was clearly based: the formulation 'the more attributes I *attribute* to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it' could become, without referring any longer to our intellect: '. . . since being able to exist' (having the possibility of existing) 'is power, it follows that the more reality' (i.e. for substance, the more attributes it contains) 'belongs to the *nature of a thing*, the more powers it *has, of itself*, to exist'.²¹ This, in the same scholium, immediately gives us the fourth proof (*a priori*) for the existence of God.

²¹ *Ethics* I, 11 Schol.; CWS I, 418.

For the time being, however, Spinoza, before dealing with the approaches that he had taken in the two lemmas, dealt with their conclusions. Whence, finally, the demonstration of Proposition 7.

III. Each of these two lemmas alone, as we saw, could found an *a priori* proof. It sufficed to accept that anything whose essence involves necessary existence exists necessarily. But, if we prefer not to take this last point into account, their conjunction in turn allows us to demonstrate God's existence *a posteriori*. This demonstration of Proposition 7 can be broken down as follows:

1. If I have the force to preserve myself, my nature would be (according to Lemma 2) such that it would involve necessary existence. In this case, then, according to the corollary to Lemma 1, my nature would contain every conceivable perfection.

2. But my nature does not contain every conceivable perfection, for I discover in myself many imperfections. Thus, according to point 1, I do not have the force to preserve myself.

3. I cannot exist, however, according to Axiom 10, without being preserved by a force at least equal to the one that I myself would have if I preserved myself by myself. But I exist. Thus, since I do not have this force, I am preserved by another being that has this force at its disposal and this other being thus exists.

4. But this being that preserves me cannot, for the same reason indicated in points 1 and 2, fail to itself have the power to preserve itself.²² This reference to points 1 and 2, to be sure, is indeed elliptical, but can clearly be explained as follows: to the extent that we can admit that the implication between the force to preserve oneself and necessary existence is reciprocal, it follows from the reciprocal of point 1 that, if this being was not able to preserve itself, it would not have every conceivable perfection; and, according to point 2, if it was imperfect like myself, it would not be able to *preserve myself* more than me; thus, if it can, it itself has the same force of preserving itself. Thus:

5. According to Lemma 2 and the corollary to Lemma 1 (as in point 1), this being has all perfections, it is God, and God exists.

Many commentators are committed, and rightly so, to establishing a relation between the second Cartesian proof by effects and the *a posteriori* proof

²² Spinoza simply says in parentheses: '(by the same reasoning by which I have just demonstrated that I cannot preserve myself by myself)'; which indeed refers back to points 1 and 2. This is a bit obscure and we are not completely sure of our interpretation.

given by Spinoza in the third demonstration of God's existence. But, since they only focus on the Cartesian proof given by *Descartes himself*, they are only ever able to point out similarities and differences. Whereas, by contrast, if we consider this proof *as it is reworked by Spinoza*, the transition becomes much more intelligible. In fact, taking into account the work undertaken by Spinoza on Lemmas 1 and 2 – and thus taking into account that there is no longer a *direct* link between perfection and existence, but that there is a link between perfection and power and a link between power and existence – the proof, even remaining within a Cartesian perspective, is transformed in the following way:

1–2) Concerning points 1 and 2, since it is now no longer possible to establish a direct link between necessary existence and absolute perfection, the detour through absolute perfection is no longer immediately clear. But neither is it required: Spinoza had only gone through it in order to distance himself as little as possible from Descartes' proof, in which my imperfection played a key role; but we do not need to pass through my imperfection in order to establish that my nature does not involve necessary existence: Descartes certainly never thought that one would have been able to think that it involved necessary existence. If he does not say anything about this, it is simply because the question of necessary existence did not come up at all in his proof. We can thus say directly: 'since it is evident that my nature does not include necessary existence,²³ I do not have, according to Lemma 2, the force to preserve myself'.

3) Point 3 can be left as is: I have to be preserved by a being whose power is at least equal to the power I would require to preserve myself by myself. But I exist. Thus such a being exists.

4) In order to prove point 4, the reference to points 1–2 would still be valid. But taking into account the simplification of points 1–2, we might say: 'the minimum power that I need to preserve myself is one that would allow me to exist necessarily; but, according to the direct link established now at all levels between the power to exist and the necessity or possibility of existing, one whose nature does not involve necessary existence is less powerful than one whose nature does involve it; thus, in order to be as powerful as I would be if I could preserve myself, there must be a nature that involves necessary existence; thus the being that exists and preserves me necessarily exists.'

5) In the absence of this direct link between the necessity to exist and absolute perfection, once again, it is no longer immediately clear that such a

²³ See *Ethics* II, Ax. 1; CWS I, 410.

being is God. But we can reason as follows: 'this being that exists necessarily has a nature that involves necessary existence; now, if God did not exist, it would have a nature that would not involve it; thus, for the same reason as in point 2 (direct link between power and possibility or necessity of existence), the nature of God, which does involve absolute perfection, would involve less power than the nature of a being that is not God and which is thus less perfect than God. Which, taking into account the direct link now established between perfection and power, is clearly absurd. Thus God exists.'

If, now, abandoning the Cartesian perspective, we accept with Spinoza that everything is a substance or a mode, and that a substance, *if it exists*, can exist only *necessarily by itself* because it cannot be produced by another thing, the proof is simplified even further:

1-2-3-4) There is no longer any need to pass through the long detour of these four points to establish that, if I exist, something must, in any event, exist necessarily. It is sufficient to say: 'I exist. Now I am either a substance or a mode. Thus a substance exists, either myself or the substance of which I am a mode. Thus something exists *necessarily by itself*.'

5) For the same reason as before, if God did not exist, its nature would involve less power than that of a being who, though not God, would nevertheless exist necessarily. Which, for the same reason as before, is absurd. And we thus have the proof *a posteriori* given in the third demonstration of *Ethics* I, 11.

* * *

This attempt to reconstruct the logic of a development is, to be clear, only a hypothesis. And the logic of this development does not in any way predetermine the value of its result according to the internal logic of the system. We do, however, believe we have been able to show elsewhere that the principle that founds the two final proofs – that is, that of the triple equivalence between possibility of existing (conceivability), power to exist, causal power, and reality or perfection – is *deducible* from what precedes them in the current version of the *Ethics*, even though Spinoza did not himself undertake this deduction. And that its implications, even if Spinoza did not explain all of them, are extremely important for better understanding what follows. But that is another story.

Eternal Life and the Body According to Spinoza

In this chapter¹ I would simply like to present some remarks on the reasons that justify Proposition 39 of Part V of the *Ethics*: ‘He who has a Body capable of a great many things has a Mind whose greater part is eternal.’² In order to do this, given that the eternity of our mind has a relation to intellectual knowledge, we must first of all try to specify what exactly is the correlate of our adequate ideas: what happens in the body when the mind understands? After that, we will be better able to understand what Spinoza tells us about the relations between the body and eternal life.

What is the corporeal correlate of our adequate ideas? We know, of course, what corresponds to universal common notions and proper common notions: for the former, it is the properties that are common to all bodies and that are equally in the whole and in the parts of each;³ and, for the latter, the properties that are common to our bodies and to certain external bodies by which they are usually affected, and that are equally in the whole and in the parts of each of these external bodies.⁴ We also know what the correlate of the true idea of God is: it is God itself, considered under the attribute of Extension, which is present in each and every one of our body’s affections.⁵ But what is the correlate of the *deductions* that we undertake based on common notions or the idea of God? On this point, we can look to Proposition 10 of Part V, to which the demonstration of Proposition 39 refers: ‘So long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have

¹ [Originally published as ‘La vie éternelle et le corps selon Spinoza’, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* 184 (1994): 27–40; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² *Ethics* V, 39; CWS I, 614.

³ *Ethics* II, 38; CWS I, 474.

⁴ *Ethics* II, 39; CWS I, 474.

⁵ *Ethics* II, 45–7; CWS I, 481–3.

the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the Body according to the power of the intellect.⁶ And the demonstration explains: so long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, our mind is not prevented from understanding; thus it understands, in this way organising its adequate ideas according to the order of deduction; and consequently, in our bodies, affections are organised in the same order.

In order to understand this, we must make four kinds of remarks:

1. At first, if you think about it a little bit, this proposition is somewhat surprising. In fact, Proposition 1, on which the demonstration for Proposition 10 is based, explicitly identifies the affections of the body with *images of things*; Proposition 14, for its part, explicitly reaffirms the same identifications; and the demonstration of Proposition 39 explicitly indicates that the affections of bodies so identified with images of things in Proposition 14 are the same ones that are at stake in Proposition 10. In itself, this is perfectly clear; for an affection of our body, considered in all its details, is always explained in part by external causes: every event that happens to our body always, in one way or another, bears the *mark of the world*. But, strictly speaking, doesn't this invalidate the demonstration of Proposition 10? For ultimately, the mental correlate of a corporeal image is not an adequate idea: it is an imaginative, and thus inadequate, idea. Consequently, one might object, a set of logically organised images is the corporeal correlate, not at all of a sequence of adequate ideas (that is, a deduction), but of a set of inadequate ideas, even if they are logically organised.

And this is true. But it in no way constitutes an objection. It would be one, if adequate ideas and inadequate ideas were simply *juxtaposed* in our mind, and separated from one another, the way differently coloured marbles sit next to each other in the same bag. But this is not the case. Since any affection of the body bears the mark of the external world, and since all of our ideas are ideas of the affections of our body, it must indeed be accepted that *each of our ideas*, grasped in the totality of its contents, is inadequate. But the theory of common notions shows that, *in every inadequate idea, there is something adequate*; and this is because, in any affection of our body, there is something that is explained by our nature alone. Our adequate ideas are thus constituted in reality by *what is adequate in our inadequate ideas*. An adequate idea is not the idea of an affection of our body that can be entirely explained by our nature alone, since no such affection exists; it is the idea of *what, in an affection of our body, is explained by our nature alone*. And given all that, Proposition 10 makes complete sense. Suppose, for example, that there are

⁶ *Ethics* V, 19; CWS I, 601.

in our body two affections A and B followed by a third affection C; suppose that none of the three are entirely explained by our nature alone, and that consequently our ideas of A, B and C will be inadequate. But suppose that there is in A an aspect A' that is explained by our nature alone (because it expresses, for example, a property common to our bodies and the external cause of A), in B an aspect B' that is explained by our nature alone (for the same reason), and in C an aspect C' that is uniquely explained by the conjunction of A' and B'. This aspect C' will also be explained by our nature alone; and *in our mind*, there will be a deduction of C' based on A' and B': from the conjunction of what is adequate in the idea of A' and what is adequate in the idea of B', we will deduce what is adequate in the idea of C'. The correlate of the deduction is thus not, properly speaking, a succession of corporeal affections organised logically: it is *the logical order in which the aspects of these affections that are explained by our nature alone are organised*.

2. It is possible, at this point, to dispel the feeling of discomfort that one often experiences when faced with such a doctrine. In fact it is often said that in Spinoza there is a kind of asymmetry between what we know of the mind and what we know of the body: we know very well what our ideas are and how they are deduced from one another, whereas we know nothing at all about what the corresponding corporeal affections are and how they are organised (we do not know, for example, what the neurological processes are that correspond to a deduction); but, it is objected, given the doctrine of parallelism, we should know exactly as much about both sides. But to this Spinoza would respond that in fact *we do know exactly as much about both sides*. Consider, for example, what happens in us when we form the genetic definition of the circle as 'the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable'.⁷ It is evident that we do not at all know what, in our body, constitutes the images of the line segment, of rotation and of the circle. But we also do not know what constitutes the corresponding imaginative ideas: why do we imagine the line segment and the circle as being black on a white background, or white on a black background, or red on a green background, etc.? We do not *understand* this: these are inadequate ideas; and to say that they are inadequate is *precisely equivalent to saying* that we do not understand the physical processes of which they are the ideas, because they are not explained by our nature alone. For that matter, nothing proves that, in two people forming the same definition, the corporeal images of the line segment and of the circle involve *the same* physical processes: everything depends on the situation in which this kind of

⁷ *TdIE*, 96; CWS I, 40.

object was imagined for the first time. It is even possible to conceive of intelligent extraterrestrials whose physiology would be entirely different from our own, and in whom, consequently, the relevant processes would be entirely different from those in us, and yet who would have the same mathematics that we have. By contrast, we understand perfectly well what is adequate in our genetic idea of the circle, because we understand perfectly well the *order* in which the corresponding corporeal images are linked (in us as in these hypothetical extraterrestrials), even if we understand none of them taken in isolation; and this, to be precise, is explained very simply by the fact that our body is itself capable of performing rotations – this capacity constituting thereby a property that it possesses in common with all other bodies that have had these images imprinted in them. And *we cannot say anything more*, not just due to ignorance, but *in principle*. For if ever we came to understand in total detail the neurological processes that accompany our genetic idea of the circle (which is, in itself, not impossible), the adequate idea to which they corresponded would *no longer be* the genetic idea of the circle; it would be the adequate idea *of these neurological processes*, which is not the genetic idea of the circle except to the extent that it is simply the idea (which is very abstract in relation to these processes) of the order according to which they are organised.

3. The important thing to understand, then, is that the ideatum of an idea is not necessarily *the thing that this idea is supposed to make us understand*. This is universally accepted with regard to inadequate ideas, as Spinoza says explicitly: any imaginative idea is the idea of a corporeal affection which, if it is the image of a thing external to us because it is caused by this thing, does not reproduce the ‘figure’ (or the structure) of that thing;⁸ and it is through this affection alone that the idea makes us understand the cause of this affection inadequately. This is why Gueroult insists on the fact that one must distinguish between idea and knowledge;⁹ whereas Bennett, for his part, prefers to say that the imaginative idea is ‘directly of’ the corporeal image and ‘indirectly of’ its cause, that is, the thing imagined.¹⁰ But what everyone accepts with regard to inadequate ideas is also true for adequate ideas. However, there appear to be three differences: first, the adequate idea by which we know a thing external to us is not the idea of a corporeal process *caused* by this thing; second, it is the idea, not of *an* affection, nor even of many affections, but of the *order* in which a set of affections is organised;

⁸ *Ethics* II, 17 Cor. and Schol.; CWS I, 464–5.

⁹ Gueroult 1974: 269–70.

¹⁰ Bennett 1984: 155–7.

and third, this order, as opposed to what happens in the case of an isolated image or a disordered chain of images, actually *reproduces* the 'figure' (or the structure) of the thing that the idea makes us understand – or at least some aspect of this structure, which we know adequately. Ultimately, then, to understand a thing external to us adequately is, first of all, even if we are not immediately conscious of it, to have the adequate idea of a certain order that is established between our corporeal affections and whose structure is homologous to that of the thing in question.

4. But then, one might ask: how can these logically ordered chains of corporeal affections at once be explained by our nature alone and also correctly reflect the structure of things external to us? The principle of the response is very simple. Consider a physical process that unfolds outside of us in extension: for example, the conjunction of two causes P and Q, which produces an effect R. This process, taken in itself and considered in terms of its content, is deduced from the nature of extension alone, from movement and rest, and the laws of movement and rest: surely one could not deduce from this nature alone that the process would invariably be produced, for that depends entirely on context; but it could be deduced that, if P and Q were given and if no external obstacle opposed it, R would be produced necessarily. For, on the one hand, if a cause produces an effect, it is precisely to the extent that the nature of the effect follows from that of the cause and involves it,¹¹ as the nature of the effect follows from and involves it, etc. And on the other hand, the nature of extension, of movement and rest, and the laws of movement and rest, is *also* the nature of our own body: it is entirely included in the nature of any body whatsoever. One could thus deduce from the nature of our body (as, for that matter, from any body whatsoever) that, if it produces in it an affection A that is explained in part by the nature of P, and an affection B that is explained in part by the nature of Q, they will tend, all things being equal, to engender in the body an affection C that will involve the nature of R. This tendency, of course, would be opposed by sorts of external causes, which, more often than not, would prevent it from being realised. But suppose that it were realised, and that the sequence ABC were actually to appear in our body. We saw above that the affections A and B, even though they are produced in us by P and Q, must respectively contain an aspect A' and an aspect B', which are explained by the nature of our body alone; these aspects A' and B' would be quite insignificant if our body had nothing in common with P and Q outside of the properties common to all bodies, but they would occupy a much more significant place

¹¹ *Ethics* I, Ax. 3 and 4; CWS I, 410.

in A and B if our body had *many things in common* with P and Q: the more our body has things in common with P and Q (which evidently depends on its greater or lesser complexity), the more affections produced in it by P and Q are explained by its nature alone.¹² So, since the affection C is explained entirely by the conjunction of A and B, it will necessarily include an aspect C', which is explained entirely by the conjunction of A' and B' – that is, by our nature alone – and which will occupy as important a place as that of A'B' in AB. In this way there will be, in the chain ABC, an aspect A'B'C' which, while being structurally homologous to the causal sequence PQR, is however explained in terms of its content by our nature alone, and whose adequate idea makes us understand the reasons justifying the proposition 'it is necessary that, if P and Q, then R'. To this extent, then (that is, to the extent that A'B'C' plays a significant role in ABC), the production in our body of the affection involving the nature of R by affections involving the nature of P and Q, totally reflecting the production outside of us of R by P and Q, will be explained *with regard to its content* by the nature of our body alone.

Only with regard to its content, of course: one cannot deduce from the nature of our body alone that this chain will necessarily be produced, much less that it will be produced at a specific moment; but an infinite understanding could deduce *a priori* that it will be produced as soon as no external causes present an obstacle to it any longer. This is the great difference between this kind of chain and a disordered set of affections produced in us by external causes according to chance encounters: in the latter case, not even an infinite understanding could predict anything just by considering the nature of our body alone, for such a chaotic set is explained by external causes not only with regard to the moment of its appearance, but also with regard to its content. Whereas, by contrast, in the case we are considering here, an infinite understanding *deduces from the essence of our body alone* that it is *capable* of producing in itself a chain of affections structurally homologous to the natural causal process PQR; it is only with regard to the moment that this chain is produced, if ever it were to be produced, that external causes would have to be taken into account. And it is precisely this difference that will provide the key to understanding the relations between eternal life and the body.

These relations, as we know, are primarily studied in Propositions 21 to 31, which are transitional. In this group of propositions, Spinoza proceeds in

¹² *Ethics* II, 39 Cor.; CWS I, 475.

three stages; the first two of these are independent of one another, and the third results from their conjunction.

I. The *first stage* corresponds to what we might call the discovery of our *eternity in-itself*. What is essential, here, are Propositions 22 and 23.

A. In Proposition 22, Spinoza demonstrates that there is necessarily in God an idea that expresses under the aspect of eternity the singular essence of each body – including, consequently, our own body, since this idea is evidently part of the infinite understanding. This is explained quite simply by the fact that there is in God an idea of everything there is, and that the essence of a body is *something*. Here I would like to clarify that, if I basically agree with Gueroult in accepting that the essences of bodies are included in the nature of the immediate infinite mode of extension, I disagree with him in that I do not see any difficulty in accepting at the same time that this immediate infinite mode is constituted by the movement/rest couplet.¹³ From the point of view of the production of modes, in fact, what follows immediately from the nature of God is what was deduced with Proposition 16 of Part I: God itself necessarily gives rise to all conceivable modes in all attributes. The immediate infinite mode of each attribute¹⁴ is thus God's property of necessarily having to produce everything that is conceivable under this attribute; and, internal to this immediate infinite mode, this property amounts to as many particular properties as there are conceivable modes: the essence of a finite mode, insofar as it is an ontological reality, is the property that God has of necessarily having to give rise to this mode sooner or later. Now, in extension, the property that God has of necessarily having to give rise to all conceivable modes is precisely the movement/rest couplet,¹⁵ since it is only by movement and rest that bodies can appear; and it is the movement–rest couplet *with all its laws* that must be, as the Appendix to Part I specifies, ample enough that they suffice to produce all logically possible bodies. God, insofar as it is affected by its infinite understanding, thus conceives the movement/rest couplet with all its laws – and, of course, with all the conceivable combinations to which these laws could give rise. But the essence of a body is precisely a certain relation of motion and rest characterised by certain laws that themselves can only consist in particular combinations of universal laws of nature.¹⁶ Thus, in fact, by eternally

¹³ Gueroult 1968: 321–4.

¹⁴ See *Ethics* I, 21; CWS I, 429.

¹⁵ See *Ep.* LXIV [to Schuller]; CWS I, 438–9.

¹⁶ See Def. after *Ethics* II, 13; CWS I, 460.

conceiving of the nature of movement and rest, God eternally conceives of all the essences of all bodies, because they are eternally included therein. But to conceive each of the laws that characterise the essence of a body always consists in understanding that, if this body has a given affection, all things being equal and leaving aside any external obstacles that might stop it, it will give rise to some other affection (to understand, for example, that ‘if A’ and B’, then C’). Therefore, God conceives of the essence of our body as an eternal truth and, by the mere consideration of this essence, eternally understands what the logically ordered chains of affections are that our body is by nature capable of giving rise to, and which it will give rise to, assuming that external causes do not prevent it from doing so.

B. Proposition 23 then shows us that this eternal idea by which God conceives of the essence of our body is *nothing other than* our mind; just as the actually existing body is just the essence of the actualised body, that is, the essence of the body producing its consequences over time with the support of external causes, so too the idea of the actually existing body, or our mind (or our soul, if you like: the translation of *mens* is irrelevant), is quite precisely the idea of the essence of the body producing its consequences in time with the support of other ideas of already actualised corporeal essences. The idea of the essence of the body thus belongs to the essence of the mind – which means precisely that it is inseparable from the latter.¹⁷ But as this idea is eternal, it only characterises the mind to the extent that it is subject to duration, since the mind only endures during the duration of the body; and on the other hand, if the mind totally ceased to exist after the disappearance of the body, this eternal idea would not belong to its essence. Consequently, there is *something eternal* in our mind itself.

Of course, this does not yet prove that we possess *eternal life*. For Propositions 22 and 23 (which incidentally apply to all ideas of all bodies, including those of animals and stones) only concern *the idea that we are*, and not yet *the ideas that we have*. For, just as we are totally unconscious if we do not have any idea, in the same way, if we simply *are* an eternal idea without *having* any eternal idea, our eternity would be an unconscious eternity – as is the case for the ‘soul’ of the stone or the animal. And the only ideas that we have, and that we can have, are ideas of the affections of our bodies, which can only come to us if our body is really affected. But the following will show precisely that *we have* eternal ideas.

¹⁷ See *Ethics* II, Def. 2; CWS I, 447.

II. To get there, however, a detour is unavoidable – the one that Spinoza undertakes in the *second stage* of our group of propositions, consisting of Propositions 24 to 28. This second stage, which appears as independent of the first, concerns *knowledge of the third kind*.

The latter, for the time being, is still presented as being simply the knowledge of *things* from God, or of God insofar as its consequences are things. Propositions 45 to 47 of Part II showed why we necessarily possess the point of departure of this knowledge, that is, the adequate idea of God; and Proposition 14 of Part V showed why it was possible for us to follow this out in knowledge by connecting this idea to what is adequate in the ideas of the affections of our bodies. I have a hard time seeing, actually, how it could be denied that knowledge of the third kind, so characterised, was not at work all throughout the *Ethics*, or at least starting with Proposition 11 of Part I: starting with that proposition, Spinoza indeed ‘proceeds’ from knowledge of God to that of the essence of things – to that of the essence of the human being, as it happens, even if he did not reach it in its singularity nor even its specificity; he never said that knowledge of the third kind would only begin once the process was complete. It thus seems to me that Proposition 14 simply explains to us what the conditions of possibility were for everything that had happened up until that point. But it is true that what had happened up until that point, and which is still in question in Propositions 24 to 28, *was not yet the superior form of knowledge of the third kind*. At the point at which we find ourselves, this form could effectively be applied, in principle, to anything whatsoever: humans, dogs, tables, etc., all of which would still *seem* to be on the same plane. One might thus still have the impression that, if the *Ethics* takes human beings as its privileged object, this would merely be for practical reasons. But we shall soon see that this privileged object – not, strictly speaking, the human being, but more precisely *we ourselves* – is also singled out for theoretical reasons.

What reopens this question is Proposition 26, which might seem totally inconsequential: ‘The more the Mind is capable of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, the more it desires to understand them by this kind of knowledge.’¹⁸ In fact, this proposition leads us to pose the following question: before we knew things by knowledge of the third kind, from where could the capacity for this knowledge, and (which comes to the same thing) our desire to reach it, have come to us? And Proposition 28 answers: from knowledge of the second kind, not from knowledge of the first kind. For adequate ideas can only give rise to other adequate ideas: it is by virtue of

¹⁸ *Ethics* V, 26; CWS I, 559.

knowing adequately the abstract properties of things that we desire to know things in their singular essences, and manage to understand that it is necessary to understand them through God in order to do so: the *TdIE*, taken as a whole, gives us an example of such a thought process. But then, the same problem arises with regard to knowledge of the second kind: from where could the desire to reach it have come to us? Since it also could not have come from inadequate knowledge, must one not conclude that adequate knowledge, ultimately, *has no chronological origin*? This leads us to the third stage of our group of propositions.

III. The *third stage* (Propositions 29–31) is devoted to what we might call the discovery of *our eternity for-itself*.

A. That adequate knowledge has no chronological origin is confirmed by Proposition 29, which marks the decisive turning-point. We have known, since Part II of the *Ethics*, that our mind is the idea of an actually existing body.¹⁹ Now we know that, in this idea, there are two aspects: it is at once the eternal idea of that eternal truth that is the essence of our body, and the non-eternal idea of that non-eternal truth that is the present, here-and-now existence of our body over time. And these two aspects entirely exhaust its nature: nothing else, outside of them, belongs to the essence of our mind. Now, of these two aspects of our mind, which is the one that allows it to know things adequately? It can only be the first. For everything that we know adequately, we know in the form of eternal truths (or ‘under the aspect of eternity’), and we *know* that these are eternal truths; it has even been shown *that we know this*.²⁰ But *how* can we know this? From where could we draw the very notion of eternity? Since eternity is not explained by duration, the aspect of ourselves that expresses the present existence of our body will not allow us to conceive it. Thus, this notion can only come to us from the aspect of ourselves that is the eternal idea of our essence.

Now it is this, precisely, that makes possible *the passage from eternity in-itself to eternity for-itself*. This passage, in fact, is made intelligible by the confrontation of three truths we now possess. First, we can infer from Proposition 10 that all the adequate ideas *that we have* are, first and foremost, adequate ideas of logically ordered chains of affections of our body. Second, we can infer from Propositions 22 and 23 that the eternal idea *that we are* is, among other things, the idea of all logically ordered chains of affections of which our body is naturally capable. But, third, we have now come to learn

¹⁹ *Ethics* II, 11–13; CWS I, 456–8.

²⁰ *Ethics* II, 44 Cor. 2; CWS I, 481.

that what, in us, *has* adequate ideas of logically ordered chains of affections of our bodies (which is to say what, in us, *has*, generally speaking, adequate ideas) is precisely the eternal idea *that we are*: it is we ourselves under this aspect and not under any other. We must thus conclude that the eternal idea that we are *itself* possesses a part of the idea that it eternally is: it is the idea of all the logically ordered chains of affections of which our body is naturally capable, and it *has* the idea of all those among these chains that are actually realised. But the idea of a chain of which our body is naturally capable is *nothing other* than the idea of this same actually realised chain, just as the idea of the essence of our body is nothing other than the idea of our actually existing body. From this it follows that the eternal idea that we are *eternally* has the adequate ideas of these actually realised chains: it *can* have them eternally because these chains, in terms of their content, are explained by the nature of our body alone and are thus eternally included in its essence; and it *must* have them eternally, because if it only had them during the time in the course of which these chains were realised (that is, during the time in which our mind also had the imaginative ideas of each of these affections thereby organised on their own), it would not be *the eternal idea that we are* that really had them: instead, it would be what, in the idea that we are, expresses the present existence of our body. All our adequate ideas therefore amount to a knowledge that we eternally have of the essence of our body: 'Whatever the Mind understands under a species of eternity, it understands [. . .] from the fact that it conceives (*ex eo quod . . . concipit*) the Body's essence under a species of eternity',²¹ that is, the essence of the body insofar as it is itself eternal.

B. Proposition 30 then specifies the exact nature of this knowledge that we eternally have. Eternity, as we know, is existence itself insofar as it is conceived as necessarily following from the definition of God alone;²² or, which amounts to the same thing, it is the very essence of God insofar as it involves necessary existence (that of God, but also that of its modes). To conceive the essence of a thing under the aspect of eternity, consequently, is to conceive the thing itself, insofar as it is real, from the essence of God: it is to conceive it through God and to understand that, by the mere fact that it is conceived by God, it must necessarily exist sooner or later. It is thus precisely to understand this thing through knowledge of the third kind. This, of course, is how God conceives the essence of all things, and consequently also the essence of our body and our mind. For the eternal idea that we are

²¹ *Ethics* V, 29; CWS I, 609.

²² *Ethics* V, Def. 8; CWS I, 409.

is precisely nothing other than the idea through which God conceives the essence of our body – and also, reflexively, that of our mind, since every idea is at the same time the idea of that idea. Thus, to the extent that we *are* this eternal idea, we ourselves *are*, from all eternity, the knowledge of the third kind that God forms of the essence of our body and of our mind. And to the precise extent that we *have* a part of the idea that we are, that is, to the extent that we ourselves know something of the essence of our body – and, reflexively, of our mind – under the aspect of eternity, we *know*, through knowledge of the third kind, that we are this knowledge of the third kind that God forms: we know that we are in God and that we are conceived by God.

C. This is how we obtain the answer to the question that Proposition 28 implicitly posed: as Proposition 31 shows, if we are capable of knowing *things in general* by the third kind of knowledge – and also, incidentally, by knowledge of the second kind – this is ultimately because we ourselves are, eternally, knowledge of the third kind of our own essence. And as soon as we recognise this, our knowledge of the third kind of *things* takes on a new aspect, it passes to a superior form. It remains, of course, knowledge of the third kind of things; but at the same time, and more fundamentally, it appears as a development of our knowledge of the third kind of *ourselves*. To the extent that we know the essence of anything whatsoever (or even simply one of its properties, provided that we know it adequately), we also know, and we know that we know, that it pertains to the essence of our body to be capable of organising its affections in an intelligible order that reproduces the structure of this thing; and we know what explains this: from this point forward, our adequate knowledges are themselves understood through their own proximate cause. Any new adequate knowledge, then, increases our knowledge of the third kind of our body and of our mind, which in turn clarifies its own genesis. So at the limit, it is conceivable that we would come to know our essence *in its singularity*: we would attain this if the affections of our body were successfully organised according to an order that fully conforms to this essence in terms of what is singular in it – that is, if our body succeeded in being truly *itself*, if it became entirely the master of itself by means of something like a kind of yoga.²³ And we are, of course, still quite far from that, and so was Spinoza!

²³ I emphasised this last point in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Matheron [1969] 1988: 583–60). But since I positioned myself almost straightaway at the end of the process (the '68 years, remember, fostered optimism!), some of my few readers told me that they remained a little perplexed. It was thus necessary to become a bit more

But in reality, to say that a new adequate knowledge increases our knowledge of the third kind of our body and of our mind simply means that it makes us gain a clearer awareness of what we eternally know. For this new knowledge is *the same* as the adequate knowledge of the corresponding capacity of our body (and the knowledge of this knowledge), which is eternally included in the eternal idea that we are. Simply put, insofar as the affections of our body are organised in a disorderly way, according to chance encounters, this knowledge that we eternally have will be obscured by the imagination; for our imaginative ideas are organised in the same disorder, which conceals the order of the understanding from us. Whereas, by contrast, the more the affections of our body are organised in an intelligible order, the more our imaginative ideas are also organised in this order, and the more they leave transparent the corresponding aspects of the adequate knowledge that we eternally have of the essence of our body. But if the affections of our body are organised in this way, it is because the essence of our body makes this possible by its nature. And so, we eternally possess knowledge of these kinds of organisations, and of the capacity that our body has to form each of them, even if an imagination not yet regulated by the understanding keeps this capacity concealed from us for the better part of our life. And the more numerous these organisations are, the greater is the eternal knowledge that we have of our essence. Hence Proposition 39, which is no longer mysterious: the more things our body is capable of, the greater is the eternal part of our mind.

modest, by insisting on the pathway rather than its hypothetical completion – about which I maintain, incidentally, that it would be as I described it, *if ever* we were to reach it.

Intellectual Love of God, Eternal Part of the *amor erga Deum*

What follows is a study of the relations between the *amor erga Deum* invoked by Spinoza in Proposition 15 of Part V of the *Ethics* and the ‘intellectual love of God’ that he defines in the corollary to Proposition 32.¹ It is often said that these two loves stand in relation to one another as the second kind of knowledge does to the third. Allow us to sketch out a different interpretation.

The *amor erga Deum*, Proposition 15 teaches us, is the feeling that is experienced by ‘he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly’.² This clear and distinct intellection of ourselves and our affects, according to the demonstration of that same proposition, is tied to the type of knowledge that was in question in Proposition 14: that in which ‘the Body’s affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God’.³ It is thus a matter of the knowledge of our affects, and more generally of our affections, which has as its point of departure the adequate idea of God (which ‘proceeds’ from this idea). Since all adequate knowledge is knowledge through causes, and all knowledge that proceeds from the idea of God opens a way for us to access the ‘intimate essence’ of its object,⁴ this knowledge makes us understand, starting from God, by going as far as possible in the intellection of their essences, the causes of our affections and our affects: that is, we ourselves, as Spinoza indicates, and also, as far as possible, the external causes that affect us and that we initially only imagined, whether joyously or sadly.

¹ [Originally published as ‘L’amour intellectuel de Dieu, partie éternelle de l’*amor erga Deum*’, *Études philosophiques* 2: 231–48; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² *Ethics* V, 15; CWS I, 603.

³ *Ethics* V, 14; CWS I, 603.

⁴ *TdIE*, 95; CWS I, 39.

Now, the intellectual love of God, as the corollary to Proposition 32 teaches us, is born of the third kind of knowledge, itself defined in Scholium 2 to Proposition 40 of Part II as being that which ‘proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things’.⁵ ‘Things’, he writes, without qualification. But it is clear that all the finite things that we adequately comprehend (ourselves included) were, whether directly or indirectly, whether by experience or by signs, initially imagined by us. It thus seems that the two knowledges from which these two loves follow respectively are in reality one and the same knowledge; simply put, this knowledge is considered in the first case in all its aspects, including events (we initially imagined this or that thing, or experienced this or that passion, and then we understood it), whereas in the second it is considered in itself, in its nature and its content, abstracting from all that which does not pertain to its essence. Whatever remains after this abstraction is eternal. If that is indeed the case, and if the relation between these loves is indeed the same, then the intellectual love of God is the eternal part of the *amor erga Deum*.

It would be easy to show that Spinoza says this almost verbatim in the Scholium to Proposition 20 of Part V, and that the final inference contained in the demonstration of Proposition 39 confirms it explicitly. Here we will try to establish it by examining the manner in which these two loves are *deduced* by Spinoza.

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Let us first consider the deduction of the *amor erga Deum*, which is given to us in Proposition 15:

He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects.⁶

The demonstration of this proposition proceeds in two steps.

1. Spinoza first establishes that ‘he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly rejoices’.⁷ But in order to demonstrate this, he simply refers to Proposition 53 of Part III: ‘When the Mind considers itself

⁵ *Ethics* II, 40 Schol. 2; CWS I, 477–8.

⁶ *Ethics* V, 15; CWS I, 603.

⁷ *Ethics* V, 15 Dem.; CWS I, 604.

and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of acting.⁸ But this poses two problems.

The first concerns Proposition 53 taken on its own. Spinoza, in fact, had demonstrated it simply by saying:

A man does not know himself except through affections of his Body and their ideas (by II, 19 and 23). So when it happens that the Mind can consider itself, it is thereby supposed to pass to a greater perfection, i.e. [. . .] to be affected with joy.⁹

This is obviously quite elliptical. But the reasoning, once it is rendered explicit, is rigorous. Spinoza means the following: suppose that at time t our mind thinks of its power [*puissance*] to act (that is, our power to think), whereas at a previous time $t-1$ it did not think of this at all; between these two instants, to be sure, *something has happened in it* that modified the knowledge that it had of itself; now, since there is no knowledge of the mind except via the intermediary of the ideas of the affections of its bodies,¹⁰ this event could only consist in a modification of these same ideas, and consequently also of the corresponding affections; it must have consisted, in other words, in the appearance of new affections that replaced the old ones; but, hypothetically, these new affections appearing at time t enabled it to become conscious of its power to act or to think, whereas its condition at $t-1$ did not yet permit it to do so; thus they increased the power of its body, at the same time that the corresponding imaginative ideas increased its power to think: they were sufficiently increased in such a way that what had previously remained unnoticed became perceptible; thus, in fact, it rejoices. Proposition 53 of Part III thus makes perfect sense.

But a second problem then arises: *why exactly* does Spinoza appeal to III, 53 in order to demonstrate V, 15? For ultimately, the relationship between these two propositions is not *immediate*: it is not explicitly a question of the power to act in the noun phrase of V, 15, whereas this notion is indispensable to the demonstration of III, 53. But the intermediaries that are lacking here are indicated by Spinoza elsewhere: they appeared at the beginning of the demonstration of Proposition 58 of Part III, which established that in addition to passive joys and desires there are also active joys and desires. In the first part of this demonstration, in fact, Proposition 53 of Part III is

⁸ *Ethics* III, 53; CWS I, 524.

⁹ *Ethics* III, 53 Dem.; CWS I, 524.

¹⁰ See *Ethics* II, 19 and 23; CWS I, 466–8.

recalled as a major premise. There follows, as a minor premise, an invocation of Proposition 43 of Part II ('He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea'¹¹), in order to infer that 'the Mind necessarily considers itself when it conceives a true, or adequate, idea':¹² a tautological inference, since the mind, by knowing that *it has* an adequate idea, knows, by that very fact, something about itself and thus has self-knowledge.¹³ And finally, in a single sentence, its conclusion is announced and its minor premise is completed by introducing a reference to the mind's power to act: 'Therefore, it also rejoices insofar as it conceives adequate ideas, i.e. (by P1), insofar as it acts.'¹⁴ Now what goes for adequate knowledge in general also goes for clear and distinct knowledge of our affects starting from God; we might only specify, in order better to focus on the specificity of this particular case, that, according to the terms of Proposition 3 of Part V, 'an affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it'.¹⁵ And so we see how Spinoza was able to justify the direct passage that he here undertakes from III, 53 to V, 15: as is self-evident, he might say, one who understands themselves and who understands their affects clearly and distinctly has adequate knowledge; moreover, by this fact alone, they transform these affects themselves into adequate ideas; thus, given III, 1, they are active; and, given II, 43, they know it; thus their mind contemplates itself and contemplates its power to act; thus, given III, 53, they rejoice.

But why this omission of the intermediaries and this exclusive insistence on III, 53? The omission of II, 43 – with, correlatively, that of III, 1 – seems to stem from the fact that Spinoza did not want to dwell too much *here* on the fact that adequate knowledge, as such, renders us *active* in the very precise sense of Definition 2 of Part III: in the sense that *our mind is its sole cause*. And the exclusive insistence on III, 53 seems to be explained by the desire to underline that, when we rejoice by understanding our affects, our joy draws its origin, not just from that knowledge as such, but from the overall process that makes it emerge in our mind: a process of which it is not certain that we are the sole cause, and which contains, precisely as the demonstration to III, 53 recalls, a modification of our imaginative field, which itself is

¹¹ *Ethics* II, 43; CWS I, 479.

¹² *Ethics* III, 58 Dem.; CWS I, 529.

¹³ In fact, the stakes of this tautology are enormous. They have been masterfully explored by Lia Levy in *L'automate spirituel* (Levy 2000).

¹⁴ *Ethics* III, 58 Dem.; CWS I, 529.

¹⁵ *Ethics* V, 3; CWS I, 598.

accompanied by a change of our body's state. This is what the analysis of the second step of the demonstration of V, 15 will confirm.

2. In this second step, in fact, Spinoza simply reminds us that the knowledge here in question is, hypothetically, that same knowledge whose possibility was deduced in Proposition 14 ('The Mind can bring it about that all the Body's affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God'¹⁶), and that it is thus a matter, for the mind, of a knowledge of itself and its own affects *starting from God*. He also reminds us that, according to the Sixth Definition of the Affects given at the end of Part III, love is a joy accompanied by the idea of its cause. The deduction can thereby be carried out: one who understands themselves and understands their affects rejoices, and now, 'this Joy is accompanied by the idea of God (by V, 14). Hence (by Def. Aff. VI), he loves God.'¹⁷ In itself, this is obvious. And yet, here as well, a problem arises.

For the joy that was deduced in the first step, given that its deduction was based solely on Proposition 53 of Part III, can only be a species of the genus of joy whose nature that same proposition, III, 53, indicated: a joy born of the contemplation of ourselves and of our power to act. But immediately thereafter, the scholium to III, 55 called this joy '*Self-love or Satisfaction in oneself*' (*Philautia, vel Acquiescentia in se ipso*).¹⁸ Thus, by sticking strictly to the result of this first step, Spinoza had to say that, when we rejoice from understanding ourselves and understanding our affects, *we love ourselves*. Of course, this does not really compromise what the second step had just established: since all adequate knowledge is knowledge through causes, it is obvious that to know our affects starting from God is to know *their causes* starting from God; and since we are ourselves one of the causes of our affects, it is obvious that the knowledge that we have of ourselves by understanding them is a knowledge *starting from God*; thus, when we rejoice from understanding them, our joy is surely itself accompanied by the idea of God as the cause of ourselves: the idea of ourselves refers us to that of God, and we love God in loving ourselves. But the fact is that Spinoza, *here*, wanted to *avoid passing through our self-love*.

We thus see, overall, that the demonstration for Proposition 15 of Part

¹⁶ *Ethics* V, 14; CWS I, 603.

¹⁷ *Ethics* V, 15 Dem.; CWS I, 604.

¹⁸ *Ethics* III, 55 Schol.; CWS I, 525; G II, 182. Translation modified. [Curley's 'self-esteem' for *Acquiescentia in se ipso* is misleadingly anachronistic. *Acquiescentia* has the sense of 'being at rest', 'being at peace' or 'subsiding', indicating an absence of conflict. On the relation between *acquiescentia in se ipso* and *gloria*, see also our note 15 to Chapter 10, below.]

V, while being perfectly correct at bottom, produced *two short-circuits*: a short-circuit, on the one hand, from II, 43, and passing directly from III, 53 to the conclusion of the first step; and on the other hand, a short-circuit from the definition of the affect which had been deduced with III, 53 (namely, of self-love or satisfaction in oneself), and passing directly from the joy deduced in the first step to the love of God. And the central role played by III, 53 clearly shows that taking the duration of the body into consideration is not excluded from the analysis of causes of the *amor erga Deum*. For the two are bound together: this all comes from the fact that the *amor erga Deum* is here considered *overall*, in the totality of its aspects, without any one among them in particular being isolated. Considered overall, in fact, the *amor erga Deum* actually consists in a set of *events*: initially we had passive affects, due in part to our nature and in part to external causes; these external causes were not, however, harmful enough to counteract entirely our effort to understand them, and perhaps even encouraged these efforts; we thus partially understood these affects by attaching them as much as we could to their two kinds of causes, with these starting from God; these affects were thus partially transformed into adequate ideas, in this way increasing our mind's power to think; the corresponding corporeal affects themselves turned out to be integrated¹⁹ within a network of logically ordered affects that rendered them less passive and increased our body's power to act; thus we experienced an affect of *active joy*; and as we understood that God was the sole immanent cause of all the causes that engendered or made possible this active joy, we loved God. But *as far as we are concerned*, we ourselves are only one *very partial* cause of the *event* that consisted in our rejoicing, here and now, in having understood, here and now, the nature of these affects rather than that of other affects: there are external causes that created, at a certain moment, a context favourable for our desire to understand, and it is these that gave us the occasion to understand this rather than that. From this point of view, consequently, it is not *specifically* the love of ourselves that led us to the love of God; we have been equally led there by the consideration of any of these multiple external causes – that is, of these multiple things that we initially imagined, and only then understood starting from God.

And yet, there is indeed, in this event, something of which we are *entirely the cause*. That something is the *very nature* of the intellectual knowledge of our affects that we have acquired; not the fact of the acquisition, here and now, of this knowledge, but the form and the content (the formal and objective reality) of the *act of intellection* that characterises it in itself; for this

¹⁹ See *Ethics* V, 10; CWS I, 601.

form and this content, to the extent that it is a matter of adequate ideas, is explained by the nature of our mind alone. And by the same token, the nature of our body is entirely the cause of the *intelligible order* in which its affections are organised in parallel: not of these affections themselves, but of our effort to order them logically and of the content of this logical order. This is the small kernel of autonomy that Spinoza will isolate in order to deduce the intellectual love of God.

This deduction of the intellectual love of God also takes place in two steps: first a deduction of the joy, then a deduction of the love. However, this time around, they are separated by considerations related to the eternity of our mind.

I. *The first step is constituted by Proposition 27.* The two preceding propositions having already mentioned knowledge of the third kind, it reads as follows: 'The greatest satisfaction of Mind [*mentis acquiescentia*] there can be arises from this third kind of knowledge.'²⁰ Its demonstration contains five steps:

A. Spinoza reminds us of the statement of V, 25 ('The greatest striving of the Mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge'²¹) while simply suppressing any mention of 'greatest striving'. He also refers (for the sake of greater transparency?) to Proposition 28 of Part IV, and 24 of Part V, which themselves served to demonstrate V, 25.

B. He deduces, without referring to any particular proposition, that 'he who knows things by this kind of knowledge', at the moment at which they gain access to it from that of the second kind, 'passes to the greatest human perfection'.²² This is an obvious fact for him, considering the identities that he has established by definition between virtue and power,²³ causal power and activity,²⁴ and reality and perfection.²⁵ But the manner in which this obvious fact is formulated here is very important for what follows. On the one hand, there is a passage: the mind 'passes' (*transit*) to a superior perfection; this will immediately thereafter enable joy to take place. But, on the other hand, the superior perfection to which the mind passes is 'the greatest'

²⁰ *Ethics* V, 27; CWS I, 609.

²¹ *Ethics* V, 25; CWS I, 608.

²² *Ethics* V, 27 Dem.; CWS I, 609.

²³ *Ethics* IV, Def. 8; CWS I, 547.

²⁴ *Ethics* III, Def. 2; CWS I, 493.

²⁵ *Ethics* II, Def. 6; CWS I, 447.

(*summam*): it is the maximum perfection that it is possible to attain; this will later make it possible to say that this ultimate passage – this passage to a degree of perfection beyond which there is no passage at all – is in *reality* the development of a perfection that immutably had always been there, and even been there from all eternity.

C. Spinoza deduces, based on the Second Definition of the Affects given at the end of Part III (the definition of joy as a passage from a lesser to a greater perfection) that one who knows things by this kind of knowledge ‘is affected with the greatest Joy’ (*summa Laetitia*) – with a joy, that is, that is still a joy in the strict sense, since there was a passage, but whose eventual prolongation will no longer be able to consist in an increase in perfection (no increase being possible any longer at this level), and which will consequently need to be analysed in other terms.

D. Spinoza, contrary to what he had done in the demonstration for V, 15, now explicitly utilises Proposition 43 of Part II (‘He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea’²⁶) in order to establish that one who experiences this supreme joy is affected ‘accompanied by the idea of himself and his virtue’.²⁷ Since, in fact, the mind that rejoices from having the most perfect possible true ideas knows that it has them and that they are true, it knows, by the same token, in a manner that recalls the first sentence of the demonstration of II, 43, that it is *active* in the strict sense of the Second Definition from Part III, namely that it is the sole cause of the form and the content of these ideas that it rejoices in (of their formal reality as well as their objective reality). Thus, actually, it rejoices by contemplating itself and by contemplating its own power to act – or, which amounts to the same thing, given the Eighth Definition from Part IV, its own virtue.

E. Finally, Spinoza – contrary, yet again, to what he had done in the demonstration for V, 15 – explicitly utilises the definition of the affect that he had deduced from III, 53, whereas that proposition itself doesn’t play a role here at any point. He recalls, in fact, the Twenty-Fifth Definition of the Affects given at the end of Part III: that of the ‘Satisfaction in oneself’ (*Acquiescentia in se ipso*) as ‘a Joy born of the fact that a man considers himself and his own power of acting’,²⁸ which already appeared in the scholium to Proposition 55 of Part III, where this affect was also called ‘self-love’ (*Philautia*).²⁹ From which it follows, given points C and D, *which this time have*

²⁶ *Ethics* II, 43; CWS I, 479.

²⁷ *Ethics* V, 27 Dem.; CWS I, 609.

²⁸ *Ethics* III, DA 25; CWS I, 536.

²⁹ *Ethics* III, 55 Schol.; CWS I, 525.

been demonstrated independently of one another, that 'the greatest satisfaction that there can be arises from this kind of knowledge'.³⁰ And he stays at that point, without passing to the love of God, as he had directly done in the demonstration of V, 15.

Overall, then, we see that Spinoza here invokes explicitly what he had short-circuited in the demonstration of V, 15 (II, 43 and the definition of satisfaction in oneself), that he leaves out what had played a central role there and whose function is now fulfilled by the new notion of a 'passage to the greatest perfection' (the recourse to III, 53), and that these two conclusions, without being incompatible, are quite different. And yet, the constitutive elements of these two demonstrations, if we abstract from their respective logical articulations, are exactly the same. These elements, whether they are implicit or explicit, are effectively the following: A. the knowledge in question in our two propositions is adequate; B. its point of departure is the idea of God; C. it allows us to contemplate ourselves and to contemplate our power to act; D. it presupposes, with regard to its acquisition, a passage to a greater perfection; E. we rejoice in it; F. it engenders in us a satisfaction in ourselves; G. it engenders in us a love of God. But the arrangement of these elements is different in each case. In V, 15, they are articulated as follows: we accept as self-evident and without it even needing to be formulated, by implicit recourse to II, 43, that A leads to C; whereby, by explicit recourse to III, 53, from whose demonstration it seems to follow that C leads to D and that D leads to E, we deduce E from A; finally, from B and E, we deduce G, F being left by the wayside. The demonstration for V, 27, by contrast, is articulated in the following manner: from A and B, whose conjunction ultimately defines knowledge of the third kind, we directly deduce D, thereby dispensing with III, 53; from D, we deduce E; in parallel, by explicit recourse to II, 43, we deduce C from A; finally, from the conjunction of E and C, we deduce F, G being left by the wayside.

Now it is easy to understand the reason for the difference between two demonstrations that ultimately bear on the same thing. If Spinoza explicitly invokes II, 43 in order to establish that knowledge of the third kind makes us contemplate only our power to act, if he dispenses with III, 53 by simply recalling that we rejoice in this knowledge because it makes us pass to the greatest perfection, if he concludes simply with satisfaction in oneself without reservation, it is because this knowledge of the third kind is now *considered in itself*, in abstraction from its eventual context. Since we are actually bound to this context, we are made to contemplate not just our own power

³⁰ *Ethics* V, 27 Dem.; CWS I, 609.

to act (that of God insofar as it is expressed through us), but also that of God insofar as it is exercised through external causes that procure for us a favourable imaginative field; the perfection to which this makes us pass is far from being 'the highest', for external causes still more favourable could always be conceived; and for these two reasons, our satisfaction in ourselves only plays a part in the active joy that we experience, whereas the consideration of any of its permissive causes always leads us back to God. Considered in itself, by contrast, reduced to what constitutes its essence, that is, to its own formal and objective reality, knowledge of the third kind indeed makes us enjoy an unsurpassable perfection (for there is no more perfect kind of knowledge) with the consciousness of being ourselves its sole cause (for we are so, and we know it), and the *summa Laetitia* that it procures for us is thus indeed, in a certain way, reducible from start to finish to the highest form of *acquiescentia in se ipso*. This is precisely why, at the point at which we find ourselves, *God seems to have disappeared*: since we are entirely the cause of the form and content of our adequate ideas, we are *also*, from this point of view, entirely the cause of the form and content of *our own idea of God*, and so it is again our power to act alone that we contemplate within it.

Spinoza has arranged things in this way, in this demonstration which nevertheless has the same logical components as that of Proposition 15, in order to isolate the small kernel of *absolute autonomy* that constitutes within itself the constitutive joy of the *amor erga Deum*. Of course, this is just to make the love of God resurface in a purer form. But, in order to do this, he needed to insert, between this first step of the deduction and the second, three very important propositions concerning our eternity.

II. With regard to this crucial interlude, which far exceeds our subject here, let us simply recall its wording. Before our first step, Spinoza had already established, in Propositions 22 and 23, that our mind, to the extent that it is the idea that God has of our bodies, *has something eternal* – and that something consists in the idea that, in God, objectively expresses the essence of our body under the aspect of eternity. And between this step and the next, he demonstrates the following three points:

A. In Proposition 29, he established that 'Whatever the Mind understands under a species of eternity' (which applies *to the form and to the content of all our adequate ideas*), 'it understands not from the fact that it conceives the Body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body's essence under a species of eternity.'³¹

³¹ *Ethics* V, 29; CWS I, 609.

B. In Proposition 30, he established that ‘Insofar as our Mind knows itself and the body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God.’³²

C. In Proposition 31, he concluded that ‘The third kind of knowledge depends on the Mind, as on a formal cause’ (and the demonstration specifies that ‘formal cause’ here means ‘adequate cause’, that is, a *complete and unique cause*), ‘insofar as the Mind itself is eternal.’³³

III. Now we can approach the *second step of the deduction of the intellectual love of God*. It itself includes three sub-steps: Spinoza, with the aid of Proposition 27 and the three preceding propositions, first of all demonstrates the existence of this love (Proposition 32), next deducing its nature (corollary to Proposition 32), and finally demonstrating its eternity (Proposition 33).

A. Proposition 32 reads as follows: ‘Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause.’³⁴ It is demonstrated in two steps:

1. Spinoza recalls the wording of Proposition 27. And he specifies, by inserting the Twenty-Fifth Definition of the Affects to replace what had earlier served to define it, that the satisfaction in oneself born of the third kind of knowledge is a joy that accompanies, in the one who experiences it, the idea of oneself.

2. Given this satisfaction in oneself, Proposition 30 enables him then to make the idea of God reappear simply by adding: ‘and consequently (by V, 30) it [this joy] is also accompanied by the idea of God, as its cause’. This, while somewhat elliptical, is perfectly justified. For the idea of ourselves that accompanies in us the joy born from the knowledge of the third kind (the idea of ourselves as the cause of this knowledge, and consequently of this joy) is evidently an adequate idea. Through it, thus, we conceive of ourselves under the aspect of eternity. From this it indeed follows, given V, 30, that it implies a knowledge of ourselves as being in God and being conceived through God, and so also caused by God. It thus indeed returns us, from within, to the idea of God as cause of ourselves and of the joy of which we are the cause. It remains to be determined what exactly follows with regard to this latter; the following corollary responds to this.

B. The corollary of Proposition 32, in fact, teaches us that ‘From the third

³² *Ethics* V, 30; CWS I, 610.

³³ *Ethics* V, 31; CWS I, 610.

³⁴ *Ethics* V, 32; CWS I, 611.

kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God.³⁵ It is demonstrated in four steps:

1. Spinoza invokes the Sixth Definition of the Affects in order to deduce from the preceding proposition that the joy it mentions is, ultimately, a love directed towards God. We already knew this. But the important thing is to understand that this is not a matter of a return pure and simple to what Proposition 15 already told us. We certainly rediscover the *amor erga Deum*, but in only one of its aspects: that which subsists when one abstracts from all its eventual aspects. For the idea of God that accompanies our joy is now no longer, as it was in V, 15, that which we are given to conceive as being the overall cause of all the causes that contributed to our mind's having adequate knowledge, here and now, of what we had started out merely imagining. It is, on the contrary, the idea of God conceived as being the cause of, among all these causes, only what Proposition 27 isolated: it is the idea of God *insofar as it is the cause of ourselves insofar as we are the cause of the form and content of our adequate knowledge*. Or, which amounts to the same thing, since all adequate knowledge makes us conceive its object as an eternal truth, it is the idea of God *insofar as it is the cause of ourselves insofar as we are the cause of what we understand of things under the aspect of eternity*. From this point, Spinoza will be able to determine by elimination what is not, and so thereby what is, love of God conceived in this way.

2. First of all, what is this love not? Spinoza, here, appeals to Proposition 29. Its demonstration in fact established that, since the mind is the idea of the actually existing body, its nature must be analysed according to two essential constituent parts and two alone: itself insofar as it conceives 'the actually present existence of the body', and itself insofar as it conceives 'the essence of the body under the aspect of eternity'. And the negative part of the statement of V, 29 concluded that, if we understand things under the aspect of eternity, *this is not* a consequence of the first of these two constituent parts. The love of God in question here is therefore not oriented towards God insofar as it is the cause of our mind considered as what perceives the presence of our body in duration. It is therefore not oriented, Spinoza says, towards God 'insofar as we imagine him as present',³⁶ which, since God is not imagined, evidently means: insofar as we conceive it as being present, as an immanent cause, in the things that we imagine – in the things that we initially imagine, and then that we understand, which all the while we continue to imagine because they continue to affect us, and

³⁵ *Ethics* V, 32 Cor.; CWS I, 611.

³⁶ *Ethics* V, 32 Cor.; CWS I, 611.

which, by affecting our body in this way, precisely make us become aware of its actual present existence.

3. In order to determine what this love of God is, the only thing left for us to do is to appeal to the positive part of the statement of V, 29. According to the latter, as we have seen, we ourselves insofar as we are the cause of what we understand of things under the aspect of eternity, are we ourselves insofar as we conceive the essence of our bodies under that same aspect. The love in question here is thus directed towards God insofar as it is the cause of this constituent part of our mind. But Propositions 22 and 23 showed that this constituent part – the act of conceiving the essence of the body under the aspect of eternity – is precisely that through which our mind is eternal. The love in question thus has for its object *God insofar as it is the cause of we ourselves insofar as we are eternal*. And since the adequate cause of an eternal thing is eternal, Spinoza can thus conclude: the love that is born from knowledge of the third kind is the ‘Love of God [. . .] insofar as we understand God to be eternal’.³⁷

4. All that is left, under these conditions, is to give a name to the form of love deduced in this way. And Spinoza then tells us: ‘this is what I call’, by definition, ‘intellectual love of God’.³⁸

C. Finally, in Proposition 33, Spinoza deduces that ‘The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal.’³⁹ The demonstration that he gives consists in applying twice in a row what we already know from the first half of Axiom 3 of Part I: ‘From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily.’⁴⁰ From this it follows, in fact, that, for any x and any y , if x is the sole and complete cause of y and if x exists eternally (and so is given eternally), y follows eternally and is thus itself also eternal. Whence the following two consequences:

1. Since, given Proposition 31, knowledge of the third kind considered in itself, abstracting from its eventual aspects, has for its ‘formal cause’ – that is, as the demonstration for V, 31 indicates, for its adequate or complete cause – our mind insofar as it is eternal, it too is eternal.

2. Since knowledge of the third kind considered in itself is eternal, and since Proposition 32 showed that it necessarily engenders the intellectual love of God, this love is itself eternal.

The intellectual love of God, which is what remains of the *amor erga*

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Ethics* V, 33; CWS I, 611.

⁴⁰ *Ethics* I, Ax. 3; CWS I, 410.

Deum when we abstract from its eventual aspects, is thus indeed its *eternal part*, just as the understanding is the eternal part of the mind. Such is the conclusion of a demonstration which, in itself, is impeccable and irrefutable if one accepts everything so far. But this conclusion poses an enormous problem, in addition to all those that the eternity of the understanding already posed. For it is so *paradoxical that it might lead us to call into question the premises on which it is based*.

The problem is well known, even if it is hardly recognised that Spinoza was aware of it and sought to resolve it. Love, according to the Sixth Definition of the Affects, is a joy accompanied by the idea of its cause; and joy, according to the Second Definition of the Affects, is the passage from a lesser to a greater perfection. It is surely these definitions on which all the preceding is based; the demonstration for V, 32 appealed to V, 28, whose demonstration itself made recourse to the notion of passage and invoked the Second Definition of the Affects; and the corollary to V, 32 in turn invoked the Sixth Definition. The intellectual love of God is thus apparently a joy in this precise sense, and consequently is a passage. But *how can a passage be eternal?* How can one *eternally pass* from a lesser perfection to a superior perfection? This seems absurd, and in fact it is. Under these conditions, one might think, wouldn't Spinoza have to say that the joy that accompanies the third kind of knowledge follows from this knowledge only insofar as it is eventual, and not at all insofar as it is eternal? For ultimately, the passage from the ostensible absence of the third kind of knowledge to the conscious presence of this knowledge in our mind (a passage on which rests the entire demonstration for V, 27, and consequently everything else) is *not* this knowledge taken in itself, considered only in its form and only in its content. Is it not therefore a paralogism, in the demonstration of Proposition 33, to apply to knowledge of the third kind considered in itself, insofar as V, 31 and I Axiom 3 really authorise us to attribute eternity to it, what Propositions 27 and 32 only really permit us to apply to its conjunctural emergence in the duration of our mind? Would not one then have to conclude that the *amor erga Deum* is reduced in reality to its eventual aspect alone, that it would consequently disappear with the body, and that eternal life, independently of the duration of the body and the mind, is under these conditions *absolutely nothing to rejoice in?* Such is the apparently very strong objection that one might address to Spinoza here.

But, it turns out, *Spinoza himself responds to this objection in the scholium to Proposition 33*. The response that he gives in this scholium can be logically broken down into five steps.

1. Spinoza immediately deduces from the 'preceding proposition', that is, Proposition 33, that 'this love towards God' (*hic erga Deum amor*: a form of the *amor erga Deum*, this love under its eternal aspect insofar as it is intellectual love) 'has had no beginning'.⁴¹ This is, in fact, actually an immediate consequence of the definition of eternity, even if this is not its definition strictly speaking.

2. Spinoza then tells us, in a very surprising manner, that, in the corollary to Proposition 32 (that 'of the preceding proposition', he says; but, since V, 33 has no corollary, he must mean V, 32), he had 'produced a fiction' (*finximus*) by *acting as if* the intellectual love of God 'had come to be' in our mind.⁴² This is, it seems, an astounding declaration, and one that forces us to call into question everything that has come before: what could be the value, it might be asked, of a demonstration that is based on a fiction? But Spinoza, in reality, has given us in advance a methodological justification of this approach in the *scholium* to Proposition 31.

In that *scholium*, in fact, he told us:

here it should be noted that although we are already certain that the Mind is eternal, insofar as it conceives things under a species of eternity, nevertheless, for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show, we shall consider it as if it were now beginning to be, and were now beginning to understand things under a species of eternity, as we have done up to this point.

And he added: 'We may do this without danger of error, provided we are careful to draw our conclusions only from evident premises.'⁴³ Now this very precisely clarifies the approach that he had taken, starting with V, 27, in the demonstration and corollary to Proposition 32.

Let us be more precise. It was a matter of Spinoza demonstrating a truth of the type: 'it is necessary that if *p*, then *q*', where '*p*' means: 'Our mind understands things by knowledge of the third kind', and where '*q*' means: 'Our mind experiences an intellectual love towards God.' He demonstrated this truth by making recourse to a *fiction* that consisted in acting as if '*p*' described a temporal process, an event that began and continued in time; this evidently led to acting as if the same were true for '*q*'. This fiction rendered the demonstration 'easier', it 'made better known' the relation between

⁴¹ *Ethics* V, 33 Schol.; CWS I, 611.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ethics* V, 31 Schol.; CWS I, 610–11.

knowledge of the third kind and the intellectual love of God, to the extent that it made it possible to make use of the theory of affects as it was laid out in Part III with regard to joy and love: from the antecedent 'p', which thereby became 'the mind *attains* knowledge of the third kind', one immediately deduced, thanks to that notion of passage, the consequent 'q', in the form: 'the intellectual love of God *comes to be* in the mind'. This in no way prevents the proposition 'if p then q' from being true, for the demonstration indeed established the *necessity* of the causal link between the supposed fact that p and the possible fact that q. But if this fiction facilitated the demonstration, it was on condition of 'taking a precaution'; and the latter consisted in *not affirming as true the antecedent as having a chronological meaning*, and so also in not affirming the consequent *in this sense*; it consisted, in other words, in affirming, with regard to the fact that p, only what we understood of it in a 'perfectly clear' manner (by replacing in 'p' the word 'attains' with the word 'possesses', since the actual possession of knowledge of the third kind by the mind is the only thing that would have been *proved* since II, 47); by means of which we deduce that, with regard to the fact that q (by replacing in 'q' the words 'comes to be' with the word 'is', given that the results of two necessarily linked processes are themselves necessarily linked, and that the causal relation expressed in 'if p then q' is thus conserved when we abstract from the respective chronological constituent parts of 'p' and 'q'), we can draw our conclusion 'without danger of error'. And if we know moreover that knowledge of the third kind is eternal, as was the case since the first half of the demonstration for V, 33, we can then, with no more danger of error, conclude that the eternity of the intellectual love of God follows necessarily. It is in this manner that the mathematician invoked in Paragraph 72 of the *TdIE* 'forms the fiction' of a semi-circle that turns around its diameter, by deducing the true proposition 'if a semicircle is rotated around its diameter, it will produce a sphere', and, without including what had been fictional in the antecedent and the consequent when each are considered in isolation, retaining only their necessary link, conceives thereby without any risk of error the 'intimate essence' of the sphere and deduces all its properties.⁴⁴

In our case, however, nothing is yet resolved. For, in order for the precaution indicated by Spinoza to be truly efficacious, one must *completely* abstract, *in the consequent* as well as in the antecedent, *from everything* that has *any* relation with duration. But, in the consequent such as it had been deduced in the corollary to V, 32, it is not just the *coming to be* of the love that consists in a passage in the course of time; it is, it seems, *this love itself*,

⁴⁴ *TdIE*, 72; CWS I, 32.

at least if we stick to the definition of love furnished by the theory of the affects. What then could remain of such a love when it is deprived of this aspect of 'passage', which is included in its definition and thus pertains to its essence? And yet, despite appearances, *something indeed remains*: Spinoza indicates what this logically consists of in three steps in the scholium to V, 33.

3. Spinoza tells us in fact that this love towards God, even though it has not in reality had any beginning, 'has all the perfections of Love, just as if it had come to be'.⁴⁵ What exactly does he mean by that?

In order to understand this, let us first of all take a look at in what consists the perfections of a love *which has a beginning*, that is to say, love as an affect. We know that, generally speaking, an idea is more perfect insofar as its ideatum is more perfect, that is, insofar as it objectively expresses more perfection. We also know that the perfection of a thing, generally speaking, is its power to act. And finally we know that joy, on the side of the body just as on the side of the mind, is an increase of its power to act. So from this it is clear that the perfections that joy *has*, insofar as it is a mental affect, consist in what, in the idea that it *is*, it objectively expresses insofar as it is a corporeal affect, the latter consisting in what the body acquires when it passes to a superior power to act. Now these perfections acquired by the body throughout this passage are clearly all the degrees of power to act through which it successively passes, from the initial degree to the final degree. But *all these degrees are themselves contained in the final degree*, since, hypothetically, its power to act from beginning to end is only increased without losing anything; otherwise, we would not simply have a joy, but an alternation of joys and sadnesses. Ultimately, then, the perfection that joy *has* as a corporeal affect is the degree of power to act that the body acquired during the period of the process that this joy *is*. And the perfection that joy as a mental affect *has* is that which, in the idea that it *is*, objectively expresses this final degree of power to act acquired by the body.

Can one say, under these conditions, that the joy immediately disappears when the body's power to act ceases to be increased? No, of course not; for this final degree of the body's power to act, if it is stabilised, is indeed *something real*, which the mind must thus *continue* to objectively express for as long as the body is maintained. Everything real in the joy must thus subsist during the duration of this stable state, until the next diminution of the power to act. This moreover is what Spinoza himself seems to want to indicate in the *general definition of the affects* that he provides, no doubt

⁴⁵ *Ethics* V, 33 Schol.; CWS I, 611.

in order to specify what had been somewhat elliptical in his definitions of joy and sadness, at the very end of Part III. Indeed, when he tells us that a passive affect is ‘a confused idea, by which the Mind affirms of its Body [. . .] a greater or lesser force of existing than before’ – and when he specifies that this does not mean ‘that the Mind compares its Body’s present constitution with a past constitution, but that the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really (*revera*) involves more or less of reality than before’ – he clearly means that every affect implies a passage, but he insists on the fact that *all the reality of an affect is contained and as it were integrated in its final state*.⁴⁶ And ‘more or less of reality than before’ surely does not mean ‘more or less of reality than in the immediately preceding moment’, for such a moment does not exist (between two moments, there are always an infinity of others); it must mean: more or less reality than at the beginning of the process of increase or decrease of the power to act that terminated in the present state, whatever the duration of this present state.

It must thus be accepted that every joy, without exception, really contains two aspects: there is the ‘passage’ and there is the ‘result of the passage’, and the second can subsist independently of the first to the extent that it continues to express something real. But now we see the conclusion that must be drawn from this: if our mind, instead of having *attained* a certain state at the end of an increase of its body’s power to act, had always been in that state, it would have possessed all the perfections that it possesses when it is subject to the corresponding affect of joy, because it would objectively express the same corporeal power to act as it expresses at the end of the process that this affect is; it would thus have been in a state which is surely not joy in the strict sense, but which, far from being affectively neutral, would be on the contrary quite agreeable, since it would have *all the perfections of the joy* (everything positive in the joy as an affect, all that it expresses of reality of power), *exactly as if it had come to be*. And if this state were accompanied in us with the idea of its cause, one could, in the preceding lines, replace ‘joy’ with ‘love’. This is what Spinoza tells us here about the intellectual love of God: its perfections are the very ones that we would acquire if it had been a love – an affect truly having come to be in our mind. And this is what he will clarify in the fourth step of the scholium.

4. Spinoza continues: ‘There is no difference here’ (from what was said in the corollary to V, 32) ‘except that the Mind has had eternally the same perfections which, in our fiction, now come to it, and that it is accompanied

⁴⁶ *Ethics* III, GDA; CWS I, 542–3; G II, 203–4.

by the idea of God as an eternal cause.⁴⁷ And in fact, this is the only difference, and there is no longer any problem. We now know that the *amor erga Deum*, that is, the joy of understanding something through knowledge of the third kind, includes, like all joy, an aspect of 'passage' and an aspect of the 'result of the passage'. We know that its 'resulting' aspect consists, on the side of the mind, in what this knowledge of the third kind objectively expresses: the ultimate degree of the power to act acquired by the body throughout the process during which it was itself manifested in its eventual aspects. We also know that this final degree of power consists⁴⁸ in a logically ordered sequence of affections (or 'images of things'), and that the intelligible order in which the latter are arranged is explained by the essence of the body alone. And finally we know that, on the side of the mind, the objective expression of this intelligible order is in reality already given from all eternity, since it is included in what the mind, insofar as it is itself eternal, conceives eternally of the essence of the body. We thus know, now, that the intellectual love of God is that which, in the *amor erga Deum*, objectively expresses the degree of reality or perfection involved in what we eternally know of our essence: it is nothing other than *what would be* the final stage of the *amor erga Deum* if that love were reduced to its eventual aspect ('A prolonged gazing on the calm of gods!⁴⁹'), but with this 'sole difference': that it was already eternally there, and that the *amor erga Deum* considered in its eventual aspect was only its progressive unveiling in duration.

5. The only thing left, to make everything clear, is to *find a name*. For if the intellectual love of God is nothing other than the eternal aspect of this joy that is the *amor erga Deum*, it is no longer possible to say that it itself consists in an affect of active joy. Thus it is necessary to find a new name for this state that characterises it, and which stands in the same relation to active joy as it itself does to the *amor erga Deum*. Spinoza, borrowing a traditional term, calls this state *beatitudo* or *blessedness*, and gives it a definition that, I hope, will now be perfectly clear: 'If Joy, then, consists in the passage to a greater perfection, blessedness must surely consist in the fact that the Mind is endowed with perfection itself.'⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, then, one must now define the intellectual love of God as *beatitudo* (eternal possession of the

⁴⁷ *Ethics* V, 33 Schol.; CWS I, 611.

⁴⁸ See *Ethics* V, 10; CWS I, 601.

⁴⁹ [A reference to Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin*: 'O récompense après une pensée / Qu'un long regard sur le calme des dieux!'] (Valéry 1971: 212–13).]

⁵⁰ *Ethics* V, 33 Schol.; CWS I, 611.

perfection involved in knowledge of the third kind) *accompanied by the idea of God as its eternal cause.*

Under these conditions, this scholium sheds new light on everything we thought we knew about the theory of the affects – without, of course, calling it into question. For if all joys and all loves, including passionable ones, include both an aspect of ‘passage’ and a ‘resulting’ aspect, if the ‘resulting’ aspect always consists in the current possession by the mind of the perfection acquired in the course of this ‘passage’, and if beatitude is defined as Spinoza has just defined it, one must conclude that *every joy and every love, including passionable ones, implies a participation in beatitude.* If we are barely aware of this, it is because the violence of the passage tends to eclipse the serenity of the result. Rigorously speaking, moreover, one would have to say the same thing of sadness; for if the latter consists in a decrease of the power to act, it too would leave behind, at the end of this decrease, *a certain degree of perfection* that we would currently have, even if we were still less aware of this than in the case of our joys and our loves. It is only necessary to specify that, in the case of passionate affects, it is a matter of a *confused participation* in beatitude, since the idea that objectively expresses our body’s power to act is itself a confused idea; and that is why this participation is not eternal, no more than is the confused idea from which it follows. Still, in any case, we have been led to a *reversal of perspective* in relation to what we have known since Part III. Of course, it was legitimate initially to define joy as a passage to a greater perfection, and then to deduce, as in the demonstration of III, 53, that we rejoice in the contemplation of our power to act because it only takes place on the occasion of such a passage: this remains true, and is as close as possible to what really happens on the plane of duration. But, now, we can just as well initially define beatitude as consisting in the contemplation (clear and distinct or confused) of our power to act, and then deduce from it that any increase in perfection makes us happy because it enables us to savour beatitude a little less obscurely than previously; passionable joy would then be defined as a passage from a *more confused* participation to a *less confused* participation in eternal beatitude;⁵¹ this would also be true, and would enable us

⁵¹ We sketched this idea out, without justifying it in a truly rigorous way, in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Matheron [1969] 1988: 589–90). Pierre-François Moreau, referring to this, has provided original and very clear developments concerning the ‘opaque’ presence of the characteristics of eternity in the *conatus* of finite modes in duration, the possibility that follows from this for a metaphysical truth to be ‘perceived experientially’ even before it is understood, and the perspective that this opens up

to better situate the preceding truth. What must thus be understood is that beatitude and the intellectual love of God are not things *that happen to us*: in reality, we eternally *are* beatitude and the intellectual love of God, just as we eternally *are* the knowledge of the third kind that God has of our essence. And to the extent that we eternally *have* a part of this knowledge of the third kind that we are, we eternally *have* the conscious enjoyment of a part of that beatitude that we are as well.

with regard to the references to Scripture that appear in the scholia to V, 36 and IV, 68. (See Moreau 1994a: 56–64.)

II

Spinoza on Politics and Ethics

State and Morality According to Spinoza

In order to understand the relations between State and morality in Spinoza, it would suffice, in principle, to make two basic claims and to develop all that they imply.¹ First claim: considerations regarding the State have their place in moral philosophy. Spinoza explicitly indicates this place; it appears in Scholium 2 of Proposition 37 of Part IV of the *Ethics*. Its context is well known. The preceding propositions had established in what the Supreme Good of human beings who live under the guidance of reason consists, both on the individual level and on the interhuman level. The propositions that follow will show what means we have at our disposal in order to attain this Supreme Good and what are the obstacles that oppose it: they will show, in other words, what is good and what is bad. And, between these two groups of propositions, we have, precisely, this scholium. Whence we can infer that the object it mentions, that is to say *political society*, is considered by Spinoza as the *condition without which* it would be impossible for us to have these means at our disposal of accessing the Supreme Good and to eliminate these obstacles. And this is indeed the case: what highlights the place assigned to politics in Part IV are the reasons for which moral philosophy is necessarily led to take interest in the State, insofar as it discovers therein that upon which the realisation of its project depends.

And yet it also must be said that Spinoza himself does not at all present things in this way. In fact – and this is the second claim – Scholium 2 of Proposition 37 is presented with all the appearances of a digression: its content does not depend in any way upon what immediately preceded it; or, more

¹ [Originally published as 'État et moralité selon Spinoza', in Emilia Giancotti (ed.), *Spinoza nel 350° anniversario della nascita/Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza* (conference at Urbino, 4–8 October 1982), Naples: Bibliopolis, 1985: 343–54; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

precisely, it is deduced exclusively from those among the preceding propositions that *concern neither* the Supreme Good nor the desires of the reasonable human being, but that are simply direct consequences of the theory of the passions laid out in Part III. This does not mean that this scholium does not have theoretical foundations in the system. Quite the contrary. But it does mean that the *theoretical* foundations of political science have no relation, or at least no direct relation, to the *practical* reasons for which the philosopher is led to take interest in the object of this science. It is true, to be sure, that life in a political society, and in a well-ordered political society, is indispensable to obtaining the Supreme Good, and even, more modestly, to accessing the kingdom of reason: Spinoza is certainly not the first to have said this! But it is also true that *it is not for this reason that political society exists*, even if all philosophers have fallen into the illusion consisting in assigning to it as its final cause the satisfaction of their own rational desires. And, finally, it is true that, when we will have understood the true causes and the State's true mode of functioning, we will by the same token understand what made, at least from the beginning, this philosophical illusion inevitable.

* * *

We in fact understand from the outset why this philosophical illusion is at least *possible*. What makes it possible are the risks implied in the *very methodology* that necessarily belongs to moral philosophy. Spinoza explains this in the Preface to Part IV, taking up moreover what he had already said in Paragraphs 12 to 15 in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. The goal of moral philosophy (of all moral philosophy before Kant, and not only Spinoza's) is in fact to determine the type of life that will necessarily make human beings happy if they practise it, and to indicate to them at the same time the means by which they will be able to achieve it. Now, to be happy is always to satisfy our predominant desires. But there are two kinds of desire in us: there are those that follow necessarily from our nature alone, and those that do not necessarily follow from it, but which are explained by the conjunction of our nature and the always variable and fluctuating external causes that affect us. From which it follows that, *if ever* someone were to be entirely dominated by the desires that followed necessarily from their nature alone, and if they were not prevented from satisfying them, this person, hypothetically, would necessarily be happy. This does not mean that it would be impossible for us to be happy as soon as other desires took hold of us, but it does mean that, in this latter case, we will not necessarily be happy, because our goodness will not be guaranteed. And under these conditions, the method that the moral philosopher must follow is implied in

the very project: it must consist in determining which of the desires follow from our nature alone, to consider them in isolation by abstracting from other desires, and deducing from them all of the other consequences that would follow if the influence of these other desires did not come to disrupt their deployment. It consists, in other words, in constructing in thought an *ideal model of human nature* and then indicating to us the means by which we might get closer to it. A purely operative model, to be sure, justified only by the necessity according to which we must assign ourselves a goal in order to act, and that concerns us to the sole extent that we are indeed dominated by the desires that it takes into account. But the fact remains that moral philosophy does in fact give us a theory of *what would happen* if we acted according to the laws of our nature. A theory whose claims will become the *rules of life* for those who desire to live in this way.

Up to this point, there is not yet any illusion. But the illusion begins at the moment when this purely operative norm is surreptitiously transformed into an *ontological norm*. This is, moreover, only a particular case of the teleological illusion in general, whose mechanism Spinoza had dismantled in the Appendix to Part I, and of which he simply shows in the Preface to Part IV the supplementary nuances that are introduced by general ideas. We build a house, he tells us here, by being inspired by a model that pleases us, and we call it perfect or imperfect according to the more or less successful execution of our project. Then, believing that all of those who have built other houses were inspired by the same model as we were, we judge their work according to a greater or less adequation to the project that we attribute to them. And finally, projecting this interpretation onto nature itself, we imagine that all things, by nature, strive to conform to the general ideas that we have made of them as a function of our own desires, and when we claim that they do not attain them, we attribute this deficiency to a kind of ontological imperfection, to the privation of something that they *should have* had and yet they do not have, and from which we conclude that they 'sin'. Now, this is exactly the same way the non-Spinozist moral philosopher proceeds: the one who desires to live according to the laws of their nature alone, constructs, for the needs of their own practice, a theoretical model of human nature corresponding to their desire. But they imagine that all human beings, by nature, *tend* to realise this model and are *destined* to realise it, that such is the *end of human nature*, and that those who do not conform to this end to which they nevertheless *should have* conformed are sinners. Whence the notion of 'moral obligation', which perverted everything.

This outline is absolutely general: it holds, according to Chapter 1 of the *Political Treatise*, for all non-Spinozist philosophers without exception,

as much for Hobbes as for Saint Thomas Aquinas. They do not all assign the same end to human nature, but all of them assign an end to it from which an obligation follows. And we understand, under these conditions, the way in which these philosophers are necessarily led to give an account of the State and to gauge its functioning. For, if we move backwards from the end of human nature to the means for realising it, then to the means for these means, etc., a moment always comes when we hit upon political society. Human beings, *in order to realise* the end of their nature, thus have the *duty* to live in political society; and, if they do indeed live therein, this comes quite simply from them having understood more or less that to which they were obligated. Whether political society is constituted naturally, as in Aquinas, or by a contract, as in Hobbes, matters little: in any case, its existence is explained by the *moral end* that it is destined to satisfy, and by the comprehension of this end. But again, this comprehension must be followed through completely. In other words, political society must be organised so as to respond in the best way possible to the demand that gave birth to it: everything will work well, according to Aquinas, if and only if the government officials are always in a position to govern in conformity with the common good, that is to say, if they are virtuous; everything will work well, according to Hobbes, if and only if subjects understand that the preservation of their life requires on their end an absolute submission to an absolute sovereign, and if they act in light of this – that is to say, once again, if they are virtuous. Whence the gigantic tautology that Spinoza, in Chapter I of the *Political Treatise*, reproaches all philosophers for having committed: the moral function of the State, ultimately, requires as a condition for its exercise the kingdom of virtue that it was precisely intended to promote.

To what extent was this illusion inevitable? This is what we will see in a moment. But what is certain is that it is indeed a matter of an illusion. And in order to see this, it will suffice to take the ideal model of human nature *for what it is*, that is to say, for a pure and simple operational model, without projecting it ontologically. This model, in reality, in *no way* constitutes the end of human nature; and this quite simply because there are no ends, no more in human nature than elsewhere: there are only desires. Human beings do not tend towards anything other than what they necessarily desire here and now, and that is all. It is true, to be sure, that, *to the extent* that we have adequate ideas, we strive necessarily to understand the truth and to make others understand it: Spinoza demonstrates this in detail in Propositions 19 to 37 of Part IV. The philosopher isolated this particular desire by abstraction in order to show, *to those who would be positioned to experience it as he did*, the path to follow in order to assure its deployment and to give it pride

of place. But it is also true that we have, besides, a mass of inadequate ideas that it is *impossible* for us not to have, and which provoke other desires in us that might lead us in all kinds of different directions. Yet there is *no ontological privilege* of rational desires with respect to others. The appearance of privilege comes only from our considering human beings in isolation, by separating them from the external causes that act on them; but it is *natural*, for a finite being, to be affected by external causes; and if we reconnect the comportment of an individual with the set of causes that determine it, we always find the same quantity of ontological perfection, whatever may be the relation established in each case between internal and external determinism. It is thus not a question of saying that we *must* live according to reason: what we must do is what we do necessarily, without culpability nor sin. All that an individual does is always done as a consequence of a desire that is a modality of its *conatus*, and all *conatus* is divine: it expresses, *in every case*, the power [*puissance*] of God. Whence the Spinozist theory of right as it is expounded in Chapter XVI of the *Theological-Political Treatise* and in Chapter II of the *Political Treatise*, and that we must take literally: right is power [*puissance*], and strictly nothing else.

Under these conditions, it is indeed impossible to explain the existence of political society and the conditions of its proper functioning by deducing a moral norm whose realisation it would have as a function. *There is no moral function of the State*: to pretend otherwise would amount to saying that the State exists in order to satisfy the desires of the philosopher, since the ideal model of human nature is nothing other, in reality, than the projection of these very same desires. But if the State existed for this reason, that would mean that those who make it continually exist and persist also experience the desires of philosophers, and that they experience them strongly enough to act on them [*passer à l'acte*]. This would imply that they already live under the guidance of reason. Now, if this were the case, they would have precisely no need for the State, as Spinoza says in Paragraph 1 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise*. Whence the conclusion he draws from it in Paragraph 7 of the same chapter: the natural causes and foundations of the State must not be sought on the side of the teachings of reason, but we must deduce them 'from nature of the common condition of men', that is to say, from their condition as human beings subject to passions. But we must still properly understand this formulation. If the State exists necessarily, it is because human beings are subject to passions, and that is all. But it is a question of a *purely causal* necessity: Spinoza does not mean, as he is almost always taken to be saying, that the State is necessary *in order to oblige* human beings subject to passions to live in conformity with reason. He simply means: from the sole

fact that human beings are subject to passions, and by way of the necessary consequence of the very play of their passions, the State exists.

* * *

This affirmation, truth be told, is only found in such a clear form in the *Political Treatise*. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza tells us, again in Chapter IV, and without explaining himself further, that ‘the foundations of the best republics’ can be deduced from ‘natural divine law’, that is to say from the teachings of reason, and that their study falls under ‘universal Ethics’. And the mechanism of the social contract, such as it is laid out in Chapter XVI, again appeals to the intervention of reason, though passionate motivations certainly play a more decisive role. Is it simply a question of an exoteric presentation? Or was there, on the contrary, some evolution in Spinoza’s position on this point? And if there was, would it not come from the fact that Spinoza’s very metaphysics, in 1670, had not yet arrived at the radical immanentism that would characterise it in its final form? Antonio Negri seems to suggest the latter in *The Savage Anomaly*, and I do have the sense that this is the right solution; but considering his analysis would take us too far afield.

In any case, things are clear if we stick to the *Political Treatise*. If the multitude desires to live in political society, we learn from Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI, *it is not* under the guidance of reason, but under the influence of a common fear or common hope. And it is easy to see how things pan out. Spinoza, in fact, explained in Paragraph 15 of Chapter II that the state of nature, in reality, is not a state of juridical independence: relations of power are already at play, though they are in perpetual fluctuation. For each of us, successively, falls under the dependence of each other, whether due to fear of retaliation or in hopes of benefiting from their good deeds. A bit of memory is thus sufficient so that all, at the end of these successive experiences, wind up bringing their hopes and their fears to bear on one and the same object: the power of all. And such is precisely, according to Paragraph 3 of Chapter III, the sole difference by which political society is distinguished from the state of nature. Whence the genetic definition of sovereignty that we are given in Paragraph 17 of Chapter II, and which accounts, not only for the origin of the State, but for its internal *conatus* such as it continuously functions here and now. Sovereignty is ‘right such as it is defined by the power of the multitude’: it is power whose usage the multitude grants to the sovereign at each moment, and by means of which the sovereign can inspire in each member of the multitude enough fear and enough hope to incite granting to it again the usage of its own power in the following instant; which, again,

permits the sovereign to inspire fear and hope, etc. And the State will subsist for as long as this self-regulating mechanism by which its very essence is defined functions.

But, to be sure, this self-regulation is not assured by simply any conditions: the power of the multitude, as Paragraph 9 of Chapter III explains, can just as easily be turned against the sovereign if it gives orders that provoke general indignation; and, in that case, the sovereign will lose its right. Now, among the conditions indispensable to the self-regulated functioning of the machine of the State, which I will not examine in its totality, there are two that will interest us in particular. Since, if the State is not *intended* to realise a moral end, the fact remains that, in order for the State to persevere in its being, it is necessarily led to produce *moral effects*.

On the one hand, as was shown at the beginning of Chapter XVII of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, a sovereign who would only govern by fear would hardly have a chance to last a long time: the strongest power is one that is able to reign *over the hearts of its subjects*. But again, for this to be the case it is necessary that the norms prescribed by the State be *interiorised* by the subjects themselves. In order to provoke this interiorisation, the State has a number of means at its disposal: it did not invent religion nor teleological ideology, but it can utilise them for its benefit. But, in any case, and whatever the process employed, the result is clear: the State, in order to perpetuate itself, must necessarily tend to produce, in the very consciousness of its subjects, these pseudo-virtues of which it is a question in Paragraphs 19 and 23 of Chapter II of the *Political Treatise*, and which are *obsequium* and *justice*. *Obsequium* is not simply the fact of respecting positive law: it is the ‘constant will’ to respect it in all circumstances, including when we believe ourselves assured of impunity. And *justice*, in the same way, is the constant will to render to each what they are owed according to positive law. Whence the necessary appearance, in the interiority of each subject, of the *form* of moral conscience, the condition *sine qua non* of the long-term survival of the State.

But, on the other hand, it is not possible to interiorise just anything. The sovereign will only reign over the heart of its subjects if it gives them orders that, in terms of their content, are not *too* far removed from their own desires, or at least from the desires of the majority of them. And all sovereigns know this, more or less. Yet the passions of human beings are diverse and contradictory: only reason can lastingly unite them. For this to occur it is not necessary that each, individually, be reasonable; it suffices that a large number of individuals confront their respective passional desires so that, if a common denominator emerges from this confrontation, this common denominator would be approximately in conformity with reason, or at least

have the appearance of being so. This is what we learn in Paragraph 6 of Chapter VIII. Whence it follows that if the sovereign wishes to give orders that have some chance of being executed willingly by the majority of its subjects (and it always wills this to a certain extent at least), these orders, in terms of their content, will *more or less* coincide with what reason itself would have suggested to them if they had lived under its guidance: more or less, according to the nature of the regime and the institutions; but, in a stable State, the decisions of political power will always have the *minimum* of rationality indispensable for the creation of a *consensus*; were this not to be the case, the State would not be stable by definition.

Now, this is precisely what is going to consolidate the illusion of normativity into which philosophers naturally tend to fall. We have seen how this illusion was possible, and now we understand why it was inevitable from the beginning. For philosophers, before becoming philosophers, had first *learned the conclusions* that reason would subsequently ratify. And they learned them in the form that life in political society necessarily gives to them: in the form of *interiorised normativity*. To such an extent that, when reason is able to deduce them, this appearance of interiorised normativity will transform conclusions into premises: the rational desires of philosophers will take on, in their eyes, the aspect that they might have accepted anyway, but which the political conditioning that they initially underwent gives the weight of an irresistible obviousness; these desires will appear to them as expressing *the very end* of human nature, inscribed in the heart of each human being, and to which each *must* conform at risk of committing a sin. The first figure of the 'free human being' is that of a human being who does not yet know that they are free. And this is why, after having declared in Paragraph 20 of Chapter II that an action contrary to reason is not properly speaking a sin, no more than following reason is to obey properly speaking, Spinoza adds in Paragraph 21:

It's not so improper for men who've become accustomed to live in a state to call something sin if it's contrary to the dictate of reason. For the best states should have established their laws according to reason's dictates.²

Such is, we might say, the perverse effect of the rationality of the State – an effect all the more perverse the farther this rationality is extended, that is, the better the government is. In a very poorly constituted State, reason, supposing that it could develop in spite of everything, would be better

² TP II, 21; CWS II, 515–16.

protected against this reinterpretation of its demands. However, it is true that in reality it would hardly be able to develop there: what creates the external conditions of possibility of its flourishing are at the same time what conditions its downfall. From there, we turn in a circle: philosophers assign to the State what they have received from it by transfiguring it by the moral end they assign to it, and the moral effects produced by the State seem to bring an experimental verification to their deductions that in turn reinforces their illusion.

But there is clearly a way to break the circle: it is to have more and more adequate ideas. The more of them we have, the less the desires that they inspire in us will appear to us as norms that the superior of part of ourselves would impose on the inferior part. With knowledge and existence of the third kind, the illusion of normativity would disappear completely: we would be beyond good and evil. But, in order to get there, we can no longer count on the State, since it is not made for this. The State, even the best one, will only ever be the result of a relation of forces between individuals subject to passions, whose authentic liberation would entail its disappearance if it took place in everybody.

Ethics and Politics in Spinoza (Remarks on the Role of *Ethics* IV, 37 Scholium 2)

As early as the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, it was clear that the philosopher, according to Spinoza, would necessarily end up being concerned with politics.¹ In Paragraph 14 of that work, in fact, having just claimed to have conceived, as an ideal model, a *perfect human nature* – perfect, that is, as *powerful as possible* – consisting in the ‘union that the mind has with the whole of Nature’,² Spinoza immediately added: the end that I pursue is ‘to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand.’³ From which he concludes, a little farther on: for that, it is necessary ‘to form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible’.⁴

To be sure, if we take this text in isolation, it doesn’t yet prove that politics is at issue. But now let us consider what he had said earlier, throughout the first eleven paragraphs of the same treatise, concerning pleasures, honours and riches. These external goods, having previously appeared to Spinoza in succession first as certain goods, then as uncertain goods and then as certain evils, acquire their definitive status in Paragraph 11: these are conditional goods, which are only evil for us if they are pursued *for themselves*, but which, insofar as they are mere means, can *contribute greatly* to the acquisition of the true good. Now, if we connect this passage to the preceding one, the

¹ [Originally published as ‘Ethik und Politik bei Spinoza: Bemerkungen über die Funktion der Anmerkung 2 des 37. Lehrsatzes von Ethik IV’, in Klaus Hammacher, Irmela Reimers-Fovote, and Manfred Walther (eds), *Zur Aktualität der Ethik Spinozas* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000): 317–27; republished in Matheron 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² *TdIE*, 13; CWS I, 10–11.

³ *TdIE*, 14; CWS I, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*

implication is clear; for if one wants the same end for everyone, one also wants the same means for everyone. Therefore what Spinoza implicitly wants is the formation of a society in which the greatest possible number of people could peacefully enjoy the pleasures of the senses (without being disturbed by this or that religious authority), where the greatest possible number of people live in economic comfort (which implies *at least* that the regime of property must not be too inequalitarian), and where honours would be spread among the greatest possible number of people (which implies *at least* a certain degree of democratisation of political institutions). Of course, it is not possible to prove that Spinoza, at the point at which he wrote the treatise, had himself established a link between these two passages, nor that he himself had drawn out all of its conclusions. But they are indeed conclusions that he would subsequently develop throughout his work, with an extraordinary consistency.

He would develop them, however, in a form that was more complex than might have been expected, and one more complex than that with which his contemporaries were familiar. This is most clearly manifest in Part IV of the *Ethics*, by the apparent discord between the place occupied by Scholium 2 to Proposition 37 and the contents of that scholium itself.

* * *

In the propositions leading up to this scholium,⁵ Spinoza *explains*, by deducing at length and in detail from its *causes*, what he had initially only experienced as a lived demand. Why did he aspire, from the outset, to realise this ideal model of a perfect human nature, which he had defined without justifying it? Because, under the guidance of reason (which is to say when the orientation of our *conatus* is determined by the laws of our nature alone), we desire nothing other than *to understand* and to procure for ourselves all possible means for understanding; whence it follows, since everything is conceived by God, that our Supreme Good can only consist in the intellectual love of God and in our link to God – or, which amounts to the same thing, our link to nature as a whole.⁶ And why did he aspire, from the beginning, to ensure that many others would acquire this perfect human nature along with him? Because, under the guidance of reason, we necessarily desire for others what we desire for ourselves, as the desire to *make others understand* is the necessary extension of the desire to understand.⁷

In the same way, in the propositions that immediately follow this

⁵ *Ethics* IV, 19–37; CWS I, 556–68.

⁶ *Ethics* IV, 26–8; CWS I, 559–60.

⁷ *Ethics* IV, 37; CWS I, 564–5.

scholium,⁸ Spinoza causally explains what he had at first only empirically observed, and he devotes the rest of Part IV to the detailed development of this explication. Why had he been able to see that pleasures, honours and riches, once they are reduced to mere means and become accessible to all, would greatly contribute to the realisation of his double objective, the individual and the interhuman (that is, to understand and to make others understand)? Because, on the one hand, the *individual development of our understanding* depends on the richness of our imagination, which has as its physical correlate the capacity of our body to be affected by the external world and to affect it in many ways,⁹ and this capacity itself depends on the preservation of our biological integrity¹⁰ – which presupposes the enjoyment of all sorts of very varied and well-balanced pleasures, the political guarantees related to the possession of these means and the absence of ideological constraints of the superstitious type. And because, on the other hand, the *possibility of helping others develop their understanding* depends on the establishment of a general climate of concord at all levels¹¹ – which presupposes the existence of a broad consensus, based on a joyous acceptance of the organisation of powers, the distribution of goods and the determination of common values.

Now all of this, clearly, has to do with politics, to which Scholium 2 to Proposition 37 is devoted. One thus understands the place of this scholium in Part IV: it comes after the deduction of the two rationally founded desires (individual and interhuman) and before the deduction of the means to satisfy them, because political society is itself – and this is more true insofar as it is better constituted – the *condition without which* it is impossible for us to have these means reliably at our disposal.

One might thus expect – and the readers of the seventeenth century certainly did expect – that the content of this scholium would conform with a very traditional approach, which was typically followed ever since Plato and Aristotle, and which nearly all the philosophers of the seventeenth century still followed, Hobbes included. This approach, characteristic of all teleological anthropology, was essentially that which Spinoza would describe – in a very polemical form, but quite correctly regarding the basics – in the first paragraph of Chapter I of the *Tractatus Politicus*. One begins with the *ends of human nature* such as reason would have us understand them (these ends,

⁸ *Ethics* IV, 38–40; CWS I, 568–70.

⁹ *Ethics* IV, 38; CWS I, 568.

¹⁰ *Ethics* IV, 39; CWS I, 568.

¹¹ *Ethics* IV, 40; CWS I, 570.

depending on the case, may or may not be conducive to the development of reason itself), and one accepts that the human being naturally has the *obligation* to pursue them because human beings are *made in order to* pursue them. One then determines the means necessary for the realisation of these ends, and one finds that political society is one of these means; from which it follows that humans have a *duty* to live in political society, and that, if they actually do live there, it is because their reason more or less made them understand that they have this obligation. Whether political society is formed naturally, as the Aristotelian tradition would have it, or if it is instituted artificially and by contract, as Hobbes would have it, in the end it always exists *for that reason*; and this is what grounds its legitimacy. So one deduces how political society would have to function in order to answer to its end as best as possible, one concludes that leaders and subjects (or only subjects, as the case may be) have a *duty* to comport themselves in the required way, and one laments that they generally do not do so, without really being able to do anything about it.

Now as it turns out, this kind of approach does not correspond to anything in the contents of Scholium 2. Spinoza, in this scholium, does not claim at any point that political society is instituted (contractually or not) *for the sake of* creating the conditions without which the demands of reason defined in Propositions 26 to 28 and 37 would be unrealisable. Quite the contrary, what he says about political society is solely deduced from those of the preceding propositions that *do not concern* the Supreme Good or the desires of the reasonable human being, and which are simply direct consequences of the theory of passions elaborated in Part III of the *Ethics*. What Spinoza does say is that, if humans lived under the guidance of reason, they would spontaneously agree with one another without needing the State; he says that the agreement between human beings subject to passions would actually be impossible if the force of the State were not there to impose it; he thereby presupposes that human beings subject to passions could only live in conformity with the demands of reason if the State obliged them, and that *therefore he himself desires*, insofar as he is reasonable and a philosopher, that the State oblige them to do so; but he does not say that the State exists *for the sake of* so obliging them, nor consequently that it exists *for the sake of* ensuring the realisation of the ethical ends of human nature. And if he does not say this, it is for two obvious reasons: because ethics *cannot provide* such a foundation for politics, and because politics *cannot receive one*.

* * *

The fact that Spinozist ethics cannot provide this kind of foundation for politics comes quite simply from the fact that *it does not prescribe anything*: there is not, for Spinoza, any moral obligation, because there is no teleology, no more in human nature than outside it; there are only desires, each of which is as natural and naturally legitimate as any other. The ideal model of a perfect human nature, as the Preface to Part IV warned us, is *not* an ontological model; it is not a universal norm inscribed in the very nature of every human being, in relation to which any transgression would constitute a perversion. The causal explanation of its formation, which Spinoza had given us, demystified it at the same time: it is only an *operative* model that the philosopher conceived, given the demands of his own practice, by isolating those among our desires that follow from our nature alone without depending on anything from external causes (because it is only these about which one could demonstrate in total certainty that their realisation would necessarily make us happy), and by deducing the kind of life that would follow for those in whose minds they prevailed. Part IV of the *Ethics* thus gives us the theory, not of *what must be* (for nothing ‘must’ be), but of *what would happen if* humans were to live according to the laws of their nature alone. It is a theory whose statements would become the rules for action for those who desired to live in this way, but only for them: once all teleology is eliminated, it is absurd to say that those who have other desires are obligated to desire that which they do not in fact desire; and it is doubly absurd, consequently, to say that the State has the obligation to oblige them to conform to the desires of the philosopher.

But it is also clear that politics, for its part, could not receive its foundation from ethics conceived in this way. For then it would be reduced to the theory, no longer of what the State must be in order to fulfil as best as possible the moral function that it must fulfil (since it no longer ‘must’ be anything), but of *what would happen if* its members, leaders and subjects, lived according to the laws of their human nature alone, which is to say under the guidance of reason. Let us be clear: *leaders and subjects*. For leaders are human beings, like everyone else; Paragraph 5 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise* even suggests that the exercise of power subjects them to exceptionally violent passions, by which they are ‘pulled in every direction’ (*distrahuntur*).¹² If one absurdly founded political theory on the hypothesis

¹² TP I, 5; CWS II, 506. Translation modified. [‘. . . ita ut qui sibi persuadent posse multitudinem, vel qui publicis negotiis distrahuntur . . .’ (G III, 275). Curley’s translation reads: ‘So people who persuade themselves that a multitude, which may be divided over public affairs. . .’. Spinoza writes *vel* and not *sive* here, so ‘the multitude’ and

that these people were reasonable, there would be no reason not to suppose that subjects would be too. But what would happen in the State if everyone were reasonable? Spinoza says here, as he already said in Chapter V of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and as he would say again in Paragraph 1 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise*: nothing would happen, since then human beings would be in agreement without any constraint and the State would simply not exist! Theoretically grounding politics on the demands of reason is tantamount to depriving it of any object.

Under these conditions, from where could one draw its foundations? It can only be, as the propositions to which Scholium 2 refers indicate, and as Paragraphs 5 and 7 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise* confirm, *objective knowledge of the behaviour of human beings subject to passions*, and nothing else. Scholium 2, in fact, refers first of all to Proposition 28 of Part III of the *Ethics* (as well as to Proposition 19 of Part IV, which in turn refers to that same Proposition 28); and Proposition 28 itself summarises *the entire first half of Part III*, which showed us why human beings subject to passions are necessarily attached to *things* – to the *economic goods* that they want to possess – and which also enables us to understand, if we keep in mind the Appendix to Part I, how this attachment to things engenders the teleological illusion from which *religious ideology* is born. Scholium 2 also refers to Propositions 33 and 34 of Part IV, as well as to Proposition 35; and these three summarise *the entire second half of Part III*, which is devoted to *passional interhuman relations* and which explains to us the origin of what is later called our *unsocial sociability*: a sociability that follows from the *imitation of the affects*,¹³ which is the origin of *pity*¹⁴ and the *ambition for glory*,¹⁵ and owing to which (as the Scholium to Proposition 35 reminds us) human beings, even those subject to passions, are useful to one another; but this is an *unsociable sociability* (as Propositions 33 and 35 remind us), because this affective imitation, to the extent that imitated affects are themselves *passional*, necessarily becomes *conflictual*: it becomes *ambition for ideological domination* (or intolerance),¹⁶ *economic envy*,¹⁷ and also engenders an *ambition* and an *envy* having as its

‘those pulled in every direction by public affairs’ are distinct alternatives, not names for the same subject. Shirley correctly distinguishes between them, but loses the sense of *distrahuntur* Matheron is here emphasizing: ‘so that those who believe that ordinary people or those who are busily engaged in public business . . .’ (Spinoza 2002: 682.)

¹³ *Ethics* III, 27; CWS I, 508.

¹⁴ *Ethics* III, 27 Schol.; CWS I, 509.

¹⁵ *Ethics* III, 29–30; CWS I, 510–12.

¹⁶ *Ethics* III, 31 Cor.; CWS I, 512.

¹⁷ *Ethics* III, 32; CWS I, 513.

specific object the *power over others* – which, in civil society, means political power. Finally, Scholium 2 refers to Corollary 2 to Proposition 40 of Part III, which is dedicated to the *desire for vengeance*: an unsociable affect on its own, but which, when it is propagated by affective imitation to the point of inciting many individuals to join forces against one and the same aggressor, can eventually put the brakes on unsociability and foster sociability, even if more often than not it produces the opposite effect. Pity, ambition for glory, ambition for domination, envy, vengeance: these are precisely the passions that Paragraph 5 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise* will name; and, as Paragraph 7 will expressly indicate, it is by drawing on this material, and this alone, leaving aside the demands of reason, that political science must be able to be constituted as a whole.

Once this political science is constituted, what does it look like? As Scholium 2 allows us to anticipate, it will be comprised of two parts.

The *first part*, which forms the object of the first five chapters of the *Political Treatise*, is dedicated to the explication of the existence and nature of the State from its immanent cause, where this cause is the set of interactions between individuals subject to passions that constitute it. It shows us how, from the play of these interactions alone, there must necessarily arise a unified collective force, by whose vengeful action, as Scholium 2 also indicates, sociability can be ‘established’ (*firmari*) and unsociability repressed;¹⁸ from which, in Paragraph 17 of Chapter 2, we get the genetic definition of the state as the ‘power [*puissance*] of a multitude’.¹⁹ And it also shows us how the multitude unified in this way is organised as a totality that has its own structure (governmental, economic, religious institutions) and which, to the extent that it is already more or less self-regulated, constitutes a *sui generis* individuality having its own *conatus* – or, as Scholium 2 already indicated, its own ‘power [*pouvoir*] to preserve itself’.²⁰

But this new individuality suffers in exactly the same way as human individuality, and for the same reason: its *conatus* is poorly directed, because it is ceaselessly affected by external causes that disturb it – these might be topologically internal to it, but internal to it like foreign bodies (institutions incompatible with traditions, or with one another, etc.) – and because its real functioning is thus never explained by the play of its own laws alone. Whence the *second part of political science*, which forms the object of Chapters VI to XI of the *Political Treatise*. Spinoza there does exactly, for

¹⁸ *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 2; CWS I, 566–8.

¹⁹ TP II, 17; CWS II, 510.

²⁰ *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 2; CWS I, 567. Translation modified.

the State-individual, what he had already done for the human individual in Part IV of the *Ethics*: without any normativity, he constructs for each type of political society a *theoretical model of the perfect State* – perfect, that is, as *powerful as possible*. He obtains these theoretical models by considering, for each of these types of State, only what follows from its nature alone, abstracting from the disturbances that arise from external causes, and by deducing the way in which it would function if such disturbances were eliminated: by deducing, in other words, not what would happen if its members comported themselves according to the laws of their human nature alone (which we have seen would be absurd), but what would happen if that type of State comported itself only according to the laws of its nature as a State – and, consequently, if ‘the power it has of preserving itself’²¹ were fully assured, so that the outcome would be its permanent reproduction. Political science, in its second part, thus becomes *the science of different possible types of perfectly self-regulating institutional systems*: the science of institutional systems that, by the intermediary of the passions that they engender in their leaders and subjects, necessarily determine the former to govern in such a way that the latter will necessarily be satisfied and will necessarily continue to grant them the means to govern. It is clear what there is in common between all the different models conceived by Spinoza in the *Political Treatise*: governmental institutions as democratic as possible given the nature of sovereignty, economic institutions that favour a maximum of commerce, and religious institutions that favour maximal tolerance.

* * *

At this point, ethics regains its rights. And it regains them because now it possesses the best chance of realising its own demands. For we have seen that conditions of optimal political equilibrium are at the same time those that best enable reason to be developed. The democratisation of society, the extension of the market economy, tolerance: it is precisely these that best ensure the agreement called for by Proposition 40, the preservation and the health of the body called for by Proposition 39, and the expansion of horizons called for by Proposition 38; so it is also these that, by enabling us to procure for ourselves all the non-excessive joys that are at stake in the propositions to come, will make possible the existence of the ‘free human being’, whose portrait is sketched out at the end of Part IV of the *Ethics*: producing this sketch was not the goal, but it is indeed the result. This is no coincidence, to be sure, since the passional desires that engender political

²¹ Ibid.

society have the same root, ultimately, as rational desires: the *conatus* of the human individual. But in order to discover this, it was necessary to forget along the way what we knew of the demands of reason, and to forget them until political theory was entirely constituted; if we did not, it all would have amounted to nothing, or led to disastrous results: wishful thinking, utopian reveries, alibis complacently furnished for the established disorder, failed attempts at establishing a 'virtuous reign' by means of terror, etc. The constitutions of the *Tractatus Politicus* could never have been deduced from the mere necessity of satisfying the requirements of Propositions 38 to 40. The only way to make political practice *ethical* is to begin by studying it in itself and for itself, in its actual functioning, and by objectively deducing, leaving aside any moral considerations, the different possible ways to ensure the self-regulation towards which it tends. Then, and only then, can one propose, with any chance of success, one of these possible combinations to the public, the combination that would best foster the development of reason by being most suited to the existing situation. The latter two criteria are surely not always satisfied together (they were not, for example, for the Hebrews, and the case of the Ottoman Empire seemed particularly desperate), but they were in Spinoza's Holland.

But supposing that these criteria were met, the task of the *Ethics* would not be accomplished; rather, on the contrary, it would have only just begun. For if one must not confuse the theoretical foundations of political science with the ethical demands that determined Spinoza to elaborate these foundations, it nevertheless remains true that this elaboration was for him only a step along the way to meeting these demands. The best of all States, indeed, can only create the external conditions that are least unfavourable for the *eventual* triumph of reason in the mind of each, and these conditions are far from being sufficient. At that point, it is then up to ethics itself – and on its own, this time – to determine the path to be followed by each in order for this triumph to be ensured: this is the object of Part V.

But still, it is clearly necessary that these external conditions must be established – which, at present, is nowhere the case. Whence the necessity of the philosopher's political engagement, which can take the most diverse forms according to the circumstances, but which is in any case ineluctable. And let us conclude by way of clarifying that, on this point, the philosopher is *entirely free*. The Spinozist identification of right and power [*puissance*] means that the philosopher is under no obligation to obey any tyrant; indeed, the opposite is the case, for a tyrant strikes no fear in the hearts of philosophers and thus has no power over their actions. The Spinozist definition of justice as respect for positive law does not in any way prevent the philosopher from

considering certain laws as unjust, for there are laws that necessarily have the effect of inspiring subjects to desire their violation, in this way making each subject an enemy of positive law. And the Spinozist argument according to which the worst of all States is still preferable to the state of nature, if it prohibits its subjects from behaving anarchically, in no way prevents the philosopher from working towards the disappearance of such a State and towards its replacement by another; indeed, on the contrary, they know that this disappearance is inevitable in the long run, that there is a risk that it might lead to a situation temporarily equivalent to the chaos of the state of nature, and so that it would be better to prepare in advance for this change to take place in the best possible conditions. Thus nothing is *a priori* ruled out for the philosopher when it comes to their relation with established powers [*pouvoirs*]: active support, critical support, constructive opposition, unconditional opposition, whether this is open or clandestine – everything depends on the circumstances. Spinoza's own political engagement is only one example of these multiple possibilities.

Indignation and the *Conatus* of the Spinozist State

I would like to develop here¹ a hypothesis that I first sketched out in 1986² in order to try to account for an apparent paradox concerning Spinoza's development from the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*. On the one hand, it is evident that in the *TP* one no longer finds any trace of the still-contractarian explanation with which the *TTP* had accounted for the genesis of the state. But on the other hand, it is just as obvious that the *TP* nowhere explicitly gives us any alternative explanation. Spinoza does tell us, in Paragraph 7 of Chapter I, that 'we must seek the causes and natural foundations of the state, not from the teachings of reason, but from the common nature, or condition, of men'³ – that is, quite clearly, from the condition of human beings subject to passions. But the promised explanation does not appear anywhere, and above all not where it should appear, that is, in Chapter II. From this the conclusion is often drawn that Spinoza's problematic had simply changed, that he had ended up recognising that political society was 'always-already-there', and that there was nothing more to say. However, it always seemed strange to me that Spinoza did not seek to explain why, exactly, political society was 'always-already-there'. This is why I tried a first time, twenty-four years ago,⁴ to fill in this lacuna by recourse to the theory of *affective imitation* expounded in *Ethics* III. But from this theory, I retained (following, for that matter, an indication Spinoza himself provided in *TP* I, 5) only the four passions that constitute what could be called

¹ [Originally published as 'L'indignation et le *conatus* de l'État spinoziste', in Myriam Revault d'Allones, and Hadi Rizk (eds), *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994): 153–65; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² See my essay on 'The Problem of Spinoza's Development' [included in this volume as Chapter 11].

³ *TP* I, 7; *CWS* II, 506.

⁴ See Matheron [1969] 1988: 321–7.

the *fundamental cycle of interhuman life*: pity, ambition for glory, ambition for domination, and envy. The explanation that I gave still seems to me today to be a *possible* explanation, and even for the most part to be correct. But as such, it has the disadvantage of having to appeal to utilitarian calculations, and not all humans necessarily make this kind of calculation. It thus did not *prove*, strictly speaking, that – human nature being what it is – political society must necessarily exist. But I now think that in the *TP* there is a *passage*, and only one, which, when it is entirely clarified, accounts for this necessity and thus contains the sought-after explanation. And at the same time, we will find that this single passage, when it is well understood, also enables us to understand why Spinoza did not explicitly give this explanation.

* * *

This single passage is Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI. But we must read it carefully, on pain of only discovering banalities in it. In this paragraph, Spinoza tells us:

Men [. . .] are guided more by affect than by reason. So a multitude naturally agrees, and wishes to be led, as if by one mind, not because reason is guiding them, but because of some common affect. As we said in III.9, they have a common hope, or fear, or a common desire to avenge some harm. Moreover, all men fear being alone, because no one alone has the strength to defend himself, and no one alone can provide the things necessary for life. So by nature men desire a civil order. It can't happen by nature that they'll ever completely dissolve it.⁵

This passage, on a first reading, might easily seem to be open to a contractarian interpretation: human beings, fearing the inconveniences that the solitude of the state of nature would have in store for them, *agree amongst themselves* to submit themselves to a common authority. And the verb *convenire*, which is used here, can in fact have a juridical meaning: that of 'entering into a contract'. However, on a second reading, it is clear that this interpretation won't do. Spinoza, in fact, does not simply say *convenire*, but *naturaliter convenire*; and anybody reading this would understand that he is opposed to Hobbes here: if humans 'naturally agree' to live in political society, what this really means is that they have no need for the artifice of a convention in order to arrive at this result. Are we then to understand that human beings live naturally in political society because, being endowed with

⁵ *TP* VI, 1; CWS II, 532.

reason, they have always understood its advantages, and that consequently they never seriously considered the question of living otherwise? The end of the paragraph seems to confirm this. And yet, on a third reading, this is also ruled out. For the beginning of the passage explicitly indicates that political society has *only* passionate causes. Spinoza does not only mean that passions such as fear give us the end (avoiding solitude) and that reason indicates the means (recognising the authority of a sovereign); for, in that case, he would say (as he had said earlier, following Hobbes, in Chapter XVI of the *TTP*) that political society is explained *both* by reason and by the passions. Here, by contrast, the entire process (fear of solitude, natural accord in order to escape it, desire to obey a sovereign authority) is passionate from beginning to end. But then, in what does this process consist, exactly? What are the intermediary passions between the first term and the last? To this question, Spinoza here only gives a very elliptical response: he simply *refers to Paragraph 9 of Chapter III*. But, if we turn to this paragraph, a great surprise awaits us.

Paragraph 9 of Chapter III, in fact, is devoted, not at all to the causes of the *existence* of the State, but on the contrary to the causes of its *dissolution*. There we find a formula analogous to the one that will be repeated in Chapter VI: ‘certainly’, Spinoza tells us, ‘men are guided by nature (*naturae ductu*) to unite in one aim (*in unum conspirant*)’ – which is the equivalent of Chapter VI’s *natura convenire* – ‘either because of a common [hope or] a common fear, or because they long to avenge some common loss’.⁶ But this time it is a matter of an agreement of subjects *against* the sovereign. And, contrary to what we will find in Chapter VI, Spinoza here explains in what this ‘guidance by nature’ consists that leads subjects to join forces: its name is *indignation*. In fact, he says, ‘because the Right of the State is defined by the common power [*potentia*] of a multitude, it’s certain that its power [*potentiam*] and Right are diminished to the extent that it provides many people with reasons to conspire against it’;⁷ and this is precisely why, he adds, ‘what arouses general indignation belongs less to the right of the State’.⁸ And the

⁶ TP III, 9; CWS II, 521; G III, 288.

⁷ Ibid. Translation modified.

⁸ Ibid. Translation modified. [‘Tertio denique considerandum venit ad civitatis jus ea minus pertinere, quae plurimi indignantur’ (G III, 288.). Throughout his translation of the *Political Treatise*, Curley tends to drop the language of indignation: ‘The third and final consideration is that things most people resent [*quae plurimi indignantur*] are less within a Commonwealth’s Right’ (CWS II, 521). And while Shirley retains ‘indignation’, his rendering makes it sound as though that which arouses indignation *could* be part of the right of the commonwealth or state: ‘The third and final point to

link between common fear, indignation, the coalition of subjects and the destruction of the State is illustrated much more concisely still at the end of Paragraph 4 of Chapter IV, where Spinoza examines the effects of an excess of tyranny: 'To slaughter and rob his subjects, to rape their young women, and actions of that kind, *turn fear into indignation*, and hence *turn the civil order into a state of war*.'⁹ Now, if the transformation of fear into indignation turns the civil state into a state of war, the reference in Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI to Paragraph 9 of Chapter III seems rather to indicate that it is also capable of turning the state of war into a civil state. But how? In order to understand this, the best thing to do is to examine *how*, exactly, this transformation takes place.

First of all, let us recall what indignation is. As it is defined in the *Ethics*, it is another form of affective imitation: as the first corollary to *Ethics* III, 27 has it, it is *the hate that we feel for those who do evil to a being that resembles us*; and we feel by the imitation of the victim's affects, with an intensity all the greater the more the latter resembles us – it being understood, as Proposition 22 with its Scholium had shown beforehand, that it will be stronger still if this victim is also someone that we love. From there, one understands how, under a tyrannical regime, common fear can turn into indignation and lead to an overthrow of oppression. The tyrant, by definition, is one who governs essentially by fear. But fear always implies the hatred for that which inspires it; for it is a form of sadness, and hatred is nothing other than sadness accompanied by the idea of an external cause. However, if we stopped there, nothing would happen yet; there would simply be common fear, that is, if each feared the tyrant on their own without somehow being concerned for others, the hatred towards the tyrant would remain episodic, for it would never terrorise all of its subjects at once; and anyway, each would hate it in isolation, would wish the worst on it in isolation, would hope in isolation for some vengeance, but without seeing a way out of their situation. This is what happens when the tyrant's excesses are not too visible, and when the tyrant successfully ensures that each subject, closed in on themselves, remains silent about their own misfortunes for fear of being denounced, and seeks to extricate themselves from the whole affair at the expense of others: in the Turkish despotism, Spinoza tells us in Paragraph 4 of Chapter

be considered is this, that matters which arouse general indignation are not likely to fall within the right of the commonwealth' (Spinoza 2002: 693). Matheron's argument here is that the very same dynamics that make these things arouse indignation are the reason why they *cannot* be considered as falling within the right of the State.]

⁹ TP IV, 4; CWS II, 527. Matheron's emphasis; translation modified.

VI, subjects lived *in isolation*. But when the misdeeds of the leaders become too enormous to remain hidden, when everything starts to be known and talked about, indignation necessarily appears, and this changes everything: each becomes *permanently* indignant about the abuses that they see committed around them or that they hear about all the time, and consequently is permanently disposed to hate the tyrant and wish them ill; and each, from the moment they know that others besides themselves are indignant about the evils done to them, begins to see *that they are not alone* in the face of the tyrant, that they can count on others to help and that a collective resistance is thus possible. At that point, one of two things will occur: either the tyrant understands the danger, backpedals by granting some concessions to their subjects, and their power is checked until they consider themselves once again strong enough to oppress their subjects (which sets these subjects against the tyrant anew, etc.), these pendular oscillations thereby ensuring one way or another an approximate self-regulation of the social body; or else, on the contrary, the tyrant remains obstinate, and insurrection becomes the order of the day.

Suppose now that this insurrection overthrows the tyrant, but that this leads to a civil war that drags on, breaks down little by little into a multitude of small local wars, and finally leads to a complete dissolution of all social relations. Let us go farther and deliberately enter the realm of fiction: suppose that the individuals thereby led to the state of nature lose all memory of their life in political society. Making recourse to this kind of fictive hypothesis is in no way anti-Spinozist in principle, any more than it is anti-Spinozist to define 'sphere' by fictively positing a semi-circle turning around its diameter,¹⁰ or to deduce the properties of the intellectual love of God by fictively positing it as arising in time although it is in reality eternal.¹¹ Incidentally, Spinoza explicitly justifies counterfactual conditionals in Paragraph 57 of the *TdIE*.¹² So, in this hypothesis of a return to the pure state of nature, what will happen? Following Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI, we have seen, political society must necessarily reappear; and *if we take seriously the reference that Spinoza makes here to Paragraph 9 of Chapter III*, we have to accept that it must reappear by a process analogous to that by which it dissolves; which comes down to saying that *indignation engenders the State in exactly the same way that it causes revolutions*. Now, given the preceding, the way in which things take place is actually very easy to understand.

¹⁰ See *TdIE*, 72; CWS I, 32.

¹¹ *Ethics* V, 33 Schol.; CWS I, 611. [See Chapter 6 of this volume.]

¹² *TdIE*, 57; CWS I, 26.

Consider now a group of individuals living in the vicinity of one another, making no use of their reason, and having no idea even of what political society could be. We can immediately deduce from the Spinozist theory of the passions (which is what I did in 1969) that each of them would successively engage with one another in the cycle of pity, ambition for glory, ambition for domination, and envy: if one of them encountered a difficulty, another would help them out of pity, would continue to help them out of the ambition for glory, and would benefit from trying to impose on them their own desires and their own values (by violence, if need be), and would end up trying to strip them of the goods that they had helped them procure; and this would be reproduced a multitude of times, with only a continual change of participants. If we stop there, and if we hypothetically eliminate any utilitarian calculus (which I did not do radically enough in 1969), nothing new would ever be produced: each victimised individual would constantly remain alone in the face of their aggressor, like each subject of the Turkish tyrants was alone in the face of their masters, and the situation could continue indefinitely; the roles of aggressor and victim would only go through endless permutations. But the couplet aggressor–victim is precisely never isolated. For all aggression has witnesses which, by affective imitation, become indignant against those who they consider to be the aggressor and come to the aid of those who they consider to be the victim. So that at the end of what could be a very short period of time, we will obtain the following *double result*. On the one hand, everyone will, as an aggressor, have run up against the indignation of all, and will thus consider each as a potential enemy; and each, as a victim, will have benefited from the indignation of all and will thus consider each as a potential ally. Each, consequently, will fear all others and will hope to benefit from the help of all; *one and the same thing will thus inspire fear and hope in each: the power [puissance] of all*.¹³ And on the other hand, each will ceaselessly find themselves in a state of indignation against someone and will thus be permanently disposed to come to the aid of all those that they consider as victims of aggression; so that *the power of all can become an effective reality*, benevolent to some and formidable to others. And this possibility will quickly be realised.

Indeed, from that point forward, each time that two individuals enter into conflict, each of them will call on the aid of all others, since all will be able to help them. And each of the others will respond to the call, since they will already be so disposed: each, imitating the affects of the one of the adversaries who most resembles them, will be indignant against the

¹³ See TP III, 3 *in fine*; CWS II, 518.

one who resembles them less, and will fight against them; and the one who resembles them more will evidently be the one who has more or less the same desires and the same values and who possesses more or less the same things. Consequently, all things being equal, victory will come to the one of the two adversaries who conforms more to the current model, and the one who deviates more will be crushed and dissuaded from starting again. Under these conditions, after a certain number of repetitions, a consensus will end up imposing common norms concerning what each can desire and possess without danger: *there will actually exist a collective power [puissance] of the multitude* that will ensure the security of conformists and which will repress deviants. This amounts to saying, in conformity with the Spinozist definition of *imperium* ('right, which is defined by the power [*potentia*] of a multitude'¹⁴), that we have here, at least informally and in a nascent state, an *imperium democraticum*.

And this *imperium*, once it appears in broad daylight, will tend to perpetuate itself. For each, through hope and fear, will again put their own forces at its disposal; which will enable the power of the multitude to again reconstitute itself and to continue to inspire fear and hope in each, etc. After which, of course, this informal democracy could be institutionalised: the multitude might safeguard the *imperium* for itself by giving it rules of functioning that will consolidate customs; or, on the contrary, if it runs up against problems that are too difficult, it might return it to an individual or a small group.¹⁵ But, all things being equal, the same process of self-reproduction will always be at play.

Here then is what the reference to III, 9 in VI, 1 suggests to us. Of course, this hypothesis, since it is fictive, cannot explain how, *historically*, political societies were constituted. But it explains *ontologically* why political society necessarily exists: it shows why, even in the case most unfavourable for its formation (in the unreal case of individuals entirely deprived of political experience and subjected only to the blind play of their passions, incapable even of the slightest instrumental use of their reason), political society, in spite of everything, must *somehow* arise; which lets us understand *a fortiori* why it necessarily exists in all other possible and real cases. And it enables us at the same time to understand *what kind of necessity is at stake here*. In fact, when we say: 'political society is necessary because human beings are subject to their passions', this is true, but it is equivocal. If by this one understands: 'there *must be* political society in order to lead human beings to live

¹⁴ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

¹⁵ See the beginning of TP VII, 5; CWS II, 547.

according to reason because they do not do so spontaneously', it is false: this only gives the reason why the philosopher accepts political society and seeks to improve it, but it explains nothing of *the cause for its existence*. What it must mean, then, is: 'human beings are subject to their passions and, as a *consequence* of the very play of their passions, political society necessarily exists'.

* * *

At this point, however, a question arises: Why didn't Spinoza explicitly give us this hypothetical genesis of the State, which ontologically accounts for the necessity of its existence, in the *TP*? Why was he content to suggest it to us by a mere reference? But in fact, what we have just seen suffices to make us understand that he had two reasons for this: one negative and the other positive.

First, the negative reason: Spinoza, in fact, *really had no need* to give us this genetic explanation; or, which amounts to the same thing, there is a sense in which he does nothing other than give it to us throughout the whole *TP*. Actually, Paragraph 9 of Chapter III shows that indignation, when it does not lead to the complete destruction of the existing form of the State, plays a *regulative role* in the functioning of political society by reining in the sovereign and thereby establishing checks on its power. Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI, for its part, allusively shows that the role of indignation is not only regulative, but that it is also *constitutive* of the very reality of the State. Now it is easy to see that these two roles, in reality, are not truly distinct. In fact, what emerges from the very explanation that Spinoza suggests is that *the state of nature*, in the strict sense, *cannot exist*, and that consequently *there is not*, in reality, any genesis of political society *from out of that state*. This does not in any way mean that human beings cannot find themselves in a situation analogous to that which we typically call 'the state of nature'. But it does mean that this so-called 'state of nature', contrary to what Grotius and Hobbes had previously thought and what Locke and Rousseau would subsequently think, is not really a *state*: it is not a *status*,¹⁶ a stable situation having its own proper characteristics and from which one would have to leave in order to enter into political society. The state of nature, in reality, to the extent that it would destroy itself if it were to exist, is *the very genesis of political society*, and not at all *that from out of which* this genesis would take place. Or more precisely, it is *one of the moments* of the self-genesis of political society, or of its self-reproduction, or of its self-regulation, in those cases where the

¹⁶ ['status' in Latin in the original.]

latter is effected *in the worst way*: in cases where an *extreme disequilibrium* (the dissolution of a particular form of the State as a result of indignation) is compensated for by a *no less extreme* re-equalisation (the reconstitution of another form of the State as a result of indignation). Now there is no difference in nature between this process and the ordinary internal dynamics of actually existing political societies. Simply put, in the majority of cases, the gaps between disequilibrium and compensatory re-equalisation are not very large: leaders commit abuses, subjects become indignant against them, but the leaders are afraid of being overthrown and take steps towards rallying the majority of subjects to their side; which means that this majority will become indignant anew preferentially, no longer against the leaders, but against what remains of their enemies. But the process is fundamentally the same: we have in both cases a pendular oscillation between an indignation *against the established order* (which generally only threatens it, but which, in extreme cases, overthrows it) and an indignation *against the enemies of the order* (generally against those of the same order as had previously existed, which has been re-established somehow, but, in extreme cases, against those of the new order which replaced the old one), the state of nature being simply the extreme limit that this oscillation may reach in the worst of cases. And this pendular oscillation at base manifests nothing other than the very *conatus* of civil society: its obstinate and tenacious effort to persevere in its being through and against everything. But it then becomes clear that the *genesis of political society*, abstracting from any question of origin, is nothing other than *the very process by which it produces and reproduces itself permanently*, every day and before our eyes, and which is strictly identical to that by which it would have exited from a hypothetical state of nature if the latter had existed – just as the perfections of the intellectual love of God are strictly identical to those that would have been if it had arisen in time. And this is why, precisely, the definition of the *imperium* as being ‘right, which is defined by the power of the multitude’¹⁷ is indeed a *genetic definition*: it simply expresses in shorthand this process of the self-constitution and self-reconstitution of the State.

However, if it is true that Spinoza had no need to include a separate discussion dedicated to the genesis of the state, it is also true that it would not have been a waste of time for him to have done so, if only insofar as it would have allowed him to show that the question should not be posed in this way. That he moreover felt this way himself is precisely what the discreet reference to III, 9 in VI, 1 shows. But why this discretion? Why does Spinoza

¹⁷ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

restrict himself to a mere reference, as if it were a question of a thought not to be divulged without precaution, a thought better left to be guessed at by those readers who would be intellectually and morally capable of facing up to it? It is here that the *positive reason* for his silence steps in.

This reason is at once very simple and very troubling. On the one hand, in fact, we have just seen that indignation plays an essential role in the self-constitution of political society. But on the other hand, Spinoza explicitly indicated to us in the Scholium of *Ethics* IV, 51 that *indignation is necessarily evil*. And this should be taken in the strictest sense. For if it is true that there are passions which are evil by themselves but which are indirectly good in certain cases (humility, repentance, disgrace, etc.¹⁸), Spinoza is very clear that this is not the case for indignation: it is necessarily evil because it is a form of interhuman hate, and interhuman hate ‘can never be good’¹⁹ – this affirmation is justified by the fact that hate necessarily determines us to strive to destroy that which we hate, and this is absolutely contrary to the demand of reason that pushes us to desire for others that which we desire for ourselves.²⁰

Thus it is not a question of distinguishing between many kinds of indignation, some of which might be good, for example revolutionary indignation against tyrants. Even if we were to allow that indignation could be good for society, it could never be so for the individuals that experience it; and by the same token, it is evil *as such* for society itself, for it introduces into the City the seeds of discord that would compromise the positive effects that it might potentially have: there is no difference, from this point of view, between the September Massacres and the assassination of the Brothers De Witt, even if one agrees that Spinoza would no doubt have approved of the French Revolution. But then, if indignation is constitutive of the very *conatus* of the State, does this not mean that there is, at the very root of political society, something inescapably evil?

For it seems that this is the case. If in fact we consider the *imperium democraticum* of the nascent state, such as I have tried to reconstruct it above – the *imperium democraticum* characterised by the still-informal exercise of the power of a multitude in full effervescence – it is clear that its functioning is in no way idyllic: the elementary form of democracy, according to Spinoza, is lynching. And all actual societies retain a trace of this, in more refined forms, to some degree. It is true that Spinoza’s whole effort in his

¹⁸ *Ethics* IV, 54 Schol.; CWS I, 576.

¹⁹ *Ethics* IV, 45; CWS I, 571.

²⁰ *Ethics* IV, 37; CWS I, 564–5.

constitutional projects consists, in one sense, in trying to efface this trace as much as possible, which is to say to conceive of institutional mechanisms that would ensure *as much as possible* the self-regulation of the political body by appealing to positive affects rather than to hate. But, even under the most civilised forms of self-regulation, indignation subsists, however marginally. In the case of the Hebraic theocracy this is evident: one of its principal motivations is 'theological hatred', which it cultivates equally alongside positive motivations; even if it essentially bears on the foreign enemy of God, it nevertheless remains true that each citizen relies on its constant threat, knowing that given the least deviation on their part it would be instantaneously substituted for neighbourly love in the minds of their compatriots and that everyone would turn against them. In the States of the *Political Treatise*, by contrast, positive affects are preferentially cultivated; but indignation remains present in the background. No doubt Spinoza told us, already in the Scholium to Proposition 51 in Part IV of the *Ethics*, that the sovereign who condemns a citizen – and doubtlessly also the judge who condemns in its name – is not motivated by indignation but by *pietas*. But he cannot understand *pietas* to mean the virtue that he will define in the first Scholium to Proposition 37 of Part IV of the *Ethics* ('the Desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason'²¹), for, with some exceptions, sovereigns and judges are human beings subject to passions like any other. So, he must mean this word in its traditional sense: that of the love of country. And in fact, in the States of the *Political Treatise*, judges must love their country, without regard for any of the very concrete advantages that it procures for them (that they receive, for example, the proceeds from the fines that they impose).²² But strictly speaking, one who, under the regime of passion, loves their country and consequently the group of citizens taken as a whole, is necessarily indignant against those who do the latter wrong by troubling the civil peace. And the same goes for everyone who approves of the functioning of justice in general. Simply put, in the case of the most civilised States, indignation becomes *abstract*: it aims above all not at this or that individual suspected rightly or wrongly, but at delinquents in general – and, only as a consequence, those who have been truly identified as such according to the applicable procedures. But it is always a matter of indignation. And it is impossible that this could be otherwise, even in the most perfect *imperium democraticum*, about which Spinoza lacked the time to give us a theory. I agree entirely with everything that could be said about

²¹ *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 1; CWS I, 565.

²² *TP* VI, 29; CWS II, 541. *TP* VIII, 41; CWS II, 583.

the *potentia multitudinis* and the liberatory effects of its full exercise, but it must not be forgotten that, in the *imperium democraticum*, it is a matter of a power [*puissance*] that is also exercised over each of the members of the multitude taken individually, and potentially *against* certain among them. It is true, of course, that a community of sages dominated by the intellectual love of God would make collective decisions, and that it would make them democratically; but we would then have a democracy without *imperium*, and this would no longer truly be a State. To say that there is an *imperium*, even a democratic one, is equivalent to saying that there is repression, no matter how minimal it is. And under the regime of passion, it is impossible to *want* this repression without feeling an indignation, at least a virtual one, against all those who will potentially deserve to be submitted to it. Not that indignation is indispensable to the exercise of repression; rather, it is an ineluctable side-effect of it.

There is indeed, in the end, something radically evil in the nature of every State, including the best constituted one, even though such a State would be otherwise favourable to the development of reason and the 'bright side' would massively outweigh the evil in it. This is not a matter of a theoretical aporia: it follows from Spinozism, and moreover, nothing in Spinozism requires that things should be otherwise. But no doubt Spinoza found this somewhat disturbing, and preferred not to insist on it too strongly, instead discreetly pointing out a truth that he held in reserve to be developed further. Perhaps this is *one* of the reasons for the incompletion of the *Political Treatise*.

Passions and Institutions According to Spinoza

Spinoza's political doctrine is, in a sense, deduced entirely from his theory of passions, even though Spinoza himself did not always carry out this deduction explicitly.¹ Indeed, we can show, first of all, that the Spinozist theory of passions allows us to account for what Spinoza calls '*the causes and natural foundations*'² of political society and the main types of institutions that it includes. We can show, second, that this theory of passions allows us to account for the way in which Spinoza conceives of the *institutional dysfunctions* that are at the origin of the self-destruction of the majority of actually existing political societies. And finally, we can show that it allows us to account for the way in which Spinoza conceives of the remedies to be given for these dysfunctions: these remedies consist in the establishment of *perfectly self-regulating institutional systems*. These are the three points that I wish to try to summarise here.³

'The Causes and Natural Foundations' of Political Society

Spinoza tells us explicitly in Paragraph 7 of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise* that 'the causes and natural foundations' of the State must be deduced not from the teachings of reason, 'but from the common nature, or condition, of

¹ [Originally published as 'Passions et institutions selon Spinoza', in Christian Lazzeri and Dominique Reynié (eds), *La raison d'État: Politique et rationalité* (Paris: PUF, 1992): 141–70; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² TP I, 7; CWS II, 506.

³ We are here summarising, in a *very simplified* form, the analyses that I gave long ago in chapters V, VII, IX and XI of my book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Matheron [1969] 1988). At bottom, we are only modifying them on one point (see note 21, below).

men⁴ – that is to say, very clearly, from the nature or condition of human beings *subjected to passions*. But which passions exactly? On this point, we have three kinds of indications at our disposal.

A. Throughout the *TP*, Spinoza presupposes as self-evident that human beings desire necessarily to *possess material goods* (this is *avaritia*, a passion ‘that is universal and constant’⁵) and that they are necessarily *superstitious*.

Now, on the one hand, the origin of the desire to possess material goods was explained perfectly in the *first half of Part III* of the *Ethics*, even independently of any reference to interhuman relations. We necessarily strive to persevere in our being.⁶ When this striving (*conatus*) is favoured by external causes, it becomes *joy*.⁷ When this joy is accompanied by the idea of an external cause that we attribute to it, it becomes *love* for this external cause:⁸ we attach ourselves to it unconditionally, we desire to appropriate it for ourselves at any cost and to preserve it,⁹ we *alienate* ourselves entirely to it. And this alienation, by derivation, can be transferred from the thing in which we rejoice to other things with which it is associated in our mind: for example, to the means of obtaining and re-obtaining it in the future, such as money¹⁰ or land.

And, on the other hand, the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* had already showed how this theory of love allows us to account for the genesis of our belief in *anthropomorphic divinities*, while the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise* had analysed the mechanism by which, as soon as we fall victim to fear,¹¹ this belief is transformed into superstition.¹² In the last analysis, then, superstition too is entirely explicable on the basis of the first half of the theory of passions.

Thus, before even taking interhuman relations into account, we know already why human beings are necessarily subject to two sorts of alienation: an *economic* alienation and an *ideological* alienation.

⁴ *TP* I, 7; CWS II, 506.

⁵ *TP* X, 6; CWS II, 599.

⁶ *Ethics* III, 4–9; CWS I, 498–500.

⁷ *Ethics* III, 11 and Schol.; CWS I, 500–1.

⁸ *Ethics*, III, 12–13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

⁹ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

¹⁰ See *Ethics* IV, DA XXVIII; CWS I, 593.

¹¹ See *Ethics* III, 18 and Schol. 2; CWS I, 504–5.

¹² See *Ethics* III, 50 and Schol.; CWS I, 521–2.

B. In Paragraph 5 of Chapter I of the *TP*, Spinoza summarises for us, in a masterful, abridged form, the essentials of his theory of *passional interhuman relations* such as he developed it in the second half of Part III of the *Ethics*. The passions mentioned in this paragraph are *pity*, the *ambition for glory*, the *ambition for domination*, and *envy*. And as Spinoza points out, all four share a common origin: *affective imitation*, whose deduction is given in *Ethics* III, 27. As soon as we imagine that a being *similar to us* experiences this or that affect, we ourselves experience, from this fact alone, this same affect. Consequently, when we see somebody suffering, we share in their suffering (this is *pity*¹³) and we desire to free them from it (this is *benevolence*¹⁴). If we succeed in doing so, the other rejoices, and consequently we ourselves rejoice in the idea of ourselves as the cause (this is *glory*¹⁵); and since here a very pleasant feeling is at stake, we desire to continue to help others in order to reproduce it (this is the *ambition for glory*¹⁶). But if we wish to make others happy, we do not wish, for all that, to sacrifice our own desires; we thus strive, in order to resolve this contradiction, to convert others to our own values, to oblige them to love what we love and to hate what we hate:¹⁷ the ambition for glory changes into an *ambition for domination*,¹⁸ and this can engender the worst of intolerances¹⁹ – in particular, concerning *ideological* matters, *superstitious intolerance*. Finally, if we succeed in making others love the things that we wished to make them love, if the other takes possession of one of these things and gets joy from it, and if this thing can only be possessed by one person, we desire to enjoy it ourselves and consequently take it from them: this is *envy*,²⁰ which is manifested principally in *economic* matters. But as soon as we have succeeded in depriving others of what they enjoyed, they are saddened, we take pity on them and the cycle begins again.

¹³ *Ethics* III, 27 Schol.; CWS I, 509.

¹⁴ *Ethics* III, 27 Cor. 3; CWS I, 509.

¹⁵ *Ethics* III, 30 and Schol.; CWS I, 510–12. Translation modified. ['. . . laetitiam concomitante idea causae internae gloriam et tristiam huic contrariam pudorem appellabimus' (G II, 163). Curley translates this 'gloriam' as 'love of esteem', creating a misleading resonance with the 'self-esteem' of the next sentence; 'self-esteem' is how Curley translates Spinoza's *acquiescentia in se ipso*. On the latter, see our note 17 in Chapter 6, above.]

¹⁶ *Ethics* III, 29 and Schol.; CWS I, 510.

¹⁷ *Ethics* III, 31 and Cor.; CWS I, 512.

¹⁸ *Ethics* III, 31 Schol.; CWS I, 512.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ethics* III, 32 and Schol.; CWS I, 513.

C. In Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI of the *TP*, Spinoza states that, if human beings naturally agree to live in political society, it is not under the guidance of reason, but under the influence of a common passion such as fear. And in order to justify this claim, he references Paragraph 9 of Chapter III, where he had shown how human beings end up joining forces when the fear that they felt in common changes into *indignation*. But indignation too is a form of affective imitation, which was explained in *Ethics* III, 27, Cor. 1: it is the hate that we feel for one who hurts a being similar to us, and we experience it by the imitation of the affects of the victim.

These are the three kinds of indications which, in the *TP*, allow us to clarify somewhat the relation between the theory of passions and the theory of the 'causes and natural foundations of the State'. And in fact, on this basis, we can understand perfectly *why human beings necessarily live in political society*, even though Spinoza himself did not give us this deduction. We can understand how, supposing that human beings lived in the state of nature, they would necessarily leave it and almost immediately form the embryo of a State.

Let us suppose then that a certain number of individuals, without any experience of political society, live side-by-side in the state of nature in a specific place.²¹ If one of them experiences difficulties finding subsistence, one or many others, by pity or ambition for glory, will come help; then, if their help is efficacious, their pity and their ambition for glory will change into ambition for domination and envy, and they will begin to attack this individual; but a certain number of others, who were up until now only passive witnesses, will become indignant by the harm being done and will be led to come help; and this will happen many times over. But one who repeatedly takes the position of the aggressor will provoke the indignation of many others. And they too, for the same reason, will become indignant about each aggression that they will have witnessed. So that, at the end of what might only be a short period of time, since each is in the same position, each will necessarily have provoked the indignation of all the others and will thus consider them as potential aggressors, and each will necessarily have benefited from the indignation of all the others and will thus consider them as potential allies. Each, consequently, will fear all the others and will hope to get the help of all the others; one and the same thing will thus inspire in

²¹ This paragraph, where the only modification that I have made to my previous analyses is found (see note 3, above), recalls nearly word for word a passage from my essay on 'The Problem of Spinoza's Evolution' [included in this volume as Chapter 11].

each fear and hope: the power [*puissance*] of all.²² And from a different angle, since each will be ceaselessly in a state of indignation against somebody, each will judge this situation intolerable and will thus be permanently disposed to help all those that they consider victims of aggression: the power of all will be able to become an effective reality, both benevolent and formidable. We see what follows: each time that two individuals enter into conflict, each of them will call on the aid of all the others, and each of the others, responding to the call and imitating the affects of the one of the two adversaries that are *the most similar to themselves*, will be indignant and will fight against whomever resembles them the least: against those whose values most diverge from their own or who possess the most things that they do not possess. The one of the two adversaries that is the furthest from the majoritarian norm (the one who least resembles the others) will thus be crushed and dissuaded from beginning again. Under these conditions, after a certain number of repetitions, a consensus will finally be reached in order to impose common norms, in order to severely repress those who violate them and in order to powerfully protect those who respect them: there will exist a *collective power* [*puissance*] *of the multitude* that will ensure the security of the conformists and will neutralise the deviants – that is to say, there will exist, at least informally, an embryo of state sovereignty, since sovereignty is precisely ‘right defined by the power [*potential*] of the multitude’.²³

But the group thus formed will not be able to remain indefinitely in the inorganic state. If it wishes to survive, it will necessarily have to resolve a certain number of problems; and in order to do so, it will have to institutionalise itself. These problems will, of course, be multiple and very complex. But, according to what has already been established, it is easy to see that we can group them under three rubrics.

1. There is, first of all, clearly, the *problem of leadership*. The collectivity is constituted in a single force, but who is going to lead this single force? Now this is a very acute problem, as there are many candidates.²⁴ Indeed, beginning from the moment where political power exists, each, by *ambition for domination*, wants to participate in it as much as possible; and each, by envy, is saddened if political power is exercised by others. The ambition for domination is no longer only ideological, and envy is no longer only economic: they also become *political*. Whence all kinds of conflicts, upon whose resolution the survival of the group depends.

²² TP III, 3; CWS II, 517–18.

²³ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

²⁴ See TP VII, 5; CWS II, 547–8.

2. There is also the *problem of ideology*. For it is not sufficient to know who is going to lead, as we must also know what will be ordered: once those who are to wield supreme power have been designated, they must define *what is good and what is evil*.²⁵ This is indispensable, since one of the two original sources of conflicts among human beings is the *ambition for ideological domination*: since human beings fight because they do not have the same values and because each one wants to impose their values on others, the group will only survive if political authority succeeds in making the group accept *in a stable way*, at least in large part, a system of common values. And since the values that human beings adopt depend on their personal superstitions, this implies *that superstition itself be institutionalised*: one of the obligations of the State – that it carries out in any case, whether those who hold power like it or not, and without which it would no longer be a State – is to decide which religions are authorised and which religions are forbidden.²⁶

3. Finally, there is the *problem of property*. It too is an urgent problem, since the second original source of conflicts among human beings is *economic envy*: since human beings argue over the same things as soon as they can only be possessed by one person (which is particularly clear in the case of land), the group will only survive if the sovereign defines precisely *who has the right to what*, or *what belongs to each*,²⁷ and if it succeeds in making this regime of property acceptable in the long term.

Now, in fact, most of the time, these problems are poorly resolved. Whence all sorts of institutional dysfunctions which, in the long term, result in the destruction of the State.

The Institutional Dysfunctions of Political Society

On this point, Spinoza gives us two kinds of indications: on the one hand, there are two general principles; and on the other hand, there are a multitude of examples that appear to be merely juxtaposed, but which, if we make the effort to reconcile them, afford us a total vision of the catastrophic becoming of actually existing political societies – which is nearly equivalent to a theory of history.

The two general principles²⁸ are the following.

²⁵ TP II, 18; CWS II, 514–15.

²⁶ TP III, 10; CWS II, 521–2.

²⁷ TP II, 23; CWS II, 516.

²⁸ TP III, 8–9; CWS II, 520–1. TP IV, 4; CWS II, 526–7. TTP beginning of XVII; CWS II, 296–7.

First principle: we cannot make human beings do anything whatsoever; it is impossible to make them do something for which there would be no hope of reward or threat of punishment to motivate them. For example, we cannot force them to fly into the air. Nor can we force them, by simple repressive measures, to believe what appears absurd to them, to not desire to possess the things that they love, to love those who harm them or to hate those who do well unto them, etc. There is, as Étienne Balibar has argued, an ‘irreducible minimum’²⁹ of freedom that sovereigns are *obligated* to grant to their subjects, because it is impossible to go against human nature and to make it such that human beings stop being human.

Second principle: when sovereigns try, in spite of everything, to encroach upon this irreducible minimum, the consequences are catastrophic for the State. For the more they repress, the more they inspire fear in their subjects; but fear, since it is a form of sadness,³⁰ always implies hate for those we fear; and consequently, if they do not know how to stop it in time, this fear that they inspire, after a certain threshold, changes into *indignation* – according to the same mechanism that was at the origin of the constitution of political societies, but which is also the origin of their dissolution:³¹ subjects, as soon as each realises that they can count on others because all have become indignant by the wrong done to each, join forces against the sovereign who, in the most extreme scenario, is overthrown.

But when, exactly, are these situations produced? This is what the multiple examples given by Spinoza allows us to discern and on the basis of which it is possible to reconstitute an entire theory of the development of poorly organised political societies. If we take these examples and put them back to back, we see very clearly the way in which Spinoza conceives of the development of a political society from the moment it is supposed to leave the state of nature up until the moment of its ultimate dissolution and of its absorption by *other* political societies. There are, moreover, many possible schemas of development; but I will limit myself here to the one that is the most complete.

A. Let us take things from the beginning. Let us imagine human beings who have just left the state of nature and have just constituted a political society, without having ever had the experience of a previous political society (a situation which, of course, has never actually taken place). Which form of

²⁹ [Balibar 1998: 94.]

³⁰ *Ethics* III, 18 Schol. 2; CWS I, 505.

³¹ *TP* III, 9; CWS II, 521. *TP* IV, 4; CWS II, 526–7.

sovereignty will they give themselves? In reality, to be sure, it varies greatly: everything depends on the regime human beings had been familiar with before returning to the state of nature. The Hebrews, for example, who had been familiar with slavery in Egypt, *could not* live in a democracy.³² But since we are supposing here that there was not anything before the state of nature, the solution clearly presents itself: *the first form of sovereignty, logically, is democracy*. In the state of nature, nobody lastingly ruled over anybody else, and, aside from exceptional cases, nobody really imposed themselves by force or by prestige; now, aside from particular reasons, the ambition for domination and envy make it such that nobody willingly cedes authority to another;³³ thus, since there is no particular reason to give sovereignty to any one individual as opposed to another, it will be given to the assembly of people as a whole: each wanted to lead, and each will be satisfied with this, since each will have their own ration of power equal to the others; this is why democracy is the simplest and the most logical solution (the most ‘natural’³⁴), and likely the one that was most often adopted historically.³⁵

That being said, how will this primitive democracy develop? Here there are two possible hypotheses: circumstances are either unfavourable or favourable.

First hypothesis: circumstances are unfavourable. In this case, democracy cannot maintain itself. In fact, human beings that are supposed to have left the state of nature are, by definition, very *miserable*. Three consequences follow:

1. *Economically*, they live in a very rudimentary natural economy: no cities, no commerce, no money, etc. These are *barbarians*.³⁶ The only economic good to which they can be attached is thus land. Now land is a good that can only be possessed by a single individual: it is the *monopolistic* good par excellence. And consequently, it is the one that generates the most *envy*: if my neighbour possesses a plot of land and if this possession makes them happy, I necessarily desire to possess *the same plot of land* (precisely this very one, in what makes it different from all the others, for this is what makes them happy and these are *the affects* that I imitate); and since the partitioning of plots of land has already happened, I cannot even, in the event that I fail, search elsewhere for another more or less similar plot of land; I thus

³² TTP V, 27; CWS II, 145.

³³ TP VII, 5; CWS II, 547–8.

³⁴ TTP XVI, 36; CWS II, 289.

³⁵ TP VIII, 12; CWS II, 570.

³⁶ TTP V, 20; CWS II, 143. TP X, 4; CWS II, 598–9.

necessarily covet the goods of others. Whence the possibility of very violent conflicts that would only disappear totally if the private ownership of land was eliminated,³⁷ and which, in the absence of any monetary economy, must be particularly frequent.

2. *Ideologically*, since human beings are miserable, they are necessarily very superstitious.³⁸ And consequently, because of the ambition for domination, each desires to force others to adopt their personal superstition in all of its details, in its most absurd and its most irrational aspects, thus in its most *incommunicable* aspects. Whence an extreme intolerance which, again, makes very violent conflicts possible: this is 'theological hatred' in the pure state.³⁹

3. Due to these economic and ideological conflicts, human beings are, *politically*, rather unfit for collective government:⁴⁰ the meetings of the assembly of the people are turbulent and always risk turning into a riot. And consequently, when circumstances pose serious problems that must be resolved quickly (famine, epidemic, foreign aggression, etc.), the assembly of the people *can no longer function*: feeling itself incapable of reaching an agreement internally and unable to avoid degenerating into seditions, it abdicates, in this confusion, to the benefit of a prestigious individual or a small group of prestigious individuals, which it believes to be capable of mastering the situation.⁴¹ Democracy is thus transformed into a monarchy or into a very restrained aristocracy.

Second hypothesis: circumstances are favourable. In this case, to the extent that there are not any major problems, democracy can somehow maintain itself. And it becomes *more and more capable* of functioning correctly. In fact:

1. Civil peace favours *economic development*: we pass from barbarism to *civilisation*.⁴² Land is better cultivated, arts and crafts develop, commerce appears, cities are built, currencies are invented or re-invented, etc. Under these conditions, human beings are able to attach themselves no longer only to the land, but also to *money*. Now, on the one hand, money divides *less* than land, for it is a *less monopolistic* good: if my neighbour has a certain sum of money, I can obviously desire to take it from them, but this is not the

³⁷ TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

³⁸ TTP Praef.; CWS II, 67–8. See the example of the Hebrews, TTP II, 40–1; CWS II, 105–6. And by way of contrast, see the example of the Macedonians, TTP XVII, 23–9; CWS II, 301.

³⁹ TTP XVII, 65; CWS II, 311.

⁴⁰ See the example of the Hebrews: TTP V, 26–9; CWS II, 145–6.

⁴¹ TP VII, 5; CWS II, 547–8.

⁴² TP X, 4; CWS II, 598–9.

only possible solution; I could just as easily acquire *the same* sum of money by working and saving (this will indeed be the *same* sum of money since, in this case, qualitative differences are no longer applicable). Economic conflicts thus decrease. And on the other hand, the market economy positively creates a common set of interests: human beings tend, to a certain extent, to agree about what concerns ‘common affairs and the arts of peace’.⁴³

2. Since human beings are less miserable, they also become less superstitious, and thus less intolerant: they no longer seek to impose *every detail* of their own superstition on others. Economic prosperity, incidentally, appeals to foreign countries,⁴⁴ which have other superstitions, and these contacts make religious monotheism impossible:⁴⁵ one becomes habituated to accepting that not everybody has exactly the same beliefs. And under these conditions:

3. Since economic and ideological conflicts decrease, the assembly of the people can function in a less turbulent manner. Human beings become more apt for collective government.

And yet, for a completely different reason, *democracy disappears all the same*. In fact, the natives absolutely will not grant civic rights to those foreigners that flock to a country for its economic prosperity, and who become more and more numerous; for the ambition for domination and envy are satisfied the more we are *distinguished* from others, the more we are privileged with respect to them.⁴⁶ *We thus refuse immigrants the right to vote*, who remain excluded from the assembly of the people.⁴⁷ But, after some generations, the descendants of these immigrants are no longer distinguishable from citizens – aside from, precisely, their non-participation in power [*pouvoir*]. Democracy thus becomes aristocratic: and it naturally becomes this way, spontaneously, by the simple play of economic growth.⁴⁸ And its undoing is its lack of fidelity to its own internal principle: democracy withers away by being insufficiently democratic.

B. Let us now consider *aristocracy*. Concretely, to be sure, Spinoza is thinking of market aristocracies such as Holland, Venice, the Genoese, etc.: regimes in which power [*pouvoir*] belongs to an urban patrician class composed

⁴³ TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

⁴⁴ TP VIII, 12; CWS II, 570.

⁴⁵ See TTP XVII, 1–3; CWS II, 322–3.

⁴⁶ *Ethics* III, 55 Schol.; CWS I, 525–6.

⁴⁷ TP VIII, 12; CWS II, 570.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

exclusively of the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, while the rest of the population is excluded from the civic body. How will this aristocracy develop?

Here, the drama comes from the disequilibrium that is due to the progressive diminution of the patrician class in relation to the plebeians. As long as the patricians are numerous enough, things will go well. But, in fact, their number tends more and more to decrease. There are indeed some patrician families that disappear, and there are others deprived of their civic rights following some crime, while others are ruined and expelled, etc.⁴⁹ And during this time, the total population continues to increase, while the patrician class, always for the same reasons, refuses more than ever to increase its numbers. Now this disequilibrium will entail three kinds of consequences.

1. First consequence: *candidates for monarchy will appear*. In fact, Spinoza tells us, there are very few human beings that are sufficiently skilful to be capable of *really* heading up the State: only about one in every fifty people, and the other forty-nine will only passively follow.⁵⁰ When the patrician class is numerous, there is no problem: if there are 5,000 patricians, there will be 100 true Statesmen, and their ambitions will be neutralised.⁵¹ But in a city where only 150 patricians remain, and consequently only three political leaders, each of these three leaders will necessarily aspire to eliminate the two others, that is, to become a monarch. The patrician assembly is then divided into factions: it becomes a closed field where aspiring dictators clash with one another.⁵² And what is dramatic is that these aspiring dictators are going to find support among the people. In fact:

2. The second consequence of the relative diminution of the patrician class is the *decline of economic activities*.⁵³ On the one hand, patricians worry less and less about making their own businesses more profitable since they have other sources of wealth: their positions, for example, often allow them to dispossess rich plebeians.⁵⁴ And on the other hand, for this reason and for another even more general reason, plebeians themselves are less and less incentivised to acquire wealth. What then might a *nouveau riche* hope for? Nothing, since they will always be barred from joining the ruling class and will remain as contemptuous as before. *Avaritia*, when it is not reinforced by ambition, risks being beat out by sensual pleasures.⁵⁵ So much so that

⁴⁹ TP VIII, 12; CWS II, 570.

⁵⁰ TP VIII, 2; CWS II, 565.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² TP VIII, 2; CWS II, 565.

⁵³ See TP X, 4–7; CWS II, 598–9.

⁵⁴ TP VIII, 37; CWS II, 582.

⁵⁵ See TP X, 7; CWS II, 599.

the non-patrician bourgeoisie, as soon as they earn some money, prefer to spend it on weddings and feasts rather than reinvesting it, which ultimately produces no satisfaction for them; morals are corrupted, the enterprising spirit gives way to immediate enjoyment,⁵⁶ and the extravagant laws put in place to remedy this are without effect.⁵⁷ Whence, little by little, there is economic decline along with, to be sure, the aggravation of the misery of the working and lower classes that begin to push back and make demands: and now the *fastidium praesentium* [contempt for the present] and the *rerum novandarum cupiditas* [desire for a renewal of things] appear.⁵⁸ Under these conditions:

3. The third consequence of the relative diminution of the patrician class is the *appearance of religious conflicts*, that is to say, the unleashing of intolerance. For as soon as human beings become unhappy again, superstition again becomes invasive; and since the established religion is indeed incapable of ameliorating these issues, the miserable masses yearn for new superstitions.⁵⁹ Now, there are always theologians ready to answer this call: churches degenerate into theatres, doctors become orators and no longer have any concern other than drawing attention to themselves and the novelty of their teachings.⁶⁰ Whence the process analysed in detail by Spinoza all throughout Chapter XX of the *TTP*: each theologian, by ambition for domination, wishes to impose their views on others, tries to get people behind them, and appeals to secular power [*pouvoir*] in order to request that their adversaries be repressed; secular power, choosing the easiest solution, believes that it has re-established peace by giving into the pressure of the most powerful and outlawing the expression of certain opinions; but the remedy, which is ultimately ineffective, is in fact worse than evil, since it gives to the theologians of the victorious party an instrument of permanent extortion against power [*pouvoir*]. These theologians, who can now legally demand that whoever displeases them be arrested, begin to establish a veritable ideological dictatorship; and the more powerful they become, the more they desire to increase their power [*puissance*]: ultimately, it is the totality of political power [*pouvoir*] to which they aspire.

We can see what follows from the conjunction of these three consequences. The miserable people, worked up and led by theologians, seek a

⁵⁶ *TP X*, 4; CWS II, 598–9.

⁵⁷ *TP X*, 5; CWS II, 599.

⁵⁸ *TTP XVII*, 13–17; CWS II, 298–9; G III, 203.

⁵⁹ *TTP Praef.*, 5–8; CWS II, 67–8.

⁶⁰ *TTP Praef.*, 14–17; CWS II, 70–1.

providential human being who will deliver them from their unhappiness; and the people find this in one of the current monarchic candidates. The patrician class, attacked both from below and on high, is thus rendered impotent: aristocracy is reversed and gives way to monarchy; this is quite literally how William of Orange took power [*pouvoir*] in Holland in 1672.⁶¹ Aristocracy too then disappears due to an infidelity to its own principle: by refusing to integrate the group of economic elites (the bourgeoisie), its collapse results from not being 'aristocratic' enough in the etymological sense.

C. We now have *monarchy*. Will things work out any better here? Certainly not, and again for the same reason: due to an infidelity to the internal principle of the regime. For, in reality, so-called absolute monarchy is *not and can never be absolute*: the king never governs alone, he can neither be all-knowing nor make others obey by physical force alone, he needs councillors and subordinates; this is why he appeals to his friends, courtiers, mistresses, friends of his mistresses, etc.; and in the end, they are the ones who make suggestions to the king and ensure the application of these decisions.⁶² Put differently, monarchy is in reality an aristocracy in disguise; but it is the worst kind precisely because it is disguised.⁶³ there are no collective discussions followed by decisions taken by the majority, but instead each, individually, seeks to influence the sovereign; it is a free-for-all wherein the prince's mind is at stake. Whence, again, three consequences.

1. First of all, *economic decline escalates*. Since those who are favoured by the king govern without supervision, their principal concern is to get rich at the expense of the subjects, and above all, to be sure, at the expense of the rich subjects;⁶⁴ and the king is in no way opposed to this, since he has an *interest* in his subjects being miserable: all riches excite his envy and, to the extent that riches are a power [*pouvoir*], seem to him to potentially threaten his ambition for domination.⁶⁵ Commerce and industry thus collapse, overwhelmed by the burden of taxes, the court's spending, etc.⁶⁶ And, of course, the people become more and more unhappy.

2. In order to restrain or prevent general discontent, the sovereign has two means at its disposal. The first is *ideological*: it tries to pass itself off as a

⁶¹ TP IX, 14 *in fine*; CWS II, 594–5.

⁶² TP VI, 5; CWS II, 533–4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ TP VII, 12; CWS II, 549–50. TP VII, 21; CWS II, 554.

⁶⁵ TP VI, 6; CWS II, 534. TP VIII, 31; CWS II, 578–9.

⁶⁶ TP VIII, 31; CWS II, 578–9.

god, or as a representative of God, or as a monarch with divine right;⁶⁷ this is the 'greatest secret' of monarchical regimes.⁶⁸ But in order to do so, it needs the support of the clergy, whose functions must be given a façade of prestige⁶⁹ and who in turn become all-powerful. Priests thus make it such that a climate of absolutely stifling Inquisition reigns, which even further reinforces their power [*puissance*], etc.; their real power [*pouvoir*] soon detracts from that of the sovereign.⁷⁰

3. The second means, which is much more brutal, is *political*: it is recourse to the *army*. An army of mercenaries, to be sure, in order to repress subjects.⁷¹ But these mercenaries, aside from extorting money from the population, require war in order to get rich.⁷² And the king is in agreement with them, since (another 'secret' of monarchical regimes) war allows him to appear as indispensable in the eyes of the people.⁷³ But this way of proceeding comes at a cost; for the army, under these conditions, also becomes all-powerful, and any ambitious general, as long as he brings back some victories and becomes popular among the troops, can directly overthrow the king.⁷⁴

State ministers, ecclesiastical dignitaries, military leaders, all the machinery of the State tend thus to become autonomous and fight against one another for the possession of supreme power [*pouvoir*]: the situation, at the top of the State, tends to get dangerously close to the state of nature. It is true that there is, despite all this, a regulatory mechanism: these are popular revolts, which are produced when the king and those he favours truly go too far and the fear that had up until then been felt by the subjects changes into indignation.⁷⁵ But these revolts do not solve anything, for the people now have the habit of unloading all responsibility onto a single human being and obeying them passively: as soon as they chase off the monarch, another one steps in, as was the case with the English people and Cromwell; and this new monarch gets caught in the gears of the system: he does the same thing as his predecessor.⁷⁶ Whence new revolts, new monarchs, etc. But even this does not last indefinitely. For a moment comes when the people lose all hope,

⁶⁷ *TTP* XVII, 18–28; CWS II, 299–301.

⁶⁸ *TTP* Praef., 10; CWS II, 68.

⁶⁹ *TTP* Praef., 5–13; CWS II, 67–70.

⁷⁰ See *TTP*, all of XIX; CWS II, 332–44.

⁷¹ *TTP* XVII, 67–70; CWS II, 311–12. *TP* VII, 12; CWS II, 549–50.

⁷² *TP* VII, 22; CWS II, 554–5.

⁷³ *TP* VII, 5; CWS II, 547. *TP* VIII, 31; CWS II, 578–9.

⁷⁴ *TP* VII, 17; CWS II, 552–3.

⁷⁵ *TP* III, 9; CWS II, 521. *TP* IV, 4, *in fine*; CWS II, 527.

⁷⁶ *TTP* XVII, 26–31; CWS II, 328–9.

where they become totally apathetic and accept everything. We then arrive at a certain equilibrium which, as was the case with the Turks, can last quite a long time provided that the country is not attacked from the outside.⁷⁷ But this is an equilibrium of death: the State no longer has any motivation, nor any 'virtue';⁷⁸ that is to say, it no longer has any power [*puissance*]. The slightest attack coming from the outside will cause the State to crumble without putting up a fight, and the subjects will not be able to rejoice in this.⁷⁹ In this way political bodies perish.

What then must be done in order to eliminate these dysfunctions? This is clearly the fundamental problem of political science. Spinoza provides a method for resolving this problem in Chapter V of the *TP*: we must, he tells us in Paragraph 2, look to the *end* of political society. And this formulation is, at first glance, surprising, given Spinoza's anti-teleologism. But the rest of Paragraph 2 allows us to understand what he means: the end of political society is the *desires* that determine human beings to never want not to live in it, to always reconstitute it as soon as it is dissolved, to never remain in the state of nature. Now we are already familiar with these desires. We have claimed that each time political society dissolved or tended to dissolve, it was because *conflicts* reigned, because *discord* had taken root therein (economic, ideological and political discord); we also claimed that, each time that discord tended to take root, it created a climate of *insecurity* that was generative of *fear*, and that for this reason it was unbearable for human beings; we claimed, finally, that each time this climate was established, the transformation of fear into indignation produced an opposing reaction that tended to eliminate the causes of insecurity by more or less re-establishing harmony, possibly on new foundations – the limit case being when one would return to the state of nature in order to immediately leave it by establishing a new regime. And this, at bottom, was the very *conatus* of political society, its obstinate and tenacious striving to persevere in its being despite all of the disequilibria that affect it. The path to be followed is thus clearly indicated: it is a question of relying on *conatus* and seeking out its conditions of optimal satisfaction. It is a question, put differently, of discovering institutional systems that will be *the most perfectly self-regulating*: those which, by the play of their own functioning alone, will determine human beings to live in peace and harmony, that will consequently ensure perfect security, and which, given this fact, will reproduce themselves without any disturbance,

⁷⁷ *TP* VI, 40; CWS II, 543.

⁷⁸ *TP* X, 8; CWS II, 599–600.

⁷⁹ *TTP* V, 22–6; CWS II, 144–5.

without passing by way of this oscillation between catastrophic disequilibria followed by more or less successful re-equilibria.

But from there, there are a multitude of possible solutions. And first of all, there are at least three major forms of the self-regulation of political society, each of which is adapted to different circumstances.

In the first place, there is a form of self-regulation that is, *in reality*, completely disastrous: the one which reigned, for example, in the Turkish empire, and that is only ensured by the fact that the subjects are so terrorised that they cannot lift themselves out of it.⁸⁰ But in truth, as we have seen, this only has the appearance of self-regulation, since it leaves the State without any internal motivation and thus can always fall prey to even the slightest external disturbance. Thus the *TP* will not say any more about this.

In the second place, there is a form of self-regulation that is perfectly suitable for countries whose morals have remained barbaric (natural economy, religious intolerance, inaptitude for collective government): it is the one that had *almost* been realised with Hebraic theocracy, and that Spinoza had studied in detail in Chapter XVII of the *TTP*. Politically, it is perfectly satisfying, it perfectly assures harmony and security, human beings are perfectly happy; but they are only happy because they have been conditioned to obey without thinking and to let themselves be herded like livestock;⁸¹ so much so that this self-regulation has as its counterpart the death of intelligence. But, luckily, Dutch readers of Spinoza did not live in a barbaric country, and this is why the *TP* will not say any more about this either.

Finally, in the third place, there are forms of self-regulation that are perfectly suitable for civilised countries like Holland (market economy, aptitude for religious tolerance, aptitude for collective government). These forms of self-regulation are what is at stake in the last six chapters of the *TP* where Spinoza gives us two ideal models of institutional systems.

Two Ideal Models of Political Society

In the last six chapters of the *TP* (Chapter XI being left unfinished), Spinoza thus puts forward two models suitable for countries such as Holland. To be sure, he certainly does not think that these are the only two possible models of a perfectly self-regulating civilised political society: he does not say that such a society will *only* be able to function without disturbance if one or the other of these models is adopted; he simply says, and demonstrates in detail,

⁸⁰ *TP* VI, 4; CWS II, 533.

⁸¹ *TP* V, 4 *in fine*; CWS II, 530.

that *if* one or the other of these models is adopted ('if', and not 'only if'), the State will function without disturbance. On this foundation, he had projected to give us a detailed model for each of the three logically conceivable forms of sovereignty: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy; but he did not have the time to do this for democracy, to which Chapter XI was supposed to be dedicated. This then leaves us with only monarchy and aristocracy. As for what concerns the theory of democratic regimes, this can only be the object of conjectures.

A. *The theory of ideal monarchy* is the object of Chapters VI and VII. The problem is the following: monarchs or monarchical candidates (for example, William of Orange) clearly wish to be as powerful [*puissants*] as possible. It is thus a matter of examining on which conditions they will *truly* be able to be as powerful as possible. But, as we saw, the major defect of so-called 'absolute' monarchies consists precisely in that they *are not* absolute and will never become absolute. The question is thus knowing by which institutional system it would be possible to make them all powerful, if not absolute because that is impossible, at least as minimally 'non-absolute' as possible. What then, on this basis, are the institutions that logically follow from the monarchical principle?

1. Let us begin with *governmental institutions*. In order that a king be as *powerful as possible*, he must necessarily act in such a way that his will is *always* executed. For this, he must act in such a way that subjects always *desire* to carry it out. And for this to be the case, the most sure-fire approach is to act in such a way that his will is always in conformity with the aspirations of the people, or at least the vast majority: if the people receive orders that please them, they will surely obey them. But under what conditions is this possible? Two kinds of institutions are equipped for this.

In the first place, the king will never be able to decide anything without having first consulted an assembly⁸² that will represent all of the different segments of the population⁸³ and that, once decisions are made, will have the responsibility of *carrying them out*⁸⁴ and *will control*, generally speaking, the functioning of institutions.⁸⁵ Between consultation and execution, it should indeed be noted, the king alone *will decide*, otherwise he would no

⁸² TP VI, 24–5; CWS II, 539–40.

⁸³ TP VI, 11; CWS II, 535. TP VI, 13–15; CWS II, 536. TP VII, 4; CWS II, 546. TP VII, 18; CWS II, 553.

⁸⁴ TP VI, 18; CWS II, 537. TP VI, 24; CWS II, 539.

⁸⁵ TP VI, 17, 20, 24, 26, 33–4, 36–7; CWS II, 537–43.

longer be sovereign; but the obligation to take the advice of the assembly, though it does not in principle commit him to anything, will at least make him *familiar* with the will of the people.⁸⁶

In the second place, it will be necessary that the instrument of the execution of the king's will, that is to say the *army*, is entirely in the hands of the people; instead of an army of mercenaries, we will thus have a *popular militia*: the army will be *the people armed*.⁸⁷ And under these conditions, to be sure, the king *will always want* to be in conformity with the will of the people, even if it is by way of a fear of the multitude.⁸⁸ This will not in any way diminish his power [*pouvoir*]: in any event, a monarch is always obligated to submit himself to the will of other people, since he cannot do anything alone; and finally, he always depends on those who *actually* have the armed forces at their disposal;⁸⁹ if this later is identified with the people, there will thus never be any revolutions!

By means of these two conditions, we can see that the king will indeed be as powerful as possible: the assembly will make known to him the aspirations of his subjects, the popular militia will necessarily inspire him to conform his desire to the aspirations of his subjects, and the subjects, by definition, will obey these decisions that will necessarily satisfy them; his will, as was required, will thus always be executed. But the efficacy of these two conditions depends in turn upon two supplementary conditions, which must ensure economic and religious institutions.

2. *Economic institutions* (regimes of property) respond to the following problem: the king must be obligated to conform to the popular will, as we have said, but still it must be the case that *there is* a popular will, and that it is *unified*. If the citizens are divided, if they have divergent interests, it might very well be the case that no clear majority results from the assembly, or that a clear majority is only the result of interminable discussions that paralyse the system. In both cases, the king could very well regain his autonomy by playing on these divisions. So that the system functions efficaciously, the people must then form a monolithic block when faced with the king, united by common interests of which they are fully conscious. But how is this to be done?

Given what we have seen concerning the respective effects of land and money, the path is clearly indicated. Land, as we said, divides human beings,

⁸⁶ TP VII, 4; CWS II, 546.

⁸⁷ TP VI, 10; CWS II, 535. TP VII, 22; CWS II, 554–5.

⁸⁸ TP VII, 11; CWS II, 549.

⁸⁹ TP VII, 12; CWS II, 549–50. TP VII, 22; CWS II, 554–5.

while money unites them. *Land divides human beings* because, as soon as it becomes private property, each desires the land of others even though the same plot of land can only be possessed by a single person; the only means for a peasant to increase their estate is thus to encroach upon that of others. And even if it is divided up equally, which will attenuate envy without eliminating it, human beings will not be *positively* united for all that: each will busy themselves exclusively with their own plot of land, without dealing with anything beyond that, and nobody will think of their interests as being aligned with the interests of others. Money, on the contrary, *does not* necessarily *divide* human beings: in order to earn money, nobody has to take it from others since it is sufficient to work and save; economic envy is thus not necessarily at play therein. And the monetary economy, positively, *unifies human beings*: the banker who lends money to shopkeepers has an interest in them running good businesses, the shopkeepers have an interest in their suppliers and clients doing good business, etc. Little by little, each becomes interested in general prosperity, and each is conscious of it because it is immediately evident. It is clear, under these conditions, that in order for there to be a *single* popular will, citizens must be exclusively interested in money, and not at all in land taken as an end in itself.

Now the means for achieving this are simple, but radical; the *land* must be *nationalised*.⁹⁰ Let us be totally clear on this point: nationalisation does not mean collectivisation. Spinoza tells us specifically that land will belong to the State, and that the State will *lease* it to individuals who will farm it individually and will sell their products on the market.⁹¹ But they will farm it as *tenants*, not as owners, and the difference is crucial. What will thus be avoided is the *immobilisation of capital in the purchasing of land*. Whereas, in the European monarchies of the seventeenth century, and in particular in France, the wealthy bourgeoisie had nothing more pressing to do than buy land in order to 'live nobly' off ground rent, this will no longer be possible in Spinoza's monarchy: whoever is wealthy will be obligated, in order to keep growing their money, to invest it in commerce or to lend it to others who will in turn invest it.⁹² This will thus be the regime of the *market economy in the pure state*, free from the feudal remnant that is landed property. But this would not be capitalism such as it developed in Europe beginning in the seventeenth century, and which was only possible with the emergence of a proletariat, itself made possible by the fact that peasants were chased off their

⁹⁰ TP VI, 12; CWS II, 535–6.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

land en masse: here, on the contrary, the access to land would be maximally facilitated. But it would be facilitated in a form such that the land, ceasing to be the object of financial investment, would at the same time cease to be the object of affective investment.

Under these conditions, the practice of commerce and of lending with interest would create indestructible links between human beings: there would truly be *one* general interest that would be immediately perceptible.⁹³ And this would be translated to the assembly by way of massive majorities, which would be very quickly obtained, ‘concerning their common affairs and the arts of peace’.⁹⁴ The king would thus be obligated to conform to the will of the people, precisely because there would be a *single* will, and it would be a fact and not just talk. Or at least he would be obligated to do so if a final precaution is taken, which concerns religious institutions.

3. What would these *religious institutions* actually be? The principle of the response is clear. As soon as there is external commerce, as we have seen, the multiple contacts with foreigners of different religions cannot but influence the inhabitants of the country themselves, and intolerance in turn becomes nefarious: Chapter XX of the *TTP* showed at length why, beginning from the moment where divergences in opinion appear, it is both *impossible* to reduce them (at the very least, eliminating their cause, that is, commerce itself, is ruled out) and why it is *very harmful for the State* to try to eliminate them. Tolerance is thus imposed. But in what form?

A solution, here, would be logically conceivable in itself: this would be that all of the citizens would belong to the same religion, but that this religion would afford a total freedom of thought to the faithful and would not impose on them any obligatory dogma beyond the strict minimum. This will be suitable, as we will see, for an aristocratic regime. But for a monarchic regime, this solution is ruled out. For if there was a State Church and if the king was the head of it, this would give him immense prestige that might perhaps allow him to free himself from the tutelage of the assembly by passing himself off as the direct representative of God. And if the king was not the head of it, the result would be even worse, as there would then be two concurrent powers [*pouvoirs*]. No matter in what form, consequently, the establishment of a State religion would be disastrous.

The only remaining possible solution is thus that *religion must be a purely private affair*. All Churches would be authorised, along with all of the sects that might ask for authorisation, on the sole condition that they preach

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

harmony and obedience to the laws, but without any of them benefiting from the slightest privilege or the slightest positive support (financial, etc.) from the State, and without their priests being anything other than mere individuals.⁹⁵ This would not happen without some inconveniences, for the division of the people into a multitude of Churches and sects, by crystallising divergences, always risks engendering conflicts; but the climate of extreme solidarity created by economic institutions will render these oppositions almost completely inoperative.

Such is the ideal monarchy. Spinoza clearly does not think that William of Orange would accept this constitution, but it is indeed in the logic of the monarchical principle. And there will certainly come a day when an intelligent king will adopt it. So, once these institutions are put in place, the only thing left to do would be to let the machine run its course: the monarchic State would have to find its equilibrium and would no longer be able to be destroyed, except by unforeseeable external causes.

B. The *theory of the ideal aristocracy* is the object of Chapters VIII, IX and X of the *TP*. The problem is posed in the same way: given an aristocratic republic where sovereignty is possessed by the group of patricians, how are they to be made as powerful as possible? How is this to be done so that such a State functions efficiently and without internal contradictions? What, on this basis, are the institutions in logical conformity with its principle? This amounts to asking, since the *TP* was written after William of Orange's coup d'état, *what would have had to change* in the institutions in order to avoid the dissolution of the regime.

1. What must be, first of all, the *governmental institutions*? Here, by definition, sovereignty belongs to *the assembly of all the patricians*, who are recruited by co-optation:⁹⁶ the assembly, and the assembly alone, makes the laws and appoints magistrates.⁹⁷ And this time, its power [*pouvoir*] really can be absolute, or at least approach the absolute, for it is numerous enough to know the situation of the country on its own and to carry it out its decisions by itself.⁹⁸ It thus has no need to consult the people, who play strictly no role in the State.⁹⁹ Nor does it have any need for a popular army: nothing prevents

⁹⁵ *TP* VI, 40; CWS II, 543.

⁹⁶ *TP* VIII, 1; CWS II, 564–5.

⁹⁷ *TP* VIII, 17; CWS II, 572.

⁹⁸ *TP* VIII, 3; CWS III, 566.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

it from recruiting mercenaries, even foreigners, in order to repress its own subjects; in any event, there is no difference between a plebeian soldier and a foreign soldier, since plebeians themselves are like foreigners in their own country.¹⁰⁰

Will this be inconvenient for the people? No, but only on one condition that is absolutely fundamental: *on the condition that the patrician assembly is sufficiently numerous*. Since it is true that each of its members taken individually is governed by their passions, it is also true that their passions lead them in different directions, and most often in opposed directions; they thus can only cooperate, when it is time to vote, concerning what their respective desires have in common, without any of them being able to obtain all that they wish for; now, the more numerous they are, the more their contrary passions tend to be mutually neutralised, and the more the common denominator that is produced tends to be in conformity with the demands of reason, because the latter are the only ones that are truly universal.¹⁰¹ Each, certainly, desires to oppress the plebs as much as possible; but each wishes to oppress the plebs in their own way, and these different wills are incompatible; if they are numerous enough to clash, the best compromise will thus be to not oppress anybody, and the plebeians, in the end, will have nothing to fear.¹⁰²

But again, precisely, the assembly must be numerous enough. And therein lies the heart of the problem. As we have seen, what is lost, in aristocratic republics, is always the numerical disproportion between the patricians and the plebeians. The cause of this degeneration must then be eliminated: the relation between the number of patricians and the number of plebeians must absolutely never drop below a certain well-defined limit. This relation, Spinoza says, must be *at least* one patrician for every fifty plebeians: at least that many, for there is no problem if it is higher, quite the contrary.¹⁰³ Consequently, each time that the population is increased or the ruling caste is decreased, the equilibrium will have to be re-established by co-opting new patricians: this is the *fundamental law* of the aristocratic regime.¹⁰⁴

Who will be appointed? Anybody, in principle, since the assembly is sovereign. But the State has an interest in how the choice bears on its riches: in this way, all of the plebeians will desire to become wealthy in order to join the patrician class (which they will all *hope* to join *if* there are enough

¹⁰⁰ TP VIII, 9; CWS II, 568–9.

¹⁰¹ TP VIII, 6; CWS II, 567.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ TP VIII, 2; CWS II, 545–66. TP VIII, 13; CWS II, 571.

¹⁰⁴ TP VIII, 13; CWS II, 571.

vacant slots each year), their *avaritia* will be reinforced by the ambition for domination, and this will stimulate economic activities.¹⁰⁵ This is why Spinoza stipulates that every new patrician will have to pay, at the moment of their election, a rather heavy tax that only the rich will be able to afford.¹⁰⁶ Inversely, for the same reason, the patrician class will have to periodically purify itself by eliminating incapable or parasitic elements: every patrician that is ruined by their own misdeeds will be stripped of all of their rights; if, by contrast, their ruin is due to misfortune, the State, like a kind of insurance company, will compensate them.¹⁰⁷ Thus, in the end, if this fundamental law is respected, all of the plebeians will work to become rich, all of the patricians will work to remain rich, economic prosperity will reign and there will not be any popular discontentment.¹⁰⁸

But what will have to be done to make sure this fundamental law is respected? This will be the role of a smaller assembly: the *council of syndics*. This council will be composed of old patricians elected for life by the sovereign assembly: elected for life so as to be shielded from all pressure, old so as to not have any time left to become too arrogant.¹⁰⁹ Their role will be, precisely, to uphold respect for the constitution,¹¹⁰ and in particular, respect for the fundamental law.¹¹¹ And so that they have an *interest* to really uphold this, the new patricians will pay a tax to them.¹¹²

Finally, with the patrician assembly being too numerous to work quickly, it will hand over the majority of its tasks falling under the executive power to an even smaller assembly elected by it and responsible before it: the *Senate*.¹¹³ The senators will be elected for a year so that all of the patricians may hope to one day become a senator:¹¹⁴ *internal democracy among the patricians* is the best means for satisfying all of the ambitions for domination and for eliminating the causes of envy. And these same senators will be paid by means of a tax on the revenue of external commerce: they will thus have an interest in peace and economic prosperity.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁵ TP X, 6–7; CWS II, 599.

¹⁰⁶ TP VIII, 25; CWS II, 573–4.

¹⁰⁷ TP VIII, 47; CWS II, 587–8. TP X, 7; CWS II, 599.

¹⁰⁸ TP X, 7; CWS II, 599.

¹⁰⁹ TP VIII, 21; CWS II, 573.

¹¹⁰ TP VIII, 20; CWS II, 572–3.

¹¹¹ TP VIII, 25; CWS II, 573–5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ TP VIII, 29; CWS II, 576–7. TP VIII, 33–4; CWS II, 579–80.

¹¹⁴ TP VIII, 30; CWS II, 577–8.

¹¹⁵ TP VIII, 31; CWS II, 578–9.

These then are the governmental institutions: the patrician assembly makes the laws and appoints magistrates, the Senate executes them, the syndics oversee, and all indeed have an interest in doing their part. But the efficacy of all of this depends, here again, on economic and religious institutions.

2. *Economic institutions*, according to what we saw previously, will in any case function in a context where commerce will predominate. And yet, at the very least for the plebeians, the *regime of property* cannot be the same as in the ideal monarchy. For the plebeians, who have no civic rights and are like foreigners in the State, do not have any reason to be particularly *attached* to it. Thus if they possess only mobile goods, nothing would prevent them from leaving the country: in the case of war, or epidemic, or economic crisis, they would emigrate, taking their fortune with them, and if they are rich, this would be a deadweight loss for the society.¹¹⁶ They must thus be attached to a country for some particular reason. And the only way to fix them to it is to give them *private ownership of land* and to take all the measures possible so that they remain in possession of their own land, so that they are not chased off it. Here again, consequently, the access to land will be too easy for a proletariat to form: the market economy will not become capitalist. But things, this time, happen in such a way that the land (which the owners will have *bought*, and no longer leased) will become the object of a financial and affective investment. Without a doubt, for the reasons already mentioned, this attachment to the land will introduce a certain division among the plebeians; but this matters little, since they will not have to elect an assembly; and if they are not conscious of having common interests, they will be governed more easily. As for the patricians, if the regime of property is indeed the same for them (Spinoza does not say anything about this), the divisions that would risk being introduced among them will be very greatly offset by the massive predominance of the market economy that will ensure governmental institutions as well as the unification of religious institutions.

3. *Religious institutions*, in fact, clearly have as their role, for the reasons already indicated concerning monarchy and which are valid for every civilised country, making the most complete tolerance reign; but they can only fulfil this role in the same way as in the monarchical regime. For, in order for the patrician assembly to be well functioning, it must be *unified*, it must stand together when faced with the plebs – just as the people of the ideal monarchy had to stand together when faced with the king. *Factions*

¹¹⁶ TP VIII, 10; CWS II, 569.

constituted internally thus must be avoided at all costs, since the plebs might be able to use them for their advantage. Now the diversity of religious sects *can always* serve as a pretext for the constitution of factions, and the regime of property does not permit us to counteract this tendency as radically as in monarchy; each patrician risks then feeling more solidarity with their plebeian co-religious believers than with patricians belonging to other Churches. Thus in order to avoid this division into sects, *all of the patricians must belong to one and the same State Church.*¹¹⁷

Does this contradict the principle of religious liberty? No, for two reasons. On the one hand, the dogmas of this State religion will have to be extremely simple so that they can be acceptable to all human beings, whatever their beliefs may be; they will have to limit themselves to the common denominator of all religions compatible with life in society, and, regarding everything else, each will be able to think and say whatever they wish.¹¹⁸ This minimal *Credo* is the one laid out in Chapter XIV of the *TTP* that Spinoza references here: God exists (God's nature matters little, each can conceive of it however they like); God is unique, omnipresent and omnipotent (it matters little what God's omnipresence and omnipotence consists in); God orders us (it matters little in what form) to practise justice and charity; God saves those who practise these two virtues, does not save the others, and forgives those who repent (it matters little the way in which we conceive of salvation, perdition and pardon). We thus indeed have there the strict minimum of beliefs indispensable for civil peace; and as for everything that goes beyond this, each is free.

On the other hand, nobody is obligated to be a candidate for the patrician class. And the plebeians, if they are clearly encouraged to join the State Church, are in no way constrained by it; *for them*, things happen just like in the ideal monarchy: all the Churches that ask for authorisation are authorised, on the sole condition that they not teach anything that would be contrary to the minimal *Credo*.¹¹⁹

These then are the institutions of the ideal aristocracy. The regime, as we can see, will be as perfectly self-regulated as the former: if it is not destroyed by unforeseeable external causes, it will last indefinitely.¹²⁰ Finally, this regime will be able to function in two forms: a centralised form (like in Venice) or a federal form (like in Holland). In a *centralised* aristocracy,

¹¹⁷ *TP VIII*, 46; *CWS II*, 587.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *TP X*, 9; *CWS II*, 600.

which is studied in detail in Chapter VIII, sovereignty will be exercised by a single patrician assembly, which will reign in a single city in which all of the previously described institutions will be concentrated. In a *federal* aristocracy, which is studied more briefly in Chapter IX, we will come across the same institutional system, but multiplied: each city will have its own sovereign patrician assembly, its own syndics, etc., and the central government will be ensured by a federal senate to which each local patrician will send its delegates; as for federal laws, proposed by the Senate to all the local patrician assemblies, they will be adopted if the majority of the assemblies accept them.¹²¹ This latter regime is preferable in itself; for each local patrician assembly, to the extent that the number of its delegates to the federal Senate will be proportional to its size,¹²² will be strongly urged to increase the number of its members in order to prevail over patricians of other cities;¹²³ perhaps, then, if this tendency prevails over the contrary tendency (which will clearly remain very strong) the regime will get closer to democracy.

As for *ideal democracy*, all we have are conjectures, since Chapter XI was barely started. But, to the extent that the remedies encouraged by Spinoza for monarchy and aristocracy come down to making each of these two regimes function *as democratically* as their nature allows, we can extrapolate. We can try to reconstruct Spinozist democracy by imagining what would become of federal aristocracy if each local patrician class, by increasing its size, ended up integrating the entire population into it (with the exception of women and servants,¹²⁴ as I have elsewhere tried to show in detail¹²⁵). We can also try to reconstruct it by imagining what would become of the Spinozist monarchy if, for one reason or another, the king consistently found himself in a position where he was unable to exercise his functions.¹²⁶ We would not obtain, it is true, the same result in both cases; this is perhaps why Spinoza was unable to finish this chapter before his death.

But perhaps there is yet another reason for this. For, as long as it is a question of making a non-democratic regime function as democratically as possible, the democratisation to be introduced therein is completely relative: in

¹²¹ TP IX, 5–6; CWS II, 590–1.

¹²² TP IX, 6; CWS II, 590–1.

¹²³ TP IX, 4; CWS II, 589–90.

¹²⁴ TP XI, 3–4; CWS II, 602–4.

¹²⁵ [See Chapter 17 of this volume.]

¹²⁶ See TP VI, 16 *in fine*; CWS II, 536–7.

a monarchical regime it only serves as a counter-balance; in an aristocratic regime it only concerns patricians. But a *democracy functioning democratically* would have to be *absolutely* democratic, would admit of no counter-balance and would concern the entire population. And this is perhaps, as Spinoza says of wisdom, 'as difficult as it is rare'.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Ethics* V, 42 Schol.; CWS I, 617. Translation modified.

The Problem of Spinoza's Evolution: From the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*

Here I would simply like to elaborate on the interpretation that I gave, long ago, in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, concerning a fact that, in one sense, nobody denies: Spinoza, in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, accounts for the genesis of the State in contractarian terms, whereas, in the *Political Treatise*, he stops making recourse to the language of the social contract.¹ Is this a real shift or only an apparent one? To my mind, it is real: back then I maintained, and I still think, that the language of the *TTP* must be taken seriously, and that its disappearance in the *TP* really corresponds to the emergence of a new doctrine; I characterised, and would still characterise, this new doctrine as consisting in a non-contractarian explanation of the genesis of the State solely out of the anarchic and blind play of relations of forces such as they spontaneously function in the state of nature according to the mechanism of the imitation of the affects. But some objections have been raised, and I would like to respond to them.

First, we must eliminate the false problems. Spinoza always held that the existence and the legitimacy of political society stems, ultimately, from the consent of its subjects; if one wants to call that a 'contract', then he is clearly a contractarian; but in that case it is a question of knowing *how* this consent is given. Similarly, Spinoza always held that right is identical to power [*puissance*]; if one wants to call 'contractarianism' the doctrine according to which entering into a contract itself establishes, independently of any subsequent variation of force relations, an irreversible obligation, then he is no contractarian at all; but in that case it is a question of knowing *how* the

¹ [Originally published as 'Le problème de l'évolution de Spinoza du *Traité théologico-politique* au *Traité politique*', in Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (eds), *Spinoza: Issues and Directions* (Leiden: Brill, 1990): 258–70; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

unified collective power that defines the right of the sovereign is constituted. What might be called the at least apparent contractarianism of the *TTP* thus concerns, not the foundation of the legitimacy of the State, but its mode of production: in that text, the State does seem to be born of a collective, deliberate and concerted decision that, as in Hobbes, constitutes a break with the dynamics of the state of nature in order to create a new relation of forces from scratch. The non-contractarianism that I think can be attributed to the *TP* consists, by contrast, in affirming that the very dynamics of the state of nature, due to the imitation of the affects, give rise to political society by themselves, without any deliberation. And the problem is of knowing whether Spinoza really shifted from the first of these positions to the second.

Now one can dispute the thesis of Spinoza's evolution in two ways: either by showing that he held the first position until the end; or by showing that he adhered to the second from the start.

I. The first way to refute the thesis of Spinoza's evolution consists in trying to show that, in the *TP* itself, Spinoza, despite appearances, still maintains the contractarian point of view of the *TTP*. To do this one appeals either to a positive argument, or, as a last resort, to a negative argument. But I do not think either is satisfying.

The positive argument amounts to saying that, if one attentively examines the texts, one finds in many places in the *TP* the *explicit*, if very discreet, affirmation of a contractual origin of the State. (One does not, by the way, ask after the reasons for this discretion.) But in fact, the texts cited, which are of three kinds, in no way prove what they are supposed to.

A. Most often, Paragraph 6 of Chapter IV is cited; it is the only place in the entire *TP* where the word *contractus* is used: 'the contract, or the laws by which a multitude transfers its right to a Council or a man. . .'.² But if the multitude transfers *its* right, in the singular (*suum jus*), there is already a right of the multitude as a collective entity, and not simply a juxtaposition of individual natural rights. And since right is identical to power [*puissance*], this right of the multitude is nothing other than the power of this same multitude. But, as we know from Paragraph 17 of Chapter II, the right defined by the power of the multitude is, precisely, sovereignty, or the State (*imperium*). Thus, manifestly, the contract in question here is not that by which individuals living in the state of nature come together to leave this state in order to constitute political society by producing a sovereign: there *already is*, by hypothesis, a sovereign, namely the multitude itself, and consequently also a

² *TP* I, 6; CWS II, 528.

democratic State. In fact, in this passage, Spinoza directly addresses a classical and well-known case, which Grotius (incorrectly, according to Spinoza) cites in order to justify his theory of the possible division of sovereignty: one in which a sovereign people transfers to an aristocratic assembly or to a king the sovereignty that it collectively exercises over each of its own members, but only after having first established a certain number of fundamental laws that this king or assembly would be obligated to respect (whence the expression 'contractus, seu leges. . .'). The word *contractus* thus refers here, not to the genesis of political society as such, but to one of the possible modes of transition from a democratic State to a non-democratic State. And it does not appear in any other part of the *TP*. As for the verb *contrahere*, it appears six times (twice in III, 14; twice in III, 15; and at III, 6 and VI, 33), but there it applies only to States entering peace treaties.

B. Exactly the same thing could be said with regard to the expression 'transfer of right', which is also frequently cited to support the contractarian interpretation. Notice that, even if Spinoza had used this expression to characterise the genesis of political society as such, this would still prove nothing: 'transfer of right' means 'transfer of power', which is to say the relatively irreversible establishment of a new relation of forces, and it is in no way necessary (although this does not mean it is impossible) that such an establishment is made by contract. But *in fact*, in the *TP*, Spinoza *never* uses this expression to characterise the genesis of political society as such: doubtless in order to avoid any equivocation, he *never* says (and he very well could have, given his language) that individuals establish the State by transferring their natural rights to a sovereign. The verb *transfer*, which appears twenty-two times in the *TP*, refers to a transfer of sovereignty that proceeds from a people (already constituted as a people) to a democratic assembly or to a king;³ from a people to a king;⁴ from a people to a military leader authorised to recruit mercenaries;⁵ from a people to an aristocratic assembly;⁶ from a people or an aristocratic assembly to a king;⁷ from one aristocratic assembly to another;⁸ from an aristocratic assembly to a monarch;⁹ and finally from

³ *TP* IV, 6; CWS II, 528. *TP* VII, 5; CWS II, 547. *TP* VIII, 3; CWS I, 566.

⁴ *TP* VII, 5; CWS II, 547.

⁵ *TP* VII, 17; CWS II, 552.

⁶ Twice in *TP* VIII, 3; CWS II, 566.

⁷ *TP* VI, 8; CWS II, 534. *TP* VI, 14; CWS II, 536. *TP* VII, 2; CWS II, 545. *TP* VII, 5; CWS II, 547. *TP* VII, 23; CWS II, 555.

⁸ *TP* VIII, 17; CWS II, 572.

⁹ *TP* VII, 9; CWS II, 548.

one monarch to another.¹⁰ Besides these, it refers once to a transfer of right carried out by the State for the benefit of some individual,¹¹ and it appears one other time to indicate that the right to honour God cannot be transferred.¹² It is thus impossible to interpret it as referring to a possible ‘social contract’.

C. The last refuge for the contractarian interpretation of the *TP* is the use of the word *convenire* in Paragraph 13 of Chapter II: ‘*si duo simul convenient, et vires jungant. . .*’. Now this passage does indeed concern the genesis of political society. And *convenire* can mean, among other things, ‘entering into a contract’. Given this, instead of translating the beginning of this phrase, as is typically done, as: ‘If two men agree [*s’accordent*] with one another and join forces’ (giving a general and not a specifically juridical sense to the verb ‘*s’accorder*’), it could potentially be translated as: ‘If two men *convene together* [*conviennent ensemble*] to join their forces’, using the strict juridical sense that the verb *convenir* had in seventeenth-century French. But, if it is true that *convenire* can have this latter sense, it is still necessary to ask if it actually has this sense in *Spinoza’s language*; if not, one is begging the question, proving the contractarianism of the *TP* by means of a translation that imposes it.¹³ For, on the one hand, when Spinoza explicitly speaks of the social contract in juridical terms, that is to say in Chapter XVI of the *TTP*, he doesn’t use the word *convenire*, but *pacisci*¹⁴ – a word that doesn’t play any more of a role in the *TP* than the word *pactum* does. On the other hand, in the *TP* itself (where ‘to contract’, as we have seen, typically translates *contrahere*), none of the nineteen occurrences of *convenire* has a specifically juridical sense. This verb, other than in this one contentious passage,¹⁵ means ‘to get together in the same place’;¹⁶ ‘to be suitable for . . .’;¹⁷ to vote in the same way;¹⁸ to agree

¹⁰ Five times in *TP* VII, 14; CWS II, 551. *TP* VII, 23; CWS II, 555.

¹¹ *TP* III, 3; CWS II, 517–18.

¹² *TP* VII, 26; CWS II, 557.

¹³ [‘*Si duo simul convenient et vires jungant . . .*’ (G III, 281). Elwes: ‘If two come together and unite their strength . . .’ (Spinoza 1951: 296). Shirley: ‘If two men come together and join forces . . .’ (Spinoza 2002: 686). Curley: ‘If two men make an agreement with one another and join forces . . .’ (CWS II, 513). Clearly, Curley’s translation imposes the contractarian interpretation in just the way Matheron describes.]

¹⁴ *TTP* XVI, 14; CWS II, 285; G III, 191

¹⁵ *TP* II, 13; CWS II, 513

¹⁶ *TP* IX, 3; CWS II, 589

¹⁷ *TP* I, 4; CWS II, 505. *TP* VI, 2; CWS II, 532. *TP* VIII, 5; CWS II, 567. *TP* VIII, 7; CWS II, 567–8. Twice in *TP* VIII, 37; CWS II, 582. *TP* X, 1; CWS II, 596. *TP* X, 9; CWS II, 600.

¹⁸ *TP* VIII, 25; CWS II, 575. *TP* IX, 6; CWS II, 591.

to vote in the same way;¹⁹ for subjects to agree on the conditions to impose on the king that they mean to elect;²⁰ for allies to agree on the interpretation of the clauses of a treaty already entered into;²¹ to agree to commit a crime;²² and to live in harmony in an already constituted political society.²³ Finally, in the only other passage (leaving aside *TP* II, 13) where *convenire* is used to give an account of the genesis of the State, which is to say in Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI (*multitudinem* [. . .] *naturaliter convenire, et una veluti mente duci velle*), the contractarian interpretation of this verb is formally ruled out by the addition of the adverb *naturaliter*: if humans 'naturally agreed' to live in political society, this would mean that, contra Hobbes, there would be no need for the artifice of a convention in order for them to come to this conclusion.

The positive argument thus does not hold up: *nowhere* in the *TP* does Spinoza say that political society is contractual in origin; and the passage just mentioned seems to suggest the opposite. This impression is reinforced if one compares this passage with the end of that same Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI, where Spinoza tells us that 'by nature (*natura*) men desire a civil order'.²⁴ It is reinforced even more if one considers two of the three other occurrences of *naturaliter* in the *TP*. The 'civil order', Spinoza tells us, 'is naturally established'.²⁵ And Paragraph 25 of Chapter VII is even more clear: after having said that, if the people did not establish any rule of succession when it established the monarchy, they return to the state of nature upon the death of the king, Spinoza adds: 'As a result, the supreme power naturally returns to the multitude (*et consequenter summa potestas ad multitudinem naturaliter redit*).'²⁶ Spinoza clearly does not mean that the state of nature, in which there is no *summa potestas*, is identical to popular sovereignty; he means that, when a group of human beings returns to the state of nature, this naturally, spontaneously, almost automatically, establishes (all things being equal) democratic sovereignty immediately, even if this establishment remains informal.

However, one might object, this proves nothing: for Spinoza, everything is natural, and consequently contracts are too; couldn't *naturaliter convenire*

¹⁹ *TP* VI, 25; CWS II, 539.

²⁰ *TP* VII, 30; CWS II, 561.

²¹ *TP* III, 15; CWS II, 524.

²² *TP* VII, 14; CWS II, 551. *TP* X, 2; CWS II, 598.

²³ *TP* II, 15; CWS II, 514. *TP* VII, 5; CWS II, 547.

²⁴ *TP* VI, 1; CWS II, 532.

²⁵ *TP* III, 6; CWS II, 519.

²⁶ *TP* VII, 25; CWS II, 557.

mean: 'to enter into a contract, which, like all things in nature, is included within the universal determinism'? This might seem a bit strange, but even so, Spinoza never explicitly says the contrary. And it is here that the negative argument in favour of the contractarianism of the *TP* steps in.

II. This negative argument amounts to saying that, in the *TP*, there is no text that unambiguously indicates the exact mode of production of political society as such, and consequently that explaining it by the imitation of the affects is without foundation. Whence one concludes that, since Spinoza has already expressed himself on this subject and has not contradicted himself in the meantime, nothing permits us to suppose that, when he wrote the *TP*, he had modified or surpassed the contractarian explanation proposed in Chapter XVI of the *TTP*.

I should point out that I myself raised this objection in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, where I was hardly concerned with confirming my interpretation via the texts of the *TP*; I saw in that treatise a lacuna, and the recourse to Part III of the *Ethics* seemed to me both necessary and sufficient to fill it (which, by the way, is true *in itself*). But in fact, *there really are*, in the *TP*, passages that, *taken together*, entirely confirm my interpretation while simplifying it somewhat. Now it is true that they do not appear in Chapter II, where one might expect to find them; this poses a problem that I will return to in my conclusion. But they do appear *before* and *after* Chapter II. And from engaging with them, and putting them into relation with the *Ethics*, one can draw three kinds of considerations.

A. The passage already cited from Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI does not just have the negative meaning to which I have already alluded (that is, the non-necessity of a contract). The expression *naturaliter convenire*, if we consider how it is used elsewhere in the *Ethics*, already provides, *on its own*, a positive indication of the manner in which a non-contractual genesis of the state might take place. And, by the same token, the same thing could be said about the other already cited occurrences of *naturaliter*²⁷ and the ablative *natura*.²⁸ In Part IV of the *Ethics*, in fact, Propositions 32 to 34 teach us that, to the extent that human beings are subject to passions, they do not necessarily agree with one another by nature and can even be opposed to one another; and one of the examples given in the demonstration of Proposition 34 is that of envy, regarding which Spinoza refers to *Ethics* III, 32: Peter and Paul will enter into conflict, he tells us, if Peter enjoys something that only

²⁷ *TP* III, 6; CWS II, 519. *TP* VII, 25; 557.

²⁸ *TP* VI, 1; CWS II, 532.

one person can possess, and if Paul, by the imitation of the other's affects, thereby loves that thing and desires to take possession of it. But, in the scholium that follows, Spinoza clarifies: if Peter and Paul harm one another, this is not 'insofar as they agree in nature (*quatenus natura conveniunt*), i.e., insofar as each loves the same thing';²⁹ for, to that extent, their respective loves, which is to say their respective joys, would be mutually reinforced by the mechanism of imitation. If they harm one another, Spinoza continues, it is because they are at the same time supposed to 'disagree in nature (*natura discrepare*)', because the monopolistic character of the loved thing, which presents an obstacle to the affect of joy imitated by Paul, ultimately transforms the affective imitation into its opposite by leading Paul to be saddened by being deprived of that which Peter enjoys having.³⁰ Thus, the 'natural agreement' at stake here is the *imitation of the affects* in all those cases, and only in those cases, where nothing prevents the imitated affects from producing to the end and without contradiction all their effects in the minds of those who imitate them. And if one accepts that the *naturaliter convenire* of the *TP* has the same sense as the *natura convenire* of the *Ethics* (which is likely, since, in that same Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI, Spinoza *also* employs the ablative *natura* as a synonym of *naturaliter*), one must thus conclude that, in one form or another, the same mechanism must be at work in the formation of the State. But in what form? Other texts of the *TP* make it possible to specify.

B. In Paragraph 5 of Chapter I we find a very precise and complete summary of the entire second half of Part III of the *Ethics*, which is to say of the theory of *interhuman passions*, which itself follows entirely from Proposition 27, which is devoted precisely to the imitation of the affects. Not only does Spinoza explicitly refer there to the *Ethics*, but he even repeats some of its formulations. First of all, he indicates, repeating the very terms of the Scholium to Proposition 32, that it is the same mechanism of imitation that is the origin of *pity*³¹ and *envy*.³² He moreover explains, in nearly the same terms as in the *Ethics*,³³ what the *ambition for domination* is, which at bottom is *intolerance*: to want to dominate another is essentially to want to compel them to adopt our own values, to make them love what we love and hate what we hate; but the use of the verb *glorietur* recalls at the same time

²⁹ *Ethics* IV, 34 Schol.; CWS I, 562; G II, 232. Translation modified.

³⁰ *Ethics* IV, 34 Schol.; CWS I, 563; G II, 232.

³¹ *Ethics* III, 27 Schol.; CWS I, 509.

³² *Ethics* III, 32; CWS I, 513.

³³ *Ethics* III, 31 Cor. and Schol.; CWS I, 512.

that this intolerance has its origin in the *ambition for glory*:³⁴ if we want to convert others to our values, it is in order to be able to make them happy and to rejoice in us thereby (that is to say, to glorify us), without our being obligated to sacrifice our own desires for them – what we seek in the struggle for power (and Spinoza, here, repeats the same terms of *Ethics* IV, 58 Schol.), is thus less a real personal advantage than the joy of having earned the praise of those like us by eliminating the adversary that, by our lights, would mislead them with false values. Finally, between these two accounts, the allusion to the conflict between *mercy* and *vengeance* (with the latter being predominant) briefly evokes the consequences of these four fundamental affects:³⁵ the endless alternation between cycles of reciprocal negativity, in which hate calls forth hate, and of cycles of reciprocal positivity that are always more difficult to initiate. So, as you can see, everything is there.

Now, after this masterful summary, Spinoza tells us, in Paragraph 7 of that same Chapter I, that the causes and natural foundations of the State must be deduced, not from the teachings of reason, but from the common human nature or condition – that is, obviously, from the nature or condition of human beings subject to passions. But what passions could these be, if not, precisely, those at stake in Paragraph 5? And in fact, that same paragraph already enables us to glimpse how this would take place. From pity to envy, from ambition for glory to the ambition to domination, and *vice versa* – the passage in both directions is at once necessary and incessant. Pity and the ambition for glory are the origin of sociability; the ambition for domination and envy are the origin of unsociability; and these two groups of passions are inseparable. Thus it is clear that the interhuman passions, by virtue of the contradiction that runs through them, at once makes the state of nature unsustainable for us and makes us leave that state spontaneously. How exactly? I have explained this elsewhere by an interaction of individual calculations: if everyone sought to make use of the natural sociability of all others for their own benefit in order to defend themselves against the natural unsociability of each, then after some trial and error the outcome of these efforts would be the establishment, without any contract, of a unified collective power. This is, I still think, a *possible* process. But in the *TP*, there is another passage that enables us to explain everything more simply still, without making any appeal to calculation, solely by recourse to the imitation of the affects. But for this one must introduce an additional affect which is not mentioned in Chapter I.

³⁴ *Ethics* III, 29 and 30; CWS I, 510.

³⁵ *Ethics* III, 33 and 34; CWS I, 513.

C. Let us now return to Paragraph 1 of Chapter VI. Spinoza there declares that, if human beings naturally agreed to live in political society, this would not be according to the guidance of reason, but according to the influence of a common passion: a common hope, a common fear, the desire to avenge some damage suffered in common; and all human beings, he adds, actually fear solitude, which deprives them of the means of defending themselves and of procuring what is necessary for life. Now, to justify this claim, *Spinoza refers to Paragraph 9 of Chapter III*, which concerns not the genesis of the State but *the causes of its dissolution*: the State, he tells us in this paragraph, has less right over its subjects to the extent that a great number of them are *indignant* at its conduct and so form a coalition against it. And at the end of Paragraph 4 of Chapter IV, the link between common fear and indignation is clarified: the sovereign, Spinoza tells us, loses its sovereignty just as soon as, due to its repeated abuses (assassinations, dispossessions, violations, etc.), the fear that it inspires in all its subjects *turns into indignation*, thereby transforming the civil state into a state of war. Indignation, as we know, is yet another form of affective imitation: it is *the hate that we feel towards one who harms a being that resembles us*;³⁶ and we feel it by the imitation of the victim's affects, with a greater intensity the more this victim resembles us. Thus we understand why indignation is necessary in order for a revolution to be possible. If common fear were all there is, that is, if each, on their own personal account, feared the tyrant in solitude without thinking of the harm of others (as in the isolation of individuals under the Turkish regime, invoked by Spinoza at *TP VI, 4*), nothing would happen: their hatred of the tyrant would remain episodic, for no sovereign tyrannises *each* of its subjects all the time; and, anyway, nobody would see the means of putting an end to the situation. But everything changes when indignation arises: since the tyrant always tyrannises *someone* at any given point, our indignation makes us *permanently* resent the intolerable character of the government; and if those like us who experience indignation towards the tyrant's evil publicly express it at all, we learn that *we are not alone* in the face of tyranny and that it is possible to unite ourselves to overthrow it. Now, if we take seriously the reference to *Ethics III, 9* that Spinoza makes in *TP VI, 1*, we must accept that *indignation engenders the State in exactly the same way that it causes revolutions*. And in order to understand this, it suffices to replace, in what we have said, the initial isolation of each before the tyrant with the isolation of each in the state of nature, the tyrant with the set of all individuals insofar as they

³⁶ *Ethics III, 27 Cor. 1*; CWS I, 509.

constitute aggressors, and the subjects with the set of all individuals insofar as they constitute victims.

Let us suppose that a certain number of juxtaposed individuals, without any experience of political society, lived in the state of nature in a particular place. If one of them had trouble in securing their existence, one or many others, by pity or the ambition for glory, would come to their aid; then, if their aid were efficacious, their pity and their ambition for glory would turn into the ambition for domination and envy, and they would start to become aggressive towards them; but a certain number of others, who until that point were passive spectators, would become indignant at the evil done to them and would become disposed to defend them. And this would happen repeatedly. But for the same reasons, they would find themselves taking the place of the aggressor and inspiring the indignation of many others. And for the same reason, they would themselves become indignant at each aggression they witness. So after what might only need be a short period of time, everyone will have successively provoked the indignation of others and will thus consider everyone as a potential aggressor, each will have successively benefited from the indignation of others and will thus consider everyone as a potential ally, and each, ceaselessly finding themselves in a state of indignation towards someone else, will judge this situation to be intolerable and will be permanently disposed to aid whomever is attacked. From that point forward, whenever two individuals enter into conflict, each of them will call everyone else to their aid; and each of the others, responding to the call and imitating the affects of the combatant that *most resembles them*, will become indignant and will enter into conflict against the one that resembles them less: against those whose values diverge more from their own, or who possess (*de facto*) more things of which they are themselves deprived. Those who deviate most from the majoritarian norm will thus be crushed and dissuaded from starting up again; or, if this does not happen all at once, it will happen at the end of the next conflict, for if it recurs, those who are victorious will surely increase their ranks. Under these conditions, after a certain number of repetitions, a consensus will eventually emerge that imposes common norms, severely represses those who violate them, and powerfully protects those who respect them: there will be a *collective power* [puissance] of the *multitude* that will ensure the security of the non-deviants; and consequently, by definition,³⁷ we will have, not just informally, a sovereignty and a State (an *imperium*). And then, if new problems were to arise, the situation could be institutionalised in one form or another.

³⁷ See TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

So we see that, if we adhere strictly to the texts of the *TP* and simply accept that the words that designate the passions there have the same meaning as they do in the *Ethics*, we find there everything that we need in order to account for a non-contractual genesis of the State: if pity and the ambition for glory are at the root of sociability, and if the ambition for domination and envy are at the root of unsociability, indignation (for lack of anything else) is, on its own, sufficient to constitute a common force that represses unsociability and protects sociability. But then, one might object, if all of this follows directly from Part III of the *Ethics*,³⁸ how could Spinoza not have immediately thought of this? Is it even plausible that he did not immediately think of it? Should we not instead accept that, even if he had good reasons to say nothing about it, he already had this explanation in mind when he wrote the *TP*?

III. We thus come to the second way to dispute the thesis of Spinoza's evolution. It consists in saying that, from the time of the *TTP* onward, Spinoza already was in possession of the doctrine of the *TP*. The argument, here, cannot be positive: the passages that justify the explication by the imitation of the affects, already very sparse in the *TP*, are totally absent from the *TTP*. But there is a negative argument, and it is actually quite solid. It amounts to claiming that, to the extent that *there is no contradiction between the TTP and the TP*, nothing proves that the contractarianism of the first text is not simply an exoteric version, or even a particular application, of the non-contractarianism of the second.

Now, *it is true* that there is no contradiction between the *TTP* and the *TP*; I have always thought so, and have even written as much.³⁹ *It is true* that the doctrine of the *TTP* can be considered, in a certain way, as an exoteric version of that of the *TP*: when one addresses oneself, as Spinoza did, to readers trained in the school of Grotius and Hobbes, one might very well, in order to adapt oneself to their language, call 'contract' the consensus by which the State is constituted and reconstituted. *It is also true that*, in another way, the contractarianism of the *TTP* can be considered a special case of the non-contractarianism of the *TP*. The account given in the *TP*, as I have tried to reconstruct it here, applies in the most general case, requiring the least hypotheses: the individuals in question are considered abstractly, leaving aside any (even instrumental) usage of their reason, leaving aside, at the limit, even any memory; and it amounts to showing that, even in that

³⁸ [Matheron here writes 'livre II', but he must mean Part III.]

³⁹ Matheron [1969] 1988: 328–9.

extreme case, political society would *still* arise from out of the play of their passions alone. But it is obvious that, if one reintroduces what this abstraction leaves aside, things would take place even more quickly: the more the individuals involved would be capable, at the beginning of the process, of anticipating its results, the more steps could be skipped and trial and error avoided. At the limit, if they correctly anticipated the final outcome, that is, political society itself, they would doubtless come to an agreement, by means of something more or less analogous to a contract, in order to create or recreate it immediately; and this would be the case (and in reality it is) if they themselves had *already lived* in political society and remembered this – the process all the more approaching the pure contractual model the more they had learned to make sure of their reason in order better to satisfy their passions (the same ones, of course). So I agree entirely with Douglas Den Uyl's demonstration of non-contradiction in *Power, State and Freedom*;⁴⁰ my interpretation based on the *TP* is suitable for an 'absolute' state of nature, which would not be preceded by anything, and it explains ontologically *why*, in general, there is political society; the (more or less pure) contractarian interpretation is suitable for an 'intermediary' state of nature, resulting from the breakdown of a given political society, and it explains (more or less approximatively) *how*, historically, one passes from one State-form to another.

But what exactly does this demonstration prove? What it establishes, strictly speaking, is that Spinoza, at the time of the writing of the *TP*, retrospectively interpreted the account of Chapter XVI of the *TTP* as a particular application, formulated moreover in slightly *ad hominem* language, of the more general theory that he had in his possession by then. But can one conclude that he had already interpreted it in this way *at the time of the writing of the TTP*? There is no textual evidence for this. Spinoza does claim, in Chapter XVI, that the transfer of power [*puissance*] by which the State is constituted could take place in two ways; but the difference that he indicates (*vel vi, vel sponte*⁴¹) does not go beyond that which exists between Hobbes' commonwealth by acquisition and his commonwealth by institution, both of which are contractual. Is it not plausible to suppose, in the absence of any indication to the contrary, that Spinoza, at that time, had not yet gotten past the general horizon of contractarianism?

It would be necessary to establish a test that would make it possible to decide this question positively. Now such a test has been discovered, and

⁴⁰ Den Uyl 1983: Chapter III.

⁴¹ *TTP* XVI, 24; CWS II, 287; G III, 193.

it seems effective to me. It was discovered by a young French researcher, Christian Lazzeri, who presented it at a conference, whose proceedings have not been published, held in December 1985 in Paris.⁴² Lazzeri's hypothesis was as follows: Spinoza, at the time of the *TTP*, could not yet have gotten beyond the contractarian point of view, because he did not yet have the theoretical means to do so; and he did not have them because, when he was in the process of writing the *Ethics*, he had not yet elaborated his theory of the imitation of the affects as it would ultimately be presented in Part III after Proposition 27. What proves this, Lazzeri claims, is that, in at least one case, the very text of the *TTP* testifies clearly enough to this non-elaboration. The example he invokes seems convincing to me, and I think that we can add another to it.

A. The text that Lazzeri relies on is found in the third paragraph of Chapter XVII of the *TTP*.⁴³ This passage, in a sense, is homologous to Paragraph 5 of Chapter I of the *TP*: one also finds there a kind of summary of the principal interhuman passions. But, in fact, it is very different from that of the *TP* and it does not mention Part III of the *Ethics* at all. The *ambition for domination* is mentioned there, but it is not characterised as being essentially intolerance (which is very surprising in this work, one of whose principal aims is the struggle against intolerance); its link with the ambition for glory is also not indicated, nor consequently is its non-utilitarian character; it is not even presented as consisting in particular as a desire to dominate *other human beings*: Spinoza simply says that each always wants to direct everything according to their will (*omnia ex suo ingenio moderari vult*), things and events no less than human beings; and the allusion that follows to *summum lucrum* even seems to suggest that, for the Spinoza of the *TTP* as for Hobbes, the ambitious aspire to dominate those like them, not for the sake of happiness, but in order to utilise them, just like they do other things, as simple means in the service of their own interests. *Glory*, it is true, is also mentioned; but Spinoza declares that, under its influence, each 'disdains equals (*aequales contemnit*)',⁴⁴ whereas glory in the sense of Part III of the *Ethics* leads us on the contrary to attach an *exaggerated* importance to the opinions of others; one can thus see that the word 'glory' here has, not its Spinozist

⁴² Christian Lazzeri, today 'not so young' and a professor at the University of Paris X, did not present this argument in writing until much later, in his remarkable work *Droit, pouvoir et liberté. Spinoza critique de Hobbes* (Lazzeri 1998). But he did work it out much earlier.

⁴³ *TTP* XVII, 15; CWS II, 299; G III, 203.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

sense (joy from the rejoicing of others), but its Hobbesian sense (joy from contemplating our own power, where the latter is conceived in a purely instrumental way): if we believe ourselves to be much more powerful than others, then, in fact, we will disdain them. Finally, envy is mentioned, but its necessary link with pity is not mentioned – and pity does not even appear here. It thus indeed seems that Spinoza, at that time, still explained the interhuman passions in the manner of Hobbes. And under these conditions, actually, the state of nature would have to be characterised, not by an unsociable sociability, but by an unsociability pure and simple; it could therefore not lead beyond itself by the play of its own dynamics: there would indeed have to be, in order to leave it, a radical rupture obtained by a reflective and concerted common decision, that is, something like a contract.

B. Perhaps we can go farther still. If the doctrine of the imitation of the affects was not yet elaborated at the time of the *TTP*, is this not because the very foundation of the whole theory of the passions, which is to say the theory of the *conatus*, was itself not yet in place?

We know, for sure, that this theory underwent an evolution. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza speaks of the effort that each thing makes to ‘preserve itself in its state’ and ‘bring itself to a better one’;⁴⁵ a static formulation and a dynamic formulation are juxtaposed without their link being elucidated. In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, he indifferently employs ‘preserve its being’⁴⁶ and ‘persevering in its state’;⁴⁷ seeming thereby to give the first of these two formulas a static meaning. In the *Ethics*, on the other hand, not only has Spinoza definitively abandoned ‘persevere in its state’ (a formulation he retains for the principle of inertia, but no longer for *conatus*) in favour of ‘persevere in its being’;⁴⁸ but he goes on to explain exactly what this means: since our *conatus* is nothing other than our actual essence,⁴⁹ ‘to persevere in our being’ does not simply mean ‘not to die’, but instead to produce the effects that follow from our nature; *conatus*, actualised essence, productivity of being, power to act – all these become identical.⁵⁰ Perhaps it might also be thought that in the *Ethics* itself, the doctrine was not established on the first attempt; I want to explore that elsewhere. But what is certain is that the evolution goes in the direction of a progressive identification of the two

⁴⁵ KV I, V, 1; CWS I, 84.

⁴⁶ CM I, I, 6; CWS I, 314; G I, 248.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Ethics* III, 6; CWS I, 498.

⁴⁹ *Ethics* III, 7; CWS I, 499.

⁵⁰ *Ethics* III, 7 Dem.; CWS I, 499.

notions of self-preservation and causal dynamism, where both are ultimately identified with the actualisation of the consequences of our essence.

Now, in Chapter XVI of the *TTP*, Spinoza gives us a formulation of *conatus* that is situated at a *very early* stage in this evolution. In the course of his deduction of natural right, he declares that each thing, so far as it can, strives to persevere *in its state (in suo statu)*:⁵¹ this is the static formulation of the *Short Treatise* and the *Cogitata*. Is this just a careless slip of language? Definitely not, since what he says immediately thereafter goes in the same direction. Is it a matter of a simple statement of the principle of inertia? Maybe, but then human *conatus* would be entirely reducible to inertia, since the whole passage is precisely meant to apply to the human being; and what follows appeals to consciousness and calculation. Spinoza continues: 'and [it] does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself.'⁵² This is surely incompatible with the doctrine of the imitation of the affects, which will teach us on the contrary that we are directly, immediately, prior to any utilitarian calculus, affected by what affects others. But it is a logical enough consequence of the static conception of *conatus*: if the striving to preserve ourselves comes down, as in Hobbes, to the simple desire not to die, and if everything else is only a means in view of this end, whatever is felt by others will never mean anything to us, since their life is not our own; the imitation of affects would thus be impossible.

So, like Lazzari, one might think that the contractarianism of the *TTP* was, for Spinoza, a kind of last resort, insofar as he did not yet possess the means to grasp in other terms how the state of nature could be left. And if later he acquired these means, perhaps, as Negri contends, he gained them through what he had learned during the very writing of the *TTP*: about intolerance, the productivity of the imagination in religious phenomena, everything that he had to deal with in the course of drafting this work – all this would push him to try to elaborate the concept. Whence the final version of Part III⁵³ of the *Ethics*, which in turn made possible the more comprehensive and radical non-contractarianism of the *TP*.

* * *

One last question remains: why, at the end of this evolution, did Spinoza not articulate in clear terms the conception at which he finally arrived? Why did he say nothing about it in Chapter II of the *TP*, where the question of

⁵¹ *TTP* XVI, 4; CWS II, 282; G III, 189.

⁵² *TTP* XVI, 4; CWS II, 283; G III, 189.

⁵³ [Again (see note 38, above) Matheron refers to Part II, but must mean Part III.]

the genesis of the State should have been addressed? Why did he only make allusions that only allow us to draw it out through cross-references? This stems, I think, from something that bothered Spinoza. In fact, as we have seen, the explication of the genesis of the State is so much simpler and more general, it requires so many fewer hypotheses, it makes less of an appeal to calculation, the greater we make the role played by *indignation*. But, according to Spinoza, indignation is *necessarily evil*.⁵⁴ It is not even indirectly good, like shame and remorse: even in human beings subject to passions, pity and the ambition for glory, joined with a little calculation, *could*, on their own, produce exactly the same socially useful effects. But, *in fact*, pity and the ambition for glory *necessarily* culminate in hatred for what does harm to those with whom we identify, and their effects are multiplied at a very steep price. There will never be any State, no matter how perfect, without some repression, nor any repression without an abstract collective indignation at least towards non-conformists in general. One must thus accept, whether one likes it or not, that there is something fundamentally evil at the very root of the State, a necessary corollary to its beneficial effects: the same evil, ultimately, that lies at the root of revolutions. And doubtless Spinoza did accept it, and he did not like it. This is no theoretical aporia, but the recognition of a disagreeable reality – something that he no doubt preferred not to dwell on.

⁵⁴ *Ethics* IV, 51 Schol.; CWS I, 575.

Is the State, According to Spinoza, an Individual in Spinoza's Sense?

The question posed here is very precise.¹ It is not: 'Is the State in reality an individual in the real sense of the word?' Nor is it: 'Is the State in reality an individual in Spinoza's sense?' Nor even: 'Is the State, according to Spinoza, an individual in the real sense of the word?' In the past I have answered this question in the affirmative,² but without actually posing the question as such. Lee C. Rice, in a very interesting article,³ addressed to me, from his own strictly individualistic point of view, objections from which I learned a lot, but which, to my mind, did not entirely respond to the question as I posed it. Pierre-François Moreau then came to my defence,⁴ this time truly posing the question, by developing what I had only sketched out, and by expanding on it in an entirely original way. Then Steven Barbone, in a chapter of his excellent doctoral dissertation,⁵ returned to and developed Rice's thesis against us by laying out, with rare mastery, *all* the arguments that could logically be raised against us from their point of view – but which, again, and for the same reason, have not absolutely convinced me. Finally, Étienne Balibar, from his own 'transindividualist' perspective, dedicated an important piece⁶ to the question (not exactly the one I posed, strictly speaking) in which, having read my work against Rice's – apparently

¹ [Originally published as 'L'état, selon Spinoza, est-il un individu au sens de Spinoza?', in Michael Czelinski, Thomas Kisser, Robert Schnepf, Marcell Senn, and Jürgen Stenzel (eds), *Transformation der Metaphysik in die Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003): 417–35; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² Matheron [1969] 1988: 330–54.

³ Rice 1990.

⁴ Moreau 1994b: 427–65.

⁵ Barbone 1997.

⁶ Balibar 2005a.

believing that this was what Moreau had done – he delivered captivating analyses with which I often agreed, but from which I do not think one could conclude that the State, according to Spinoza, is not an individual in Spinoza's sense.

Here I would like to return to the question from a quasi-‘philological’ perspective (as one says in Italy, in a generally pejorative sense) by staying at the level of the texts, and I will treat it in five points. In points I, II and III, I will analyse three passages from the *Ethics* that, to my mind, should be enough to decide it; in IV, I will refer to some passages from the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, in which I believe complementary confirmations and clarifications can be found; and I will conclude in V with a problem.

Along the way I will respond to the objections that have been made to me (I count fifteen of them). But since their authors might not recognise them (I have not always recognised, for my part, some of the theses that have been attributed to me), I will mention them without naming anyone, in the mode of ‘si quis dixerit’. I hope they will grant me this. And I thank them for everything they have taught me.

I. First of all, let us recall the Spinozist definition of the individual, which is given in what might be called the ‘summary of physics’ after Proposition 13 of Part II of the *Ethics*.⁷ This definition immediately distinguishes between two cases, of which it might be said that the first is a particular case of the second. Many bodies, Spinoza tells us, form an individual together when they are ‘so constrained by other bodies’ (*cum reliquis ita coërcentur*) (a) ‘that they lie upon one another’ (or ‘remain engaged with one another’: *ut invicem incumbent*), (b) ‘or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain well-determined manner (*ut motus suos invicem certa quadam ratione communicent*)’.⁸

The first part (‘when they are so constrained by other bodies’) simply means that an individual can only exist if external causes allow it to. Case (a), taken to the letter, might be used to describe, for example, a group of travellers on a metro train at rush hour, but it evidently does not concern political society. Thus, we will only examine case (b) here.

One will immediately note the extreme generality of the expression ‘certa

⁷ *Ethics* II, Axioms, Lemmas, Demonstrations, Definitions, and Postulates after 13; CWS I, 458–63; G II, 99–100.

⁸ *Ibid.* Translation modified.

quadam ratione', which I have tried to translate with an equally general formula. More often one finds a slightly more precise translation: 'according to a precise relation' (Pautrat); 'according to a certain relation' (Misrahi).⁹ This isn't wrong, fundamentally. As we will see, it would even be perfectly correct to translate this expression by 'according to certain laws'. But, for our purposes, that would be premature here, and it might lead to confusion: we must absolutely not give the impression that what is at stake here is *necessarily* (which of course does not rule it out) a matter of physical laws expressible in terms of mathematical relations, since nothing of the sort is necessarily implied by the words 'certa ratione'. This is, it seems to me, the only way to avoid getting lost from the start.

It is true, by contrast, that Anglo-Saxon translators are right to resort to the notion of *fixity*, which the adjective 'certa' also connotes (Curley writes: 'in a certain fixed manner'). So perhaps it would be better to overtranslate our expression a bit by rendering it as: 'in a certain well-determined *and invariable* manner'. But, to be rigorous about it, it is also true that many bodies that (according to a certain law) collide and bounce off each other, so that they never meet again, form, at the extreme lower limit of individuality, an ephemeral, even instantaneous individual – which would surely remain one if none of these bodies ever subsequently encountered any others (for in that case, the same law would continue to account for their behaviour), but which, since this never happens in a plenum, is in reality immediately destroyed. Anyway, little matter: outside of this limit case, determination and fixity imply one another; many bodies form a lasting individual only if, when their movements are mutually communicated according to a *certa ratio*, the overall result of their interactions (all things being equal, if external causes still hold) is to redetermine the same movements to be recomunicated according to the same *certa ratio*. Thus, in general, all individuality in the sense of (b) consists in a minimum of *self-regulation*.

In this way, one can immediately see that certain objections addressed to the thesis of the individuality of the State are not pertinent. For it is quite certain that, in order to be an individual in Spinoza's sense, it is sufficient, in the attribute of Extension, to conform to the definition that Spinoza gives. But this definition in no way requires, for example, that *all*

⁹ [In this chapter Matheron discusses in detail the differences between the various French translations of Spinoza's Latin. We have translated all of these into English, but will always provide the original French in footnotes, explaining our decisions when we feel it to be appropriate or necessary. In this case: 'selon un rapport précis' (Pautrat); 'selon un certain rapport' (Misrahi).]

the activities of constituent parts are deduced from the laws of the whole: from Spinoza's perspective, this would only apply to the total individual, or the *Facies Totius Universi*,¹⁰ the totally integrated individual whose laws, effectively, coincide with the universal laws of nature from which nothing escapes; but, in a finite individual, each constituent body can very well perform movements other than those that it communicates according to the *certa ratio* of the whole, and can communicate them to external bodies or to other constituent bodies according to other *rationes*, or even without any invariable *ratio*.¹¹ It also does not require in the least that constituent bodies of the type (b) must be touching (we can communicate movements by talking to each other), nor even that any body situated locally within the whole must be a constituent part submitted to its *certa ratio*, nor even that the constituent parts can only live within the whole. And that the ecosystems of the Earth are individuals with which human beings enter into composition (which Spinoza would quite obviously accept) does not constitute an objection: nothing prohibits us from thinking that one and the same body can enter, by different movements and according to different *certain rationes*, into compositions with many individuals at once. All these objections come down to the fact that their authors, who no doubt are thinking only of biological organisms, have a certain idea of what an individual *must* be; but Spinoza's idea is infinitely less restrictive, and it is this idea that we have to grasp.

II. It remains to be seen whether or not this definition applies to the State. Now it turns out, and this has not been noted often enough, that Spinoza himself *responds very clearly to this question* in the Scholium to Proposition 18 of *Ethics IV*.¹² It is true that what he adds immediately thereafter poses another problem (*the problem*, one might say), but, it seems to me, it does so without weakening his response in the least. So let us consider each of these two points, which must be carefully distinguished.

A. After having said that, among things external to us, we can conceive of none more useful than those that agree entirely with our nature, Spinoza explains: 'if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another (*si enim duo ex. gr. ejusdem prorsus naturae individua*

¹⁰ See *Ethics* II, Lem. 7 Schol. after 13; CWS I, 461. See also *Ep.* LXIV [to G.H. Schuller]; CWS II, 438–9.

¹¹ See *Ethics* II, 24 Dem.; CWS I, 468–9.

¹² *Ethics* IV, 18 Schol.; CWS I, 556–7; G II, 223.

invicem junguntur'), 'they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one (*individuum componunt singulo duplo potentius*)'.¹³

The expression '*invicem junguntur*' is intentionally vague here, but it means, at any rate, that these two individuals coordinate their activities. In order to do this, if we are considering human beings, they speak to one another; in speaking to one another, they physically communicate movements by the intermediary of the air; these movements produce images in each of their bodies, from which follow certain behaviours by which their movements are recommunicated, and so on; so that overall, as in the pendulum that Gueroult refers to in order to illustrate the Spinozist doctrine of individuality,¹⁴ the movements performed by each are different than what they would have been if this reciprocal adjustment had not taken place. And these communications of movements evidently happen 'in a certain well-determined manner', which is required in order for the activities of the two partners to be actually coordinated. With regard to the number of individuals, two, Spinoza explicitly gives this as an example: it does not matter what other number of individuals we choose, including the number of inhabitants in any given State. If one furthermore accepts (and how could one not accept it?) that the activities of citizens in one and the same State are generally more or less coordinated, even if only by an approximate obedience to the same laws, would one not conclude that these fellow citizens together form, if their number is n , 'an individual n times as powerful than each on their own'? Or perhaps, given a potential coefficient of loss k owing to the approximate character of their cooperation (k being between 1 and n), that they form 'an individual n/k times as powerful as each of them'? But, in any event: that they form *an individual* in Spinoza's strict sense, whatever its power?

However, one might object that this claim of Spinoza's actually has a counterfactual sense; for, one might say, many individuals can *never* be 'of entirely the same nature': if they seem to be, they are at least distinguished by their singular essences; and consequently, their union in a single individual, even if it can and must serve as a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, is always unrealisable. But in fact – leaving aside that it is hard to imagine what such a counterfactual (in the indicative mood, no less) would mean in

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gueroult 1974: 171–5 and 555–60. [The reference is to Huygens' compound pendulum, which according to Gueroult provides Spinoza with the model of individuality conceived in terms of a constant relation of motion and rest. See Koyré 1968, Chapter 4.]

the context of this scholium – whenever Spinoza compares the respective natures of two individuals, he never uses the word ‘*prorsus*’ (‘entirely’) in such a restrictive manner. A single example: in the Scholium to Proposition 68 of *Ethics* IV, he invokes Adam encountering Eve, who ‘agreed entirely with his nature (*quae cum sua natura prorsus conveniebat*)’;¹⁵ since Adam and Eve are distinguished not only by their individual essences, but also by their sex, the ‘entire’ agreement referred to by *prorsus* here can thus only concern their common human nature, and there is no reason why it wouldn’t be the same in the Scholium to Proposition 18 of *Ethics* IV. One might retort, it is true (although nobody has said this), that before the fall Adam and Eve supposedly lived according to the guidance of reason, and that this is what their ‘entire’ agreement in nature refers to. But the adverb ‘*prorsus*’, in this scholium, serves to distinguish the commonality of nature that unites Adam and Eve, not from what might unite the two of them with non-reasonable humans who did not yet exist, but from what might unite the two of them with non-human beings surrounding them (including the serpent!) – all of which would be, at least, modes of thought and extension just like the two of them. And in the formulation from the Scholium of *Ethics* IV Proposition 18, it is not yet a question of reasonable human beings, but only of human beings in general; for the immediate conclusion is: ‘To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man (*Homini igitur nihil homine utilius*)’, without specifying whether the ‘useful’ human beings designated by *homini* live according to the guidance of reason or not.¹⁶ This formulation thus applies to, among other things, any group of human beings whose members cooperate, whether its members are reasonable or subject to passions – and, consequently, to the State as well.

That said, one might also raise the contrary objection: the State, it is now alleged, cannot be an individual, not at all because its members are not entirely of the same nature, but, quite on the contrary, because they *are* of the same nature.¹⁷ One might here invoke the Scholium to Lemma 7 of the ‘summary of physics’, where it is a question of an individual that itself is ‘composed of a number of Individuals of a different nature (*ex pluribus*

¹⁵ *Ethics* IV, 68; CWS I, 585; G II, 262. Translation modified.

¹⁶ *Ethics* IV, 18; CWS I, 556; G II, 223.

¹⁷ These two objections are not logically contradictory. One might think that what merits the name of composite individuals are only 1) those which are composed of individuals of different natures, and 2) those (if any such exist) which are composed of individuals whose natures are so similar that they go all the way to the complete identity of their individual essences, even though the second case cannot be realised in fact. To be blunt, we do not see why the intermediary case would be excluded.

diversae naturae Individuis compositum'),¹⁸ and one will immediately conclude that an individual composed of individuals of the same nature is impossible. But the text in no way authorises such a conclusion, and its intention is just the opposite. Spinoza, at the beginning of the Scholium, recalls that the four preceding lemmas (Lemmas 4 to 7) made an inventory of different kinds of variations that an individual composed of 'the simplest bodies (*ex corporibus simplicissimis*)' can undergo without changing its nature – one might say that such an individual has a degree of composition 1. Then he adds: let us now consider individuals of degree 2, composed of individuals of degree 1, and let us see what is new about them in relation to the preceding. Now what is new about them, first of all, is that their constituent parts *can be* of a different nature; for, as Axiom 3 immediately following the definition of the individual indicates, the individuals of degree 1 that compose them are either soft or hard if they are of type (a), or fluid if they are of type (b). And secondly, and above all, what is new about them is that they can undergo, in addition to the variations indicated in the four lemmas, supplementary variations whose explication constitutes the principal object of the scholium. It is thus unsurprising that Spinoza, in a scholium dedicated entirely to the *differences* between various degrees of composition, would choose to explain the second of these two novelties by taking the example of an individual that illustrates the first at the same time. But *he does not say* that this is the only possible case, and we do not see anything there that would permit one to think so. With regard to individuals of degree 3, 4, and so on, which he only mentions without giving any examples, we see even less that would allow one to impose such a restriction on them. Now, based on the first postulate that immediately follows the Scholium to Lemma 7, the human body is *at least* an individual of the fourth degree, and is no doubt much higher still; and the State, *if it is* an individual, would itself be of degree five or higher. Thus, since Spinoza does not impose any restriction on individuals of these degrees with regard to the similitude of their constituent parts, the State *could be* an individual. Thus, as Spinoza already explicitly said that any group of individuals of the same nature that unite their forces is itself an individual, and as moreover the State is one of these groups, everything adds up, and the question seems settled.

B. That said, what kind of individual is at stake here, exactly? This question, let us clearly note, is distinct from the preceding one, and the answer that we give, whatever it may be, must not invalidate what has already been established. But it is true that there is a problem here.

¹⁸ *Ethics* II, Lem. 7 Schol. after 13; CWS I, 461–2; G II, 101–2.

In fact, in the same Scholium to *Ethics* IV Proposition 18, immediately after ‘there is nothing more useful than man’, Spinoza adds: ‘Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all so agree in all things that . . . (*quam quod omnes in omnibus ita convenient, ut . . .*)’.¹⁹ Let us stop here for a moment. The agreement of all in all things, without any restriction, obviously does not characterise actual States: it is an ideal to strive towards, which would only be realised in a community of sages, or, with regard to external behaviour at least, in the perfectly laid-out States of which Spinoza will provide some models in the *TP*. But actual States, provided that they have a certain stability, generally reach a certain approximation of this: all subjects, or almost all of them, are pretty much in agreement, whether you like it or not, when it comes to nearly always respecting legality in almost all things (delinquents respect many more laws than they violate); in other words, all, or almost all, are in agreement in all things up to a certain point, or *in a certain way*. And it is this way that seems to me to be introduced by the words ‘*ita . . . ut*’ – which I would prefer to translate with Appuhn by ‘in such a way that’, without a comma after ‘things’, rather than by ‘so that’ (Pautrat) or ‘such that’ (Misrahi), preceded by a comma, which gives the false impression that what agrees *can only be* the consequence of an absolutely perfect agreement.²⁰ So what is this way? This is what is indicated by what comes next, and it is what constitutes the problem.

The sentence, in fact, is completed like this: ‘in such a way that the Minds’ (or ‘Souls’) and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind’ (or ‘Soul’) ‘and one Body (*ita . . . ut omnium Mentem et Corpora unam quasi Mentem, unumque Corpus componant*)’.²¹ And it is this ‘quasi’ (which I have translated, and we will see why, into ‘*as it were*’,²² without repetition) which forms the basis of the *principal objection* addressed to the thesis of the individuality of any human community in general: since *quasi* means ‘as if’, we are told, Spinoza obviously must mean that, even in the best possible case

¹⁹ *Ethics* IV, 18; CWS I, 556; G II, 223. Translation modified.

²⁰ [‘de façon que’ (Appuhn); ‘en sorte que’ (Pautrat); ‘de telle sorte que’ (Misrahi). Matheron’s preference for Appuhn’s translation appears to be based on his worry that the *en sorte que* and the *de telle sorte que* of Pautrat and Misrahi might be read teleologically, as though the agreement of human beings were *for the sake of* composing one mind and body, inverting the order of cause and effect. Thus we could also have translated them as ‘in order that’ and ‘in order for’, as in: ‘all should so agree in all things in order that they will compose, as it were . . .’.]

²¹ *Ethics* IV, 18 Schol.; CWS I, 556; G II, 223.

²² [‘comme’.]

(that of a community of sages, or of a perfect State), and all the more so in the case of actual States, the souls and bodies of all do not *really* compose a single soul and a single body, but only give the appearance of doing so; and if these States do not really have either body or soul, how would they be real individuals? From which one concludes that the individuality of the State is only metaphorical.

Now this might seem irrefutable. But let us look a little closer. This formulation can actually be interpreted in three ways, based on whether one considers 'quasi' as a subordinate conjunction modifying 'componant', or, on the contrary, as an adverb, one either qualifying *Mentem* alone, or both *Mentem* and *Corpus* together. If it were a conjunction, of course, we would find ourselves at the limits of proper grammar, since *componant* is already modified by *ut*. However, by implication, one might then understand it to mean: 'in such a way that (everything happens) as if the Minds and Bodies of all composed one Mind and one Body'. Now this is impossible. For, if we consider bodies, we have one of two options: either these bodies do not communicate their motions according to a *certa ratio*, in which case *nothing would happen* as if they composed one body; or else they communicate their motions according to a *certa ratio*, and so things would not happen *merely* 'as if' they composed one body; based on the end of the definition of the individual, we would have to say that these bodies really do 'compose together a single body or Individual (*omnia simul unum corpus, sive Individuum componere*)'.²³ In either case, then, 'quasi' would be out of place. And due to the 'parallelism' (I use this term, like everyone else, for lack of a better word), the same would have to go for souls. This interpretation thus does not work.

Thus, *quasi* is an adverb. But does it apply only to *Mentem*, or to *Mentem* and *Corpus* at the same time? This latter interpretation is preferred by the majority of translators (quite clearly in the case of Misrahi: 'compose as it were one mind and as it were one body';²⁴ a little less clearly in the case of Pautrat: 'compose, so to speak, one mind and one body',²⁵ where the first four words give the impression of forming a single unit; the same goes for Appuhn: 'compose in some way one mind and one body',²⁶ and for Curley: 'compose, as it were, one Mind and one body'). But the only justification given, at least as far as I know, is that, according to the conventions of Latin rhetoric, *quasi* is not to be repeated, no matter what. I agree completely:

²³ *Ethics* II, Def. after 13; CWS I, 460; G II, 100.

²⁴ ['composent comme une seule âme et comme un seul corps'.]

²⁵ ['composent, pour ainsi dire, une seule âme et un seul corps'.]

²⁶ ['composent en quelque sorte une seule âme et un seul corps'.]

if *one wanted to write* in elegant Latin a sentence meaning: ‘compose, as it were, one mind *and as it were* one body’, it would be better not to repeat *quasi* prior to *Corpus*. But if *one wanted to write* in elegant Latin a sentence meaning: ‘compose as it were one mind and compose (without ‘as it were’) one body’, would one repeat *componant*? Certainly not, and one would no doubt place this verb at the end of the sentence. One would therefore write the same sentence in either case: that is, the one that Spinoza actually wrote (*unam quasi Mentem, unumque Corpus componant*). This sentence is therefore ambiguous – as is, I hope, the translation that I have suggested, in which ‘as it were’, not repeated, seems to me to be more easily detachable from ‘compose’. What are we to do, under these conditions?

The best thing to do, it seems to me, is to choose the interpretation that is not in contradiction with what Spinoza *had just said* – namely, that two individuals of the same nature that join their forces together compose an individual – if, that is, there is one and only one such interpretation. And there is one and only one. Let us suppose, in fact, that *quasi* applies to *corpus*. In this case, the bodies in question compose something that resembles one body, but which is not really one. Now Spinoza *defines a body*, in a general way, as being a *finite mode of extension*; the first definition of *Ethics II* in fact tells us: ‘By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way (*certo, et determinato modo*) expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing.’²⁷ So a quasi-body which is not a body is not a finite mode of extension; and since it is also not an infinite mode, it is not a mode at all: it is a mere aggregate of modes. But an individual, if it is something, is indeed *a mode*, and not a mere aggregate. Thus, in extension, individuals of the same nature that join their forces *do not compose* an individual; and, by virtue of the ‘parallelism’, the same goes in thought. Thus, since Spinoza himself means to say precisely the contrary, either he contradicts himself in the space of four lines, or else *quasi* cannot apply to *corpus*.

But do we not find the same contradiction if we apply *quasi* to *mens*? Actually, no. For Spinoza never says that every finite mode of thought is a *mens*. He does give, in Propositions 11 to 13 of *Ethics II*, what amounts to a definition of the *Mens humana* as being *the idea of an actually existing human body*, but he never gives a definition of *mens* in general; and he also never defines any word as designating ‘the idea of an actually existing body’ in general.

It is true that, in the scholium to *Ethics II*, 13, after having said that individuals, including non-humans, are ‘all, though in different degrees,

²⁷ *Ethics II*, Def. 1; CWS I, 447.

nevertheless animate (*omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animate sunt*), he invokes the existence of non-human *mentes* and indicates the method to follow in order to evaluate their degree of perfection in relation to the *Mens humana*.²⁸ But all that can be drawn from this is that, among the ideas of actually existing non-human bodies, some of them are *mentes*. Strictly speaking, this in no way means that *all* are *mentes*. No doubt they have only a certain threshold of resemblance with the *Mens humana*. Spinoza, in any event, in no way claims to give us here a complete enumeration of all degrees of 'animation', with a general term to designate all of them and particular terms to designate each of them. Given 'omnia . . . animata sunt', the best general term here would seem to be 'anima'; but Spinoza, who did not like this word, avoids employing it here; he would not give in and use it, as we will see, until later, at the end of the *TP*.

Let us therefore come to a conclusion regarding the scholium to *Ethics* IV, 18. All human groups whose members cooperate, including the State when it has a minimum of stability, are, to different degrees, individuals. In each of these groups, to different degrees, all the human bodies (or almost all) together compose a single body. And in each of them as well, to different degrees, all the human minds (or almost all) together compose a single 'idea of this actually existing body', which, no doubt because it is too different from the *Mens humana*, is a quasi-*mens* without being truly a *mens*, and whose exact nature remains to be determined.

III. Nevertheless, it might be said that this is not yet sufficient. To the preceding, or rather to what I wrote a long time ago on the same score with much less precision in my detailed commentaries, the objection has been raised that this was not the essential point. What happens in the State, it is said, perhaps literally conforms to the definition of the individual given in *Ethics* II, but this 'physicalist' definition is only an abstract moment in the Spinozist theory of individuality, and this moment is surpassed from the beginning of *Ethics* III: starting with *Ethics* III, 6, it becomes clear that what essentially characterises an individual is its *conatus*. Now, one objects, the State such as Spinoza conceives of it has no *conatus*. What one finds instead, we are told, is merely a set of human *conatus*, each of which only has regard for itself, and one would search in vain for the least allusion, in Spinoza, to a natural collective striving directly tending towards the preservation of the State itself. Or else, we are told from another perspective, one indeed finds transindividual processes which are like sketches of collective *conatus*, like

²⁸ *Ethics* II, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 458; G II, 96–7.

tendential or virtual collective individuations, but these processes are too incomplete, too diverse, too chaotic, too conflictual, too contradictory, to constitute a unified overall *conatus*; they remain well short of the minimum of indispensable unity. In response, I posited that in principle there is *conatus* as soon as there is self-regulation, and I above all strove to reconstruct the different forms that self-regulation assumes in the States that are in question in the *TTP* and in the *TP*: the self-regulation implied by the very nature of the State in general, the self-regulations very imperfectly described here and there by Spinoza in his occasional reflections on actual States (and whose chaotic, conflictual character, the result of which would always be their destruction and replacement by another State, I did not deny, but indeed underscored), the nearly perfect self-regulation in the Hebraic theocracy such as it is conceived in the *TTP*, and the perfect self-regulation in the States of the *TP*. All these, I thought, without dwelling on it too much, constituted so many descriptions of state-*conatus* grasped in all the diversity of its avatars. Later I would return to this theme by insisting on the very ambiguous self-regulating role played by indignation in actual States according to Spinoza. But I took it for granted, like everyone else, that Spinoza never speaks of a *conatus* of the State, and that on this subject there could only be indirect proofs. But actually, it turns out that there is a passage of the *Ethics* in which Spinoza speaks about this explicitly. In fact:

A. In the second scholium to *Ethics* IV, 37, Spinoza gives us in passing a veritable genetic definition of the State: ‘This Society, maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself, is called a State (*Societas, legibus, et potestate sese conservandi firmata, Civitas appellatur*)’, he tells us.²⁹ *Societas*, considered in itself, is thus prior by nature to the State; if there were not a State (or if there were no longer, or almost no longer a State), there would still be interhuman relations, human groups would constantly tend to be formed, and this is when those tendential transindividual processes mentioned above would unfold; but their conflictual character would render them too unstable to endure – up until the precise point when, by their very interactions, the State is born. For, once the State is constituted, the laws that it imposed give this *Societas* the stability that it lacked and make it a *Civitas*, characterised essentially by its *potestas sese conservandi*.

B. Contrary to what has often been objected against us, Spinoza, in certain very specific contexts, uses the words *potestas* and *potentia* interchangeably. For example, in the demonstration to *Ethics* V, 29, he invokes, in order to characterise the two principal powers of the human mind, the

²⁹ *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 2; CWS I, 567; G II, 238.

'potentiam concipiendi res cum relatione ad tempus', then the 'potestatem . . . concipiendi res sub specie aeternitatis', and returns finally to 'haec potentia concipiendi res sub specie aeternitatis', that is, to the same 'potentia' which initially he called 'potestas'.³⁰ Similarly, in the demonstration to *Ethics* V, 42, he invokes the 'potestatem libidines coërcendi', which immediately thereafter becomes the 'potentia ad coërcendos affectus'.³¹ Clearly, then, *potestas* and *potentia*, when they are followed by a gerund or a verbal adjective (in the genitive, or in the accusative preceded by *ad*) have exactly the same sense.

C. In the demonstration to *Ethics* III, 7, Spinoza tells us, with regard to anything in general, that the 'potentia, seu conatus, quo in suo esse perseverare conatur' ('the power, or striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being') 'is nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing itself'.³² *Potentia, seu conatus*. We can thus posit the following two equivalences: 'Potestas sese conservandi of the civitas' = 'Potentia sese conservandi of the civitas' = 'conatus quo civitas in suo esse perseverare conatur'. The *Civitas*, that is, the State insofar as it stabilises *Societas*, thus indeed has a *conatus*.

And the preceding teaches us something else, too. Since the *Civitas* is one thing among others, its *conatus*, for its part, is nothing other than its actual essence – that is, its essence insofar as it actually produces consequences in duration, with the more or less distorting support of external causes. But what defines the essence of a thing are the laws of its nature. And what defines its actual essence are these same laws in composition with those of external causes that act on them – that is, at any rate, *these laws*. Now as we have just seen, that by which *Societas*, having become *Civitas*, acquires the power to preserve itself *are also laws* – no longer physical ones, but juridical ones. Would not what defines the essence of the State be, in one form or another, *a system of actually functioning juridical laws*?

IV. Now this is precisely what the *TTP* and the *TP*, which we will now take a brief look at, tends to confirm. But this brief look requires some precautions, which we must first insist on.

A. Concerning these two treatises, in fact, some preliminary remarks are in order regarding their language. The *TTP* and the *TP* are addressed to

³⁰ *Ethics* V, 29 Dem.; CWS I, 609–10; G II, 298.

³¹ *Ethics* V, 42 Dem.; CWS I, 616; G II, 308. I would like to thank C. Ramond for having highlighted these two points, which had escaped my notice – even though I had just spent three hours commenting on the demonstration to *Ethics* V, 29!

³² *Ethics* III, 7 Dem.; CWS I, 499; G II, 146.

readers who were not meant to have known the *Ethics*. This rules out, in principle, that one might be able to find formulations in them that would be incomprehensible to anyone who had not read that work. This is why, in particular, the word ‘individual’ is *never* used with regard to the State in the treatises: readers who would not know the definition given in the *Ethics* would be completely lost and would no longer be able to follow. In *TP* II, 13, for example, Spinoza says almost the same thing (the same thing, ultimately) as he does in the scholium to *Ethics* IV, 18, but there he removes the word ‘individual’: ‘If two men make an agreement with one another and join forces, they can do more together’³³ – nothing out of the ordinary there. And, contrary to what is very often objected against us, it is also perfectly unsurprising when, in Chapter XVII of the *TTP*, Spinoza, after having rhetorically asked the question of whether it is ‘by nature’ that one nation is more disobedient than another, responds: ‘nature creates individuals, not nations, individuals who are distinguished into nations only by differences of language, laws and accepted customs’.³⁴ Spinoza, in this passage whose object is in no way to determine whether the State (or the nation) is or is not an individual, takes the word ‘individual’ quite simply in the only sense which would have been accessible to his readers, that of individual human beings; and the sense of the passage overall is also quite clear: the members of a nation *are not born* with the characteristics that distinguish that nation from all the others. All that can thus be inferred from this text, if one sought a response here to a question that it does not pose, is that a State is not a human individual, nor is a human individual a State!

By contrast, with regard to the usage, in the *TP*, of the words ‘corpus’ and ‘mens’ as applied to the State (*quasi mens* being here replaced by *veluti mens*), the question is more complicated. The use of the word ‘body’ does not risk surprising readers; for one very often speaks of the ‘body of the State’ in a metaphorical sense, whether to invoke some resemblance with a living organism, or else in reference to the juridical fiction of a ‘civil’ or ‘moral person’. And it has been objected against me that this is precisely the sense in which Spinoza uses it; for it has been remarked on this score that in the *TP* (and I admit that this had escaped me), he not only uses, with regard to the State, the expression *una veluti mente*, or *veluti mens*, but also (just once, however) the expression *unum veluti corpus*.³⁵ Now it seems to me, on the contrary, that Spinoza, in this single usage, means rather to suggest

³³ *TP* II, 13; CWS II, 513.

³⁴ *TTP* XVII, 93; CWS II, 317; G III, 217.

³⁵ *TP* VIII, 19; CWS II, 572; G III, 331.

discreetly to his readers that the word *corpus*, which he and they both apply to the State, does not have for him the metaphorical sense that they typically grant it; *veluti corpus* would then mean: 'something like the body you think of when you say the word "body", but which is not really such a body'; for if a metaphorical body is 'like' a real body, a real body is also, itself, 'like' a metaphorical body. But, since this is not the aim of the *TP*, Spinoza, in the six other places where it is a question of a *corpus imperii* or *civitatis*,³⁶ does not bother to dissipate the equivocation and does not make recourse to *veluti*. He can afford to do so because, according to him, it *truly* is a matter of a body in his own sense.

And he does exactly the same thing, with a quantitatively opposite result, in the case of the word 'mens'. If, in fact, *imperii mens* might be surprising (in the theory of the 'civil' or 'moral person', it is generally specified that it 'has no soul'), the expression *una veluti mente*, by contrast, is entirely banal if it is taken to qualify a state with an 'inanimate' mind; and in the classical comparison with a living organism, when *corpus* occurs, it is instead *veluti mens* that one expects to find. And as elsewhere, taken to the letter, this expression indeed designates what is according to him equivalent to the very real 'soul' of the State-individual: Spinoza, again without dispelling the equivocation, uses *mens* with *veluti* nine times,³⁷ whereas he only uses it without *veluti* three times.³⁸ In these three latter cases, strictly speaking, that of III, 2 (*totius imperii corpus et mens*) might not matter, since *una veluti mente* already appeared in the same sentence, and *corpus et mens* seems to form a unit; but in the two others, and above all in VIII, 19 (where one also finds, and probably for the same reason, the only occurrence of *veluti corpus*), no doubt he meant to suggest to his readers in the same way that *veluti mens* has for him a much stronger sense than they might have thought, and that *veluti* must be removed if one wants to find a term adequate to designate the quasi-*mens* of the State.

But, in the relations between the body and soul or quasi-soul, what is *absolutely excluded* is recourse to the language of the 'parallelism' of the attributes. Spinoza never makes recourse to this language, not even in the case of the human mind and body. And he could not have. Try, as a kind of test, to

³⁶ *TP* III, 1; CWS II, 517. *TP* III, 2; CWS II, 517. *TP* III, 5; CWS II, 519. *TP* IV, 2; CWS II, 525. *TP* VI, 19; CWS II, 537–8. And *TP* IX, 14; CWS II, 594.

³⁷ *TP* II, 16; CWS II, 514. *TP* II, 21; CWS II, 515. *TP* III, 2; CWS II, 517. *TP* III, 5; CWS II, 519. *TP* III, 7; CWS II, 520. *TP* IV, 1; CWS II, 525. *TP* VI, 1; CWS II, 532. *TP* VI, 19; CWS II, 537–8. And *TP* VIII, 6; CWS II, 567.

³⁸ *TP* III, 2 again; CWS II, 517. *TP* VII, 3; CWS II, 546. *TP* VIII, 19; CWS II, 553.

translate the second half of *TP* II, 10 into this language: the result would be horribly complicated (just like how ‘the sun rises’ would translate into Copernican language), and the reader would understand nothing; whereas what Spinoza does say in his inadequate language is very simple and perfectly clear. It is a waste of time, then, to feign surprise at some ‘violations’ that can be found here and there.

That said, with all these precautions taken into account, we will see that the *TTP* and the *TP* not only never weaken, but indeed confirm, and even clarify, the doctrine of the individuality of the State such as it emerges in the *Ethics*. In fact:

B. At the beginning of Chapter IV of the *TTP*, Spinoza, as is well known, gives us a definition of law in general: ‘The word *law*, taken without qualification, means that according to which (*id secundum quod*) each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way (*una eademque certa ac determinata ratione agunt*).’³⁹ And he adds: ‘This depends either on a necessity of nature or on a human decision’, then specifies two lines later that the law which depends on a human decision ‘is more properly called legislation (*jus*)’.⁴⁰ Law defined in this way, in other words, can be either natural or juridical. But one must note that, according to this definition, as Manfred Walther has emphatically highlighted,⁴¹ a juridical law that is not applied is *not a law*: in order for it to be one, it must be the case that those to whom it is prescribed *actually act* (*agunt*, and not *agere debent*) as they are prescribed.

Now, if one compares this definition to that of the individual given in the *Ethics*, one sees immediately that ‘that conforming to which’ the bodies that compose an individual ‘mutually communicate their movements *certa quadam ratione*’ is quite precisely *a system of laws in the sense of the word ‘law’ defined in the TTP*: we find in both cases *certa ratione*; the addition of *ac determinata* doesn’t change its meaning at all, since what ‘*certa*’ positively expresses (specifically, that *ratio*) is simply negatively confirmed by *determinata* (nothing other than this *ratio*); the absence of *una eademque* in the definition of the individual arises from the fact that, in a somewhat complex individual, the communications of movements that define it can take place according to many laws at once; and the fact that, in this same definition, *ratione* remains in the singular means that these laws constitute a system. And since nothing suggests that the *certa ratio* of the *Ethics* would have a

³⁹ *TTP* IV, 1; CWS II, 125; G III, 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Walther 1985 (see esp. pp. 411–18).

lesser extension than that of the *TTP*, it is thus confirmed that, in general, individual human beings who communicate their movements *according to a system of juridical laws* well and truly compose an individual.

C. That the same thing goes for the State is confirmed by the *TP*. Spinoza, in fact, gives us in *TP* II, 17 a definition of *imperium*: 'This right, which is defined' (or 'delimited') 'by the power of a multitude, is usually called *Imperium* (*jus, quod multitudinis potentia definitur, Imperium appellari solet*).'⁴² In the *TTP*, the word *Imperium*, as we know, sometimes means 'sovereignty' and sometimes 'State'; and when it designates the State, it can again have two senses: the system of institutions that rules over the collectivity, or the collectivity which is ruled over by this system. Now the definition given here, if it might seem more natural to apply it to sovereignty, applies no less to the State taken in the first sense. The *jus* in question, taken in what today we would call its 'subjective' sense, or the *right* [*droit*] that the power of the multitude *has* at its disposal, is evidently sovereignty. But the same *jus*, taken in its 'objective' sense, also designates *law* [*droit*], that is, the set of *jura* or 'legal rules', whose effectivity the power of the multitude ensures; and this means the State in the first sense.

Now the State in the first sense is not really *anything other* than the State in the second sense: the system of *jura*, if we recall that a rule of law not applied is *not* a true rule of law, is simply 'that conforming to which' the state collectivity functions; or, which amounts to the same thing, 'that conforming to which' the members of this collectivity communicate their motions 'in a well-determined way (*certa ratione*)' which seems necessary to ensure its preservation. The system of *jura*, in other words, *expresses the actual essence of the State-individual*: not its essence in the strict sense – since many of its laws could be modified without its nature necessarily changing, and there have often been laws that compromise its preservation more than they ensure it – but its essence insofar as it produces its effects by entering into composition with causes external to it (the passions of leaders, clan struggles, old lingering customs or the emergence of new ones, etc.) that might either favour or else disturb its self-regulating mechanisms.

D. But how is this actual essence expressed? In a very specific way, which, at first glance, might seem very surprising. In fact, the *imperium* in the second sense, that is, the State-individual, has a synonym in the *TP*: the *civitas*, which, conforming perfectly with the definition given of it in the second scholium to *Ethics* IV, 37, is defined in *TP* III, 1 as being 'the whole body of

⁴² *TTP* II, 17; CWS II, 98; G III, 33.

the state (*imperii . . . integrum corpus*).⁴³ But what is the *quasi-mens* of this body?

Spinoza has a very precise answer to this question. On the one hand, he invokes the beginning of *TP III, 2: imperii, seu summarum potestatum Jus* (recall that, in Spinoza, *summae potestates*, in the plural, always means ‘the sovereign’, which can be collective – and which actually was, in Holland).⁴⁴ In the ‘subjective’ sense, this is a tautology: ‘the right of sovereignty, that is, (the right) of the sovereign’. But this is also true in the objective sense: ‘the law [*droit*] of the State, that is, of the sovereign’. Obviously, this does not mean (as some have said I claim) that the State and the sovereign are the same thing: even in democracy, the assembly of the sovereign people would not be the only institution of the State (there would also be courts, an army, etc.). But it does mean, just as tautologically, that the right [*droit*], or system of *jura*, in effect in the State is the decreed right [*droit*] of the sovereign.

And on the other hand, at the beginning of *TP IV, 1*, with regard to this *Jus summarum potestatum*, Spinoza tells us: ‘in hoc potissimum consistere vidimus, nempe quod imperii veluti mens sit’: ‘we’ve seen that [that right] consists chiefly in this, that it is, as it were’, (objectively,) ‘the mind of the state’ (or, ‘subjectively’, ‘as it were, the soul of sovereignty’, which hardly has a clear meaning).⁴⁵ Thus, from the beginnings of *TP III, 2* and *TP IV, 1*, one must conclude that *right, or the system of legal rules in effect in the State, is the quasi-soul of that State*. It is in this that the actual essence of the State taken in the second sense is expressed: it is the idea of that actually existing State.

It might seem bizarre to locate right solely in [the attribute of] thought. But let us return to the definition of law given in the *TTP* by recalling that it only applies for actually applied laws. Laws, we saw, *are not* the ‘well-determined and well-delimited manner’ in which those they concern act; they are ‘that conforming to which’ they act in this way. But if they are not *in* the actions of those that they concern, where are they? Where are the laws that describe the actions of physical bodies, if not in the ideas formed of them by the community of physicists? And where are the laws (put into effect) that prescribe to human beings actions that must be executed (and which actually are executed), if not in the ideas formed of them by the community of prescribers and executors? It is true that their correlates in extension, that is, the *certae rationes* immanent to the actions themselves (the question is actually a little more complicated here, but we will leave

⁴³ *TP III, 1*; CWS II, 111; G III, 284.

⁴⁴ *TP III, 2*; CWS II, 111; G III, 284.

⁴⁵ *TP IV, 1*; CWS II, 125; G III, 57.

it aside), are, most of the time, called 'laws' by Spinoza – and I followed his lead above. But, according to the strict definition of law given in the *TTP*, the system of *jura* (to account for the extensive sense of the word 'law', it is simply necessary to add: 'from the perspective of Thought') is indeed, strictly speaking, the *veluti mens* of the *imperium*.

And battle-worn Spinoza will finish with this *veluti mens* when he applies to it, now without *veluti*, the general term *anima*, which he had refused to employ in the scholium to *Ethics* II, 13 in order to designate any idea of an actually existing body: he finally writes in *TP* X, 9: 'Anima enim imperii jura sunt': 'For the laws are the soul' (which is not a *mens*) 'of' (that individual that is) 'the state.'⁴⁶

E. On this subject, however, there are, in the *TP*, 'violations of the parallelism' that are not merely exoteric manners of speaking, but which point towards something else. Spinoza, in fact, speaks on three occasions of the *mens* or the *veluti mens* of the State as if it *commanded* its body. Let us consider the first two cases: in *TP* III, 5, 'the body of the state must be guided as if by one mind (*imperii corpus una veluti menti duci debet*)';⁴⁷ and in *TP* VIII, 19, the patricians must form, 'as it were, one body, governed by one mind (*unum veluti corpus, quod una mente regitur*)'.⁴⁸ It does not seem as though Spinoza needed to make recourse to these two verbs in order to accommodate his readers; the same things could easily have been said without any 'violations'. This is why it has been objected against us that, given this absence of any 'exoteric' justification, one of two things must follow: either one must reconsider the entire theory of parallelism, which has not yet been understood; or else one must admit that this is a matter of mere metaphors, which are moreover entirely banal. But in fact, this 'violation' does have a justification. Let us once again return to the definition of law given in the *TTP* with the distinction that it implies between the laws and the *certain rationes* immanent to the actions that conform to them. This distinction, one must note, is not of the same type as that between the two sorts of laws. Physical laws appear in the quasi-*mens* of the scientific community well after the appearance of processes that unfold the *certain ratione* in extension. Legal rules, by contrast, exist in the minds of legislators and subjects *before* the actions that they prescribe or whose manner they legislate over are carried out *certain ratione*. Since these *jura* are the *anima* or the quasi-*mens* of the State, there is thus good reason to say of the latter that it 'guides' or 'rules over' its *corpus*. To

⁴⁶ *TP* X, 9; CWS II, 600; G III, 357.

⁴⁷ *TP* III, 5; CWS II, 519; G III, 286. [Matheron refers to *TP* III, 9 in the original.]

⁴⁸ *TP* VIII, 19; CWS II, 572; G III, 331.

re-establish the parallelism, it suffices to mention the cerebral processes and the speech-acts that, prior to their application, accompany these *jura* in the bodies of leaders and subjects; but then we rediscover the typical reasons for these latter being absent in the *TP*.

With regard to the third case, we are indeed dealing with a metaphor. But, in spite of appearances, it is a metaphor . . . for parallelism! Spinoza, in *TP VI*, 19, compares the king to ‘the mind of the Commonwealth’, and the council, which alone has the power to inform the king and to carry out his decisions, to ‘the mind’s external senses [. . .] through which the mind conceives the condition of the State’, and to ‘the body of the Commonwealth, through which the mind [. . .] does what it decides is best for itself’.⁴⁹ It seems like a Cartesian comparison. But since, in the Spinozist monarchy of *TP VI–VII*, everything is established in such a way that the king necessarily decides in accordance with what the majority of his council has chosen, doesn’t everything happen, in one sense, as if the council alone governed? And since, moreover, it is the decisions of the king and the king alone that are executed by the subjects, who only obey them for that reason, doesn’t everything happen, in another sense, as if the king alone ruled the State? And don’t these two ‘parallel’ readings describe one and the same thing?

F. Finally, with regard to the *conatus* of the State, let us underscore one specific point. *Potentia* and *potestas*, we have seen, are synonymous in some contexts. But not all of them. And only *potentia* implies the presence of a *conatus*. Now, it has been objected against me and against the existence of a State *conatus*, that in the *TP*, Spinoza often speaks of the *potestas* of the State, but never of its *potentia*. But actually, it seems to me that things are not quite so clear. Spinoza, in the *TP*, speaks once of the *potentia* of the *totius imperii corpus et mens*,⁵⁰ eight times of the *potentia civitatis*,⁵¹ and five times of the *potentia imperii*.⁵² And if he actually speaks quite often of *potestas* in the passages where it is a matter of the State, he only twice talks of the *potestas civitatis*,⁵³ once of the *potestas imperii*,⁵⁴ and eight times of the *summa potestas imperii*.⁵⁵ This hardly adds up to a serious predominance of *potestas*.

⁴⁹ *TP VI*, 19; CWS II, 538; G III, 302.

⁵⁰ *TP III*, 2; CWS II, 517.

⁵¹ *TP III*, 3; CWS II, 517; *TP III*, 6; CWS II, 519. *TP III*, 8; CWS II, 520. *TP III*, 9; CWS II, 521. *TP III*, 12; CWS II, 522. And three times in *TP VII*, 25; CWS II, 556–7.

⁵² *TP VII*, 18; CWS II, 553. *TP VII*, 25; CWS II, 556. *TP VIII*, 3; CWS II, 566. And twice in *TP IX*, 4; CWS II, 589–90.

⁵³ *TP III*, 8; CWS II, 520. *TP III*, 16; CWS II, 524.

⁵⁴ *TP VIII*, 2; CWS II, 565.

⁵⁵ *TP VII*, 5; CWS II, 547. *TP VII*, 25; CWS II, 556–7. Three times in *TTP VIII*, 2; CWS

And moreover, since Spinoza could not in the *TP* speak of the State as an individual, he also could not have explicitly attributed a *conatus* to it there, as he does in the *Ethics*.

V. Let us conclude with a problem. We know now *what* the idea of the actually existing state is. But this idea itself – what ideas *does it have*? In other words, of what does the *anima* of the *imperium* think? In order to suggest how this question might be answered, let us simply point out two things.

A. What Spinoza says about the human soul in *Ethics* II, 12, as he clarifies in the scholium to *Ethics* III, 13, has a universal bearing. The *anima* of the State must therefore perceive more or less confusedly all the affections of its bodies, and they alone. Each idea that the *anima* has of the whole is thus constituted of ideas, or of parts of ideas, or of sets of ideas or parts of ideas, which are in the *animae* of the parts of this whole. It would be futile, therefore, to look for the ideas that the *anima* of the State has outside of the souls of its members.

B. But the demonstration of *Ethics* II, 24 also has a universal bearing: the parts of a body belong to its essence *only insofar as* they communicate certain of their movements to one another according to the laws that express this essence. However, since their total integration is never complete, they can also perform other movements, and communicate them to other parts or to external bodies, according to other laws that do not bear on the whole. What happens *locally* internal to a body is thus not always an affection of *that body*, does not always truly happen *within it*. And, when that is the case, the *anima* of that body has no idea of it: it only perceives what, in its body, concerns the communication of the movements that define it, which either disturb, or encourage, or simply modify it. Now, as I have briefly indicated elsewhere,⁵⁶ and as Pierre-François Moreau has admirably developed,⁵⁷ the State is a *much less integrated* individual than the human body: its members, even in the most 'totalitarian' States, have among themselves a multitude of formal and informal relations, which the legal rules externally frame by enabling them to be played out peacefully, but without intervening with regard to their content; and each of them is itself affected by all sorts of non-human things that these legal rules do not bear on in any way. The ideas that the *anima* of the State has are thus only those that, in the souls of its members,

II, 565. *TP* VIII, 19; *CWS* II, 572. *TP* VIII, 44; *CWS* II, 585–6. *TP* IX, 14; *CWS* II, 594–5.

⁵⁶ Matheron [1969] 1988: 57–8, 65.

⁵⁷ Moreau 1994b: 448–56.

have some relation with these legal rules: and only these, as distinct from the profuse multitude of other ideas that circulate in these same souls, amputated from the whole richness of their imaginative and perceptive context. Now, as Spinoza indicates in the scholium to *Ethics* II, 13, the degree of consciousness of a *mens* – and this evidently goes for all *anima* in general – is measured by its capacity to simultaneously perceive a multitude of different things. Thus, the *anima* of the State must be *much less conscious* than the souls of its members; and this all the more as the ideas that figure there (those that its members have with regard to the State's own functioning, with the desires that they inspire, but only insofar as these ideas and desires are actual) are themselves, and not just in 'totalitarian' States, extremely monotonous in general. Consequently, there is no danger here of any 'fusion of souls' in a *Volkgeist*. Perhaps, then, we can sketch out a definition of *mens*: a *mens* is an *anima* whose degree of consciousness is superior to that of the *animae* of the constituent parts of its body. And that of the State is not one of them.

The Ontological Status of Scripture and the Spinozist Doctrine of Individuality

What is Scripture?¹ In a sense, the entire *Theologico-Political Treatise* constitutes an answer to this question. But to say what something is, is not immediately the same thing as explaining *what its being is*, or what kind of being it has. Spinoza obviously accepts that, one way or another, Scripture is a being. And he certainly agrees with Leibniz that, in order for there to be *being*, there must necessarily be *a* being. Scripture qua being therefore has a unity that confers upon it a certain individuality. But it is well known that in Part II of the *Ethics* Spinoza explains to us what he understands by individual: an individual, he tells us in the definition that follows Proposition 13, is any set of bodies that is held together, or which, if they are displaced in relation to one another, reciprocally communicate their movements according to a well-determined law. Now can one really say that Scripture, or for that matter any human work in general, literary or otherwise, has individuality *in this sense*? That seems absurd. And yet, in fact, one can say just this. It is true that, at first glance, it can only be said in a metaphoric sense: this is what emerges from the very principles of Spinozist exegesis such as they are elaborated in Chapter VII of the *TTP*. But we will see that Chapter XII provides us with the means to grant Scripture the ontological status of an individual *in the literal sense*.

Let us begin with the metaphoric sense. In a certain way, what constitutes the unity of Scripture is explained to us in Chapter VII. This unity, at first glance, is not immediately visible: the books that constitute Scripture have

¹ [Originally published as ‘Le statut ontologique de l’Écriture sainte et la doctrine spinoziste de l’individualité’, *Travaux et documents no. 4: L’Écriture sainte au temps de Spinoza et dans le système spinoziste*, Groupe de recherches spinozistes (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992): 109–18; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

very different natures, they were written at very different times, and they respond to very different concerns. Their unity, at least superficially, might appear as the product of an arbitrary historical decision: the Pharisees of the second temple for the Old Testament,² and certain councils for the New,³ decided at some point to unify all these books into a single *corpus*. But those who made this decision obviously had their reasons for doing so: these books are all one, they thought, because they express the *Word of God*. Now, whatever they might have thought this meant, it is clear that this justification has its logic. For everyone agrees that *God cannot contradict himself*. Thus, if one wants to determine in what consists the teaching of Scripture as a whole, of Scripture *as such* and as opposed to the particular opinions held by authors of the particular books, one method imposes itself, and Spinoza follows it: one must compare all of these books with one another, eliminate everything that is contradictory in them, and retain only the common denominator – which, like the properties that constitute the object of the common notions in nature, will be present everywhere and denied nowhere.⁴ After this, of course, one can re-examine everything in its light. We know what the result of this inquiry is: the only common denominator that results from this comparison is the minimal *Credo* expounded in Chapter XIV.

This is not, however, the same thing – any more, by the way, than in the case of the common notions – as calling this a simple *residue* that would be drawn out by abstraction with some degree of success. For if that were so, one could practise the same operation on just about any group of texts. One might find some scattered moral remarks in the complete works of Sade, in a collection of the sports sections of newspapers, in a treatise on astrology and in a cookbook; this might even be just about the only common denominator that one could find in all these texts from start to finish; and yet, this common denominator would not mean anything, not just due to its skeletal character, but because it would be in contradiction, or without any particular relation, with that from which it had been drawn. Now it is clear that the common denominator of scriptural texts is of an entirely different nature: its presence is all-pervasive, it is generally not in contradiction with the more particular statements that accompany it (if these statements do not always agree with one another, most of the time they do agree with it), and finally they maintain fairly close relations with everything else. If this is right, it could obviously be explained by the very history of the editing of

² *TTP* X, 43–7; *CWS* II, 237–9.

³ *TTP* XII, 28; *CWS* II, 254.

⁴ *TTP* VII, 27; *CWS* II, 176.

Scripture; that is to say, ultimately, by the very history of the Hebrew people. What initially decided everything was Mosaic theocracy:⁵ the complete identification, on the one hand, of the political and the religious, that is, between the country and God; a nearly perfect constitution, on the other hand, that inspired in each Hebrew a very powerful love for their country (and thus for God), and, consequently, for all of their compatriots. Thus, love of God and love of one's neighbour were initially mixed together with that of the fellow citizen: this demand was maintained throughout the long history of the Hebrew people. But it was maintained by being adapted to the fluctuations of this history: by simplifying it (love of God was progressively detached from all determinate religious rituals), by universalising it (love of one's neighbour gradually extended to all of humanity) and by interiorising it (love of God and of one's neighbour appeared more and more as being its own reward). And the ultimate endpoint of this development was obviously Christ himself, who clearly articulated, for the first time, the reduction of religion to the minimal *Credo*. Thus there was, from beginning to end, a single fundamental inspiration. And it is precisely this continuity that enables us, without being reductive or arbitrary, to read the different books of Scripture alongside one another in order to draw out a common meaning, and then to reinterpret in light of this common meaning what is essential about each of these texts on their own.

In order better to appreciate the result of this double movement, we will proceed by a counter-argument: we will consider what Spinoza tells us, not about Scripture, but about the Qur'an, in response to a criticism that Lambert van Velthuysen addressed to him by way of Jacob Osten.

Now in Letter XLII, Velthuysen thought he had managed to raise a formidable objection against Spinoza. According to the logic of Spinozist exegesis, he said, the Qur'an would have to be considered as expressing the Word of God just like the Bible, and there would be no means to prove that Muhammad was a false prophet; for Muhammad had also prescribed the practice of moral virtues in the name of God, and Spinoza himself explicitly declared that the Jews and Christians were not the only ones to whom God had been prophetically revealed. From which it follows, since this conclusion is obviously scandalous and unacceptable, that Spinozist exegesis must rest on utterly false principles. Now Spinoza, in Letter XLIII, responds to this objection in a very strange manner.⁶ First of all, he declares: it is clear from my writings that Muhammad was an impostor; he effectively suppressed

⁵ See all of *TPP XVII*.

⁶ *Ep. XLIII [to Ostens]*; *CWS II*, 389.

freedom of thought, and I myself showed that the true religion necessarily grants this freedom to its faithful. Second, he adds: even if this were not the case, it would not be my place to prove that Muhammad, or anyone else, is a false prophet; on the contrary, it is up to the true prophets to themselves prove the authenticity of their mission. From which it follows, third, that if what Velthuysen said was right, that is, that Muhammad truly taught the divine law and provided some signs of his mission, then, in fact, there would be no longer be any reason not to consider him as a true prophet.

Now the first and the third parts of this response are pretty surprising at first glance. For, on the one hand, what Spinoza tells us about Muhammad's intolerance applies just as well to Moses: not only did the founder of the Hebrew state not grant anyone freedom of thought, but he even devised, as Spinoza showed in detail in Chapter XVII of the *TTP*, an institutional system that took away the people's *desire* to think for themselves; must one not thus conclude that Moses was also an impostor? But then on the other hand, Spinoza also cannot really dispute what Velthuysen said about Muhammad: he knew quite well, as did everyone, that the founder of Islam prescribed justice and charity just like Moses, and that, even if he did not perform any miracles, one must certainly be able to attribute enough correct predictions to him in order for the biblical criteria for the authenticity of signs to apply to him; must one not thus conclude that Muhammad was also *really* a true prophet? In other words, if we combine these two points, must it not be said that Moses and Muhammad were both *at the same time* true prophets and impostors?

Yes, it must; but everything depends on their respective contexts. Muhammad was an impostor to the extent that, without being a conscious deceiver (Spinoza does not even pose this question, any more than he does for Moses), he prescribed as indispensable to salvation plenty of things that were well in excess of the limits of the minimal *Credo*. And Moses, *in this sense*, was an impostor in exactly the same way. But the insertion of the Pentateuch within the biblical corpus neutralised what, in Moses' teaching, amounted to imposture: it left intact only that common denominator that could be identified with the authentic divine law; and it is this, precisely, that made Moses a true prophet. Now it is perfectly possible to insert the Qur'an within this same biblical corpus; this incidentally might even correspond to Muhammad's own intentions, as he always recognised the authority of the Old and New Testaments; and as soon as we do that, the same neutralisation follows: placed in this context, the Qur'an changes its meaning and it appears merely as one of many expressions of the divine law, thereby justifying the attribution of the quality of being a true prophet to its

author. It simply turns out that, in the case of the Qur'an, this integration was not ultimately realised; but we can see how, if it had been realised, this would have been capable of changing everything from top to bottom.

We therefore witness, between the different books of Scripture, a veritable *circulation of meanings*. Each book, considered in isolation, has its own meaning, which often includes a healthy dose of superstition, and considering it on its own does not yet enable one to distinguish the essential from the accidental; indeed, perhaps at this level there is not even anything essential or accidental. But from the interaction of these different books, an overall meaning emerges: the demand for justice and charity based on the love of God. And this overall meaning, in turn, proceeds to govern over the reinterpretation of each book. This obviously applies for particular moral prescriptions: once the circumstances in which a given book was written are known, the prescriptions that one finds in it can be understood as resulting from the conjunction of these circumstances and the overall demand for charity: the application of Mosaic law is what becomes of charity in the context of the original Hebrew State; 'turning the other cheek' is what becomes of charity in the context of a decadent State in which justice is no longer respected,⁷ etc. But it also applies for speculative statements that one can find scattered throughout Scripture: once the biography of a given prophet, their temperament, their social milieu, their cultural level, etc. are known, the beliefs that they profess appear as the result of the adaptation of their demand for charity to the set of all these particular characteristics. And it also applies for the most bizarre and implausible stories: the story of Samson, or that of Elijah ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire, have equivalents in *Orlando Furioso* and the *Metamorphoses*, but knowledge of their contexts shows that they are neither (as in Ariosto) pure literary fantasies, nor (as in Ovid) tales with a political significance, but rather that they are in fact designed for edification.⁸ In this way one can say that the different parts of Scripture reciprocally communicate their meaning according to a certain law that determines the overall functioning of the whole, and which is the divine law itself; so here there is, metaphorically speaking, something analogous to the Spinozist individual whose parts reciprocally communicate their motion according to a determinate law that is imposed on each of them.

Of course, this is only a metaphor: the different parts of Scripture *are not* bodies, the circulation of meaning *is not* a communication of motion. But in order to pass from metaphor to reality, it suffices to envisage the Word

⁷ TTP VII, 31; CWS II, 177.

⁸ TTP VII, 61–2; CWS II, 183–4.

of God, no longer only from a semantic point of view, but also from a pragmatic point of view. This passage, moreover, is crucial. For *where* does this circulation of meaning between the different holy books *take place*? In the minds of those who read them, obviously, and consequently also (by virtue of the parallelism) in their bodies and in their behaviour. Scripture, in other words, is not defined only by the meaning that it provides for its readers; it is defined also, and even above all, by the usage that its readers make of it. What would happen, for example, if we all unanimously decided to relate to Scripture in the same way that we relate to Ariosto's poem? Could one then say that Scripture still *exists*?

Now it turns out that Spinoza himself posed an analogous question, and that he answered it in the negative. He tells us, in fact, at the beginning of Chapter XII, that what is *sacred*, or *holy*, is so called because it was intended by its creators for the practice of piety and religion, and that it only remains so as long as people use it in a religious manner.⁹ If Scripture is such, it is only to the extent that the words that constitute it are arranged in such a way that they dispose its readers towards the love of God and their neighbours, and to corresponding practices. But suppose that this ceased to be the case. Suppose, for example, that no one any longer understood the language in which it was written: what would remain of it? Nothing, except for paper and ink.¹⁰ But Scripture too will at some point cease to be alive: it will become, in the strict sense, a *dead letter*; the paper and ink that remains will be nothing other than a corpse exposed to the gnawing criticism of mice, until, perhaps, a new Champollion resuscitates it.¹¹ And the same would have to be said if, although it remained semantically comprehensible, it were no longer put to work by anybody – which could happen, either in a totally corrupted society where the love of God and neighbour were entirely lost, or else in a community of sages where the practice of virtue no longer needed to be supported by any revelation; in either case, no matter how different they might otherwise be, nothing would remain of Scripture but its corpse.¹² But suppose instead that Scripture were understood in some way other than its original intention required, and that it inspired practices having no relation with this intention: say, the practice of the Inquisitors, that of the Puritan

⁹ *TTP* XII, 9; *CWS* II, 250.

¹⁰ *TTP* XII, 13; *CWS* II, 251.

¹¹ [Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) was the first person to completely decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs after knowledge of how to read them was lost in the fifth century.]

¹² *TTP* XII, 11; *CWS* II, 250.

regicides of the English Civil War, or even that of the scholarly, who work on it solely for its literary beauty or its historical interest. In this case, in fact, we would no longer be in the presence of a corpse: something would be alive. But what would be alive would no longer be *Scripture itself*: it would be something else, only constituted out of the same materials; the same paper and ink, the same original manuscripts or prints, would enter along with human beings (either the same ones as before, or other ones) into entirely different *relations*; they would arouse different images in them, which would determine them to different behaviours, and consequently, in the end, a different manner of *reciprocally communicating motion*. Moreover, the case of Scripture is not unique in this regard: Solomon's Temple, Spinoza tells us, although it still had an individuality insofar as it was a collection of stones structured in a certain manner, was only *the Temple* to the extent that it was associated with a whole set of cultural practices; if these practices changed, if people worshipped idols there or if its doors were opened for business, *the Temple*, as such, would cease to be and another individuality would replace it.¹³ And, although Spinoza did not say this, this does not just apply for works whose existence is bound to religious practices: it applies for all practices without exception.

It thus seems that the ontological status of Scripture, and no doubt of any work in general, is that of a complex individuality including as essential parts a group of human beings engaged in a certain type of practice that operates according to determinate rules. An individuality, ultimately, somewhat analogous to that of political society.

But it is true that a kind of reticence arises here: Spinozist political society, it is often said, *is not really* an individual; it is only so metaphorically. And yet, it fits, *to the letter*, the Spinozist definition of individuality. In order for two bodies to communicate their motion, it is not necessary that they touch one another: they can do so by the intermediary of their environing milieu. Two people that speak to one another truly communicate their motions by the intermediary of the air, and these movements produce in them certain images from which follow certain behaviours by which they recommunicate their motions, etc. And political society, like moreover an infinity of other human communities that can agree with it or come into conflict with it, *is indeed*, in this sense, a self-regulating system of the communication of motions operating according to certain laws (civil laws, among others); *therefore it really is* an individual, since an individual is nothing other than that. What is disturbing, in this claim, is that it seems to imply a certain

¹³ *TTP* XII, 12; *CWS* II, 250.

social organicism that, it is thought, can lead to some 'totalitarianism'. But in reality, it implies absolutely nothing of the sort. A human community, aside from the fact that it fits the very general definition of individuality, has almost nothing in common with a biological organism: it is composed of similar rather than heterogeneous parts, it is insufficiently integrated, and its parts (namely human beings) have a degree of reality or perfection far superior to that of the whole. It does have, in the attribute of Thought, a kind of equivalent to a soul: the idea of itself as actually existing. But this idea only *has* very few ideas: its only ideas are those that all the members of the community share in common concerning its functioning, and nothing else. While in the mind of each of the members of the community these ideas are surrounded by a multitude of other ideas, they alone figure in the 'soul' of the community itself. Thus, if the degree of consciousness of an idea depends on the richness of the perceptual field from which it is detached and which serves as its backdrop (which I have tried to show elsewhere), a human community is a nearly unconscious individual whose parts are very conscious. Consequently there is no risk of fusion in a *Volksggeist*. And this is all the more true as each human individual belongs to a multitude of communities at once, and these are in no way harmoniously hierarchised: their agreement, which is only approximate, is at best an ideal to strive towards. A political society is an individual, but a Church is another, a business is yet another, etc. And among these, there is, in a certain way, Scripture.

Once we set aside this scruple, in fact, we can say that Scripture, qua ontological reality, is an individual including two kinds of parts: on the one hand, obviously, the collection of all the original materials of the holy books; and, on the other hand, the set of all the human beings whose reading of these books inspires their love of God and neighbour. This group of human beings must not be confused with the community of all readers of the Bible, which is much too large and of which it is only a small part: it excludes, for example, those among these readers who are animated by 'theological hatred'. It must also not be confused with the community of all those who practise justice and charity: many people practise these based on other religious texts, in complete ignorance of the Bible, and philosophy is enough for some of them. It must not even be confused with any religious community: among the religions of the Book, it transcends the borders of all Churches and all sects without including any of them entirely. We see then what relation this group of human beings, thus delimited, maintains with the *other* group constituting the Scripture-individual: the original materials of the holy Books produce in the human bodies images from which follow words and acts of justice and charity; among the latter, there are notably

those consisting in *making* other human beings *read* the holy Books for the purpose of making them charitable as well; which brings about a *demand* concerning the *reproduction* of the original materials of these same books; and these originals, once reproduced, lead again to the same images from which follow actions whose consequences again are to reproduce them, etc. This is therefore, as it were, the *conatus* of the Scripture-individual: its striving to persevere in its being, without which I do not know in what sense Scripture could be said to exist.

At this point, we could try to apply the same analysis to all human works, artistic ones in particular: in what sense, for example, could a work of art be said to exist if it strictly speaking had no public? Is it not its public that gives it life? And this could also be applied to philosophical systems – including Spinoza's, which, insofar as it is a system expounded publicly in a certain way rather than another that would have been equally possible, is not the same thing as the truth Spinoza discovered. But since Spinoza did not venture there, let us say nothing more.

Spinoza and Power

What is *pouvoir*?¹ Why do we desire to wield it over others? Why do we desire that others wield it over us? What forms do these relations of *pouvoir* assume in the different spheres of our existence? How far do its effects extend? Are these effects unsurpassable? All these questions, which are being raised again today, were, in a sense, at the very heart of the anthropological problematic of the seventeenth century: they were generally treated under the rubric of a ‘theory of the passions’. It is true that, when it comes to political *pouvoir*, a totally different type of investigation tended to come to the forefront: that which bears on its juridical foundations (the ‘right of sovereigns’ and ‘duties of subjects’), and in relation to which the analysis of the modalities of its actual exercise (the ‘means of containing the multitude’) seems only a distant relative. To the extent that there too answers were sought on the side of an anthropology, all sorts of aporias followed – as, for example, in the prodigious oeuvre of Hobbes. But Spinoza, for his part, cut the Gordian knot: by identifying, through God, right and fact, he abolished all distance and all conflict between the problematic of legitimacy and that of real functioning; the former was resolved purely and simply in the latter, which nothing could any longer prevent from occupying, at all levels, the totality of the terrain. From this there follows a general theory of *pouvoir* – of political *pouvoir* as well as non-political *pouvoir*, of ‘micro-*pouvoirs*’ as well as ‘macro-*pouvoirs*’, of their displacements as well as their interactions – all of which, and this is the least one could say, is far

¹ [Originally published as ‘Spinoza et le pouvoir’, *La Nouvelle Critique* 109 (1977): 45–51; republished in Matheron 1986, 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2. Throughout this chapter, we will leave *puissance* and *pouvoir* in the original French. In all other chapters we translate both as ‘power’, occasionally including the original in square brackets to avoid confusion. Here that solution was not viable.]

from having lost its interest. We propose to provide only a brief sketch of this theory here.

***Pouvoir* is the Alienation of *Puissance*, and a Being's *Puissance* is the Productivity of its Essence**

Pouvoir (*potestas*) is a derivation, partly real and partly imaginary, of *puissance* (*potentia*). Thus we must start with *puissance* in order to understand *pouvoir*. Should we therefore start with the *puissance* of the human being? No doubt, but not the human insofar as it is human, as if some particular privilege radically distinguished it from other beings: the originality of Spinozist 'anthropology', if one can call it that for the sake of convenience, lies in having nothing specifically anthropological about it. The *puissance* of a being, whatever it may be, is the productivity of its essence: it is this being itself insofar as it is necessarily determined to produce the consequences that follow from its nature.² Thus everything in nature is *puissance*. God is absolute causal *puissance*: it produces in itself (since nothing is external to it) everything that is not logically contradictory.³ Every finite being, insofar as it is itself partially God, has a causal *puissance* which is a part of that of God: it produces, within it or outside it, effects that follow from its own nature;⁴ and since these effects cannot be in contradiction with this nature,⁵ they have the result, leaving aside external interferences, of maintaining it in existence in the manner of a self-regulating structure. But there are external interferences; for a finite thing can only exist alongside other finite things, which act on it and constitute an obstacle to the full deployment of its effects; since it remains, in spite of everything, determined to produce these effects, we can thus say, without any anthropomorphism, that it is opposed to whatever opposes it.⁶ From this we get the well-known formula: every thing, to the extent of its causal *puissance*, strives (*conatur*) to persevere in its being.⁷ This claim is very different from that of Hobbes, in spite of appearances. The latter distinguishes between organic preservation, which is its own end, and a *puissance* that consists in the set of means that might potentially be put to work in order to attain it; which, to the extent

² *Ethics* III, 7; CWS I, 499.

³ *Ethics* I, 16; CWS I, 424. *Ethics* I, 35; CWS I, 439.

⁴ *Ethics* I, 36; CWS I, 439.

⁵ *Ethics* III, 4; CWS I, 498.

⁶ *Ethics* III, 5; CWS I, 498. *Ethics* III, 6 Dem.; CWS I, 499.

⁷ *Ethics* III, 6; CWS I, 498.

that others appear as just another means, leads very directly and simply to an instrumental theory of relations of *pouvoir*; and which, at the same time, makes these relations into an attribute specific to a human nature defined by rational calculation. Nothing of the sort in Spinoza: preservation and *puissance* are identical. Every being, at every moment, necessarily does all that it can, and, so long as it can do something, it preserves itself. This striving, or *conatus*, is desire. Desire is always legitimate: since our *puissance* is the very *puissance* of God, we have the right to do all that we are determined to do, no more and no less.⁸

It is impossible, under these conditions, to immediately connect *pouvoir* to *puissance*; neither the stone nor the sage, which however have their own *conatus*, desire to dominate anything. Thus we must here introduce a minimal hypothesis: though the human being has a body sufficiently complex⁹ that its mind can imagine, with relative clarity, external bodies and certain events that happen to them,¹⁰ it is not initially so powerful [*puissant*] that the determinism of its own nature prevails in it over influences from the outside;¹¹ and this, of course, also goes for other biological species, indeed for an infinity of conceivable species. Whereby, through the mediation of a relation to things and the representation of this relation, it becomes possible to give an account of both the demand for *pouvoir* and the supply of *pouvoir*.

The Demand for *Pouvoir*

The demand for *pouvoir* could strictly speaking be deduced from the consideration of an isolated human being, face to face with nature, supposing (which, of course, is not the case) that its existence were possible. As soon as our body, given a combination of factors, winds up in a state that renders it capable of producing more effects than previously (this is joy),¹² we necessarily strive to produce these new effects and, consequently, to remain in this new state; if the latter is associated in us with the representation of an external thing as its cause (this is love),¹³ we thus strive to perceive the presence of this thing,¹⁴ to keep it at our disposal, to preserve it or to

⁸ *TTP* XVI; *CWS* II, 282–96. *TP* II, 3–4; *CWS* II, 507–8.

⁹ *Ethics* II, Postulates after 13; *CWS* I, 462–3.

¹⁰ *Ethics* II, 17; *CWS* I, 463–4.

¹¹ *Ethics* IV, 6; *CWS* I, 550.

¹² *Ethics* III, 11 Schol.; *CWS* I, 500–1.

¹³ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; *CWS* I, 502.

¹⁴ *Ethics* III, 12; *CWS* I, 502.

reproduce it at any cost:¹⁵ we put the totality of our *puissance* unconditionally at its service, we alienate it from ourselves, in the quasi-judicial sense of the term. This is an economic alienation, traditionally expressed in the formula according to which we are possessed by the goods that we possess. And the process is the same for the negative alienation towards what we think to be the cause of a diminution of our *puissance* (in the case of hate).¹⁶ But things do not themselves tell us what we must do in order to ensure their preservation. And yet, we desire to know this, all the more ardently as fortune quickly takes away what it has given us; we oscillate between hope and fear, and, when the latter borders on despair, we anxiously attend to signs.¹⁷

These signs do appear. For our economic alienation necessarily doubles as an ideological alienation. Conscious of our attachment to things, ignorant of its causes, we take ourselves to be free subjects whose choices are motivated by the intrinsic perfection of their object: our conduct, we believe, is explained by the attraction of an end and by our decision to consent to it. But why are these things themselves at our disposal? Since 'why', for us, means 'for the sake of which', the answer is implied in the question itself: since these things satisfy us, they have been made for us, by another free subject that pursues ends analogous to our own; divinity is born.¹⁸ When fortune darkens and we desperately ask what to do, it is thus this anthropomorphic divinity that we address in the first place. And we immediately imagine, because we desire it, that it answers us by indicating what conditions would need to be met in order to satisfy us. In this way we forge a personal superstition, whose content depends strictly on our personal traumas: belief in a divinity with a particular face, which is revealed to us under particular circumstances, which demands a particular worship of us, and to which, henceforth, we alienate all of our capacities in order to obtain the objects that we covet.¹⁹ If fortune smiles on us again, our faith is strengthened. And if things once again go wrong? We change, if need be, the superstition.²⁰ After numerous failures, however, we will have to doubt our ability to communicate with the beyond. Then we will search for signs of a second degree: signs indicating to us which signs make manifest authentic revelation, which

¹⁵ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

¹⁶ *Ethics* III, 13; CWS I, 502. *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

¹⁷ *TTP* Praef.; CWS II, 65–6.

¹⁸ *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 439–42.

¹⁹ *TTP*, Praef.; CWS II, 65–76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

is the true divinity and what it wants. Gripped in a panic, we will address ourselves to the first comer.²¹

The Supply of *Pouvoir*

Now, the first comer will accept us. A supply of *pouvoir* necessarily responds to the demand for *pouvoir*. In order to demonstrate this, there is no need to add anything to our minimal hypothesis: we do not need to invoke a utilitarian calculus. If some being imagines an increase or a decrease of *puissance* in another being whose nature has something in common with its own, its own *puissance* will increase or decrease by the same stroke; for it turns out in this way to be indirectly affected by the cause of whatever happens to what is similar to it, and, to the extent that its nature is the same, this cause will produce the same effect in it.²² For the human being, in particular (but only in particular), to imagine the affects of another human being is thus *ipso facto* to experience them. From such a meagre point of departure, crucial consequences follow.

1. Suppose, first of all, that by chance we encounter a human being who is suffering. We share in their suffering (this is pity),²³ we strive to relieve it in order to deliver ourselves from it (this is benevolence):²⁴ we help them satisfy their desires, and we counsel them, as they wish, about the means to attain them. If our assistance is effective, they rejoice.

2. Now their joy, for the same reason, becomes our own, and we desire to maintain ourselves in this state. Now believing that we know what pleases those similar to us, we strive, perpetually, to actually please them (this is, in its first form, ambition).²⁵ If we succeed for a time, the other, indebted to us, considers us as the sole cause on which depends, for them, the attainment of all that they are attached to: they love us,²⁶ and put all their *puissance* at our disposal, they alienate themselves to us; they have finally found what they were looking for! This, again, reverberates with us: we love ourselves through the love that we inspire in others (this is glory).²⁷ And, in order to persevere in this exciting state, we want at any cost to perpetuate the

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Ethics* III, 27; CWS I, 508.

²³ *Ethics* III, 27 Schol.; CWS I, 509.

²⁴ *Ethics* III, 27 Cor. 3 Schol.; CWS I, 509.

²⁵ *Ethics* III, 29; CWS I, 510. *Ethics* III, 29 Schol.; CWS I, 510.

²⁶ *Ethics* III, 29 Schol.; CWS I, 510.

²⁷ *Ethics* III, 30; CWS I, 510. *Ethics* III, 30 Schol.; CWS I, 511–12.

situation that engenders it: with total selflessness, we ensure the ends of the other in order to appear in their eyes as providence itself.

3. But we cannot remain there. For we have, ourselves, our own alienations, which are generally not the same as the alienations of those who are indebted to us. From this follows the inevitable contradiction: it is impossible to stop loving what we love, impossible not to rejoice in what others rejoice in, impossible for us to take pleasure in two things at once that we know to be incompatible.²⁸ The solution is obvious: we take advantage of having the upper hand over whomever has relied on us by trying to convert them; we do everything we can to make what seems good to us seem good to them;²⁹ whereby, we can work towards their happiness with no ulterior motive. Now this goes quite far, for we never know with complete certainty what happens in consciousness. Because what each judges to be good is bound to their ideology, we demand that others take on, in all its details, our personal superstition, and they prove it to us by confessing our faith and by practising our worship; what each judges to be good is manifest in their economic choices, all the details of the material life of others that we intend to govern, and who we want to constantly thank us for governing. All this just for their own good; still no 'interest'. To say that *pouvoir* wants to be loved is a tautology, since this is its only reason for being; but to wield it amounts to coercing other human beings, so that we are able to do what they love, into loving what we do and showing it to us by doing what we love: the ambition for glory becomes the ambition for domination. We will go as far as we can in this direction: so long as others hope for something from us, everything will go smoothly; then, beyond a certain threshold of resistance, we will make recourse to fear.³⁰

Private Appropriation and the Relation of Exploitation Deduced from the Interaction of *Pouvoirs*

4. That's not all. For, when we have managed to make those similar to us love something, the latter, just as we desired, take possession of it, look after it, reproduce it and draw joy from it. Now, always for the same reason, we desire to experience this joy ourselves with a maximum of intensity. If the thing in question can only be possessed by one person, the problem arises: between those similar to us and ourselves, who will get to enjoy it directly,

²⁸ *Ethics* III, 31; CWS I, 512.

²⁹ *Ethics* III, 31 Schol.; CWS I, 512.

³⁰ TP II, 10; CWS II, 512.

and who only by proxy? And the answer is immediate: we get the thing, they get to rejoice in the joy that it provides us.³¹ This is the origin of envy.³² No doubt its vivacity depends on the nature of the economic goods to which we are attached: money, for example, an indefinitely reproducible universal equivalent, will not arouse envy if we agree to work in order to acquire it; but land, a singular thing whose quantity is limited, is the monopolistic good *par excellence* and can only divide human beings.³³ Thus we will inevitably try to dispossess or to steal the fruits of the soil that others have cultivated under our direction and under our protection. The same analysis, furthermore, also applies in ideological matters; we will be jealous of those in whom we have managed to inculcate our own superstition if they seem to surpass us in knowledge of divine things, and we will possibly seize their inventions; every ‘educator’, if their pupils let them, will so arrange things that the latter remain ‘intellectually’ inferior (*ut ingenio minus possent*).³⁴

There are however limits to this. By dispossessing others, in fact, we sadden them; and, for the same reason again, we share in their sadness: they inspire in us, as in the beginning of cycle, pity. We thus give them back a part of what we have taken from them. As little as possible, sure. Just enough to appease them. In the best case, just what they need in order to live. By this means they are put back to work, with obedience guaranteed, a work whose results we will once again appropriate: the cycle starts over. Is this not, without the least mention of any utilitarian calculus, a true deduction of the relation of exploitation – in, it is true, its most particularly feudal form?

All *Pouvoir* Implies a Relation of Forces

Thus we have the demand for *pouvoir* and the supply of *pouvoir*. It is clear, nevertheless, that they are not harmoniously in sync with one another. For since they are both deduced from one and the same hypothesis, which applies for humans in general (and no doubt for other species as well), we must conclude that each of us, even if in different proportions, even if these proportions vary according to the circumstances, desire at once to submit and to dominate. It thus pertains to the very essence of all *pouvoir* to run up against resistances: there is no *pouvoir* without a conflict, more or less latent, between the dominant and the dominated.

³¹ *Ethics* III, 32; CWS I, 513.

³² *Ethics* III, 32 Schol.; CWS I, 513.

³³ *TP* VIII, 8; CWS II, 568.

³⁴ *TP* XI, 4; CWS II, 603; G III, 360.

Let us even suppose, in fact, that we find ourselves in the most idyllic phase of the cycle: that of the pure ambition for glory. Whoever is unconditionally attached to us, by the mere fact that we occupy all their thoughts and that, in addition, they want, like everyone else, to please everyone, will desire to be loved by us exclusively in order to be maximally glorified.³⁵ They will thus demand, with an obstinate tenacity, that we alienate the totality of our *puissance* to them as they have alienated everything to us, that we be entirely at their disposal as they are entirely at ours. The outcome of this struggle (which is in no way dialectical!) will depend on the relation of forces, but it will always consist in the at least implicit recognition, on the part of the superior *pouvoir*, of a subordinate counter-*pouvoir*.

In the next two phases, in which we are more and more obliged to make recourse to fear, things are even clearer. Whoever fears us hates us, so we hate them in return,³⁶ they thus hate us more strongly still, and war risks breaking out at every moment. If it does break out, we will both find ourselves trapped in the spiral of vengeance and counter-vengeance.³⁷ Perhaps one of us will, by chance, be victorious; if they do not kill their adversary, they will enchain them or imprison them: this is the height of *pouvoir*, but at the same time its negation, since we can do anything with the body of our victim without having the least purchase over their desires.³⁸ But perhaps instead one of us will become frightened and make concessions. Then the other will once again start to love them a little bit, will love themselves in turn,³⁹ exchanges of goods and services will take place on a less inegalitarian basis than before, and, if they continue (but they will not continue),⁴⁰ utilitarian calculus might finally make its first appearance.⁴¹ The final equilibrium, here as well, will depend on the relation of forces.

But what is this relation of forces? It is said that women and children, weaker by nature than men, will always be dominated by them.⁴² But as for the rest? Between two adult males considered in isolation, can we even conceive that a more or less master-servant relationship would be established? No, without a doubt, for inequalities of physical force are never truly decisive. In reality, consequently, nothing of what has just been deduced

³⁵ *Ethics* III, 33–5; CWS I, 513–14.

³⁶ *Ethics* III, 40; CWS I, 517.

³⁷ *Ethics* III, 40 Schol., Cor. 1 and 2; CWS I, 517.

³⁸ TP II, 10; CWS II, 512.

³⁹ *Ethics* III, 41 and 41 Schol.; CWS I, 518.

⁴⁰ *Ethics* III, 42; CWS I, 518.

⁴¹ *Ethics* III, 41 Schol.; CWS I, 518.

⁴² TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

would ever be able to take place: no cycle would ever be initiated, each of the protagonists would just keep dreaming! And yet, it is indeed true that everything always happens this way in matters of interhuman relations. But, in order to understand this, we must introduce a much greater context.

Sliding from a Topography of Micro-*Pouvoirs* to a General Theory of *Pouvoir*

We understand, given the preceding, how the smallest unit of micro-*pouvoir* functions – that which only takes place between two people, and which necessarily tends to be established as soon as two similar beings satisfying our minimal hypothesis come into contact with one another. This is, in a sense, the prime matter of all interhuman life under the regime of passional alienation. But at the same time, we understand why this type of micro-*pouvoir* can never function in isolation.

We have seen, in fact, that we wield *pouvoir* over others in two ways: either when we keep them imprisoned or enchained, which has only a pitiful efficacy if they passively resist us; or else, and this is true *pouvoir*, when they dread our reprisals or hope to benefit from our assistance, so that they agree to regulate their life in accordance with our desires, that is, to alienate their *puissance* to us – a juridical alienation, this time, in a sense that is no longer metaphorical at all.⁴³ True *pouvoir* is thus nothing other than the confiscation, by the dominant, of the *puissance* of the dominated. It is an imaginary confiscation, since the *puissance* of the dominated, physically speaking, remains their own. But it is a confiscation that has real effects to the extent that the dominated is really determined to accept it, and only to that extent. Now, in order to determine them, it would be necessary to have the means, that is, the *puissance*, to do so. Which is impossible, except in the short term, if all the *puissance* of the dominant – outside of their physical force, which hardly surpasses that of others – is just what is accorded to them by the dominated themselves: how would the dominated, after the first moment of panic subsides, remain overwhelmed by a force that they could regain control of at every moment? As soon as they want to regain their independence, they will be able to do so, they will do so, and they will have the right to do so.⁴⁴ The dominant, in order to dominate, thus needs to appeal to a third party, with which they must consequently establish other relations of *pouvoir*. This does not lead us back to the previous aporia: we can, in fact, take charge of many

⁴³ TP II, 10; CWS II, 512.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

individuals by making each of them believe that the forces of all the others are entirely at our disposal; if they all believe this at the same time just once, then they will obey, this belief will become true and will redetermine each of them to obey, etc. But this does not prove that *micro-pouvoirs* can only exist in perpetual interaction.

The State of Nature is Not a State of Juridical Independence

Let us now consider, not two human beings, but a multitude of individuals. Let us place them side-by-side, without institutions or laws: let us imagine, according to the classical expression, the state of nature. And let us place ourselves in the point of view of one of them. This individual, necessarily, will attempt to wield *pouvoir* over another, and then, to achieve this, over many others; with each of them, to the extent that they are resistant, they will thus enter into conflict, sometimes violent conflict; in order to prevail, they will try to dominate other individuals still, etc.; so that they will always be at war with someone, without ever prevailing in a stable manner. Desperate, then, they will defer to the first person who comes along, who will then want to dominate them to such a degree that they will necessarily resist; in order to escape their influence, they will defer to someone else, who will try to impose the same thing on them, etc.; thus they will always be in a state of servitude. Now each of the individuals present will find themselves in the same situation. Nobody, consequently, will ever have the least real *pouvoir* over anybody. Each, by contrast, will always be dependent on all – on all, not collectively, but distributively. Each will be, if not enchained, at least imprisoned: it is impossible to escape from everyone; and each, living in fear, will always depend on the will of some others, even if the latter change ceaselessly.⁴⁵ The interaction of all the *micro-pouvoirs* will thus engender the most oppressive situation possible: the constant alienation of the *puissance* of each, with, as an overall result, the constitution of an anonymous, chaotic, blind, unpredictable *macro-pouvoir*, of which nobody would have the least share and from which nobody would benefit for even a moment. The state of nature, since right is identified with fact, is thus absolutely not a state of juridical independence:⁴⁶ it is a despotism without a despot, anarchic and protean.

⁴⁵ TP II, 15; CWS II, 513–14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The Difference Between the State of Nature and Political Society

But it is clear that such a situation tends, by itself, to be surpassed. It suffices, for this, that there is a little memory; and our initial hypothesis authorises us to suppose that the human being has some. Each individual, insofar as they want to obey, remembers having had something to fear and something to hope for from each of the others in turn; everyone, consequently, will soon enough (and this, according to Spinoza, is the only difference between political society and the state of nature)⁴⁷ place their hopes and fears in one and the same object: the *puissance* of all, which already produced its effects in a diffuse manner, but of whose efficacy each, now, becomes conscious. And each, insofar as they themselves want to wield some *pouvoir*, desires to know in what direction and to what extent they can do so without this *puissance* turning back on them to crush them;⁴⁸ each, in other words, wants to know in advance what the result will be of all their individual desires, whose law, up until that point, had been imposed like an indecipherable fate. Since everyone wants to know this common denominator, they will manage to know it successfully, or at least they will believe that they do: either by drawing it out themselves by a majority vote (democracy), or else by charging an individual or a group with that work (monarchy or aristocracy).⁴⁹ By this means each can, in total security, alienate their own *puissance* to this celebrated common will, contributing in this way to perpetually recreating a unified collective *pouvoir* that will ceaselessly redetermine them to be alienated. In this way, political *pouvoir*, that ‘right defined by the *puissance* of a multitude’,⁵⁰ will be produced and reproduced endlessly.

The State Creates New *Pouvoirs*

The State, we see, in no way abolishes the micro-*pouvoirs* from whose interaction it is the result, and outside of which it is nothing. But it stabilises them, adapts them, redistributes them according to global structures that fit together; and it also creates new *pouvoirs*, which are in turn organised in such a way as to ensure this redistribution itself. Economic *pouvoirs* were always there, and it is only now that they can be effectively wielded; but they

⁴⁷ TP III, 3; CWS II, 517–18.

⁴⁸ TP II, 16; CWS II, 514.

⁴⁹ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

⁵⁰ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514. Translation modified.

are wielded within limits defined by the regime of property:⁵¹ within these limits, at the same time that lawful competition springs up among owners, they can each utilise the force of servants who, because they possess nothing, are now, irreversibly, dependent on these owners (which is why it would be contradictory to grant these servants civil rights).⁵² Governmental *pouvoirs* – which, in any regime, are always wielded in fact by many individuals at once⁵³ – strive to draw from these clashes between owners the common denominator that everyone wants to see emerge, to transform it into laws, to translate these laws into applicable measures, to control the execution of these measures; and those who possess these different *pouvoirs* constantly try to impinge upon one another.⁵⁴ Ideological *pouvoirs*, too, were always there, with an efficacy that is now stable; but those who possess these are seen to be more or less constrained to adapt their demands (dogmas taught, worship imposed) to the demands of political *pouvoir*, ensuring one way or another the organisation of the consensus;⁵⁵ by this means each of them, within this framework, struggles to gain a monopoly.⁵⁶ Finally, a military force, whose leaders also try to stockpile as much *pouvoir* as possible,⁵⁷ add to ideological constraints the repressive component that is indispensable for ensuring that the regime of property is respected and renewed. And the cycle begins again: the more pressures exerted by the ensemble of owners translate into decisions at the top, the more these decisions are reflected in the dominant ideology, the more the latter keeps the army in its place, and the more the State functions like a self-regulating structure.

But in general, this self-regulation is in no way harmonious. For all *pouvoir*, as we have seen, always tends to extend itself everywhere. And this remains true for the regional macro-*pouvoirs* that follow from the redistribution, by the State, of micro-*pouvoirs*: ideological *pouvoir* resists political *pouvoir* and tries to annex it;⁵⁸ those who possess political *pouvoir* resist the property owners and try to dispossess them in order to enrich themselves,⁵⁹ etc. Perpetual conflicts, which perpetually resonate to the top, where they perpetually effect new redistributions of *pouvoir*, which perpetually engender

⁵¹ TP VI, 12; CWS II, 535–6. TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548. TP VIII, 10; CWS II, 569.

⁵² TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

⁵³ TP VI, 5; CWS II, 533.

⁵⁴ See almost all of Chapters VI–X of the TP (CWS II, 532–601).

⁵⁵ TTP XIX; CWS II, 332–44. TP VI, 40; CWS II, 543. TP VIII, 46; CWS II, 587.

⁵⁶ TTP Praef.; CWS II, 65–76.

⁵⁷ TP VI, 10; CWS II, 535. TP VII, 22; CWS II, 554–5. TP VIII, 9; CWS II, 568–9.

⁵⁸ TTP XIX and XX; CWS II, 332–54.

⁵⁹ TP VIII, 31 and 37; CWS II, 578–9 and 582.

new conflicts: such is the very life of political society. That the State is, as Poulantzas says, the ‘material condensation of a given relationship of forces’,⁶⁰ could literally have been written by Spinoza. It is true that, for Spinoza, relations of forces between exploiters and the exploited hardly play a role, other than as an immutable backdrop: since ‘servants’ are always, by definition, beaten in advance, the class struggle is not the motor of history.

And yet the masses do indeed make history. For the *puissance* by means of which the State wields its *pouvoir* is, once more, ‘the *puissance* of the multitude’. This latter is what each subject alienates and re-alienates every day, but which, physically speaking, remains that of each subject. No doubt the situation of political *pouvoir* is much more stable than that of a micro-*pouvoir* considered in isolation: in order for it to disappear, it would be necessary (and also sufficient) that all individuals, or at least a great number of them, decide at the same time no longer to obey it.⁶¹ And this could happen, if the common denominator of individual desires were too poorly expressed at the top, or if it did not reverberate in the base; and the cycle, as we have seen, risks being interrupted at each of its steps. If that were to happen, it would be legitimate: whoever loses their *pouvoir* loses their right.⁶² The fundamental political problem is thus that of putting into place an institutional system guaranteeing, by its mere functioning, a perfect circulation from bottom to top and from top to bottom. We know the principle of the Spinozist solutions: a maximum of democracy (among the wealthy) compatible with the nature of the particular regime, the suppression of any vestiges of feudal property and the maximal development of commerce, and maximal religious tolerance. So yes, ‘bourgeois’ democracy. But this – and, on this point, Spinoza’s position is no doubt unique – without any idealisation: the State, even the best one, is neither the realisation of ‘reason’, nor of ‘liberty’; it is nothing but relations of forces, on the basis of a generalised alienation.

Suppose . . .

Is this situation unsurpassable? No – not if we add something to our minimal hypothesis. Suppose that, if circumstances were favourable (which, of course, would require that political society were well organised, even if this were not sufficient on its own), the determinism of our own nature might eventually end up prevailing, in our body, over influences from the

⁶⁰ Poulantzas 2000: 73.

⁶¹ See *TP* III, 9; *CWS* II, 521. *TP* IV, 4; *CWS* II, 526–7.

⁶² *Ibid.* See also *TTP* XVI; *CWS* II, 282–96.

outside; corresponding to which would be, in our mind, the development of reason. Then, little by little, we would cease to alienate ourselves to things. And relations of *pouvoir*, since they were based solely on this alienation to things in the last instance, would progressively disappear. The State would disappear, and all forms of domination with it, if all human beings were reasonable: there would no longer be anything but a community of free human beings in spontaneous agreement.⁶³ Our *puissance* would reach its apex, but nobody would take anything from others, nor desire to do so. Knowledge is *puissance*; it is not *pouvoir*.

⁶³ *Ethics* IV, 18 Schol.; CWS I, 555–6.

Spinoza and Property

Spinoza clearly did not say much about the problem of property, quantitatively speaking: a few allusions in the *Ethics*, some lines in the *TTP* concerning the Hebrew State, and five paragraphs in the *TP*.¹ But it is also clear that, each time he speaks of it, it is always at decisive strategic points, and that, consequently, he accords great importance to it. Why is this? What is at stake here? In order to understand this, we must first ask ourselves what exactly are, for Spinoza, the *basic elements of the problem*. After which we will be able to try to reconstruct the internal logic of the *solutions* that Spinoza proposes.

The point of departure here clearly consists in a certain conception of property that is already entirely spelled out in Grotius, with which Spinoza's readers would have been familiar, and which Spinoza himself seems to consider as self-evident. Property is a right, in the *subjective* sense that the word 'right' had just taken on at the time, and which was entirely recent: it is a *faculty*, or a *moral power*. This right is a *real* right: it is the faculty of having a thing at one's disposal, in opposition to rights that we can have over people (*personal* rights), like the right a creditor has over a debtor, and, in particular, that a tenant has over their landlord. Finally, this real right is distinguished from other real rights by two specific characteristics. On the one hand, it is *exclusive*, in opposition to the rights that we have over things that we all can access freely: air, the water in rivers, the sea, etc. On the other hand, it is *absolute*. It is true that there are degrees in the absolute, since Grotius associates the right to property not only with *full property* (the right to have things at one's disposal in 'the most absolute' manner, as it says in

¹ [Originally published as 'Spinoza et la propriété', *Tijdschrift voor de studie van de Verlichting* 1-4 (1978): 96-110; republished in Matheron 1986 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

Article 544 of the French Civil Code), but also with *perpetual usufruct* and *temporary usufruct*; but these three rights, in spite of everything, are indeed absolute *with respect* to those other real rights, *servitudes*: the former allow us to do anything we wish with a thing within certain limits, that is, to use it for an infinite number of things, whereas a servitude only grants us this or that perfectly determined usage (the right to pass through someone else's land, etc.). Spinoza accepts all of this without discussion – apart, perhaps, from taking into account temporary usufruct, to which he never alludes.

But there is, clearly, a fundamental difference between Spinoza and all of his predecessors, including Hobbes: his conception of subjective right in general. The faculty, for Spinoza, is not merely a 'moral power [*pouvoir*]', it is a *physical power* [*pouvoir*]: right is a real power [*puissance*], and nothing else. And in turn, power [*puissance*] has desire as a necessary condition, if not a sufficient one; for it is impossible for us to do what we do not desire to do, which we consequently have neither the power [*pouvoir*] nor the right to do. Thus, examining these two points will serve to determine the basic elements of the problem: considerations regarding desire will show us why there is a problem of property, and considerations regarding power [*puissance*] will show us how it arises.

* * *

Why, in fact, is there a problem of property? Quite simply, because human beings subject to passions (all human beings subject to passions, but only human beings subject to passions) necessarily desire to possess things, that is to say, to be able to have them at their disposal in an absolute and exclusive way. And they do not merely desire to possess things: they desire to possess as many as possible, accumulating them indefinitely. On this point, then, Spinoza makes the same claim as Hobbes. But the explanation he gives for it is completely different. Hobbes, in order to account for it, made reason play a role, in the form of a utilitarian calculus: our end, according to him, is to remain alive for as long as possible, and reason allows us to discover the means that would lead to this end; we thus desire to appropriate these means for ourselves, then the means of these means, etc.; and, since nothing is ever definitively guaranteed, there is no limit to the accumulation of instruments of survival. The desire to possess as many things as possible was thus deduced from the conjunction of the instinct of preservation and the rational calculus; whence it followed that *every human being* was necessarily subject to it, since human beings, as such, were defined precisely by this very conjunction. In Spinoza, by contrast, reason absolutely does not play any role: everything follows from the imagination and from it alone.

How so? Let us say, in a nutshell, that in Part III of the *Ethics*, the genesis of the desire for property is carried out in three stages.

The first stage is presented in the first part of Part III, which concerns only individual life and is deduced directly from *conatus*. We rejoice in every increase in our power [*puissance*] to act,² and we desire to persevere in this joy. If this joy is associated in our mind with the image of an external object, we will thus desire to continue imagining this external object as present.³ This desire is transferred, by association, to all the things that we have imagined at the same time as this object.⁴ And, since experience has taught us that these things might disappear,⁵ we are saddened by the idea of their future disappearance and we rejoice in the idea of their future preservation.⁶ And we desire to preserve them for the future, in both senses of the word 'preserve': both to assure the maintenance of their existence and to keep them available *for us*, in view of whatever potential usage, even if we have no use for them at the moment.⁷ We aspire, in other words, to be able to have them at our disposal in *an absolute way*, that is to say, without any obstacle and forever.

The second stage is presented to us in the second part of Part III, which deals with interhuman relations, and where everything is deduced from the imitation of affects. The decisive proposition, in this respect, is Proposition 32: if we imagine that somebody enjoys some thing that only one person can possess, we will strive to make it so that they do not possess it. Even if this thing does not interest us at first, it is sufficient that somebody else possesses it and we do not, so that, by way of the imitation of their affects, we will desire to appropriate it for ourselves, and consequently, since it is hypothetically unshareable, to take it from them. This is one of the origins of envy. Now, of course, we know that other human beings experience the same inclinations towards us: we know that they desire to take from us all the unshareable things that we possess. Whence it follows that all the things that we wish to be able to have at our disposal in an absolute way, we also wish to be able to have at our disposal *exclusively*: we wish to exclude everyone else, to prevent them from enjoying these things, in order to prevent them from preventing us from potentially enjoying them.

² *Ethics* III, 11; CWS I, 500.

³ *Ethics* III, 12; CWS I, 502.

⁴ *Ethics* III, 14 and 15; CWS I, 502–3.

⁵ *Ethics* III, 18 Schol.; CWS I, 505.

⁶ *Ethics* III, 19; CWS I, 505.

⁷ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

Finally, the third stage is presented to us at the end of Part III, which is devoted to the impact of admiration on the passions. As we learn from the Scholium to Proposition 55, the joy that arises from the contemplation of our power [*puissance*] to act is renewed all the more insofar as we imagine that this power to act is our own, as we believe that nobody else has it in common with us, as we believe ourselves able to deny of others what we affirm of ourselves. And this is what opens the desire for property onto infinity: we wish not only to possess certain things in an absolute way and exclusively, but to possess *as many things as possible* in these two ways, in order to outdo others as much as possible. Whence, in Chapter XXIX of the Appendix to Part IV, the example of the misers who accumulate indefinitely for the sole purpose of proving to themselves and to others that they excel in the art of getting rich.

From all of this, we can already draw two conclusions. On the one hand, insofar as human beings will always be subject to passions, it will be absolutely impossible to eliminate all private property: if we eliminate property in one of its forms, it will reappear in another, or else we will encounter a generalised indignation that will lead to the ruin of the State;⁸ as long as human beings are governed by their passions, they will necessarily be attached to things and will wish to exclude others. On the other hand, and inversely, the problem of property will disappear as soon as human beings become reasonable: then property is lost in literally every sense, since the attachment to things will disappear, and stronger still, so too will the desire to exclude others from them; the free human being, as we know, desires to make others enjoy that which they themselves enjoy,⁹ without any restriction and completely. But it is only the first of these two points that we must hold onto here, for politics only exists for human beings subject to passions. And this is why Spinoza tells us, in Paragraph 1 of Chapter I of the *TP*, that the most perfect type of unrealisable political system is the one laid out by Thomas More in *Utopia*, which, precisely, eliminates all private property: full communism would only be possible if human beings were reasonable, but, in that case, politics itself would become superfluous, because we would no longer need the State, and meticulous utopian legislation would lose all of its *raison d'être* at the precise moment it would cease appearing as a chimera.

That being said, we must nevertheless nuance things. If private property, as such, cannot be overcome in the regime of passion, it is nevertheless the

⁸ *TP* III, 9; CWS II, 521. *TP* IV, 4 *in fine*; CWS II, 526–7.

⁹ *Ethics* IV, 37; CWS II, 564–5.

case that it can take on diverse forms, since it is chance associations that lead us to attach ourselves to this or that kind of object. But the consequences that follow do in fact matter from the point of view of interhuman relations. What is decisive, here, is the second stage of the genesis of the desire for property, which accounts for its exclusive character. From Proposition 32 of Part III of the *Ethics*, in fact, it follows that *the more* a thing is unshareable, *the more* its possession necessarily pits human beings against one another. To be sure, strictly speaking, a singular external object is always unshareable by definition: if we divide it in two, this will give rise to two other objects, and the object itself will disappear. But a thing can be unshareable in many senses, and according to different degrees: what is unshareable numerically is not always unshareable specifically, so long as it is reproducible. If, consequently, we are attached to a thing due to its specific characteristics rather than its individual characteristics, and if additionally the reproducibility of things of this kind has no assignable limits, the situation will be much less conflictual than in the two contrary cases: then it would be possible for us, without dispossessing anyone, to acquire a good that does not differ from their good in any meaningful way. Now, from this point of view, there are two kinds of external objects whose possession produces completely opposed effects; and these are precisely, as luck would have it, the two principal economic goods. This is what emerges from Paragraph 8 of Chapter VII of the *TP*.

On the one hand, there is *land*. The effects of its possession are not explicitly mentioned in Paragraph 8, but they are easily deduced from what we are told about the effects of its non-possession. Land, negatively, *does not unite* human beings, since it isolates each of them on their own plot of land. And most importantly, it positively *divides* them. On the one hand, in fact, land is the concrete singular thing *par excellence*: one plot of land is never the *same*, qualitatively speaking, as another plot of land, and this is important for the imagination; when we envy our neighbour, we do not simply wish to have as much land as they do, we want very precisely *their* land, for it is precisely that land right there that they enjoy, and it is *their* joy that we desire to experience. On the other hand, even supposing that the quantitative aspect of things is essentially what satisfies us, land, in any case, is not reproducible; its distribution has already happened, and there are no longer any free places: we can only acquire land by displacing somebody, legally or not – just as, in Spinozist extension, where everything is full, a physical body must displace others in order to occupy a new place. Of course, conflicts can be more or less acute: they would be attenuated to a great degree if land was shared equally, for we are more sensitive to differences bearing both on quantity and quality

than to differences bearing only on the latter. But, as long as we are attached to land, envy and egoism will subsist.

On the other hand, there is *money*. The two effects of its possession, this time, are explicitly indicated in Paragraph 8 of Chapter VII. Negatively, money *does not necessarily divide human beings*: to the extent that they strive to earn it by commerce and finance, their respective activities can be harmonised, for they require the same means in order to be brought to completion (*eadem media, ut promoveatur, requirunt*); everybody wants to get rich, everybody wants to employ the same methods in order to do so and, in the employment of these methods, the success of some does not at all imply the failure of others. This is easily grasped. On the one hand, in fact, money is not valued as a concrete singular thing, but rather as ‘a convenient instrument for acquiring all these aids’,¹⁰ as Spinoza says in Chapter XXVIII of the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*: just as common notions express the common properties of all bodies without expressing anything of the singular,¹¹ in the same way money represents all things in an equivalent, universally quantitative way, and this is the only reason we are attached to it; when two individuals possess an equal sum of money, they have no motive for mutually envying one another, since it is not a matter of the same pieces of metal, but a matter of the *same sum*, and this alone is what counts in their eyes. Now, on the other hand, it is always possible to acquire the same sum as somebody else, indeed more; for Spinoza *posits* that money is indefinitely reproducible: we do not find any trace, in Spinoza, of the mercantilist idea according to which the total quantity of riches is given once and for all, and according to which, consequently, one would not ever be able to earn money except at the expense of others; it goes without saying, on the contrary, that everybody can simultaneously become rich on the condition that they work and save. To be sure, if somebody has more money than I do, my first desire will be to take it from them: all things be equal, that is the easiest solution. But *there are*, in principle, other solutions: when human beings are attached to money rather than to land, envy *can* give way to emulation. And this is not all: not only does money not divide human beings in an irremediable way, it can also *positively unite them*; for those who seek to earn money by commerce or by finance must engage in business dealings, which are entangled with one another (*‘negotia [. . .] quae [. . .] invicem intricata sunt’*¹²): each has an interest in their partners prospering, and Spinoza posits, again, that

¹⁰ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XXVIII; CWS I, 593.

¹¹ *Ethics* II, 37–8; CWS I, 474.

¹² TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548; G III, 311.

this solidarity of interests is much more important than the minor conflicts, which are never insoluble, that might accidentally arise in these kinds of negotiations. The fact that there are commercial wars, for example, does not seem to trouble him unduly: he would no doubt say that what is at stake in them is always the possession of monopolies *in certain particular geographical locations*, and that the love of money is thus, here again, indirectly contaminated by the love of land.

To be sure, the love of land and the love of money are both irrational: they are two subspecies of *avaritia*,¹³ and the free human being likewise is free of them by definition. But it is nevertheless the case that, under the regime of passion, their respective interhuman consequences are not of equal value. As for the reasons for which human beings are partially engaged in one or the other of these paths, we must clearly ask after external causes; and if we want to modify the orientation of economic choices, it is thus on them which we must act. And the State can do this.

* * *

We thus see why there is a problem of property: because human beings subject to passions desire to be property owners, even if this desire can fix itself on completely different objects, and with completely opposed effects. But *how* does this problem arise? Put differently: what exactly is the problem?

The problem, for Spinoza as for Hobbes, and contrary to what Grotius thought and what Locke would later think, is that the desire for property, by virtue of its conflictual character, cannot absolutely be directly satisfied at the level of the individual. For Spinoza, as for Hobbes, in the state of nature, all are against all, and consequently nothing belongs to anybody. But what we often forget is that Spinoza and Hobbes do not mean the same thing by this at all.

For Hobbes, who distinguishes right from fact, we have, in the state of nature, an *absolute* right over all things: since any usage of any thing might always, depending on the case, serve as means for us to preserve our life, we have a right to it, even if we cannot exercise this right. But, for this same reason, this right cannot be *exclusive*, since all human beings have this right equally. Thus property does not exist, to the extent that one of its two characteristics is absent. And the solution to this construction will clearly be that each excludes themselves from all things to the benefit of the sovereign, who will then be able to redistribute everything as it sees fit. It is a question, in other words, of making exclusive what was not at first sight exclusive.

¹³ See *Ethics* III, DA XXXVII; CWS I, 539.

Now in Spinoza, for whom right merges with fact, it is the inverse. For him, we have the right to do exactly what we can, no more and no less; but what we can do is quite precisely what we do, no more and no less, since there is only the necessary and the impossible. The right that we have over a thing thus leads back, quite simply, to the right to do with it what we are doing with it in the precise moment when we are using it in this or that way. And consequently, in the state of nature, this right is already *exclusive* by definition: it is impossible both that multiple people make exactly the same usage of the same thing, and that they do not have the right to do so. But, by contrast, in the state of nature, our right over a thing can never be *absolute*: it cannot be so in terms of its content, since nothing would guarantee us that other human beings will leave us the possibility of making *other* uses of this thing; and nor can it be so in terms of its duration, since nothing guarantees that they will leave us the possibility of making *use of it in this particular way* indefinitely. It is true that Spinoza, in Paragraph 23 of Chapter II of the *TP*, takes up Hobbes' formulation according to which, in the state of nature, all things belong to everybody; but he adds, immediately thereafter: 'that is, to whoever has the power to claim it for himself'.¹⁴

The use of the verb 'vindicare' is significant: the *vindicatio*, in Roman law, is the legal action we take in order to recuperate a thing over which we had the right of property; by translating, as Spinoza always does, juridical language into the language of power, this then amounts, purely and simply, to the action by which we actually take possession of a thing. To say that everything belongs to everybody thus means, not that all human beings have an *absolute* right of property over all things, but that the *exclusivity* of such a usage of such a thing passes successively from the one to the other according to relations of forces, or that multiple people, always according to relations of forces, have at the same moment the exclusivity of different usages of the same thing. Whence it indeed follows that nobody has an absolute right over anything, and that consequently there is no property. And the solution to this contradiction will clearly not be that each is excluded from anything: the exclusion is already the case, it is even 'always-already' the case, and there is nothing to give up. The solution will consist in making absolute what was not absolute: whereas for Hobbes it was a matter of making the absolute exclusively absolute, for Spinoza it will be a matter of making the exclusive absolutely exclusive. Which, to be sure, will only be possible due to the existence of a common force, creating right by itself, which will guarantee each person the possibility of infinite uses of the same thing for

¹⁴ *TP* II, 23; *CWS* II, 516.

an indefinite duration. It is thus indeed the State that alone can determine the right of property of each, but for completely different reasons than in Hobbes.

That being said, once again, we must nuance things further. In fact, even in the state of nature, there are degrees of the non-absolute, exactly as there are different degrees of the absolute in the civil state. And here again we come across, for the second time, the opposition between money and land, but seen from another point of view: it is a question, this time, of the opposition between *mobile goods* and *immobile goods*. In the state of nature, Spinoza tells us in Paragraph 19 of Chapter VII of the *TP*, what we can appropriate for ourselves *least* of all, is land, as well as all things that are at this point attached to the land, which it is impossible to hide or to take with us. This does not mean, to be sure, that mobile goods truly belong to us; but this means that the rights that we have over them are a bit more solid, a bit less precarious, in the sense that other human beings have a bit less power to strip us of them. Immobile goods, in fact, *attach* us to a determined place, from which it is sufficient to chase us in order to deprive us entirely of their usage; in the case of mobile goods, by contrast, this is not sufficient: one must also be able to prevent us from running off with these goods, and one must at the same time be able to meticulously conduct a police search – which requires a large mobilisation of forces, time and even a certain fitness. Now this will remain true, all things being equal, in the civil state: our right of property, once constituted, will be *more absolute* over our furniture than over our buildings, because we will have *less* possibility of having them taken away. And this will be equally valid *for the State itself*, at the moment when it will be a question for it to determine the regime of property.

Over immobile goods, the power of the sovereign is practically without limits, at least so long as the sovereign has at its disposal a sufficient public force in order to chase anybody out; it can thus, if this condition is met, either guard them for itself, or redistribute them to individuals as it sees fit.

Over mobile goods, by contrast, the sovereign has less power, and, therefore less right. Spinoza, in Paragraph 10 of Chapter VIII of the *TP*, has in mind exactly the possibility of an emigration of plebeians who would take their money abroad with them, and it does not even occur to him that the State has the means to oppose this, nor consequently the right to prevent them from doing so: it is possible to prevent this phenomenon indirectly, but, if it does take place, nobody would be able to do anything about it any longer. Which, it being said in passing, leaves much to the imagination;

since, after all, today . . .!¹⁵ The State, too, is thus subject to constraints: it can act on the regime of property, and it must do so if it wishes to survive, but not in just any way: it can only act *directly* by means of landed property.

* * *

With the problem of property arising in this way, we understand perfectly the internal logic of the three solutions put forward by Spinoza. And we understand at the same time why *there can only be three good solutions*, and no more. It is a matter, in fact, of a rather simple combinatoric, whose principles are entirely determined by the preceding.

Generally, we know that the State alone is capable of founding the right of property by giving an absolute character to ultra-precarious real rights that were exercised in the state of nature, but that it is absolutely impossible to eliminate all private property. More specifically, we know that human beings are malleable enough that the State might be able to condition them indirectly in such a way as to fix their desire for property on land rather than money, or on money rather than land, but that, in order to do so, the State can only act directly on landed property. And we know that, to be sure, the State has an *interest* in utilising for its own ends, those of its self-preservation, the margin of manoeuvring it has at its disposal: it imposes different solutions according to the nature of the regime being preserved, and also according to what is permitted by the economic habits already contracted by the population that must live under this regime. On the basis of this, we have *two alternatives* available, which moreover do not correspond to real choices, but whose solutions are ordered by the objective situation faced by the legislator. The first, whose solution is ordered by the state of morals, concerns the orientation being given to economic motivations: *land or money*. The second, whose solution is ordered by the nature of the political regime, concerns the status to be given to the only form of property on which public powers are truly taken, that is to say landed property: *private or non-private*.

But, in any event, one of the four possibilities formally implied by this combination is ruled out due to its very absurdity: it is impossible to attach human beings to land without granting them private ownership of it. And it is also just as clear that such private property will take on different modalities depending on which solution will have been given to the first alternative:

¹⁵ ['Ce qui, soit dit en passant, laisse rêveur; car enfin, aujourd'hui !'] This may be an ironic reference to the widespread tendency among wealthy individuals and corporations to take their money offshore to tax havens.]

if we want land to be considered as an end in itself, not as a simple means for acquiring money, it must clearly be the case that it cannot be made the object of any commercial transaction, whereas it must be such an object in the other cases.

First alternative, then: must the desire for possession be preferentially oriented towards land or towards money? But we only have a choice, in reality, if commerce has *not yet* developed: beginning at the moment where it will know a certain extension, we will be interested in money in any case, and the State will no longer be able to do anything about it. Again, it is not even a matter of a choice between two positive possibilities: in an essentially rural country, living in an autarchic economy, it is impossible to artificially provoke a boom in commerce; we can only wait and hope.

The *first solution* is radical: if commerce has not yet developed, we can decide to prevent it. Not directly, since we cannot directly manipulate mobile property, but in an indirect way, by acting much more effectively than simple measures of prohibition would: by intense ideological conditioning, which habituates human beings to leading an entirely ritualised, entirely repetitive, existence without ever leaving them the slightest possibility nor the slightest desire to take personal initiatives – including, among others, but only among others, economic initiatives. But only one political regime allows us to obtain this result, while at the same time requiring that this result be obtained: the *theocratic* regime. And a single form of landed property suits it: the one that is described in a few lines in Chapter XVII of the *TTP* and of which we have just seen that it was already indispensable, abstracting from every political consideration, in order to fix *avaritia* on land.

This regime, in fact, is subject to a double necessity. On the one hand, the people must obey passively. But it must be that even the slightest hope of resistance on its part be *neutralised*. And this is only possible if it is attached to the country, not only ideologically, but also materially: that is, if the inhabitants cannot emigrate without losing all that they possess. Subjects then must be attached to the land, and consequently the property of land must be privatised: political necessities are in agreement here with what was directly required for the first solution to be put to work. But, on the other hand, there is no sovereign theocracy outside of God: the law is already given, in all of its details and forever, and political leaders are just mere agents of its execution. It must then equally be the case that even the slightest hope of usurping the leaders is neutralised; and the best means for doing so is to *unify* the population as much as possible, so that it constitutes a single bloc before the leaders. This implies, among other things, that it is perfectly unified on the plane of economic interests. Now, by hypothesis, unification

by commerce is not possible. The only resource that subsists, if we wish to limit conflicts as much as possible, it is thus to divide landed property in an *absolutely equal* way; and to make it *inalienable* so that this equality subsists – an inalienability without which, moreover, the love of land would seriously risk being supplanted by the love of money. It is true that it would be a question there, in reality, of perpetual usufruct; but we saw that Grotius, among others, identified this right with property. Such is the only means by which the *at once unifying and neutralising solution* can be put into action.

The *second solution*, for its part, is just as radical: if commerce has already developed, the only thing to do is to allow it the greatest possible freedom. There is no good intermediary solution; Spinoza says this regarding extravagant laws in Paragraph 5 of Chapter X of the *TP*: every prohibition would be inefficient and would counteract the intended goal. But this does not apply only to extravagant laws: it applies to every commercial constraint in general, since, once again, it is impossible to directly master mobile property; no matter what, there will be frauds, the law will be violated, and respect for the State will be lost. What cannot be prohibited must thus be permitted, as Chapter XX of the *TTP* indicates (concerning, notably, *avaritia*).

It is here, and only here, that the *second alternative* comes into play. For there are, in the framework of this second solution, two possible regimes of property: they are the only two that are logically conceivable, and each of them is actually required by a determinate form of the State.

The *first possibility* is what is required by the *monarchic* regime.¹⁶ Under this regime, then, the essential problem is to neutralise the king. And the best means for doing so, as in theocracy, is to *unify the people* as much as possible. But, contrary to what happened in theocracy, here the people do not also need to be neutralised, since in fact it is the people that govern by the intermediary of the king's council: the citizens, as a general rule, will never experience the desire to abandon the country in which they are the true masters. We must then adopt an *exclusively unifying solution*, without any counterpart.

Now at the economic level, as we have seen, the best unification is the unification by commerce and finance. It is also indispensable that the population draws its revenues from these two activities alone, in such a way that everybody has more or less the same interests, and that there is consequently in the king's council a massive majority before which the sovereign is obliged to bow down without having any means to play on the possible divisions among the people. And this is why *all immobile goods will have to belong to the State*, goods which it will not be able to alienate, but which it

¹⁶ See *TP* VI, 12; *CWS* II, 535–6. *TP* VII, 8; *CWS* II, 548.

will *rent out* to individuals by means of an annual usage fee. The right of the renter, it should be recalled, is not a real right, but a personal right: it is a right over the proprietor, not over the land; even in Grotius' very broad classification, there is no relation between this right and property. Spinoza moreover does not specify the exact modalities of this rental: the fact that rent is paid annually does not necessarily mean that the lease will be annual; all that we can say is that this rent will not be a very good deal, since Spinoza does specify that the State will not have any other financial resources in times of peace. It is certain, in any case, that this is in no way a matter of some kind of agrarian communism. For exploitation will remain individual; each renter will privately possess their instruments of production (those, at least, that fall under the category of mobile goods), will be able to hire 'servants' (whose existence is prefigured in Paragraph 11 of Chapter VI) to work for a wage, and will sell their products on the market: *everybody*, says Spinoza explicitly in Paragraph 8 of Chapter VII, will be obliged to enter into commerce in order to produce profit, the richest also being able to lend their money in order to gain interest. We can perfectly conceive of a capitalism without landed private property, though this possibility is never actualised in fact: we have even maintained that this had been its most 'pure' form.¹⁷ The goal sought after in Spinozist monarchy is nothing other than the elimination of all investment, affective as well as financial, in land: to focus it entirely on the market economy, so as to obtain a quasi-unanimous public opinion, which the king cannot resist.

As for the *second possibility*, its choice is imposed by the *aristocratic* regime.¹⁸ The problem, here, is exactly the inverse: it is a question, as in theocracy, of *neutralising the people*, in such a way so as to eliminate even the slightest hope of resisting the patricians. But, contrary to what happened in theocracy, here there is no particular need to unify the people. The patricians must be unified in order to be able to impose their law; but if the people were *too* unified, this would be rather dangerous, since it would have the means to exercise a pressure that is too strong. A *completely neutralising solution* must then be adopted without any counterpart.

¹⁷ Ernest Mandel once said to me that if the agrarian reform recommended by Spinoza is bourgeois, it is 'nineteenth-century bourgeois', and not seventeenth-century. For, if it were applied in the seventeenth century, it would have made the formation of a proletariat impossible, and consequently capitalism could not have developed. [Mandel was a German-born Belgian Marxist economist and Trotskyist activist, who published *La formation de la pensée économique de Karl Marx: de 1843 à la rédaction du "Capital"* in 1970.]

¹⁸ See TP VIII, 10; CWS II, 569.

Now at the economic level, as we have seen, the best means for neutralising the population is to attach it to the land. And this is why, in the Spinozist aristocracy, *immobile goods would be private property*. Spinoza even specifies that they will have to be *sold* to subjects, without their being able to rent them; but he does not say this rule applies only to goods belonging to the State, or if on the contrary it implies a general prohibition of any renting of land, including by individuals. In any case, the goal to be attained is clear: it is a question of making sure that the greatest possible number of plebeians buy at least some little plot of land or a house. Such an investment, both financial and affective, is the only one able to keep them in a country where they take no part in the government. It is true that, since commerce is free, *the land will be obligatorily alienable*, that for this reason *its distribution will not necessarily be equal*, and that there will thus be many divisions among the plebes; but, once again, this will not matter very much, and perhaps things will even be better off for it. Besides, there will be the minimum of unification indispensable to the good functioning of any society, since commerce, without necessarily being the sole activity of all, will hypothetically predominate nevertheless, and at least two stimulants will prevent it from collapsing: on the one hand, the desire that each will have to get rich in order to join the patrician class,¹⁹ and on the other hand, the fact that the senators will receive a salary proportionate to the amount of trade²⁰ – which will incite them to watch over it as they would their most prized possession.

There remains, of course, the question of the regime of landed property *in democracy*. But there is no doubt as to the solution here. In any case, given Spinoza's combinatory, there can only be three solutions all in all; and the relation of this combinatory with the political necessities confirms once again: either we must unify the people, or we must neutralise them, or we must do both at once, without it being possible – at least if we wish to avoid endangering civil peace – to do neither the one nor the other. Now, in democracy, there is nobody to neutralise, and the *completely unifying* solution is the best *in itself*. The status of landed property will thus be the same as in Spinozist monarchy.

These three solutions, as we can see, have three points in common when taken two at a time: freedom of commerce in monarchy and aristocracy as opposed to theocracy (because the market economy hypothetically reigns therein); private property of land in aristocracy and theocracy as opposed to monarchy (in order to neutralise the people); inalienability of land in

¹⁹ TP X, 7; CWS II, 599.

²⁰ TP VIII, 31; CWS II, 578–9.

monarchy and theocracy as opposed to aristocracy (to avoid dividing the people). But there is a point, and only one, which is common to all three: it is *the complete absence of any feudal property*, and even of *any trace* of feudal property. No superposition of multiple 'domains' for the same land, no distinction between 'eminent domain' and 'useful domain'. For every landed good, a single owner, whether it be the State or an individual; and, in the case of monarchy (and democracy), renters without any real rights. Feudal property, indeed, is not even considered once, not even as a possible point of discussion, whereas traditionally it was difficult (including for Grotius) to fit it into the categories of reinterpreted Roman Law: it is excluded from the outset by the Spinozist problematic. It was impossible, at the time, to go any further, if at least one wished to avoid Utopia.

As for Spinoza's communism, it is indeed very real, but it exists on a completely different level. It would reign, as we saw, in the communities of sages, if they were ever established. But these communities, as we also saw, would be an-archic in the etymological sense.

Spinoza and Sexuality

Spinoza, according to popular opinion, would have written on the topic of sexual love only deplorable platitudes, heavily influenced by the prejudices of his time and lacking a serious philosophical foundation:¹ what he was once celebrated for,² we reproach him for today; or, at best, we excuse it. Or he might have even, as some believe, outdone the prevailing puritanism: sexuality, as such, profoundly repulsed him, and women horrified him. The second of these two claims, if we stick to the manifest content of the texts, has no real basis; if we invoke their latent content, this claim would require, in order for it to be established with minimal rigour, a study whose theoretical possibility we will not contest, but which, in fact, has not yet been undertaken. The first claim, by contrast, obviously seems correct: that men love women for their beauty and cannot bear that they attach themselves to others,³ that they desire them more the more admirers they have,⁴ that the jealousy of the male is exacerbated by the representation of the *pudenda* and the *excrementa* of his rival,⁵ that sensual attachment is unstable and conflictual,⁶ that it often turns to obsession,⁷ that Adam loved Eve because of the similarity of their natures,⁸ that one who remains unmoved by the gifts of a

¹ [Originally published as ‘Spinoza et la sexualité’, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 3–4 (1977): 436–57; republished in Matheron 1986 and 2011, and in Gatens 2009. See Appendix 2.]

² See, for example, Segond’s very curious *Vie de Spinoza* (Segond 1933).

³ *TP* XI, 4, *in fine*; CWS II, 603–4.

⁴ *Ethics* III, 31; CWS I, 512.

⁵ *Ethics* III, 35 Schol.; CWS I, 515.

⁶ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 591.

⁷ *Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 571.

⁸ *Ethics* IV, 68 Schol.; CWS I, 584–5.

courtesan does not commit the sin of ingratitude,⁹ that only free men and women get married, and only if they wish to have children¹⁰ – well, there you have it, and there really is nothing sensational about all of that. Now these eight passages, if we include as well the two definitions of the *libido*,¹¹ are the only ones, unless I am mistaken, where Spinoza explicitly treated the question! There would thus only be, it seems, a negative balance sheet to be drawn up.

This, however, would be moving too quickly. After all, nobody will dispute that Spinoza was hardly in the habit of writing about anything carelessly. We have not finished tracking down in Spinoza so-called banalities that, once re-inscribed within their argumentative context, take on an unexpected meaning. Why would this not be the case here as well? Of course, we can never be too certain, but is it not better, all things being equal, to give the author of the *Ethics* the benefit of the doubt? Let us pose then, as a methodological hypothesis, that the ten passages in question were the result of serious and careful reflection, and let us see what their Spinozist signification might be.

* * *

In Part III of the *Ethics*, two definitions of *libido* are given, but only the second is formally presented as such: ‘coëundi immoderatum Amorem vel Cupiditatem’ [‘immoderate Love or Desire for . . . sexual union’],¹² then ‘Cupiditas et Amor in commiscendis corporibus’ [‘Desire for and Love of joining one body to another’].¹³ There is fundamentally no real opposition between the two: in the explanation of the second, Spinoza also uses the expression ‘haec coëundi cupiditas’; and then he notes that, if he no longer mentions the immoderate character of this affection, it is because everyday language designates it with the same word in both cases, whether it is excessive or not.¹⁴ Because every Spinozist definition is genetic, this one, despite its apparent triviality, must clearly be understood as implying a reference to its object’s proximate cause; or rather, since it is a question here of a passion, to its two proximate causes: one internal and the other external. Now the exact determination of each of these two causes poses a problem.

⁹ *Ethics* IV, 71 Schol.; CWS I, 586.

¹⁰ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XX; CWS I, 591.

¹¹ *Ethics* III, 56 Schol.; CWS I, 527. *Ethics* III, DA 48; CWS I, 541.

¹² *Ethics* III, 56 Schol.; CWS I, 527; G II, 185–6.

¹³ *Ethics* III, DA XLVIII; CWS I, 541; G II, 202.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Exp.

On the side of the subject, we are told, *libido* is both desire and love. This would have satisfied neither Saint Thomas Aquinas nor Descartes, for whom these two passions are qualitatively distinct. We could, of course, attribute this equivocation to the poverty of everyday language, which has only one term to name two different things. But, in Spinoza, is it indeed a question of two truly different things? Love, in general, is the joy associated with the idea of an external cause.¹⁵ Joy, for its part, consists in an increase of the power to act.¹⁶ The power to act, in turn, is identified with *conatus*,¹⁷ that is, the actual essence of the individual insofar as it is determined to produce certain effects that, due to its internal non-contradiction, will maintain it in existence, all things being equal.¹⁸ And *conatus*, defined in this way, is desire.¹⁹ We see, analytically, what follows from this: love is nothing other than desire itself insofar as the latter is favoured or increased, and its growth is accompanied by the representation of the external object to which a particular orientation is attached; *cupiditas quatenus*, we might say. We see it even better synthetically: to desire is to tend, insofar as we are capable, to do whatever follows from our nature; as soon as, for one reason or another, we become capable of producing more effects than before (we rejoice in this), we necessarily strive to fully accomplish the operations that our new capacity makes possible; from this fact alone, like a river that hollows out its bed by flowing wherever it can, we tend to remain in the state that enables these supplementary performances, and thus to preserve or re-actualise the cause that we assign to it and that we imagine throughout it.²⁰ To love, consequently, is equivalent to investing our desire into what allows it to be exercised with more force. Everyday language, for once, was more Spinozist than Thomist or Cartesian: there is nothing absurd nor approximative in using the same word for two affects when the one is only ever a mode of the other.

On one condition, however. For sadness and hatred are also modalities of *conatus*: they arise as soon as *conatus* is prevented from producing effects by an unfavourable external cause,²¹ which it then resists²² like a river exerting pressure on a dam, and which it tends to eliminate by encouraging whatever

¹⁵ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

¹⁶ *Ethics* III, 11 Schol.; CWS I, 500–1. *Ethics* III, DA II; CWS I, 531.

¹⁷ See *Ethics* II, 7 Dem.; CWS I, 451.

¹⁸ *Ethics* III, 4–7; CWS I, 498–9.

¹⁹ *Ethics* III, 9 Schol.; CWS I, 500. *Ethics* III, DA I and Exp.; CWS I, 531.

²⁰ *Ethics* III, 12; CWS I, 502. *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

²¹ *Ethics* III, 11 Schol.; *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 500–2.

²² See *Ethics* III, 6 Dem.; CWS I, 499.

it excludes.²³ There are sad desires just as there are joyous desires. From the moment that we relate love back to joy, declaring that a desire is at the same time love thus amounts to putting it under the second of these two rubrics. Hobbes would have rather taken the contrary position: would not what we call sexual appetite, he asks himself in a passage that leaves much to the imagination, simply be the aversion that we experience for something whose presence internal to our body is painful for us, and from which we seek to deliver ourselves by expelling it?²⁴ To which we can reply that, if that were the case, all problems would be resolved by rather simple mechanical means! . . . It is true that Hobbes, a bit further on, clearly identifies this appetite with a positive attraction;²⁵ but, if what he wrote previously is to be taken seriously, this can only be a question of a derivative process: we attach ourselves, secondarily, to the object that helps us rid ourselves of what bothers us. There is nothing of the sort in Spinoza. Clearly, all sad desires indeed have, in Spinoza too, joyous secondary effects: rage, for example, is a desire that pushes us to do evil to those whom we hate,²⁶ accompanied by the hope that this will actually happen, and hope consists in rejoicing in a future thing,²⁷ that is, loving it; never, however, will we say that this hateful impulsion is love for what is opposed to its object, even if such a love follows from it. Inversely, joyous desire might indirectly engender sadness and hate when it runs into obstacles; but it is not, in any sense, hate nor sadness, not even *secundum quid*. By defining *libido* as ‘*cupiditas et amor*’ Spinoza has thus taken a position: this affection, leaving aside what often comes to contradict it externally, is joyous through and through, from start to finish.

It is so from the start: the joy that it involves does not begin with the orgasm, nor love with the memory of the being whom we loved; if this were the case, the previous desire would consist merely in a malaise that we would rejoice in only if it disappeared, and then Hobbes would be right. Sexual excitation – this almost goes without saying for a Spinozist – is in reality already agreeable on its own terms: does it not increase our power to act in the very simple and very precise sense that it makes us capable of producing certain effects that we were not able to produce before its appearance? Suffering will only occur if the environment forbids us from actualising this capacity fully. As for what happens after, things are just as

²³ *Ethics* III, 13 Cor. and Schol.; CWS I, 502.

²⁴ L VI, 3–8; 28–9.

²⁵ L VI, 31–3; 30–1.

²⁶ *Ethics* III, 40 Cor. 2 and Schol.; CWS I, 517–18.

²⁷ *Ethics* III, 18 Schol. 2; CWS I, 505.

clear: no sadness *post coitum*, save the intervention of external causes; how would our power to act diminish by *itself*? Quite the contrary, it increases, even if it then takes other forms by being diffused more extensively. Once the effects determined by our nature are produced, we become capable, as always, of producing the effects of these effects: capable of being affected by other bodies and of affecting them in a multitude of new ways; capable, correlatively, of thinking more and better than before.²⁸ Of course, these new capacities, which arouse new desires in us, are no longer, for a time at least, of the sexual order; but such is the very life of *conatus*: it is neither an undifferentiated impulsion nor a mosaic of independent demands, but a self-regulating system of operations which, because they cannot all be effectuated at once but all of which we nevertheless tend to carry out, must follow the order defined by the laws that follow from our individual essence. Subsequent desires are the continuation of the *libido* by other paths, just as *libido* was itself the prolongation of other desires. If nothing came to disturb it, the process would be cumulative and would unfold in permanent joy. Sexuality, as a necessary moment of this self-deployment of our individuality, because it is joyous, is good in itself.²⁹

It might, it is true, lead us to excesses. For sexual pleasure [*jouissance*], as is moreover the case with the majority of pleasures,³⁰ is *titillatio* and not *hilaritas*: a favourable event, but one that affects one or many parts of the body more than others.³¹ Not that others would not be affected at all, since there are no hermetically sealed partitions in us; they are simply affected less. Now the force of a passion depends on the relation that is established between our force and that of the external cause,³² the force of the desires that it engenders is proportionate to its own,³³ and, in the case of a conflict between many desires, it is the stronger that prevails.³⁴ We see what follows from this: what provokes, for example, an affection of force 2 in part A and an affection of force 1 in part B will engender, if it acts on us with twice the amount of force, an affection of force 4 in A and an affection of force 2 in B; the difference, then, will be of 2 and no longer of 1, and the desire relative to A will be twice as likely, if we ourselves have not changed in the meantime, to eclipse the desires relative to B; to compensate for this

²⁸ *Ethics* IV, 38 and Dem.; CWS I, 568.

²⁹ *Ethics* IV, 41; CWS I, 570.

³⁰ *Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 571.

³¹ *Ethics* III, 11 Schol.; CWS I, 500–1.

³² *Ethics* IV, 5; CWS I, 549.

³³ *Ethics* III, 37; CWS I, 515.

³⁴ *Ethics* IV, 7; CWS I, 550.

disequilibrium, there must be rational desires twice as powerful than in the first case, unless a modification of the environment intervenes at that precise moment. The more the external cause has an impact on our brain, consequently,³⁵ the more desire born of the increase of the power to act located in the privileged parts tends to prevail, all things being equal, over those born of the increase of the power to act located in other parts. At the limit, if no rectification is produced, it might inhibit them completely; *titillatio* then mobilises for its exclusive benefit the new capacities that its achievement made possible: we employ all of our resources, ignoring other activities that we could have performed, in order to make it reappear indefinitely. From there, everything is blocked: monopolised by this affection to which it is obstinately attached, our body ceases developing its capacities;³⁶ we turn in circles instead of developing in a spiral. Parallel to this, our power to think ceases to increase.³⁷ Excess thus does not come from the intensity of pleasure taken in absolute terms, nor from its frequency, but from the obsessional character that it takes on for our imagination; in the free human being, in a brain in which images are organised in an order analogous to that of ideas in the understanding³⁸ and which is constituted solidly enough so as not to be shaken by the play of external causes, it would only have advantages and no obstacles. The threshold on the basis of which pleasure risks becoming 'immoderate' is elevated all the more as our reason is developed. And for the weakest, this threshold is so low that it can be crossed without one ever taking action: comparable, in its 'species of madness',³⁹ to the 'avarus' who deprives themselves of everything in order to accumulate whatever satisfies that from which they always abstain,⁴⁰ the 'libidinosus' is the sexual obsessive who, even and especially if circumstances force their chastity,⁴¹ can only ever think of one thing.⁴²

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³⁵ For it is indeed at the level of the brain, by means of the mechanism of the formation of images, that the relation between the external cause and our body is built up. See *Ethics* II, 17 Cor. and Dem.; CWS I, 461–2; and Gueroult 1974: 201–9.

³⁶ *Ethics* IV, 43 and Dem.; CWS I, 570–1.

³⁷ *Ethics* IV, 38 Dem.; CWS I, 561.

³⁸ See *Ethics* V, 10; CWS I, 601.

³⁹ *Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 571. *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 591.

⁴⁰ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 593.

⁴¹ *Ethics* III, DA XLVIII Exp.; CWS I, 541–2.

⁴² *Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 571.

Think of what, exactly? Here the second problem is posed: that of the external proximate cause, that is to say the *object of libido*. This problem is at once simpler and more complex than the first: simpler, since Spinoza clearly thinks that the identification of this object, at least in most cases, goes without saying; more complex, since we would not be able to say exactly for which reasons sexual desire has come to take this particular orientation. Of course, there is one explanation in particular that he would have to consider absurd: since final causes are ruled out, sexuality is no more *intended* to ensure the perpetuation of the species than eyes are made in order to see or teeth in order to chew;⁴³ there is procreation because there is sexuality, not sexuality so that there would be procreation; and if there are, among other things, sexual beings, it is because the laws of nature are ample enough to produce all that is conceivable.⁴⁴ Having posited this principle, with the enormous ethical consequences that it implies, Spinoza could have left it at that.

However, he says a bit more. According to the two definitions of *libido*, we saw that the object of this affection is the sexual relation itself, not the partner properly speaking. There is nothing embarrassing about that: it is always, Spinoza points out, a thing external to us that we love,⁴⁵ but we always love it *insofar as* it affects us with a determinate form of joy, and only under that aspect by which it affects us; that our pleasure is then associated with other aspects of this same object⁴⁶ does not change anything; since moreover Spinoza chose, for important reasons, to express in a single formula the distinctive traits of desire and love, and since all desire is the striving to accomplish this or that act, he could hardly proceed otherwise. There remains the question of the two different names given to this object: in the formal definition, it is the 'mixture of bodies'; in the explanation that follows, as well as in the informal definition, it is more precisely *coitus*.⁴⁷ Perhaps, in Spinoza's mind, the two expressions are equivalent; but also, perhaps the first must be taken in the broadest sense. In the first case, a problem arises: love *being* pleasure, or, what amounts to the same thing, memory of pleasure, we would have to concede that we cannot love sexually if we are virgins, and that consequently we would always remain virgins! We

⁴³ See *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 439–40; G II, 78. I will provide the reference to the Gebhardt edition for any of the passages that are a bit longer.

⁴⁴ See *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 445–6; G II, 83.

⁴⁵ *Ethics* III, 13 Schol.; CWS I, 502.

⁴⁶ *Ethics* III, 16 Dem.; CWS I, 504.

⁴⁷ See notes 12, 13 and 14, above.

would only be displacing the difficulty if we were to say that culture allows our imagination to anticipate it: where, in turn, do the cultural norms that guide us come from? The second interpretation, by contrast, seems to be more in the spirit of Spinozism: sexual excitation, already agreeable in itself, is originally provoked by ‘bodily mixtures’ consisting in unintentional physical contact of all kinds, which might be premature, whose renewal we then strive to arouse, and that a whole mess of variations and associations leads in general, through ‘trial and error’, to the coital form whose particularly satisfying effects finally stabilise our desire. As for the reasons why these first contacts themselves increased our power to act, they are undoubtedly related to the fact that this power to act, which is measured by our capacity to affect other bodies and to be affected by them in multiple ways,⁴⁸ only grows by being exerted in one form or another: it is by affecting and by being affected that we become even more capable, and that is pleasure. Let us not go any further since we lack textual evidence. But, taking into account the unitary character of *conatus* of which *libido* is itself only one modality among others, and taking into account as well the plasticity of these investments, nothing *forbids* Spinoza – and perhaps he is the only early modern philosopher whose doctrine authorises this – from allowing a non-genital sexuality. If the point of departure is also indeterminate, and if any affection whatsoever can be derived from any object according to chance encounters,⁴⁹ we catch sight of the infinite diversity of conceivable sexual comportments, which are thus included in the order of nature.

One of them, however, is massively predominant. It is the ‘amor meretricius’, which Spinoza, without the adjective employed here seeming to imply in his mind a particular reference to prostitution taken in the strict sense, defined as being ‘libido generandi, quae ex forma oritur’.⁵⁰ Thus *libido* is specified in two ways. On the one hand, it becomes ‘generandi’: we no longer simply desire the ‘mixture of bodies’, but this mixture in its procreative form; not that generation would be our end, but at least we are fixated on the act which, in fact, makes it possible. On the other hand, this same *libido* is now born ‘ex forma’: from the external form, or from external appearance, or beauty, with this last translation authorised by another passage where it is a question of ‘pulchritudine’;⁵¹ visual stimulants are thus added on to tactile

⁴⁸ See *Ethics* II, 14; CWS I, 462. *Ethics* III, 11; CWS I, 500. *Ethics* IV, 38 and Dem.; CWS I, 568. *Ethics* IV, 41 Dem.; CWS I, 570.

⁴⁹ *Ethics* III, 15; CWS I, 503.

⁵⁰ *Ethics* IV, App. XIX; CWS I, 593.

⁵¹ TP XI, 4 *in fine*; CWS II, 598–9.

stimulants, standing in for them in order to trigger excitation. How is this double modification possible?

Beauty, if we return to what this means for Spinoza, does not truly pose a problem. We call beautiful, quite simply, things that, when they affect our eyes, provoke in the optic nerve movements favourable to health.⁵² To be good for health is clearly to increase the power of a body to act; but which of its parts? Two interpretations are equally acceptable here. Perhaps it is a matter of an increase of the power to act *in any region of our organism*: the action of the optic nerve, by the intermediary of the brain, has effects pretty much everywhere. In this case, there is no difficulty: the visual image of a person with whom we have had this or that agreeable 'bodily mixture', or some other image next to it⁵³ or another image that resembles it⁵⁴ in our mind, rekindles in us earlier joyous affections and arouses our desire; then, projecting onto this person the state of greater perfection that seeing them put us in, we attribute it to them as an objective quality that would belong to them in their own right, believing thus to discover in this person the positive pseudo-value that we baptise beauty.⁵⁵ Given that the judgement of beauty is posterior to sexual excitation, whereas the perception of the external appearance precedes it, we can understand, under these conditions, why Spinoza wrote 'ex forma', rather than 'ex pulchritudine'. But also, perhaps this increase of the power to act is localised *in the optical apparatus itself*: we would experience, this time, a properly aesthetic pleasure, which would give way to the same pseudo-objectification without yet inspiring in us a desire other than that of looking; but, in order to look better, we get closer, and we soon wind up touching; if this contact evokes the old memories of 'mixtures', the association is established between contemplative joy and sensuality.⁵⁶ In reality, both mechanisms are clearly in play; whence the possibility of a *fluctuatio animi*:⁵⁷ the sight of one and the same being might mislead our optic nerve while attracting us as well. But the two contrary affects must be reconciled sooner or later:⁵⁸ either our *libido* will soon only fix itself on what pleases our eyes, or our eyes will be habituated to take pleasure in everything on which they are fixed.

More obscure are the causes of its specification as *libido generandi*. It is

⁵² *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 444–5; G II, 82.

⁵³ *Ethics* III, 15; CWS I, 503.

⁵⁴ *Ethics* III, 16; CWS I, 503.

⁵⁵ *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 443–5; G II, 81–2.

⁵⁶ See *Ethics* III, 14; CWS I, 502.

⁵⁷ See *Ethics* III, 17 Schol.; CWS I, 504.

⁵⁸ *Ethics* V, Ax. 1; CWS I, 597.

insufficient to say that society imposes it, since social norms themselves are born from the interaction of human desires. How are we to imagine, by hypothetically abstracting from every culture, as when reconstructing the civil state on the basis of the state of nature that certainly never existed, that the 'first men' would be preferentially attached to the 'first women'? It turns out, curiously, that Spinoza himself partially responded to the question, though it is in a passage intended to illustrate a very different point: Adam, Spinoza tells us, loved Eve because she was the being whose nature agreed the most with his, and which consequently presented for him the maximum utility.⁵⁹ This explanation, if it applies to sexual relations,⁶⁰ would initially seem to suggest something else altogether. It is true that Adam hardly had a choice; but if he were to have met another man, who would have naturally resembled him by a supplementary trait, would Spinoza have said that he would have preferred him to Eve? No, certainly; no more than he would have wished, applying the same principle to nutrition, to praise the benefits of cannibalism! And yet, this principle, for Spinoza, is absolutely universal: the more a thing is similar to us, the more it is good for us.⁶¹ But again it is a question of really understanding what Spinoza means here by similarity. Every being, necessarily, tends to produce effects that preserve it; a being whose nature has something in common with ours, tends thus to produce, in greater or lesser numbers according to the degree of its resemblance with us, effects that ensure the preservation of this common nature, that is to say ours considered under this aspect; our *conatus*, *insofar as* they converge, thus mutually favour one another.⁶² Now such a convergence, according to the type of effect in question, can take on multiple forms: Peter and Paul, for example, agree in nature in the sense that they both desire the same thing, but are opposed in the sense that they each want it for themselves;⁶³ if Peter's nature was such that it pushed him to desire to take from Paul the exclusive possession of this thing, it would agree with and be opposed to Paul's nature for two inverse reasons. There are resemblances that are identities, just as there are resemblances that are complementary: two geometrical figures indeed have something in common when their respective sides are exactly proportional to one another; to this extent, if each of them strove to

⁵⁹ *Ethics* IV, 68 Schol.; CWS I, 584–5.

⁶⁰ Spinoza, of course, means above all that Eve was useful to Adam insofar as she was a reasonable being like him. But one does not 'know' someone else in the 'biblical' sense by reason alone.

⁶¹ *Ethics* IV, 31 and Cor.; CWS I, 561.

⁶² *Ethics* IV, 31 Dem.; CWS I, 560–1.

⁶³ *Ethics* IV, 34 Schol.; CWS I, 562–3.

remain what it is, they would support each other by fitting together. Perhaps this is what Spinoza *also* wanted to suggest: men and women, anatomically, are made in such a way that intraspecies and genital heterosexuality generally makes the 'corporeal mixtures' that they seek out easier and more complete; whence, at the end of 'trials and errors', the frequency of this final choice – we now understand how it is possible for culture to intervene, in fact, in order to point towards this in advance. Once again, we lack the textual evidence to go any further. In any case, this explanation could only be statistical: the more or less satisfying character of this or that solution depends, in each case, on an infinite number of circumstances. This would not imply, with even more reason, any value judgement: in the absence of any teleology, to produce a causal account of what is most common is not to specify what must be in normative terms.

One step remains, but it has practically already been taken. 'Amor meretricius', in principle, has as its object beautiful bodies of the opposite sex in general. But, when we love someone, those of their aspects that please us are often associated with all of their other aspects, even if these latter were initially indifferent to us.⁶⁴ We then come to love this person for what, at least in our estimation, makes them an individual, and which distinguishes them from all the others: *amor* 'erga faeminam'⁶⁵ in the singular. Now here is where things risk taking a rather dramatic turn.

* * *

If the genetic method required that we first abstract from the interhuman context of this love, we must now reintroduce it. The women that we love, on the one hand, are beings of the same species as us, with all that this implies. There are, on the other hand, men around us, who love and do not love these women depending on the case, but whose affects nevertheless have repercussions for ours. In the two preceding sentences, to be sure, we could substitute the word 'men' for the word 'women', 'we' then being in the feminine; the demonstrations of the *Ethics* are valid for whichever sex. But, at the stage that we are dealing with at present (neither before nor after, it should be noted), Spinoza, it is true, takes the point of view of men. Moreover, we understand why. In the relations of power that are established universally under the regime of passion, and from which nobody except the wise can escape, women, due to an unclear cause that must be related to their nature – but which, since Spinoza speaks explicitly of their possible

⁶⁴ *Ethics* III, 15; CWS I, 503. *Ethics* III, 16 Dem.; CWS I, 504.

⁶⁵ *Ethics* III, 35 Schol.; CWS I, 514.

access to 'freedom of mind',⁶⁶ does not consist in a congenital incapacity of their reason, and which has doubtlessly nothing pejorative about it in the eyes of a philosopher who certainly does not consider himself well suited to subjugate others – find themselves always and everywhere in a position of inferiority.⁶⁷ Their reactions in interhuman conflicts, though they are the same as those of men, thus have less importance in practice. The sexual drama, essentially, is *played out among men*. Whence, precisely, its acuity.

All the aspects of the question are summarised in a single phrase: *amor meretricius*, indeed like every form of love that admits as its cause something other than freedom of mind, easily changes into hate; unless, 'which is worse', it would be a 'species of madness', in which case – the two translations are equally acceptable – 'it is encouraged more by discord than by concord', or 'it is discord, more than concord, that is encouraged' by it (*tum magis discordia, quam concordia fovetur*).⁶⁸ The other types of passionate love evoked by Spinoza, if it is not simply a matter of friendship or of non-sexual devotion (which are also conflictual among the ignorant), are either *libido* called 'perverse' because it is not *generandi*, or that which is founded on something other than the physical beauty of the loved one: their wealth, or their social status, pleasurable external causes with which it can also very easily be associated. But let us consider only *amor meretricius*, which Spinoza clearly takes here at its final stage, at the moment when it is already fixed on a determinate person. This passion, we are told, gives way to an alternative whose two terms are deplorable, but of which the second is more deplorable than the first.

First possibility: love, in many cases, easily turns into hate. Spinoza explains this in his deduction of *jealousy*. Jealousy has completely general causes, which are liable to darken any interhuman passionate attachment, even if it has no relation to *libido*. But, when it is sexual, a very particular cause, and one that might at first seem a bit strange, often comes to aggravate it.

Its general causes are well known. To the extent that we necessarily imitate the affects of those similar to us,⁶⁹ whoever they may be, we desire,

⁶⁶ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XX; CWS I, 591.

⁶⁷ *TP* XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

⁶⁸ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 591. Spinoza, in his manuscripts, as Gebhardt himself indicates in his critical apparatus (G II, 388), does not put the accent on the final 'a' of the singular ablative of the first declension. Gebhardt, by opting for the ablative rather than for the nominative, following the editors of the *Opera posthuma*, makes thus a choice to which only he is committed. Translation modified.

⁶⁹ *Ethics* III, 27; CWS I, 508.

all things being equal, to give them joy in order to rejoice in the idea of ourselves as the cause: such is the origin of the *ambition for glory*.⁷⁰ But when we love something, no matter what it is, we think of it more than anything else; if this thing is a human person, we thus want, at all costs, to make this particular person recognise us as the cause of their joy, that is to say, to make them love us;⁷¹ the more we succeed, the more we are glorified.⁷² If, consequently, we believe that this person is attached to somebody else, our desire for glory will be frustrated, we will become saddened, and our love will tend to change into hate at the same time that we will detest our rival.⁷³ Since women are human persons, this mechanism *also* plays itself out in the affects that concern them, in the same way that it plays itself out with those whom we feel are our friends or benefactors.

Jealousy, however, can be more or less violent. It is particularly strong when the idea of the loved one is associated in our mind with the idea of a thing that we hate.⁷⁴ Now this is what almost always takes place in *amor erga faeminam*: the sadness that is produced in us by the woman that we believe to be unfaithful is exacerbated by the representation, which we associate with her, of the *pudenda* and *excrementa* of our rival;⁷⁵ which implies that this representation, by itself, prior to any real or imaginary motives that we might have for being jealous, *already* inspired in us, as such, an insurmountable horror. From this text, and from it alone, it is often concluded that sexuality was, for Spinoza, the object of a profound repulsion. But Spinoza does not claim that this disgust is rationally justified: he simply says that men subject to passions experience it. And this is not an empirical observation made in passing: it can be deduced, rigorously, from the preceding propositions. Everything in fact follows, once again, from the imitation of affects, but envisaged under another aspect. If we imagine that a being similar to us gets joy from a thing that only a single person can possess, we will do everything to ensure that they do not possess it,⁷⁶ since we will then want for ourselves what hypothetically cannot be shared: such is, in the most general form, the origin of *envy*.⁷⁷ This affection emerges with regard to any monopolistic good: in the economic realm, for example, land, a singular thing of which

⁷⁰ *Ethics* III, 29 and Schol.; CWS I, 510. *Ethics* III, 30 and Schol.; CWS I, 510–12.

⁷¹ *Ethics* III, 33 and Dem.; CWS I, 513.

⁷² *Ethics* III, 34; CWS I, 513.

⁷³ *Ethics* III, 35; CWS I, 514.

⁷⁴ *Ethics* III, 35 Schol.; CWS I, 514.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ethics* III, 32; CWS I, 513.

⁷⁷ *Ethics* III, 32 Schol.; CWS I, 513.

the global quantity remains fixed, divides human beings when it becomes private property, whereas money, the universal equivalent⁷⁸ always reproducible in principle, does not have such disastrous effects.⁷⁹ Now, women are like land, with the aggravating circumstance that no other solution is possible: nobody can enjoy their favours, physically speaking, without at the same time forbidding others' access to them; this is a particular case of the impossibility for any body, in extension, where all is full, to occupy a new position without displacing a neighbouring body.⁸⁰ On this point, it is worth mentioning, Spinoza's imagination is hardly Sadeian! . . . Whence the inevitable consequence: when we represent to ourselves one of our own kind in such a situation, even if their partner did not interest us at all before, the idea of this pleasure from which we are excluded saddens us. We thus understand how, in every male, the generic image of the sexual organ of every other male risks becoming unbearable: the more we are *libidinosi*, the more we detest the sexuality of others, that is – since 'others' means everybody except we ourselves – the more we detest sexuality in general. In Christian nations, this reinforces certain historico-cultural conditions: priests, in order to prevent kings from getting involved with the Church's leadership, long ago condemned themselves to celibacy,⁸¹ and envy pushed them to come up with superstitious arguments tending to share their own misery with all human beings;⁸² this phenomenon is hardly reversible, and one that the marriage of pastors in reformed nations has not changed at all. Whether or not Spinoza, for his part, personally felt such an aversion is beside the point, for it is indeed certain that he found it unreasonable; since he nevertheless notes its omnipresence around him, he must explain it with the theoretical means at his disposal.

Sexual love, like all love, thus easily degenerates into jealousy; and this jealousy, due to the particular character of its object, is more violent and conflictual than any other. But this is not yet the worst: the conflicts unleashed in this way might subside, but only when hate will have sapped its own basis by annihilating the love that gave birth to it.⁸³ Now this is what the second possibility envisaged by Spinoza renders impossible.

For the process that was just analysed ceases to play itself out beginning

⁷⁸ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XXVIII; CWS I, 593.

⁷⁹ See *TP* VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

⁸⁰ See *PP* II, 7; CWS I, 274.

⁸¹ *TTP* XIX, 50–7; CWS II, 342–3; *G* III, 237.

⁸² *Ethics* IV, 63 Schol.; CWS I, 582–3.

⁸³ See *Ethics* III, 38; CWS I, 515.

at the moment when *amor meretricius*, having become obsessional, takes the form of a 'species of madness'.⁸⁴ All critical sense then disappears: we systematically overvalue the loved woman,⁸⁵ endowing her with all of the intellectual,⁸⁶ physical, and moral qualities imaginable; but, since the over-estimation is never dissociated from pride,⁸⁷ the 'virtues' that we attribute to her are above all, as if by chance, the ones that she must possess so that our ego is maximally exalted; we believe she is faithful to us, in spite of everything, even if evidence of our misfortune is strikingly obvious. No compensatory retroaction intervenes any longer. Is this blindness at least going to make us happy? No, quite the contrary; and it is again the imitation of affects that, in a third and final avatar, poisons our existence. Generally, in fact, if we imagine that the being to which we are attached is loved by other men, we will love it with even more intensity; if, by contrast, we believe that this being inspires aversion in our own kind, our love is mitigated and *fluctuatio animi* takes hold in us.⁸⁸ Since the woman upon which our *libido* is fixed is a monopolistic good, which nobody else can desire without immediately being opposed to us, we understand why – according to one of the two possible translations of Spinoza's formulation – the 'species of madness' that this induces in our mind is nourished by discord rather than concord:⁸⁹ competition encourages our obsession, whereas this obsession would be attenuated if nobody shared it with us and if everybody left us in peace.⁹⁰ Such an attenuation, however, would be felt by us as painful, since love, a joyous affection, tends necessarily to maintain itself. Then we deploy all of our efforts in order to make others love what we ourselves love:⁹¹ the *ambition for domination*, whose political and religious effects (intolerance, struggle for power) Spinoza studied first and foremost, is also at play, paradoxically, in matters of sexual taste. And this is why our madness – according to another possible translation of the same formulation – feeds discord more

⁸⁴ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 591. See *Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 519.

⁸⁵ See *Ethics* III, 25.

⁸⁶ *TP* XI, 4 *in fine*; CWS II, 603–4.

⁸⁷ *Ethics* III, 26 Schol.; CWS I, 508.

⁸⁸ *Ethics* III, 31; CWS I, 512.

⁸⁹ See note 68, above.

⁹⁰ *Ethics* III, 31, Cor. (Ovid); CWS I, 512. If we opt for the ablative, then it is the end of the corollary to which we must refer here, not the scholium. Thus Gebhardt is being unreasonable when, on this score, he 'corrects' the *Opera posthuma* by replacing 'Cor.' with 'Schol.'

⁹¹ *Ethics* III, 31, Cor. (before Ovid); CWS I, 512.

than concord:⁹² it encourages it, so as to better feed off of it. We wish, unconsciously, to have as many rivals as possible, and nothing makes us happier than being universally envied – even if, as goes without saying, nothing terrifies us more than precisely this. Whence the inextricable contradiction: if others fail to adopt our taste, we are unbearable in their eyes by striving to force them to do so;⁹³ if they let themselves be persuaded, the result is identical, since then they become our enemies. Especially insofar as we want and do not want the same thing: we sing the praises of the one we love, but nevertheless fear being heard.⁹⁴ This time, consequently, there is no longer any solution, not even a provisional one. If the second possibility is still more dramatic than the first, it is because *amor meretricius*, as soon as its obsessional character is deprived of any regulatory mechanism, renders ineluctable and inexpiable the conflicts between human males.

* * *

Passional sexuality can thus have two interrelated absolute disadvantages: at the individual level, it risks blocking our power to act and our power to think; at the interhuman level it is inseparable from a climate of competition that is hardly compatible with concord. But this double excess is not due to what is sexual: it comes from what is passional, that is to say, alienated. The worst of alienations is clearly that by which our *libido*, when affected by external causes whose mechanism is unclear to us, fixes exclusively on a particular being for whom we sacrifice everything and of whom we demand that they sacrifice everything as well: it is in this way that our field of consciousness is most restricted at the same time as conflicts that we are engaged in are the most fierce. Our dependence would be less narrow if we alienated ourselves, not to a singular individual, but to persons of the opposite sex in general: the more numerous the causes are to which we attach an affection, the less they prevent us from thinking, the less each of them renders us passive;⁹⁵ in the same way, we might say, the existence of alternative solutions would attenuate the violence of rivalries to some degree. Would an even greater generalisation be a step in the right direction? Perhaps, though Spinoza obviously says nothing of the sort. But, in any case, this is still not yet authentic liberation: alienation remains alienation, even if its object has

⁹² See note 68, above.

⁹³ *Ethics* III, 31 Schol.; CWS I, 512. Only the choice of the nominative makes possible the reference to the scholium (see note 90, above).

⁹⁴ *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 1; CWS I, 565–6.

⁹⁵ *Ethics* V, 9; CWS I, 600–1.

been enlarged; libertines, too, are quite often obsessives.⁹⁶ There is sexual emancipation only for those in whose minds adequate ideas predominate.

Under the regime of passion, in fact, only palliatives are conceivable. What is essential, to be sure, is to preserve civil peace by reducing the causes of discord to a minimum. Now, on this point, there is only one sound method: the one that also works for regulating access to civil services and to landed property. So as to attenuate envy, men, since they are in any case the ones who make the law, will divide up women 'democratically', on the basis of equality; but, contrary to what happens with land, which can be nationalised if the *avaritia* is fixed on money⁹⁷ as well, the generally highly individuated character of *libido* makes the privatisation of sexual goods necessary; each will then have their own spouse, as each Hebrew possessed a plot of land identical to their neighbour's.⁹⁸ Christ, politically speaking, was right to condemn adultery, and to declare at the same time that one who lusts after the wife of another has already committed adultery in their heart:⁹⁹ social norms must be interiorised as much as possible. In this context, however, a margin of tolerance is permissible. Stoning unfaithful women would only be efficacious in an institutional system analogous to that of a Mosaic theocracy, which would submit the population to a continual cultivation of obedience.¹⁰⁰ If we do not want such a system, then we must authorise whatever cannot be prevented, including debauchery;¹⁰¹ prohibitive measures, taken in isolation, only serve to exacerbate appetites.¹⁰² Clearly this liberalism would above all work out in favour of the stronger sex; so-called 'loose' women, even if they give themselves freely, even if they are the ones who pay, will only ever be *meretrices*;¹⁰³ whence the adjective which, without a specific reference to money, qualifies the love that 'loose' men have for them. But at least flexible monogamy is what is best suited for the civilised nations for which Spinozist constitutions are conceived. This sums up all of Spinoza's sexual politics.

⁹⁶ The passage on sexual obsession can be applied just as equally to libertines as to lovers (*Ethics* IV, 44 Schol.; CWS I, 571).

⁹⁷ See TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

⁹⁸ TTP XVII, 85–90; CWS II, 315–16; G III, 216.

⁹⁹ TTP V, 8; CWS II, 140; G III, 70.

¹⁰⁰ TTP XVII, 85–90; CWS II, 315; G III, 216.

¹⁰¹ TTP XX, 22–8; CWS II, 348–9; G III, 243.

¹⁰² TP X, 5; CWS II, 599.

¹⁰³ See *Ethics* IV, 71 Schol.; CWS I, 586. It is indeed the *meretrix* that tries to buy the favours of a man. [It is worth citing here Curley's footnote in CWS I, 591: 'I agree with Matheron that *meretricius* is not meant to refer strictly to prostitution.']

What is left is his sexual ethics. How, at this level, will men and women comport themselves under the guidance of reason? Men *and* women, for nothing prevents us from thinking the latter might attain true freedom; and Spinoza *posits* that they can.¹⁰⁴ Things are here completely clear. The sexual act, like the action of beating taken in itself, is ‘a virtue, which is conceived from the structure of the human Body’;¹⁰⁵ reason thus takes responsibility for it, as it does for everything that was positive in what we did under the influence of our passions.¹⁰⁶ Nothing is more banal, one will say, nor ultimately more repressive, than declaring that sexual life is good on condition that it is regulated by reason: who has not proclaimed this, and with the practical consequences with which we are familiar? But Spinoza does not retain anything from this tradition. Free men and women, according to him, assign to themselves knowledge¹⁰⁷ and the diffusion of truth¹⁰⁸ as fundamental goals; to this double end, they seek both what ensures the parallel development of their physical and mental capacities¹⁰⁹ and what favours concord,¹¹⁰ for all joys that are not in disequilibrium do this:¹¹¹ how, short of an incomprehensible exception whose existence we would only accept if it had been explicitly mentioned, would what Spinoza says about food, drink, smells, games and theatre¹¹² not also be valid for sexuality? And for sexuality without any taboo of any kind, since procreation is not its end? Which also rules out, it should be said in passing, the obligation to devote ourselves exclusively to it, at the risk of making fools out of ourselves! It is up to each one of us to judge to what extent and in what way it is best for us to make use of it. The only condition, as we saw, is that it must become neither obsessional nor conflictual. But we also saw that the risk of it becoming so is reduced the more reason is developed; beyond a certain threshold, all the danger would be avoided. Understand and do what you will: such is, here as elsewhere, the only norm.

It is on this basis, and on this basis alone, that the question of marriage arises. It has nothing in common, for example, with the Thomist

¹⁰⁴ See *Ethics* IV, Cap. XX; CWS I, 591. Man and woman love each other reciprocally for *their respective freedom of mind*.

¹⁰⁵ See *Ethics* IV, 59 Schol.; CWS I, 580.

¹⁰⁶ See *Ethics* IV, 59; CWS I, 580.

¹⁰⁷ *Ethics* IV, 26; CWS I, 559.

¹⁰⁸ *Ethics* IV, 37; CWS I, 564–5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ethics* IV, 38–9; CWS I, 568.

¹¹⁰ *Ethics* IV, 40; CWS I, 570.

¹¹¹ *Ethics* IV, 41–3; CWS I, 570.

¹¹² *Ethics* IV, 45 Cor. 2 and Schol.; CWS I, 572.

problematic: it is not a matter of asking ourselves if we have the right to have sexual relations, nor of responding that these sexual relations are legitimate on the basis of such and such easily predictable conditions. It is implicitly understood that free men and women will have sexual relations if they judge them good, and in the form that best suits them. The only problem is of knowing whether they will have them in the context of the matrimonial institution. An institution of positive law, which exists only because there are ignorants: Church and State would disappear if everybody were reasonable,¹¹³ and juridical property along with them, including that of women; besides, who would preside over the ceremony? But, since the institution exists, is it in conformity with reason to yield to it? Yes, Spinoza responds, but only if the following two conditions are realised together: if, on the one hand, ‘*cupiditas miscendi corpora*’ does not come from beauty alone, but also from the joy we experience in the idea of having children (*ex Amore liberos procreandi*) and raising them wisely; and if, on the other hand, the reciprocal love of man and woman (*utriusque, viri scilicet et faeminae, Amor*) does not have beauty as its only cause, but above all freedom of mind.¹¹⁴ There is nothing ‘puritanical’ about that. Motivations of so-called ‘convenience’ (wealth, social ambition, obedience to the father of the family, etc.) are absolutely excluded. Motivation by beauty, mentioned twice, goes without saying, but it is insufficient. A free man would never marry a foolish woman, nor would a free woman marry a stupid man: it would be absurd to legally commit ourselves to spending our entire life with a person whom we would not even be able to hope would one day attain authentic rationality; if, however, we wish to have short-lived sexual relations with this person, and if they agree, we will then do so outside of marriage. We would not have any interest, on the other hand, in making the Church or State legally play a role in our relations with a truly free person with whom we do not wish to have children, or who does not wish to have children with us; this case, it must be said, is very unlikely for two beings whose greatest joy would be educating others,¹¹⁵ but we can imagine some particular counter-arguments; and Spinoza, if only by having read the Bible, must have at least known of the existence of contraceptives, which his anti-teleologism would forbid him from condemning. If, however, we wish to have children without having found a free person, we will have to proceed like Descartes! But as soon as the two conditions are met, the spouses’ common freedom of mind removes

¹¹³ See *TTP* V, 20–1; *CWS* II, 143–4; *G* III, 73.

¹¹⁴ *Ethics* IV, Cap. XX; *CWS* I, 591.

¹¹⁵ See *Ethics* IV, Cap. IX; *CWS* I, 589.

all of marriage's disadvantages; and the need to educate children, for obvious social reasons, makes marriage advantageous. Without any exclusivity, however: free men and free women, as such, are incapable, by definition, of any jealousy, and they have no rational motive for abstaining from parallel experiences – even if they no longer had any reasons to go looking for them. Spinoza, doctrinally, could not have thought anything else.

Under the current conditions, however, our chances are slim for meeting an authentically free partner, or even someone likely to become such a person under our care. We will thus manage as best we can without fear or shame, and without provocation either, but without ever losing sight of the fundamental demand to which we will subordinate the totality of our existence: to understand and to make others understand. This implies, as in any calculation, accepting lesser evils.¹¹⁶ Never, and this goes without saying, will a free human being resort to constraint of any kind. Nor will they ever make lying promises so as to better seduce others: every *dolus malus* is forbidden by reason.¹¹⁷ Never, moreover, will they impose superfluous obligations: if a man committed the imprudence of accepting the gifts of a *meretrix* (there are degrees of rationality!),¹¹⁸ at least he will not feel obligated to show his gratitude by giving into her desires when she no longer pleases him;¹¹⁹ which applies also, to be sure, to the free woman who would solicit an admirer.¹²⁰ And above all, since reason prescribes him to preserve civil peace,¹²¹ the free man will respect established laws; which excludes, in nations where the established laws are strict, any relations with married women and minors. Likewise, he will conform, at least externally, to the reigning morals, so as not to compromise the task assigned to him by getting mixed up in unnecessary scandals:¹²² if we were to, on this point as well, be 'Greek with the Greeks',¹²³ well, that would cause more problems in Holland! As soon as the external situation is unfavourable, this risks introducing, in sum, many

¹¹⁶ *Ethics* IV, 65; CWS I, 583.

¹¹⁷ *Ethics* IV, 72; CWS I, 586.

¹¹⁸ See *Ethics* IV, 70; CWS I, 585.

¹¹⁹ *Ethics* IV, 71 Schol.; CWS I, 586.

¹²⁰ Claire van den Enden, we are told, married for a pearl necklace. Does Spinoza, transposing the situation by reversing the sexes, in this way defending himself against an old prejudice, nevertheless betray himself by using the word *meretrix* to designate the one that he now puts in the position of the buyer? It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions based on so little.

¹²¹ *Ethics* IV, 73; CWS I, 587.

¹²² *Ethics* IV, Cap. XV; CWS I, 590.

¹²³ Like Saint Paul, but obviously in a totally different domain! See *TTP* III, 46; CWS II, 122; G III, 54.

bothersome restrictions, which we will nevertheless have to happily put up with if we have calculated that it is the least bad solution. And without a doubt this is what Spinoza himself arrived at. But if in Spinoza there was any sexual misery, at least he lived it discreetly, as an inconvenience that was inevitable due to factual circumstances, without valorising it theoretically nor seeking to impose it on others.

Women and Servants in Spinozist Democracy

It is significant, it is often said, that the drafting of the *Political Treatise* was interrupted precisely at Chapter XI: it is as if, crushed by the aporias of an inconsistent theory of democracy, Spinoza had given up.¹ And we are indeed in the presence, if not of a contradiction, at least of an apparent paradox. In the ideal Spinozist monarchy, the king's council had to include representatives of all of the categories of citizens,² but it was added, without any justification, that certain inhabitants are unable to belong to the civic body: in addition to foreigners, fugitives from justice, the mute and the mad, servants and other such individuals are to be excluded.³ In the ideal aristocracy, again without the slightest justification, the same people are stripped of the right to present their candidacy for the assembly of patricians;⁴ if the mute and the mad were no longer mentioned, we must allow that this was undoubtedly an oversight. As for the ideal democracy, which, however, we were told would be studied in the *broadest possible* form, the only thing we ultimately learn about it is that the same exclusions are maintained more or less as such;⁵ the exclusion of women and children is added, but it is clear enough that it was implicit in the two preceding constitutions. Spinoza, this time, agrees at last to explain himself; he even does so rather extensively concerning women.⁶ But his explanation seems at first so weak, so flat, exhibiting an empiricism and a conformism so foreign to the usual

¹ [Originally published as 'Femmes et serviteurs dans la démocratie spinoziste', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 167, 2 (1977): 181–200; republished in Matheron 1986, 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² TP VII, 4; CWS II, 546.

³ TP VI, 11; CWS II, 549.

⁴ TP VIII, 14; CWS II, 571.

⁵ TP XI, 3; CWS II, 602–3.

⁶ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

inspiration of the doctrine, that one believes one understands both why he had waited so long to give us an explanation and why he was unable to continue: bad conscience, one might be tempted to think; a confused feeling of an irreducible discordance between what the principles would have made it possible to rigorously deduce, and the extra-philosophical necessities that imposed the obligation to deduce them. The situation is banal, and many have become accustomed to it; at least Spinoza had the integrity to stop there and just die!

Perhaps. But perhaps it would also be worth not deciding so quickly, on Spinoza's behalf, on what is implied in the principles of his politics. That his politics, in a sense, is of a fundamentally democratic inspiration, is hardly contestable; but the whole question is of knowing *in what sense*. Nobody would dispute that Spinoza, like anybody else, accepts and justifies certain 'prejudices' whose ideological function is obvious; but he justifies them *with reasons* that he lays out for us, and we would first have to examine them in and for themselves, by taking them seriously, without affirming at the outset their theoretical inconsistency under the pretext that their pragmatic motivations are flagrant. And what if these reasons, after being examined, turn out to be compatible with, in the true sense, and furthermore corroborated by, the very distinctive Spinozist theory of democracy? What if they contributed, in their own way, to make its meaning even clearer to us? The paradox, under those conditions, would disappear. Not, of course, the uneasiness that one might detect behind the pen of the philosopher; but then we would have to assign another origin to it.

The problem, to be sure, hardly arises in the case of children, fugitives from justice, the mad and foreigners: things are quite clear concerning all of them. Let us allow, if we may, that the exclusion of the mute is unimportant; undoubtedly Spinoza sees them as simple-minded. That leaves women and servants: here the stakes are considerable, since taken together, they constitute the majority of the native adult and 'normal' population of any State whatsoever. Let us begin with the latter, whose case is theoretically simpler, but whose identification poses a problem.

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Let us first of all justify the use of the word 'servants'. The term that is used in Chapter XI of the *TP* is *servos*. But *servus*, in the seventeenth century, had a very broad meaning: not only did it indifferently designate a slave or a serf, but it was often applied to still other categories. Hobbes, in the Latin version of *Leviathan*, uses it to render the English word *servant*, which he clearly distinguishes from *slave*, without, however, this latter word having an exact

Latin equivalent;⁷ in *De Cive*, the correspondence is even more precise: the *servi* were considered as a genus of which the *ergastuli* (defined in exactly the same way as *slaves* in *Leviathan*) constituted only a species, and this distinction was the object of a comparison with the French distinction between ‘*serviteur* [servant], and *serf*, or *esclave* [slave]’.⁸ Grotius, for his part, to take another author that Spinoza knew well, tends to put all of the possible forms of ‘servitude’ under the same rubric: besides ‘perfect servitude’, which characterises slaves in the Roman sense, and which he opposes to the condition of ‘journeymen’ whose freedom comes with the price of uncertainty with respect to the future,⁹ he haphazardly links septennial Hebrew slavery to ‘imperfect servitude’, the situation of ‘labourers who were attached to lands that were given to them’, that of ‘men of mortmain’ and that of ‘mercenaries or waged men’;¹⁰ in this latter group, in order to clearly highlight the

⁷ L XX, 10; 130 (see note 60, below).

⁸ *De Cive* VIII, 2; 103. The English distinction and the Latin distinction, in Hobbes, are thus not exactly equivalent. In the respective texts, *ergastuli* and *slaves* designate imprisoned or enchained slaves. *Servants*, which are opposed to *slaves*, must then include both physically ‘free’ Roman slaves, serfs, and those that we commonly call *servants* in England in the seventeenth century, that is to say wage-labourers in general (see note 24, below): Chapter XX of *Leviathan*, which only studies the origin of the situation of *servants* in the state of nature, leaves entirely intact the question of their status in civil society, which can be infinitely variable to the extent that it depends on the will of the sovereign; and it is difficult to think that Hobbes had not chosen this word intentionally. *Servi*, by contrast, is the genus common to *servants* and *slaves*. As for the French distinction as Hobbes interprets it, the only thing that is certain is that it resembles the Latin by the distinction that it establishes between a generic term and two specific terms: ‘servant’, in any case, indeed seems to be equivalent to *servus*.

⁹ Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II, Chapter V, XXVII.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, Chapter V, XXX. Whereas perfect servitude is lifelong and limited only by natural law (if one enters into it following a pact, the pact does not impose any restriction on the power of the master), imperfect servitude is that which is only ‘for a time, or under certain conditions, or for certain things’ (*ibid.*); but, internal to these limits, it is servitude all the same, since it indeed implies the obligation to obey without discussion any and all orders that the master might subsequently give. Slavery in general has a broader extension than perfect servitude (see the Hebrew slaves), but one less than than imperfect servitude; it characterises those who, in exchange for their labour, receive nothing but ‘food and other things necessary for life’ (see *ibid.*, II, Chapter V, XXVII): they receive neither land, unlike serfs and men of mortmain, nor money, unlike ‘mercenaries’. But this difference in the mode of remuneration is secondary: it is not on this basis that Grotius founds his classification. As for the condition of ‘journeymen’, Grotius does not specify whether or not it is linked to imperfect servitude: journeymen are indeed, it seems, ‘mercenaries’, bound by a contract of ‘louage de peine’ (see *ibid.*, II, Chapter XII, XVIII–XIX); but perhaps they are distinguished from

fluidity of such transactions, he specified that the English apprentices, during the time of their apprenticeship, were hardly different than slaves properly speaking.¹¹ Locke noticed an insurmountable gulf between these two kinds of dependence:¹² the ‘bourgeoisie’ of the end of the century will begin to emphasise the total freedom of their employees; but those of the previous generations experienced, so it seems, a certain pride in imagining a relation of the seigniorial type between themselves and their servants, which their Latin culture predisposed them to have a hard time distinguishing from a relation of masters to slaves.¹³ Taking this context into account, nothing would rule out Spinoza’s *servi* from having the same extension as Hobbes’, or his *servants*, nor would it rule out that Spinoza’s *servi* might include all those subjected to one or the other of the ‘servitudes’ of Grotius – that is to say, precisely, all of the ‘servants’ in the French sense.

There is nothing more to be said, one might think. Certainly. But let us now consider the terminology used by Spinoza in the chapters that treat monarchy and aristocracy. Among adult natives – those of sound mind, ‘honest’, and of the masculine sex – two kinds of individuals are stripped of any possibility of participating in power [*pouvoir*]. The first category is designated in Chapter VI by the word *famuli*,¹⁴ which nobody will object might mean ‘servants’, often with the added nuance of ‘domestic’, without the juridical status of slave being necessarily implied therein; this word will come to be substituted in Chapter VIII by the expression *qui . . . serviunt*,¹⁵

them by the fact that journeymen are engaged in labour so limited, not only in terms of its time, but even in terms of its content, that their contract does not leave room for any indeterminacy that might leave room for subsequent orders. In the latter case, actually, they would not obey their employers any more than a debtor would obey a creditor after being discharged. But this connection is very hazy.

¹¹ Ibid., II, Chapter V, XXX, 1, note 7.

¹² Locke 2008: 284–5.

¹³ This no doubt is what enabled Charron, for example, to write first of all that slavery, which had been almost entirely eliminated from our countries around the year 1200, had in his day reappeared massively insofar as a ceaselessly growing number of beggars and vagabonds were obliged to sell themselves in order to survive (Charron, *De la sagesse*, Book I, Chapter XLIII, 6–8); and then to affirm later on that ‘servants’ were ‘principally of three kinds’: slaves, who we are told about even though they practically no longer existed at the time in our countries, ‘valets and servants’ (*sic*), and finally ‘mercenaries’ (ibid., Book III, Chapter XV)! . . . From one chapter to another, as we can see, the generic and specific terms are switched; and at the same time, in each of these two chapters, the generic term retains its specific meaning.

¹⁴ TP VI, 11; CWS II, 535.

¹⁵ TP VIII, 14; CWS II, 571.

which indicates 'servitude' in general as much as 'slavery' in particular. The second category is characterised in exactly the same way in the two chapters: it covers all of those who *servili aliquo officio vitam sustentant*.¹⁶ Chapter VI, to be sure, might lead us to think that we have here a simple explanation of *famuli*; but, in Chapter VIII, the word *denique* clears up any ambiguity: it is indeed a matter of another group, composed of individuals who, without us being able to say absolutely that they 'serve', nevertheless live a 'servile' employment.

Who are these? Regrettably here, a small mistake of inattention has been piously transmitted through generations of translators. It is agreed that for Spinoza, in Paragraph 14 of Chapter VIII, wine sellers and pubowners (*Ænopolae et Cerevisarii*) fall under this second rubric. If we proceed in this way, we no doubt interpret before reading: we accept as going without saying that Spinoza, in an Aristotelian way, understands by *servili aliquo officio* any occupation whose 'baseness' tends to prevent those who perform it from attaining the virtues required by those qualified as citizens, and we conclude quite logically that he must refuse citizenship to those who live by the exploitation of a vice. But the Latin text, without the slightest equivocation, says exactly the opposite. Spinoza had just claimed that a hereditary patriciate was *in principle* incompatible with the aristocratic form of government, under which the supreme assembly must itself choose, in a completely sovereign way, its own members, but there did not exist any means from preventing the patricians from co-opting *in fact* their children or their blood relatives. Spinoza then adds that the regime will nevertheless be able to preserve its nature if this state of affairs is not made official by law and if the rest of the population (*reliqui*) is not excluded. A long parenthesis indicates at the same time *who* exactly we must understand by these *reliqui*: those who will be able to pose their candidacy to the assembly are all those, but only those, who are born in the State, speak the native language, are not married to foreigners, are not disreputable ('by whatever crime', *TP VI*, 11 adds), do not 'serve', and finally (*denique*) do not make their living in some servile occupation; and Spinoza immediately adds, '... among which are to be numbered wine sellers and pubowners'.¹⁷ Things are thus clear: wine

¹⁶ See the two previous notes.

¹⁷ 'Verum, modo id nullo expresso jure obtineant, nec reliqui (qui scilicet in imperio nati sunt, et patrio sermone utuntur, nec uxorem peregrinam habent, nec infames sunt, nec serviunt, nec denique servili aliquo officio vitam sustentant, inter quos etiam Ænopolae et Cerevisarii numerandi sunt) excludantur, retinebitur, nihilominus imperii forma . . .' (*TP VIII*, 14; *G III*, 330). The *quos of inter quos*, being in the masculine plural, can have no other antecedent than *reliqui*; or, if one prefers, the expression

sellers and pubowners (as though Spinoza were saying: ‘yes, even them’) also figure *among those* who fulfil the required conditions; they too, whatever we might think of the ‘morally’ questionable character of their profession, must be included among those who *do not make their living* in a servile occupation. If Spinoza had felt the need to clarify this, was it not in order to highlight that the expression *servili aliquo officio* did not have any ethical connotation here?

It remains to be seen what it positively denotes. But once this obstacle to understanding the text is removed, the principle of the solution becomes very simple. A condition has something ‘servile’ about it when, without it being confused with some employment occupied by those who ‘serve’, nonetheless resembles the latter in some particular aspect. But which? It cannot be a matter, as we have just seen, of *the nature of the activity performed*, no matter how ‘degrading’ it is: if the sale of alcoholic beverages does not constitute a handicap, then with even more reason the same will apply for the practice of ‘mechanical arts’. Nor is it any longer a matter of *poverty* taken in itself; since, in the army of the Spinozist monarchy, which is nevertheless composed exclusively of citizens,¹⁸ a payment will be made in wartime to those *qui quotidiano opere vitam sustentant*;¹⁹ this indeed implies at least the possible existence of citizens who, lacking sufficient reserves and servants

qui scilicet . . . vitam sustentant is its explication. The typical translation, which is in fact a rectification of the letter of the text in the name of what one *assumes* is its true meaning (in which case Spinoza would have expressed himself poorly), returns on the contrary to giving the singular neutral *servili aliquo officio* as the antecedent to *quos*. [To Matheron’s point, all of the major translations of this passage into English incorrectly class winesellers and pubowners as ‘servile occupations’. Curley: ‘However, provided that they don’t maintain this by an explicit law, and provided the rest are not excluded – that is, those who have been born in the state, use the native language, don’t have a foreign wife, aren’t disreputable or servile, and don’t make their living in some servile occupation (among which are to be numbered winesellers and pubowners, and others of this kind) . . .’ (CWS II, 571). Shirley: ‘However, provided that they do not claim this privilege by express law and that the others are not excluded (I mean those who are born within the state, speak the mother tongue, have not married a foreign wife, are not of ill-fame or servants, and do not gain their livelihood by some menial occupation, among whom are also to be reckoned wine-shop keepers, tapsters, and the like) . . .’ (Spinoza 2002: 728–9). Elwes: ‘But provided that they hold that right by no express law, and that the rest (I mean, such as are born within the dominion, and use the vulgar tongue, and have not a foreign wife, and are not infamous, nor servants, nor earning their living by any servile trade, among which are to be reckoned those of a wine-merchant, or brewer) are not excluded . . .’ (Spinoza 1951: 352).]

¹⁸ TP VI, 10; CWS II, 535.

¹⁹ TP VI, 31; CWS II, 541.

capable of replacing them in their absence, lose all means of subsistence when they cease to work with their own hands day to day. There then remains only one basis of resemblance, and consequently of exclusion: the state of *dependency with respect to an employer*, whatever its degree or form. Otherwise, what else could be imagined?

On the basis of this, all subdivisions are possible, and are ultimately immaterial. We could, for example, reserve *famuli* and *qui . . . serviunt* for slaves only; not for serfs, to be sure, since their existence is just as impossible in the ideal monarchy, where land is nationalised and rented out to individuals by the State,²⁰ as in the ideal aristocracy where each peasant is the owner of their own land;²¹ the 'servile' jobs would then be waged jobs: those done by Grotius' 'mercenaries or waged labourers'.²² But this is implausible if we recall that Spinoza envisioned models of constitutions suitable for Holland, where slavery was forbidden. We could also, in conformity with the rather frequent usage of *famuli*, understand by this word and by *qui . . . serviunt* domestic servants in the strict sense; *servilia officia*, in that case, would be performed by other waged labourers.²³ Again, we could see in *famuli* and *qui . . . serviunt* all those who, domestic or not, depend in a stable way on a single master, and attribute the *servilia officia* to Grotius' 'journeymen', of which it is indeed difficult to say whether or not this author identified their contract of 'louage de peine' with an imperfect servitude.²⁴ Finally we could extend *famuli* and *qui . . . serviunt* to the totality of waged labourers, whether or not they are day labourers, provided that they are so without any ambiguity, and make the *servilia officia* correspond to the whole gamut of intermediary situations between that of the servant and that of the small landowner: employees who have resources other than their wages, artisans who have been cut off from the merchant who advances them their raw materials, domestic workers, etc. In any event, whatever the extension of the first class may be, its complement will be such that the total class of the excluded will remain the same in every case. One point is thus clearly established: in Spinozist monarchy and aristocracy, all of the independent landowners will be able to lay claim to the dignity of citizens (without, to be sure, that being sufficient to achieve it under the second of these two

²⁰ TP VI, 12; CWS II, 535–6.

²¹ TP VIII, 10; CWS II, 569.

²² See note 10, above.

²³ One would then again come across the distinction made by Charron between 'valets and servants' and 'mercenaries' (see note 13, above).

²⁴ See note 10, above.

regimes), whether they are rich or poor and whatever their profession; by contrast, all of the *servants* in the everyday sense of the English word, that is, all waged labourers without exception,²⁵ will be legally excluded, even if they are so only indirectly or partially.

This still does not prove, it will again be said, that the same thing would apply in Spinozist democracy. Can we not imagine that this regime, unlike the other two, would only rule out slaves and serfs? Now that, truth be told, would be rather strange: if serfdom is impossible in monarchy and in aristocracy, it is hard to see by which specific characteristic democracy would lend itself to its reappearance; as for slavery, what was said above of its impossibility applies here as well. But might this not be a matter of a mere theoretical hypothesis ('supposing that there were slaves', etc.)? But no. For this exclusion, in Chapter XI, is the object of a very precise argument, even if it is very elliptical; and this argument, as we will see, is *just as valid for servants in the broad sense*, whose elimination under the two other regimes had not until now been given any justification. If the *servi* of democracy had a narrower extension than the 'servants' of monarchy and aristocracy, nothing would then be able to account for this difference: we would have to admit that the alleged reason provided in Chapter XI, though it finally provides the key (nowhere to be found elsewhere in the *Treatise*) to what was said in Chapters VI and VIII, is however insufficient, due to its being overly general, to explain what it was explicitly intended to explain in Chapter XI itself! Everything becomes clear, by contrast, if the two groups are identical. How can one not conclude that Spinozist democracy will also refuse citizenship to the whole set of waged labourers?

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The argument invoked could not in fact be more clear: the only ones who can aspire to citizenship are those who, submitted only to the laws of the State, remain, for the rest (*in reliquis*), *sui juris*.²⁶ Does this last expression have here, as one might initially think, the same sense as it did in Roman law? If that were the case, the explanation would not be an explanation at all; it would amount to saying that we must refuse all civic right to those whose legal status implies, among other things, that they do not enjoy any civic rights; nothing would then stop us, as Spinoza would say a bit later

²⁵ 'The term servant in seventeenth-century England meant anyone who worked for an employer or wages, whether the wages were by piece-rates or time-rates, and whether hired by the day or week by the year' (Macpherson 1962: 282).

²⁶ TP XI, 3; CWS II, 602–3.

regarding women,²⁷ from admitting anybody: it would suffice to modify the positive laws. In the absence of any indication to the contrary, however, this tautological interpretation would remain the only possible one. But *there is*, precisely, an indication to the contrary. For Spinoza himself, in Chapter II, had taken the precaution of defining the formulation that he would later use in Chapter XI: a human being is *sui juris*, he declared, insofar as they are capable of fending off every force, to avenge, at their discretion, injuries done to them, and, absolutely speaking, to live in a way that seems good to them; by contrast, whoever is ‘under the other persons’ power’ is *alterius juris*.²⁸ And he immediately clarifies: to have somebody under one’s power is either to have tied the person up or to have imprisoned them (a particular case of Hobbes’ slaves),²⁹ or else to have instilled fear in them, or else to have bound them by means of a benefit that disposes them to obey because they hope to continue to enjoy this very benefit repeatedly.³⁰ Since right is resolved in the conjunction of desire and power [*pouvoir*],³¹ it was thus a matter of course to transpose the classical notions inherited from Roman jurists into terms of effective power [*puissance*]. Now, there is often a considerable gap between what positive laws formally authorise and what relations of force truly allow. In the state of nature, where each is perpetually afraid of the rest, nobody can be said to be *sui juris*.³² In political society, nobody is ever entirely *sui juris*, since the power [*puissance*] of the collectivity is an instrument of irresistible dissuasion. But, as for whatever the State neither prescribes nor forbids (‘for the rest’, Spinoza says here), individual situations may vary completely: those who actually have the means to make decisions whose content is not dictated to them by the particular will of anybody else, remain *sui juris* in the sphere where common law does not oblige anything; others, by contrast, do not have these means and are not *sui juris* in any relation. Now servants, *in the broadest sense of the word*, clearly belong to this latter case: deprived of personal property, they risk losing all possibility of subsistence if they displease their employers. And this is the case no matter what their status in civil law [*droit civil*]: even if the law [*loi*] does not establish any punishment for the ‘free’ wage labourer who disobeys their patron

²⁷ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603. [Matheron indicates here that we refer to the second sentence: ‘... then no reason compels us to exclude women from rule’.]

²⁸ TP II, 9; CWS II, 511.

²⁹ [‘slaves’ in English in the original.]

³⁰ TP II, 10; CWS II, 512.

³¹ TP II, 4, 5, and 8; CWS II, 508 and 501–11. This point is precisely recalled in XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

³² TP II, 15; CWS II, 513–14.

(which was incidentally not always true in the seventeenth century), they will obey because fear and hope will constrain them to do so. From the fact of this personal dependence, we must then presume that servants always comport themselves, including when they publicly express their opinion on public affairs, as if they did not have any will of their own. And this is why, even in democracy, they will not participate in power [*pouvoir*]: not that they are ‘unworthy’, nor because they might be any less capable than others by nature; rather, given their condition, to count their voices would amount to counting the voices of their masters multiple times – which, precisely, would be peak anti-democracy.

Let us be clear on Spinoza’s position. Democratism, for Spinoza, is the means present everywhere, including in ideal monarchy and aristocracy, for ensuring the self-regulation of the social body.³³ But it is never, even in democracy, an end in itself. The end of politics as such is the preservation of the State. In order for this to be achieved, the problem is of putting in place an institutional system that, by necessarily determining subjects to accept the decisions of the leaders and the leaders to make decisions that are accepted by the subjects, will perpetually reproduce itself.³⁴ This implies, among other things, that this system ensures a rather precise correspondence between the overall result of the desires of those governing and those of the population as a whole.³⁵ This correspondence will be obtained, either if those governing come from all of the social categories that are able to act according to their own will (monarchy),³⁶ or at least if they are numerous enough that a rational common denominator can be drawn from their debates (aristocracy).³⁷ If this is not the case, the discontent produced by unpopular measures,³⁸ which will always be taken by an oligarchy whose demands will be opposed to those of the masses, will always enable one of the factions, whose concerns will have been made possible by the very narrowness of the group in charge, to seize all power [*pouvoir*].³⁹ It is in this way, and only in this way, that Spinoza considers the question: the usage of the means and the limits of this usage are strictly determined by the ends.

³³ On Spinoza’s ‘cybernetic’ politics, see Matheron [1969] 1988: 287–514.

³⁴ See *TP* I, 6; *CWS* II, 506. *TP* V, 2; *CWS* II, 529. *TP* VI, 3; *CWS* II, 532–3.

³⁵ *TP* VII, 4; *CWS* II, 546.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *TP* VIII, 6; *CWS* II, 567. In democracy, the two methods would coincide by definition.

³⁸ *TP* III, 9; *CWS* II, 521. *TP* IV, 4; *CWS* II, 526–7.

³⁹ *TP* VIII, 12; *CWS* II, 570. And, to be sure, this will begin again with the new power [*pouvoir*], whatever its form may be; a so-called ‘absolute’ monarchy is only ever a disguised oligarchy (*TP* VI, 5; *CWS* II, 533–4).

We can thus rather easily see, within the framework of this problematic, how we are to assess the potential extension of citizenship to those who are not *sui juris*. It would be, first and foremost, *pointless*:⁴⁰ servants, as such, are not to be feared; if they become agitated it is because their masters agitate them, but they will only ever constitute a mass passed around in conflicts between independent landowners; so it is the latter, and they alone, that must be satisfied and held in check. This measure, on the other hand, would remain *inefficient*: servants voting like their masters or for their masters would not result in any real enlargement of the popular basis of power [*pouvoir*]. But above all, it would be *very harmful* because of the long-term consequences it would produce. The reason being that it would amount, by giving $n+1$ voices to whomever had n servants at their disposal, to introducing inequality among property owners themselves. Not that this would be 'unjust' in itself, that is not the question; but we can easily see, in the two constitutions proposed by Spinoza, the implacable mechanism by which this initial disequilibrium would end up, in the long run, provoking the system to crumble. In monarchy, where the council members are named by the king at a rate of five (or four, or three) per *familia*,⁴¹ only their very rapid turnover prevents them, for lack of time, from becoming corrupted by the sovereign;⁴² but this would no longer hold if certain among them, once relieved of their duty, were to be replaced by their own servants: the pressure from the sovereign could then be continuously exercised, and the path would be open to despotism – with the at least passive approval of a people irritated by the bad government of this *de facto* oligarchy. In aristocracy, there must be at least 5,000 patricians,⁴³ because a medium-sized State needs to be actually governed by at least 100 men, and in any random group of randomly chosen individuals, only 2 per cent will have the required aptitude to become true *leaders*;⁴⁴ but if the sovereign assembly were able to welcome servants into its ranks, each would strive to elect those of their own kind in order to increase their influence,⁴⁵ and soon enough, it would no longer *truly* have 5,000 members: since the real leaders would then be very small in number (2 per cent of only those who have the most wage labourers) their rivalries would

⁴⁰ *Useless, inefficient, harmful*: this is how Spinoza often characterises measures whose rejection he encourages. (See *TTP* XX; CWS II, 344–54. *TP* X, 5; CWS II, 599.)

⁴¹ *TP* VI, 15; CWS II, 536.

⁴² *TP* VII, 13; CWS II, 550.

⁴³ *TP* VIII, 2; CWS II, 565–6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* ['leaders' in English in the original.]

⁴⁵ See *TP* VII, 4 in *fine*; CWS II, 546. *TP* XI, 2 in *fine*; CWS II, 602.

open the door to monarchy⁴⁶ at the very moment that the people, upset over the abuses that this very narrow minority would inevitably commit, would be ready to lend their support to any usurper whatsoever. In democracy, finally, it is plausible that the same process would take place: those who would have the most servants would always end up, perfectly 'legally' since they would automatically benefit from being a majority, establishing an aristocracy for their own benefit. Thus, far from this posing a problem for it, Spinoza's democratism, like that of the English Levellers,⁴⁷ requires the exclusion of waged labourers.

This argument, to be sure, presupposes the existence of servants incapable of resisting the pressure of their employers. But is it possible to imagine them not existing? That would imply, either a society composed uniquely of small landowners, or else a community of goods. Now, if the State can in fact act on the distribution of goods, it is only within certain limits. It is entirely the master of *landed property*; for nobody is able to hide the land that they cultivate or take it with them in the case of flight, nor can anybody occupy it with any security without the protection of public powers;⁴⁸ nothing prevents the State from modifying as it sees fit what it alone makes possible, whether by redistributing⁴⁹ the land equally or by nationalising it⁵⁰ – provided, to be sure, that the institutional system on the whole is compatible with the solution adopted.⁵¹ Its hold on *mobile goods*, by contrast, is much weaker: money and tools are easily hidden and, if police raids are multiplied, their possessors would emigrate, taking these goods with them in their baggage.⁵² As for stamping out the very desire for possession in minds, no external authority is capable of doing that: as long as human beings remain subject to their passions, they will necessarily attach themselves to things,⁵³ the particular object that they covet being the only thing that can change. If they were all to become reasonable, by contrast, the State would disappear:⁵⁴ the laws of a Utopian country are designed only for those who no longer need

⁴⁶ See *TP VIII*, 12; *CWS II*, 570.

⁴⁷ See Macpherson 1962: 107–59.

⁴⁸ *TP VII*, 19; *CWS II*, 553.

⁴⁹ As in theocracy (see *TTP XVII*, 85–90; *CWS II*, 315–16; *G III*, 216).

⁵⁰ *TP VI*, 12; *CWS II*, 535–6.

⁵¹ This excludes these two measures for aristocracy in which, since the property of land must be both private and alienable, the maintenance of equality is not absolutely guaranteed (see *TP VIII*, 10; *CWS II*, 569).

⁵² See *TP VIII*, 10; *CWS II*, 569.

⁵³ See *Ethics III*, 12 and 13 Schol.; *CWS I*, 502.

⁵⁴ See *TTP V*, 16–21; *CWS II*, 143–4; *G III*, 73.

laws.⁵⁵ It is impossible, consequently, to eliminate the market economy once it exists; it is even preferable to stimulate it as much as possible, since again it is commerce that best unites human beings subject to passions, whereas land divides them.⁵⁶ But the market economy comes at a cost: those who will have lost everything in competition will have to 'rent out their hard work' in order to survive; and their employers, aspiring, like anybody else, to impose their own views on others,⁵⁷ will fully make use of the means of exerting pressure that they have at their disposal towards this end.

Clearly the question would have been posed differently if Spinoza had foreseen the industrial revolution and its effects: since large factories can be expropriated from their owners because, just like the land, they cannot be hidden or transported, workers are more able to resist collectively due to their concentration therein. Perhaps, taking into account these new relations of force, he might have conceived of a 'proletarian' monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy! . . . But we cannot reproach him for this lack of imagination. His constitutions are thus 'bourgeois'. It is nonetheless remarkable, even in Holland, that they explicitly eliminate all remnants of feudalism; and that this follows from the system.

* * *

It is with respect to this same problematic that the necessity of excluding women is affirmed. But their case, in spite of everything, is slightly different than that of servants. Once the latter were identified, which was not so easy, and once we recalled the definition of persons *sui juris*, it followed analytically that it did not apply to them; the political consequences of their potential promotion thus became clear. The identification of women, by contrast, is immediate. But it is not all obvious that they would be condemned to remain always *alterius juris*, even if the State one day decided to grant them a legal status identical to that of men.⁵⁸ Accepting that this is the case, it is hard to see, in monogamous countries, what serious disequilibrium would follow from their admission. These two questions thus require special treatment.

The first is examined in a polemical context. Whereas Grotius, in a totally naïve way, affirmed as self-evident the natural superiority of the masculine

⁵⁵ TP I, 1; CWS II, 503–4.

⁵⁶ TP VII, 8; CWS II, 548.

⁵⁷ *Ethics* III, 31 Cor. and Schol.; CWS I, 512.

⁵⁸ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 604. [Matheron here specifies the first two sentences: 'But perhaps someone will ask whether women are under the power of their husbands by nature or by custom. If this happened only by custom, then no reason compels to exclude women from rule.']

sex,⁵⁹ Hobbes radically disputed it: if women, he declared, must obey their husbands in the majority of our civil societies, it is because the laws are generally made by men; again, this is not absolutely universal, since there was at least the Amazonian kingdom; but nature, in any case, has nothing to do with it: neither of the two sexes, physically or mentally, really prevails over the other.⁶⁰ Spinoza refrains from directly refuting this thesis by way of considerations on the nature of femininity. He even clarifies, going one step further than the author of *Leviathan*, that such considerations would be entirely irrelevant: in a hypothetical society where women would dominate men, he writes, men would be raised in such a way so as to remain intellectually inferior (*ita educarentur, ut ingenio minus possent*);⁶¹ this indeed implies that, in our real societies, the education of women is aimed at adapting them to a subordinate role that they have to play, and that the traditional inequalities attributed to nature thus come, by and large, from culture. It is impossible, consequently, to prove anything by placing oneself on the terrain of nature: in order to determine which of the observable handicaps truly belong to the essence of woman, we would have to know this essence, and Spinoza does not know it. So the question gets displaced: let us accept, he seems to say, that all of the observed examples of inferiority can be attributed to a cultural condition imposed by men; but how do we explain, precisely, that men, always and everywhere, are in such a position to impose it? For indeed men always and everywhere make the law,⁶² and not, as Hobbes said, only most of the time: the isolated case of the Amazonians is not significant, since they preemptively eliminated all competition by killing all of their male children;⁶³ the only ones that are to be taken into account are human groupings where the two sexes coexist *concorditer*,⁶⁴ and no exception to this rule is discernible. So where then does this come from? Hobbes does not ask himself this. Now, according to Spinoza, this brings us back to nature in a different way.

His reasoning here falls under knowledge of the second kind, or more precisely of that of the 'third mode' as it is defined in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: without knowing the essence of woman, he deduces one of its properties by the application of a universal truth to a particular case; and, in

⁵⁹ Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II, Chapter V, I and VIII.

⁶⁰ L XX, 4; 128. Spinoza, it should be recalled, would have read this work in the Latin edition of 1668 or 1670, as well as its 1667 Dutch translation.

⁶¹ TP XI, 4.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. Hobbes had said that the Amazonians had contractually abandoned their male children to neighbouring peoples (L, XX, 4; 129). Spinoza 'corrects' this passage!

⁶⁴ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

this application, he moves from effect to cause.⁶⁵ Moreover, he tells us, all things being equal, *animi fortitudo* and *ingenium* quite clearly constitute two advantages in the competition for power [*pouvoir*].⁶⁶ In reality, of course, all things are not equal: in each concrete situation, accidental circumstances play a role. But the more numerous and varied the cases are, the more the influence of these circumstances tends statistically to be cancelled out. If, under these conditions, nature had equally endowed men and women in *fortitudine* and *ingenio*, the many human societies known historically would be divided into three groups: those in which men dominate, those in which the two sexes have equal power, and those in which women would have the upper hand and would educate men in such a way so as to keep them in their position of inferiority.⁶⁷ Now, it is a fact that we do not know of a single example of these latter two kinds of relations. The falsity of this consequence thus leads to that of its antecedent: if women are always subjected to men, this can only come from their natural weakness.⁶⁸

Spinoza, without a doubt, was fully aware of the conditions of validity and the limits of his argument. Now, by accepting with him that the historical facts to which he had access were sufficiently numerous and independent of one another that the recourse to the universality of 'nature' can be made, what exactly does he establish? Not much, ultimately, even if it is crucial for his point. If the *ingenium* he speaks of here consists in certain 'intellectual' capacities, it can only be a matter of those among them that actually play a role in the struggle for domination: the capacity for treachery, for manipulation, etc. As for *fortitudo*, it clearly does not designate the Spinozist virtue of the same name,⁶⁹ which is not a natural quality; rather, it signifies, so it seems, a lesser disposition to fear and pity: 'womanly tears',⁷⁰ 'womanly compassion',⁷¹ all of this indeed diminishes the possibility of success in the pathway to power [*puissance*]. At most, and as was indicated moreover in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, this kind of reasoning only makes

⁶⁵ See *TdIE*, 18–20; CWS I, 12–14; G II, 10.

⁶⁶ *TP XI*, 4; CWS II, 603–4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ethics III*, 59 Schol.; CWS I, 529–30.

⁷⁰ '... lachrimis mulieribus' (*TTP Praef.*, 4; CWS II, 66; G III, 5). Translation modified. [Curley's translation is deflationary here and in the *Ethics* when he renders *mulieribus* as 'unmanly' rather than the more literal 'womanly'.]

⁷¹ '... muliebri misericordia' (*Ethics IV*, 37 Schol. 1; CWS I, 566). If this 'womanly compassion', as Spinoza says here, prevents the killing of animals, it must even more importantly prevent the killing of men. And so it is a handicap in fighting!

us know about the cause what we already knew about its effect:⁷² ‘there is something’⁷³ in the nature of women that disadvantages them in the game of relations of power [*pouvoir*] that condemns all of humankind to remain under the regime of passion. This is not much; and there is nothing particularly pejorative about it, since these relations themselves are in no way valorised. But from this ‘something’, everything follows: even by supposing a society having directly left the state of nature, on which no previous institution had left even the slightest trace, men would nevertheless dominate women in the majority of couples, since every human being subject to passions uses to the maximal extent the possibilities available to them to impose their own views on others;⁷⁴ after which, also necessarily, the slightly stronger sex would make use of its power [*pouvoir*] in order to amplify immoderately, by the intermediary of the education of which they would be in charge,⁷⁵ the small original inequality that would have made this very power possible; and this would soon be the case in *all* of the couples wherein women would see themselves reduced to an irreversible state of dependence that would oblige them to obey. There is no hope of escaping from this, other than by philosophical renewal. Until then, and whatever their legal status may be, women will remain *alterius juris*, just like servants.

But the second question then arises. Granting citizenship to women would also certainly be just as pointless and inefficient as granting it to servants, but would it truly be as harmful? Because ultimately, in the countries for which the *Political Treatise* was written, one only ever has one spouse at a time: if every man had two voices at his disposal instead of only one, no change would result in the equilibrium of forces. Would not the only consequence of this measure be the total disappearance of unmarried people? No, Spinoza responds, in the last lines he ever wrote. And this for two reasons in particular.

First, in general, every individual subject to passions necessarily overestimates what they love.⁷⁶ Now, under the regime of passion, it is by beauty alone that women attract men:⁷⁷ the beautiful being nothing other than what by sight arouses, in at least a part of our organism,⁷⁸ physiological reactions that are at least for a moment favourable to health,⁷⁹ this proposition

⁷² See *TdIE*, note f; CWS I, 13; G II, 10.

⁷³ ‘*Ergo datur aliquid*’ (*TdIE*, *ibid.*).

⁷⁴ *Ethics* III, 31 Cor. and Schol.; CWS I, 512.

⁷⁵ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 589–90.

⁷⁶ *Ethics* III, 26 and Schol.; CWS I, 508.

⁷⁷ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4. See *Ethics* IV, Cap. XIX; CWS I, 591.

⁷⁸ On *titillatio*, see *Ethics* III, 11 Schol.; CWS I, 500–1.

⁷⁹ *Ethics* I, App.; CWS I, 444–5; G II, 82.

can be considered analytic, or even tautological. Every man subject to passions thus tends to attribute to persons of the opposite sex an intelligence proportional to their beauty.⁸⁰ We see what would follow on the political level, even though Spinoza does not clarify this. In a general assembly where women would rule, the most beautiful among them would earn all of the male votes – and also, to be sure, those of the spouses of their admirers, who would have to vote, whether they wanted to or not, in the way their lords and masters demanded. These seductresses being themselves under the dependence of their husbands, every man whose wife had n admirers would then have $2(n+1)$ voices at their disposal, and this would trigger the mechanism described above: democracy would end up being transformed into an aristocracy of the possessors of pretty women (the very same people, no doubt, who would *also* have the most servants), aristocracy into monarchy, and monarchy into ordinary despotism.

But there is more. For, second, men cannot stand when the women they love accord the slightest favour to anybody else.⁸¹ Clearly jealousy is manifested equally in relations of power [*pouvoir*] among members of the same sex: whoever is attached to those like them, whatever the reason may be, demands from the other a reciprocal and exclusive attachment; if the man or woman who is the object of our affection becomes too friendly with a third person, we will thus hate both of them.⁸² But in the case of sexual jealousy, a supplementary cause is added to the previous one: we associate the image of a loved woman with that of the *pudenda* and the *excrementa* of our rival,⁸³ and, to the extent that the latter already horrifies us by itself,⁸⁴ our hate towards the unfaithful one and their accomplice finds itself reinforced up to the point of frenzy.⁸⁵ Without trying to psychoanalyse Spinoza, we can at least understand the way in which he would himself justify this bizarre claim: if we imagine that one gets joy from a thing that only one person can possess, as Spinoza previously demonstrated, we will do whatever it takes so that the other does not possess this thing;⁸⁶ now the woman, physically speaking, can only be possessed by one man at a time; if, consequently, a

⁸⁰ TP XI, 4; CWS II, 603–4. Of course one can laugh at the political importance that Spinoza attributes to this fact; but clearly he generalised what he had heard said about the role of women in the intrigues of court.

⁸¹ Ibid.; see previous note.

⁸² *Ethics* III, 33–5; CWS I, 513–14.

⁸³ *Ethics* III, 35 Schol.; CWS I, 514.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Ethics* III, 32; CWS I, 513.

male imagines another male taking part in a sexual activity, even though the female partner of the latter was of absolutely no interest to him beforehand, this representation will sadden him because it implies an enjoyment from which he will be excluded; thus, for any man, the idea of the sexual organ of any other man whatsoever will have something hateful about it; we thus see how, when we suspect the existence of physical exchange between the woman we love and somebody else, the hate that both inspire in us can be linked to the hate that was already awakened in us by this unbearable generic image, and which is the cumulative effect of this conjunction. Whence the paradox: if women are included in the assembly of citizens, seduction will become the political instrument *par excellence*, but those same individuals that will benefit from it, and that will necessarily want to benefit from it by ambition, will do everything they can to avenge with an extreme ferocity those to whom they will owe their victories;⁸⁷ as for the latter, for the same reason, they will ceaselessly tear themselves apart. Not only will the State degenerate, but the process will unfold under the most terrible conditions possible, with an anarchic violence in which the state of nature will show through. If men have nowhere ever agreed to grant to women a legal status formally identical to their own, it is no doubt due to their confused sense of this consequence.

Women, contrary to what is often said, did not inspire any particular revulsion in Spinoza. But what did disturb him was the severity of sexual conflicts among male humans. In order to avoid these antagonisms, which make the State ungovernable, the only means he saw, and it was certainly not with a happy heart that he proposed it, was to exclude from public life those who, indeed often despite themselves, are or could become the object of such conflicts. He would have excluded men for the same reason if they had been weaker; and if the two sexes happened to be equal, or if homosexuals did not constitute an insignificant minority, no doubt he would have thought that this complicated the question in a singular way! Such is his final word in matters of politics.

* * *

⁸⁷ On this internal contradiction of passional ambition in its most general form, see the Ovid citation in *Ethics* III, 31 Cor.; CWS I, 512. *Ethics* IV, 37 Schol. 1; CWS I, 565. [Matheron here specifies the second sentence: 'And since the greatest good men seek from an affect is often such that only one can possess it fully, those who love are not of one mind in their love – while they rejoice to sing the praises of the thing they love, they fear to be believed.']

But politics itself is never the final word for Spinoza: it is only a moment in his own philosophical project. Beyond the State, beyond even the most democratic State possible, the ideal model that he is fixated on⁸⁸ when it is a matter of interhuman relations is a community of sages free from all constraints, where each one, under the guidance of reason alone, would act spontaneously in concord with all others⁸⁹ without being submitted to any external authority.⁹⁰ Then, but only then, would every relation of dependence disappear: once ambition is transformed into the desire to make the truth known,⁹¹ nobody would seek any longer to dominate anybody else; as private property would lose all meaning for friends among whom 'all things are common',⁹² nobody would any longer need to bend to the conditions of others to ensure their subsistence. Clearly the entrance into such a community implies the individual access of each of its members into the kingdom of Reason: this is a slow and complex process that requires a considerable development of knowledge. But nothing prevents us from thinking that servants would be more capable of it than their masters: their inferiority is owed to their situation, not their nature. As for women, their natural handicap is entirely relative: they are disadvantaged in the struggle for power [*pouvoir*] just as a physically handicapped person is disadvantaged in a footrace, but that does not predetermine in any way the capacities that they might have for other things (including, since this is the heart of the question, intellectual speculation), and which would perhaps manifest themselves when this struggle came to an end. Because Spinoza imagined the possibility of sexual love founded principally, in men as in women (*utriusque, viri scilicet et foeminae*), on freedom of mind,⁹³ this indeed does not rule out the presence of women among the 'free men' of the *Ethics*.

And yet, we must get there by way of political mediation: the establishment of a Spinozist State, which would eliminate the causes of all antagonisms of the feudal type (struggles for the possession of land, religious intolerance, political oppression), is the *necessary* condition for the largest number of people to access the kingdom of Reason.⁹⁴ Now such a State, necessarily 'democratic' in the sense indicated above, would not be by definition any less repressive. Its sole function would be to establish an equilibrium

⁸⁸ See *Ethics* IV, Praef; CWS I, 545–6; G II, 208.

⁸⁹ *Ethics* IV, 18 Schol.; CWS I, 555–6.

⁹⁰ See note 54, above.

⁹¹ See *Ethics* V, 4 Schol., from *Ambitio* to *Pietas*; CWS I, 598–9.

⁹² *Ep.* XLIV [to Jarig Jelles]; CWS II, 391; G IV, 228.

⁹³ *Ethics* IV, Cap. 20; CWS I, 591.

⁹⁴ See Matheron [1969] 1988: 505–14.

of forces among individuals who, while awaiting the authentic liberation for which this would only be able to prepare them by submitting them to external conditioning, would only ever be 'bourgeois' and 'phallocratic', even in the best-case scenario, that is, if every feudal remnant had truly been eliminated from laws and mores. This is an unsurpassable horizon, at least as long as passional alienation continues to exist. Whence the indispensable side-lining of more than half of the adult population. But there is no guarantee that this necessary condition would be *sufficient*: one can only hope,⁹⁵ without being sure that the sacrifice will not be in vain. Spinoza's clear frustration in the final lines of the *Treatise* thus does not come from what he accepted as prejudices without any relation to his principles, but from what, in this precise way, was cruel in the consequences of his principles . . . Perhaps, in the end, there was indeed something there that stopped him in his tracks and killed him!

⁹⁵ On the role 'outside the system' of this hope in Spinoza, see Matheron 1971: 276.

The ‘Right of the Stronger’: Hobbes contra Spinoza

It is generally agreed that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the critique that he levels against the ‘right of the stronger’ in Chapter III of Book I of *The Social Contract*, is above all attacking Hobbes; sometimes it is added that he is also attacking Spinoza.¹ Now this is quite possible, even if it might address only a minor aspect of the question. But supposing that these are indeed the two adversaries that Rousseau targets, does this critique hit its mark?

Let us briefly recall in what this critique consists. Rousseau first of all indicates the aim pursued by those he is after, namely to secure an inviolable legitimacy for whomever actually possesses power [*pouvoir*]: ‘The stronger is never strong enough to be forever master, unless he transforms his force into right, and obedience into duty. Hence the right of the stronger.’² After this comes a brief characterisation of the thesis in question. On the one hand, the ‘right of the stronger’ is ‘apparently understood ironically’:³ since right must *add* something to the force of the stronger in order to reinforce it, it is important to declare that the two must not be confused, and even to condemn those who reduce the former to the latter; this is why one agrees that it is a ‘moral power [*pouvoir moral*]’. But, on the other hand, the ‘right of the stronger’ is ‘in principle really established’:⁴ since the objective is to justify existing powers [*pouvoirs*], it is important to ground the theory of right on principles from which one could always deduce, whatever the case may be, that whoever possesses force has, as if by chance, the right to it; and this

¹ [Originally published as ‘Le “droit du plus fort”: Hobbes contre Spinoza’, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* 175, 2 (1985): 259–73; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² Rousseau 2007: 43–4.

³ Rousseau 2007: 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*

amounts to including this conclusion, in a disguised form, in advance. In other words, the thesis of the 'right of the stronger' consists in two equally indispensable propositions, but of which only one is explicit, whereas the other only plays its role via the intermediary of its applications without ever being stated as such:

Proposition 1 (explicit): Right is a moral power [*pouvoir*] whose nature has nothing in common with that of a physical power [*pouvoir*].

Proposition 2 (implicit): Force gives right.

Finally, this thesis is made the object of a double refutation. A *direct refutation*, on the one hand, which consists quite simply in noting that Proposition 2 contradicts Proposition 1: 'Force is a physical power [*puissance*]; I fail to see what morality can result from its effects';⁵ for it is impossible, it will be readily agreed, that a cause could produce an effect whose nature has nothing in common with it. A *consequential refutation*, on the other hand, which consists in noting that Proposition 2 contradicts the intended aim, when it is conjoined with Proposition 1: 'as soon as it is force that makes right, the effect changes together with the cause; every force that overcomes a prior one assumes its right. Once one can disobey with impunity, one can do so legitimately';⁶ from this it follows that any revolt by subjects against their sovereign is justified on condition that it succeeds, and that consequently established powers never enjoy an inviolable legitimacy.

Now this double critique, in spite of appearances, applies neither to Hobbes nor to Spinoza. But, if it misses the mark in both cases, it is for diametrically opposed reasons.

Spinoza's case is quite simple: he explicitly denies Proposition 1 and explicitly affirms Proposition 2. Now his point of departure is indeed the concept of right that, since Suarez and Grotius, had become familiar to his contemporaries: right defined in subjective terms, that is, as a 'moral power [*pouvoir*]' or 'faculty'; on occasion he even uses the word 'faculty' in talking about it.⁷ But his ontology, which excludes all transcendence, gives him the means to identify this 'moral power' with *physical power* [*pouvoir*] pure and simple, that is, the capacity to produce real effects in nature. Having denied Proposition 1, he is thus shielded from Rousseau's direct refutation.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. Translation modified.

⁷ *TTP* XX, 1; *CWS* II, 344; *G* III, 239.

With regard to the consequential refutation, to the extent that he in no way pursues the aim that Rousseau seems to ascribe to him, he would surely not consider it an objection: it expresses a thesis that he makes his own, and whose statement, far from amounting to some kind of embarrassment for Spinoza, constitutes *the very point of departure* of his entire political problematic.

In Hobbes' case, it is just the opposite: he explicitly affirms Proposition 1, and makes no use, not even surreptitiously, of Proposition 2. He thus escapes both the direct refutation and the consequential refutation, meaning that he is able to pursue without contradiction the aim that Rousseau seems to ascribe to him, and which actually is his own. For Hobbes, too, right is a 'faculty': he, too, happens to use this word on the subject.⁸ And yet his ontology, if it does not exclude all transcendence (he believes in the God of his religion), forbids him from considering as real anything that is not corporeal. He must thus define right, one way or another, on the basis of a *corporeal fact*. But this corporeal fact, given his project, must *above all not* consist in a physical power [*pouvoir*]: in order for sovereigns to enjoy an inviolable legitimacy, so that we could not disobey them legitimately even if we managed to do so with impunity, it must on the contrary be independent of any possible modification of relations of force, and must consequently, somehow, be *independent of any fact*. Which, let's admit it, is not easy to conceive.

Hobbes did not manage this on his first attempt. In the *Elements of Law*⁹ and in *De Cive*,¹⁰ he accepts as self-evident *that one has the right* to do whatever is not contrary to reason, drawing the conclusion that *one always has* the right to seek to preserve their life because this is not contrary to reason; but he does not really try to define *what is* right in itself: he is only concerned with the question 'quid juris?', without raising the question 'quid jus?' It is only in *Leviathan* that he will treat this latter question, and at the price of enormous difficulties. But when he treats it, everything happens as though he had the intention of refuting in advance Spinoza's easily foreseeable solution. And this allows us to understand why Spinoza, expounding his own solution, proceeds as though he had the intention of refuting Hobbes.

These are the two points that we will take up here. We will thus begin by analysing the definition of right that Hobbes gives. In order to give an account of this using the principles (which he only expressed extremely

⁸ L XVIII, 2; 110.

⁹ Hobbes 2008: 78.

¹⁰ Hobbes 2003: 27. Here, it is true, Hobbes comes closer to the question 'quid juris?' But it is still only approximate.

laconically) and in the spirit of its author, we will try to understand it according to the method that Hobbes himself advocated, though without ever explicitly utilising it: deduction conceived as 'calculating the consequences of names',¹¹ whose rules, with regard to this question, Hobbes seems to have followed to the letter.

* * *

The definition of natural right, such as it is given in the first lines of Chapter XIV of *Leviathan*, actually includes three parts. The first part indicates that right is a species of the genus 'liberty', which itself is explicitly distinguished from the genus 'power'. The second part determines, internal to the genus 'liberty', the specific difference by which right in general is characterised. The third part, finally, concludes by determining, internal to the species 'right in general', the subspecies 'natural right'.

I. Right is a species of the genus 'liberty'. More exactly, it is a species, not of the genus 'liberty in general', but of the genus 'the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself'¹² – which is already much more precise. It remains to be seen what exactly each of these different terms signify, and why 'each', according to Hobbes, possess the liberty in question.

A. Concerning *power* [*pouvoir*], as a first approximation at least, there is no difficulty. Hobbes defined power, in its most general form, at the beginning of Chapter X: 'The power of a man (to take it universally) is his present means to obtain some future apparent good.'¹³ Power, so defined, can evidently be subdivided according to the different kinds of actions that it makes us capable of carrying out: the power to do action A, the power to do action B, etc. For the purposes of the following discussion, let us call '*p*' this *power to do something*. This amounts to positing, for any action *x*, the following definition:

(a) The power [*pouvoir*] *p* to do *x* = the set of present means whose actual utilisation, if it took place, would be equivalent to doing *x*.

From this we draw, tautologically:

(b) To utilise the power *p* to do *x* = to do *x*.

¹¹ L V, 2; 22–3.

¹² L XIV, 1; 79.

¹³ L X, 1; 50.

B. Concerning *liberty*, still in Chapter XIV, Hobbes defines it briefly *in its own sense* immediately after giving his definition of natural right: 'By LIBERTY is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external impediments.'¹⁴ But this somewhat elliptical definition will be explicated at length at the beginning of Chapter XXI. There, Hobbes tells us, one must distinguish between liberty in the proper sense, or natural liberty, and liberty in relation to laws. Liberty in the proper sense (the only sense, we argue, at stake in Chapter XIV), is quite simply *corporeal* liberty: to be free is to not be prevented from moving by any external body. From this, in this same Chapter XXI, we get a more precise definition of human liberty in general: 'a FREE-MAN is *he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he has a will to*'.¹⁵ We see that liberty is thus something entirely different than power: it is the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from doing what we want to do, assuming that we have the power to do it.¹⁶ But because it is rare that we are free to do everything, liberty in general must also be subdivided according to the different types of actions that we are not prevented from carrying out: the liberty to do action A, the liberty to do action B, etc. Let us call '*l*' this *liberty to do something*. Given (b), this amounts to positing, for any action *x*, the following definition:

(c) The liberty *l* to do *x* = the liberty *l* to utilise the power *p* to do *x* = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising at will the power *p* to do *x*, assuming that we have this power *p*.

Since the utilisation of the absence of an obstacle obviously consists in doing what this obstacle, if it existed, would have prevented us from doing, we can also posit, given (b):

(d) To utilise the liberty *l* to do *x* = to do *x* at will.

¹⁴ L XIV, 2; 79.

¹⁵ L XXI, 2; 136.

¹⁶ Hobbes, in Chapter XXI, only speaks of 'natural' powers [*pouvoirs*]: physical force and intelligence. He does not mention 'instrumental powers': reputation, wealth, possession of friends and servants. But since he specified, at the beginning of Chapter X, that the latter are obtained by means of the former, this amounts to the same thing. I am free to buy a chateau, for, if my intelligence enables me to acquire the financial means, nothing would stop me from buying one if I wanted to!

C. However, a difficulty arises here. On what grounds, in fact, can Hobbes affirm in Chapter XIV that *each*, under all circumstances, has the liberty 'to use his own power, as he will himself'?¹⁷ Does he not say, in Chapter XXI, by contrast, that the enchained human being is *not free*, to the extent that an insurmountable external obstacle prevents them from utilising at will, or 'as they will', the majority of their powers *p*? Does he not specify, at the beginning of that same Chapter XXI, that a healthy person tied to a bed, who retains the power *p* to get up, does not have the liberty *l* to do so, whereas the sick person confined to bed by a fever has the liberty *l* to get up but lacks the power *p* to do so? But Hobbes foresees this objection and, in Chapter XIV, responds: external obstacles, he tells us, 'may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him'.¹⁸ Let us unpack this overly elliptical explanation. The 'power to do what we will' is not simply power in general. If we subdivide this in the same way as in the previous cases, we obtain, once again, a multitude of elementary powers: the power to do action A if and when we want to do it (that is, at will), the power to do action B if and when we want to do it (that is, at will), etc. This *power to do something at will*, which is much more than a simple power *p*, we will call 'P'. And given (b), we define it as follows:

(e) The power [*pouvoir*] P to do *x* at will = the power P to utilise at will the power *p* to do *x* = the power *p* to do *x* accompanied by the liberty *l* to do *x*.

From (e), (b), and (d), we then deduce:

(f) To utilise the power P (to utilise at will the power *p* to do *x*) = to utilise both the power *p* to do *x* and the liberty *l* to do *x* = to do *x* voluntarily.¹⁹

¹⁷ L XIV, 1; 79.

¹⁸ L XIV, 2; 79. This passage disappeared from the Latin edition of *Leviathan*. This seems to provide circumstantial evidence in favour of Tricaud's hypothesis, which is very plausible for a number of other reasons, according to which a good part of the Latin text of *Leviathan* was drafted before the English version. (See Tricaud's translator's introduction to *Léviathan* [Hobbes (1971) 2005: xvi–xxix].) But even if one does not accept this hypothesis, the disappearance of this passage can be explained without much difficulty: Hobbes, justifiably thinking his explication much too elliptical, judged it a waste of time to expand on it in order to respond to an objection that nobody would even dream of raising. In this he would hardly have been mistaken.

¹⁹ Throughout this chapter, we will use parentheses in order to indicate, whenever it is not immediately obvious, that an expression must be taken as a single unit.

But wanting to do something is obviously the same thing as wanting to do it voluntarily. Thus, given (b) and (f),

(g) To want to utilise the power P (to utilise at will the power p to do x) = to want to utilise the power p to do x .

From which it follows that:

(h) To utilise at will the power P (to utilise at will the power p to do x) = to utilise at will the power p to do x .

We see what follows from this: in order for an external obstacle to prevent us from utilising at will the power P that we supposedly have (to do x at will), it would be necessary, given (h), that it prevents us from utilising at will a power p that, given (e) and (c), no external obstacle is supposed to prevent us from utilising at will – which is logically contradictory. Thus, in fact,

(i) For any action x , no external obstacle ever prevents us from utilising at will the power P (to utilise at will the power p to do x), assuming we have this power P.

D. Now, using the very terms of (i), we can, by a mechanical application of (c), easily define a particular subspecies of liberty: *the liberty to utilise at will the power [pouvoir] to do something*, which we will call 'L', and which is to power P what liberty l in general is to power p in general. In order to do this it is sufficient to replace, in our formula (c), 'l' with 'L', 'p' with 'P', and 'to do x ' with the expression that appears in parentheses in (i). This gives us:

(j) The liberty L (to utilise at will the power p to do x) = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising at will the power P (to utilise at will the power p to do x), assuming we have this power P.

From (i) and (j) we then deduce the following:

(k) For any action x , we always have (or each always has), under all circumstances, the liberty L to utilise at will the power p to do x .

In this way we have returned precisely to what Hobbes said at the beginning of his definition of natural right, and which is now totally justified: *each, under all circumstances, always has the liberty L to use as they will (or at*

will) *their own power*, that is, the set of all their powers p . And this would be blatantly false if it were a matter of a mere liberty l .

Hobbes has thus found *this fact independent of any fact*, which he needed in order to make it impossible to identify right and force. And he has found it without sacrificing anything of his ontology. For the fact of this liberty L is a purely physical fact, even if it is a negative one: the absence of any corporeal obstacle to the exercise of possible powers P , themselves defined by the conjunction of corporeal powers p and the absence of any corporeal obstacles to the exercise of those powers p . But this purely physical fact owes absolutely nothing to fluctuations of relations of force. An enchained prisoner has almost no liberties l , even if they have just as much power p as a free human being; a sick old beggar has almost no powers p , even if they have just as many liberties l as a great lord; neither of them, then, have almost any powers P ; but both, under all circumstances and for any action whatsoever, have the same liberty L as a king, for, *if ever* any powers P corresponding to any imaginable actions were placed at their disposal, nothing would prevent them from utilising them at will.

II. Right, however, is not liberty L in general. If right included all liberty, Hobbes' project would remain only half-realised: right would be distinguished from fact, but only in the sense that it would exceed it by encompassing it. We would indeed have, as was required, the right to do an infinity of things that we cannot really do: to escape, for example, if we were imprisoned. But, contrary to Hobbes' desire, whatever is in fact would also be by right, including any revolt by subjects against their sovereign. Everything, strictly speaking, would be by right: every fact, everything possible, and even everything impossible. Thus it is important, in order to avoid this consequence, to limit the extension of right by reserving this name for a very particular form of liberty L . This is the object of the second part of the definition of natural right, which actually applies for *right in general*. The latter, Hobbes tells us, is the liberty L that each has to use their own power (that is, their powers p) as they will, to be sure, but only 'for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life'.²⁰

Now since this is a definition, it does not, in principle, need to be justified. But, in order to prevent the reader from rejecting it, it is still appropriate to show that it corresponds to what is generally understood by 'right'. Hobbes only does so here allusively, by introducing the word 'nature' with its traditional connotations; they would suffice if, as he thinks, the account of his

²⁰ L XIV, 1; 79.

anthropology that he had already given was convincing. Everyone, or nearly everyone, in fact accepts quasi-axiomatically that it is legitimate to pursue the ends that our human nature assigns us (self-preservation, animal ends, the end of reason)²¹ and that it is illegitimate to contravene them. But, it is usually added, this only applies on condition that we subordinate inferior ends to superior ends, to which the former must be sacrificed if need be. Now, in Hobbes, teleology persists, but the hierarchy is inverted: animality (animal movements) is for the sake of self-preservation (vital movement),²² and reason is only an instrument of calculation in the service of animality. For anyone that agrees to apply the traditional axiom to the basics of Hobbes' anthropology, the preservation of our life must thus appear as the unique end that is unconditionally legitimate, and which it is unconditionally illegitimate to neglect. Why not, under these conditions, include this in the very definition of right? And if, then, one accepts defining right in subjective terms, as was typical ever since Grotius, that is, in terms of 'faculties' (the only two faculties that we originally have by nature being precisely, according to Grotius, ownership of our life and of our members, and freedom), the proposed formula is in no way surprising:

(1) Right = the liberty L to utilise our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of preserving our life.

And so, we are confronted with a new form of liberty L: that of utilising our powers p as we will *for the sake of an end* e . To what extent do our previous formulas apply here?

In order to establish that, let us first note something obvious: 'To utilise our powers p as we will for the sake of an end e ' never consists in utilising *all* of them for the sake of this end e , for not all actions go in that direction; it can only consist, in the best case, in utilising one or several of them, in knowing all those that we want to make use of because we consider them to be the most likely to contribute to the realisation of e , and in abstaining from using the rest. It might even consist, if none of our powers p satisfy this condition, in *not* utilising our powers p ; for 'to utilise them', unless we really twist our words, means utilising *at least one*. Whence the following formulas, whose second letters ('b' in '(mb)', etc.) refer to the letter of the prior formula that each puts to work:

²¹ See ST I-II q.94 a.2.

²² L VI; 27–35.

(mb₁) To utilise our powers p = to utilise at least one of our powers p (it doesn't matter which).

(mb₂) To want to utilise for the sake of e the power p to do x = to want, because we consider it likely (and more likely than the others) to contribute by its use to the realisation of e , to utilise the power p to do x .

(mb₃) To utilise our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of e = to utilise all those of our powers p that we want (to utilise for the sake of e) and to abstain from employing the others.

(mc) The liberty le = The liberty l to utilise our powers p for the sake of e = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of e .

(md) To utilise liberty le = to utilise our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of e .

(me) The power Pe = the power P to utilise our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of e = our powers p accompanied by liberty le .

From (me), (mb₁) and (md), (mb₃), and finally (mb₂), we draw the following:

(mf) To utilise the power Pe = to utilise both our powers p and liberty le = to utilise at least one of our powers p , which we want to utilise for the sake of e , without employing other powers = to utilise voluntarily at least one of our powers p , without utilising any others besides, which we consider as the most likely to contribute to the realisation of e .

If we clean up this latter expression a bit, we get:

(mg) To want to utilise the power Pe = to want both to utilise at least one of our powers p and only to utilise those whose use we consider to be the means best suited to e .

From this it follows that:

(mh) To utilise at will the power Pe = to utilise at will at least one of our powers p while at the same time considering its use to be the means best suited to e .

Now we have our powers p by definition. To say that we have the power Pe is thus the same as saying, given (me), that we have liberty le . But, given (mc), (mb₃), and (mb₂), to suppose that we have liberty le is the same as supposing that all those of our powers p whose use appears to us to be the means best suited to e (if there are any) are accompanied by liberty l , and that consequently, given (e), we would have the power P to utilise any of them at will. And this would be the case if we had the power P to utilise at will any one of *all* our powers p . We can thus posit, on the model of definition (j) and taking (mh) into account:

(mj) The liberty L to utilise our powers p as we will for the sake of e = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising at will the power Pe , assuming we have the power Pe = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising at will at least one of our powers p while at the same time considering its use to be the means best suited to e , assuming we have the power P to utilise it at will.

Now, on the one hand, if we have this latter power P , nothing would prevent us from utilising at will the corresponding power p , since they are identical. And on the other hand, whatever e is, nothing would prevent us from considering *at least one* of our powers p as being liable to contribute to the realisation of e by its use. For, under any circumstances, and even in the most desperate cases, there are always actions that can be considered as potentially contributing, in however small a way, to the realisation of a given end: even if none of our powers p are sufficient for us to attain that end, we at least have some power that makes it possible for us to move towards it, or to start moving towards it – or else, we no longer have a single power p left, and we are dead. It is thus certain that nothing would prevent us from utilising at will the power Pe if we had it. Consequently,

(n) For any end e , each always has the liberty L to utilise their powers p as they will for the sake of e .

And, in our particular case,

(o) Each always has the liberty L to utilise their powers p as they will for the sake of preserving their life.

From this it follows, given (l), that *each, under all circumstances, is always the subject of right*. But it also follows from this that we do not have, in principle, the right to do just anything.

In order to establish the latter point, let us first of all note that a right that we do not have the right to exercise at will is not really a right. Next let us note that to perform an action x is the same thing, in any case, as making a determinate usage of our powers p (consisting in putting only one of them to work: that of doing x) for the sake of a determinate end: that is, obtaining the result that this action x , by nature, directly and immediately produces (for example, someone's death, if the action is killing). So:

(p) The right to do x = the right to do x at will = the right to utilise at will our powers p for the sake of obtaining the direct result of action x .

Now we replace the word 'right' that appears in the last clause here with its definition as given in (l), we add (after 'life') the conjunction 'and' in order to respect natural language, and we suppress (after 'and') the unnecessary repetition of the expression 'to utilise at will our powers p ', and what we get is:

(q) The right to do x = the liberty L to utilise our powers p at will, or as we will, for the sake of preserving our life and for the sake of obtaining the direct result of action x .

Now it is obvious, this time, that we do not necessarily possess this particular form of liberty L. We always have, given (n), the liberty L to utilise at will our powers p for the sake of that unique end e , or a unique end e' , but we do not always have the liberty L to utilise them at will for the sake of two ends e and e' at once.

In order to see why, it is sufficient that one accepts the following:

(r) Since the formulas from (mb₂) to (mj) are mere definitions, they remain true if one replaces 'e' with 'e and e'', 'le' with 'lee'', and 'Pe' with 'Pee''.

We immediately see, given (r) and (mh), that we are prevented from utilising at will the power Pee' so defined if *none* of our powers p can be considered as being utilisable *at once* for the sake of both e and e' . But let us show this more precisely in our particular case. Taking for our end e the preservation of our life and for end e' obtaining the direct result of action x , we deduce the following from (r), (mj) and (q):

(s) The right to do x = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from utilising at will at least one of our powers p all the while considering its use as being the best means of (preserving our life and obtaining the direct result of action x), assuming we have the power P to utilise this power p at will.

But the only power p that could enable us to obtain the direct result of action x is the power p to do x . To utilise it at will is to do x at will. And its use is action x . Thus, finally:

(t) The right to do x = the absence of any external obstacle liable to prevent us from doing x at will while considering x as being the best means of preserving our life, assuming we have the power P to do x at will.

Now, if it is true that nothing would prevent us from doing x at will while we have the power P to do so, it might also turn out that, in this or that conjuncture, the accomplishment of x might be less favourable to the preservation of our existence than its non-accomplishment. It is not even out of the question that our situation might be so clear to someone that, in the use of their reason, they would find it absolutely impossible to establish the least relationship of ends to means between the preservation of our life and action x – an impossibility that, in this case, would come from an external obstacle. This obstacle, strictly speaking, would no longer be, as was the case for the powers p without liberty l , in a body or a set of bodies. But it would indeed be a corporeal obstacle; for it would arise from an objective situation, characterised, like every objective situation, by a *relation between bodies*: a relation such that, insofar as it subsists, action x would necessarily and manifestly be in contradiction with the preservation of our existence, and we would thus be prevented from seeking the least reason to do x for the sake of this end, even if otherwise nothing prevents us from doing x at will for the sake of another end. In this case, given (t), *we do not have the right to do x* . Consequently,

(u) For any action x , we have the right to do x if and only if, in the objective situation in which we find ourselves, we can have reasons to consider x to be the best means of preserving our life.

In general, this leaves us with a wide enough range of possibilities. For in matters of action, a situation can almost never be evaluated with mathematical certainty: there are almost always, at a given moment, many actions

that, one way or another, might reasonably be considered as being so many 'best means', and among which we thus have the right to choose. At the limit, if we were immortal, we would have the right to do everything, for any action that we would accomplish would invariably have the result, among other things, of our survival; God, who fits this description, thus has the right to everything.²³ But of course, we are not God!

In this way, the second part of Hobbes' project is realised. As before, right exceeds fact: our right to accomplish this or that action, just the same as with any liberty *L*, is absolutely independent of the power *P* to accomplish it that we may or may not have at our disposal; the prisoner, for example, has the right to escape without having the power *P* to do so, because it is not impossible to think that if they had this power and if they put it to use, their successful escape would increase their chances of survival. Now, however, fact greatly exceeds right: there are many things that we have the power *P* to do and that we do not have the right to do. Subjects, for example, almost always have the power *P* to disobey civil laws: they have the physical power *p*, and also the liberty *l* to do so, if they are not in prison;²⁴ and yet they never have the right to, even when they think themselves powerful or skilful enough to get away with it with impunity, because it is indubitable that their disobedience would diminish their chances of survival by compromising the authority of the sovereign and thereby risking a fall back into the state of nature. Right, whether it is natural or positive, is thus in no way power [*puissance*].

III. It remains to be seen what, exactly, the phrase 'to have reasons' means in (u). And it is here that the specification of right as *natural right*, which is the object of the third part of our definition, plays a role.

For clearly we can consider an action *A* as the best means of preserving our life, or of attaining whatever other end, for two kinds of reasons: either for *direct reasons*, if our personal examination of the question has led us to think, by our own proper judgement and reason, that this is true of action *A*; or else for *indirect reasons*, if action *A* has been prescribed to us by an authority, of which our judgement and reason has simply indicated to us in advance that all that they prescribe, whatever it may be, would *ipso facto* and without further examination merit being understood in that way. These two sorts of reasons, direct and indirect, thus respectively define two species of the genus of actions satisfying the condition laid out in (u).

²³ *L* XXX, 4; 235–6.

²⁴ *L* XXI, 1; 136, and 22; 145.

But whoever has the right to do any action of a certain genus also has, and *consequently*, the right to do any action belonging to one of the species included in that genus. And what goes for right goes *a fortiori* for liberty L. Applying this to the species of actions defined by direct reasons, we can thus say:

(v) Whoever has the right (or the liberty L) to do anything that they have reasons to consider as being the best means of preserving their life has, *consequently*, the right (or the liberty L) to do all that they consider, according to their own judgement and reason, as being the best means of preserving their life.

But given (mb₂) and (mb₃), to do all that we have reasons to consider as being the means best suited for an end *e* is the same, precisely, as utilising at will our powers *p* for the sake of *e*. Thus, given (v),

(w) Whoever has the right (or liberty L) to utilise at will their powers *p* for the sake of preserving their life has, *consequently*, the right (or the liberty L) to do all that they consider, according to their own judgement and reason, as being the best means of preserving their life.

Now it immediately follows from (q) that the right to utilise at will our powers *p* for the sake of preserving our life is identical with the liberty L to utilise at will our powers *p* for the sake of preserving our life. Thus, given (o) and (w),

(x) Each has the right to do all that they consider, according to their own judgement and reason, as being the best means of preserving their life.

Since this right is the only one that we have in the state of nature (for, prior to any stable convention, we have no reason to place authority in others regarding the choice of means, and so direct reasons for choosing are the only ones at play), let us call this 'natural right'. This amounts to positing, as a genetic definition whose construction is justified by (x):

(y) Natural right = the right that each has to do all that they consider, according to their own judgement and reason, as being the best means of preserving their life.

In this way we understand the definition from Chapter XIV. We obtain it by replacing, on the right side of (y), the word 'right' with its definition from (l), and by completing the whole with three kinds of additions: 'and' (after 'life'), in order to respect natural language; 'consequently', to recall the deductive truth mentioned in (w); and the reference to 'nature', for the reasons indicated in the second line of paragraph B. This gives us, finally:

(z) 'Natural right' = (A) The liberty L 'that each man hath to use his own power, as he will', that is, to utilise at will their powers *p*, (B) 'for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life', (C) 'and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto'.²⁵

This natural right, even in the state of nature, thus necessarily limits itself. And this is so without there being any need to appeal to another norm in order to prohibit anything: when it comes to anything that falls outside the category of actions mentioned in part (C) of (z), definition (y) alone analytically obliges us to say that *we do not have* the natural right to do it. And in the state of nature, where our only rights are natural rights, we quite simply *do not have this right*. And this, of course, applies to abstentions from actions as well as to actions: we do not have the right to abstain from doing whatever it is impossible to consider otherwise than as being the best means of preserving our life, and abstaining from which thus absolutely cannot be considered as exhibiting this characteristic. This is the sole source of all our obligations, including those that we subsequently contract.

From this there follow, in the state of nature, three consequences. First of all, before we have undertaken a deliberation for the sake of a given end, we lack the right not to subordinate this end to the preservation of our life with the intention of sacrificing it if this choice becomes necessary: if, rashly believing that our life were not threatened, we thumbed our nose at this requirement, whatever we ultimately decided would be legitimate, at least internally. Next, when we have chosen *after* deliberation that which, according to our own judgement and reason, appears to us to be here and now the best means of preserving our life, we no longer have the right, at least internally, not to employ this means here and now. Finally, *during* the deliberation itself, we surely have the choice of a multitude of actions or abstentions of possible actions, but we do not have the right to consider those that it is absolutely certain that nobody, under any circumstances and no matter what

²⁵ L XIV, 1; 79.

their judgement or reason, would ever consider as being the best means of preserving their life, because it would be logically impossible to do so: we are bound *a priori* by certain general rules, necessary conclusions of practical syllogisms that no human reason could fail to draw if it truly deliberated based on appropriate major premises. These general laws are precisely the *natural laws*,²⁶ whose field of application clearly remains to be determined.

And it is at this point, but only at this point, that Hobbes invokes that which most commentators on his theory of natural right begin with: it so happens that the state of nature is a war of all against all. No doubt we already knew this, since Hobbes established this truth in Chapter XII. But the definition that he gives of natural right at the beginning of Chapter XIV is totally independent of it: the theory of the state of nature only starts to play its role from the point at which one asks to what this definition applies – a definition that we have arrived at without its support. The answer to this question is well known. On the one hand, in the state of nature, no action is universally prohibited; for, in the war of all against all, no means of defence is *a priori* excluded: there is nothing that, one way or another, cannot be considered as being the best means of preserving our life.²⁷ On the other hand, the first natural law, from which all the rest follow, actually prescribes something: that we seek peace, because the latter is incontestably more favourable than war to the preservation of our life; but it only prescribes this to us on condition that we judge peace to be realisable;²⁸ and since it is up to us to make this judgement, in our soul and conscience, without any mathematical certainty, it is once again a matter of an internal obligation that does not universally impose any action on us.²⁹ Thus it turns out that everything is permitted externally, to the extent that no external observer – outside of God, who discerns what is in people's hearts – could ever know if what we do here and now is indeed inspired by good motives. In this sense, finally, but only in this sense, right really does encompass fact. But this is so accidentally, even if it is an anthropologically necessary accident: it changes nothing of the very nature of right. And if right encompasses fact, it also exceeds it indefinitely: each has the right to all things, including the bodies of others,³⁰ whereas nobody could ever conquer the whole world, or kill or enslave all others; for each, if they had the power P to ensure this

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ L XV, 1–2; 89.

³⁰ L XIV, 4; 80.

universal domination at will or to carry out this universal massacre at will, could utilise at will this power P without being prevented by the objective situation they found themselves in (and which is, precisely, the state of nature itself) from considering the execution of such a project, according to their own judgement and reason, as being one of the best possible means of preserving their own life. The right of the stronger, if you like, but just as much the right of the weakest. And it is precisely because right is something entirely different than power [*pouissance*] from the start that it continues to be distinguished from it subsequently: if they had initially been identified with one another, all that would be obtained by transferring one's right would be modifications of relations of force – which is indeed the case for Spinoza, but not for Hobbes.

For the latter, in fact, the transfer of right that establishes political society is the operation by which we agree to pass from a situation S_1 (the state of nature itself), in which anything could be considered as being the best means of preserving our life, but where our chances of survival are very slim, to a situation S_2 (the civil state), in which it is no longer possible to consider anything as being the best means of preserving our life, but where our chances of survival are infinitely better. Maintaining S_2 without returning to S_1 (even if we have the power P to return to it) is thus, manifestly, the single best conceivable means of preserving our life so long as we are in S_2 . From this it indeed follows that political obligation (an obligation, not to obey the sovereign *because* it is stronger than us, but to place our forces at its disposal *to give it the force* to ensure civil peace) is independent of the actual powers [*pouvoirs*] from which we may or may not be able to exempt ourselves with impunity: since all revolt always consists in a return from S_2 to S_1 , whatever its final outcome might turn out to be, *one never has the right to revolt*.

* * *

Spinoza, it would appear, sets up the same problematic: the notion of subjective right is no more a question for him, it seems, than it is for Hobbes, and he finds it necessary, as Hobbes did, to reinterpret it in order to give it a sense compatible with his ontology: no longer, strictly speaking, because his ontology excludes anything that is not corporeal, or whatever is not a relation between bodies, but because it excludes all transcendence. But his solution is diametrically opposed to Hobbes'. And, compared with the latter, it is extraordinarily simple: right just is power; *moral power* [*pouvoir*] is nothing other than *physical power* [*pouvoir*] – by which we certainly do not simply mean corporeal power [*pouvoir*] (it is also operative in the attribute of Thought), but the *capacity to produce real effects in nature*.

He lays out this solution in two places. At the beginning of Chapter XVI of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, his account has the same structure as the Hobbesian definition of natural right, as if it were designed to refute it point by point: there we find the same three parts, A, B and C, whose functions have simply changed. In Paragraphs 2 through 5 of Chapter II of the *Political Treatise*, by contrast, the same statements are presented in a different order, more directly suited to the internal requirements of Spinozism.

In the account at the beginning of Chapter XVI of the *TTP*, the three parts A, B, and C no longer serve to progressively define a genus, species, and subspecies; a definition is given at the start, and their role is to justify it by demonstrating that it perfectly accounts for what is clear and distinct in the notion of right that we commonly have (in the same way that the first propositions of Part I of the *Ethics* are designed to demonstrate that the Spinozist definition of God perfectly accounts for what is clear and distinct in the traditional philosophical concept of God). But each of these three parts in fact contains, among other things, an implicit critique of the corresponding part of the Hobbesian definition. Let us briefly reconstruct the different statements that this text includes, adding to them other statements that we will designate with the sign ' which will be simple transformations of the preceding, and which will enable us to make logical transitions very easily.

The initial definition is as follows:

(a) Natural right = the natural laws by which we conceive each individual as being naturally determined to exist and to act in this or that way.

After this comes an explanation in three parts.

I. Contrary to what the first part of Hobbes' definition indicated, natural right does not belong to the genus 'liberty L'. It belongs, instead, to the genus 'power [*pouvoir*] P'. In order to establish this, it suffices to begin with the *subjective rights of God*, about which everyone rightly agrees, and Hobbes was first among them,³¹ that they are coextensive with God's power [*puissance*]. Nobody would dispute that in fact:

(b) God has the right to everything that is within its power [*puissance*], that is, everything.

³¹ L XXXI, 5; 235–6.

This can be transformed into:

(b') A being whose power is the power of God has the right to everything that is within its power.

But one could also say, and this has a very rigorous sense when it is based on the ontology of Part I of the *Ethics*, that:

(c) The power of nature as a whole is the very power of God.

This can be transformed into:

(c') Nature as a whole is a being whose power is the power of God.

From (b') and (c'), we immediately deduce:

(d) Nature as a whole has the right to everything that is within its power.

From this we can draw:

(d') A being whose power is the power of nature has the right to everything that is within its power.

But it is clear that:

(e) The power of nature is identical to the set of all the respective powers of all natural individuals together.

From which we get:

(e') Each natural individual is a being whose power is the power of nature.

And from (d') and (e') we deduce:

(f) Each natural individual has the right to everything that is within its power.

II. It remains to be determined in what exactly the power [*puissance*] of a natural individual consists. Spinoza, as Hobbes had done in part B of his definition, invokes for this purpose the notion of *self-preservation*. But he

deduces it in a manner that is exactly opposite to how Hobbes had deduced it. The latter, we saw, after locating right in the genus 'liberty L', which enabled him to establish that everything that is by right is not necessarily the case in fact, made use of the law of self-preservation in order to show that all that is the case in fact is not necessarily by right. Spinoza, for his part, after locating right in the genus 'power [*pouvoir*] P' in order to show that all that is the case in fact is by right, makes recourse to the law of self-preservation in order to show that only what is the case in fact is by right. For the notion of power P, in itself, is no longer sufficient: there are things that we have the power P to do and that however we do not do because we do not desire them. Now, according to Spinoza, it is not true that we have the *power* [*puissance*] to do these things. In order to demonstrate this, Spinoza makes a claim that Hobbes had accepted literally, but gives it an entirely different meaning, by taking the expression 'law of nature' in a purely objective sense, and no longer, as Hobbes had, in its traditional normative sense. And in fact, Proposition 6 of Part III of the *Ethics* authorises us to say that:

(g) The supreme (objective) law of nature is that each being, insofar as it can, strives to persevere in its state without taking any others into account and having regard only for itself.³²

To the extent that this law expresses, no longer an end that we should always pursue without always pursuing it in fact, but what necessarily takes place and whose contrary could not take place, two consequences immediately follow: on the one hand, this law is never violated, and nobody ever does anything illegitimate; on the other hand, *nobody can ever do*, and so never has the power to do, what they are not necessarily determined to do here and now according to this law. One must thus accept that:

(g') The power [*puissance*] that an individual has is its power to exist and to act as it is necessarily determined to, according to the laws of its nature.

And from (f) and (g') we finally conclude:

³² The Pléiade translation distorts the meaning of this statement by adding a 'therefore' [*donc*] that does not appear anywhere in the original. It is not a matter of a consequence of what had come before, but of a new premise, which, when added to (f), will enable the deduction of (h).

(h) Each natural individual has the right to exist and to act as it is necessarily determined to, according to the laws of its nature.

III. Strictly speaking, this conclusion (h) is sufficient to justify definition (a) entirely. But we still have to clarify its sense in order to avoid a final equivocation. Part C of Hobbes' definition, in fact, appeals to the use of reason: we have the right to do all that, according to our judgement and *our reason*, we can consider as being the best means of preserving ourselves. This does not imply that our reason cannot go astray, but it does imply that we are obligated to use it to evaluate our chances of survival. But here, this obligation has disappeared. It would only be imposed if the expression 'the laws of our nature' meant 'the laws of our nature alone'. But the power [*puissance*] to act according to the laws of our nature *alone* does not define right: it defines virtue.³³ What the laws of our nature determine us to do, they sometimes determine us to do alone, it is true; but most often they do so in conjunction with laws proper to external causes that affect us. When the first of these two kinds of determinations prevails over the second, right does in fact merge with virtue; but in that case, it is only a question of the right of those who live according to the guidance of reason, regarding whom Spinoza can allow himself, at the beginning of Chapter IV of the *TTP*, to speak exoterically of 'divine law', or of 'natural divine law'.³⁴ But those who do not live according to the guidance of reason, that is, those in which the second kind of determination prevails over the first (and who constitute the majority of people), also strive to persevere in their being insofar as they can. If they happen, too often, to act contrary to their own interests, it is due to their relative impotence [*impuissance*]: this arises from external causes imposing a limit on their striving and inflecting its course. But nobody is bound to do more than they can. And this relative impotence is still a relative power [*puissance*]: each, at every instant, necessarily does all that they can, and to the precise extent that they manage to do something, they still manifest their power to exist and to act and thus have the right to do what they do. Since this striving (this *conatus*) to persevere reasonably or unreasonably in our being is nothing other than desire,³⁵ one can thus say, finally, without adding anything to the very content of the preceding, that:

³³ *Ethics* IV, Def. 8; CWS I, 547.

³⁴ *TTP* IV 1; CWS II, 125; G III, 57. *TTP* IV, 18; CWS II, 129; G III, 61.

³⁵ *Ethics* III, 9 Schol.; CWS I, 500.

(i) The natural right that each individual has is delimited, not by reason, but by desire and power [*puissance*].

IV. At the beginning of Chapter II of the *TP* we find the same claims (which we will designate with the same letters, adding, once again, in order to clarify logical transitions, other statements marked with the sign '). But this time, Spinoza does not feel the need to mould his account to the framework that Hobbes' problematic imposes: he now answers only to the immanent logic of his own philosophy. He also begins, starting in Paragraph 2, by immediately identifying the power [*puissance*] of God with the *conatus* of every natural being in general, without yet specifying whether this means nature as a whole or the finite individuals that constitute its parts:

(g) Every natural being has a power [*puissance*] by which it is necessarily determined to exist and to act.

(c) The power by which every natural being exists and acts is the very power of God.

From (g) and (c) we can deduce:

(g'c') Every natural being is a being whose power to exist and to act is the very power of God.

Paragraph 3 then takes us from power to right. But Spinoza is no longer content, as he had been in the *TTP*, to declare *that* God's right is coextensive with its power; he explains *why this is the case* by defining *what* God's right is, and by the same token what right in general is. Hobbes would characterise right as being a liberty? Fine. But what is the liberty that a being enjoys, if not this very being itself, insofar as it is free? Now God's power is precisely its very essence;³⁶ and God produces its effects with an absolute liberty, even in Hobbes' sense of 'liberty', since it is not constrained by anything external to it.³⁷ Thus:

(b₁) The right that God has is identical to God's power insofar as it is considered to be absolutely free.

³⁶ *Ethics* I, 34; *CWS* I, 439.

³⁷ *Ethics* I, 17 Cor. 2; *CWS* I, 425.

This can be transformed, if we are not afraid of tautologies and if we accept that God's power is also its power to exist and to act, into:

(b'₁) The right that a being whose power to exist and to act is the very power of God is identical to this being's power to exist and to act, insofar as this power to exist and to act is the very power of God, which is absolutely free.

From (b₁) we immediately deduce:

(b₂) God has the right to everything that is within its power, that is, to everything.

From (b₂) or from (b'₁) one can draw:

(b'₂) A being whose power to exist and to act is the very power of God has as much right as it has power to exist and to act.

From (g'c') and (b'₁) we then deduce:

(h₁) The right that every natural being has is identical to its power to exist and to act insofar as its power to exist and to act is the very power of God, which is absolutely free.

Finally, from (h₁), or from (g'c') and (b'₂), we deduce:

(h₂) Every natural being has as much right as it has power to exist and to act.

Spinoza can then, in Paragraph 4, reproduce his definition of natural right, now justified by (h₁) and (h₂):

(a) Natural right = the very power of nature = the rules according to which everything happens = the laws of nature.

After this, in that same Paragraph 4, Spinoza repeats statements (d), (e), and (f), only referring to (e) in passing by means of a mere allusion; this amounts to applying the universal truth formulated in (a) to the particular case of nature as a whole, and then to that of the finite individuals that constitute it, among which are, notably, individual human beings. Finally,

Paragraph 5 develops anew the clarification provided by (i). This clarification, translated into the language that we thought would be appropriate to Hobbes, we can provide as the following definition, given any action x :

(i') The natural right to do x = the power [*pouvoir*] P (to do x at will) accompanied by the desire to do x = the power [*pouvoir*] p to do x accompanied by the liberty l to do x and the desire to do x .

It is clear, under these conditions, that a transfer of right, to the extent that the word 'transfer' still means anything, only ever consists in a transfer of power [*puissance*], that is, in a change of relations of force internal to the sphere of natural right: it is hard to imagine by what mysterious transmutation it would be possible to get, from a physical power [*pouvoir*] (in the sense defined above), something other than a physical power [*pouvoir*]. Our juridical situation, under all circumstances, whether that means the state of nature or civil society, is thus indeed the result of all the relations of force that we maintain here and now with those like us. All right, even positive right, is never anything other than a modality of natural right.³⁸

The right that a sovereign has to order its subjects is thus nothing other than its power [*puissance*], which itself is nothing other (and this Hobbes accepts) than the collective power [*puissance*] put at its disposal by its subjects and by means of which it can force each of them individually to obey – a power that, at some point, they may well cease to grant it, in which case its right would disappear.³⁹ From this it follows that if a sovereign, by its methods of government, determines its subjects to rise up, it would not be able to invoke any juridical norm whatsoever in its own defence: from the moment one revolts, *one always has the right to revolt*.⁴⁰

* * *

Hobbes and Spinoza both, then, follow their respective logics to the very end with imperturbable rigour. And they wind up with conclusions directly opposed to one another, although both are safe from Rousseau's critique.

It is true that Hobbes leaves open the possibility of a legitimization after

³⁸ *TP* III, 3; CWS II, 518.

³⁹ *TTP* XVI, 24–30; CWS II, 287–8; *G* III, 193–4. See also the famous passage from Letter L, where Spinoza specifies that this is the point concerning which his political thought fundamentally differs from that of Hobbes. (*Ep.* L [to Jarig Jelles]; CWS II, 406–7.)

⁴⁰ This does not mean that one is always right to do so (see *TP* III, 5; CWS II, 518–19). But that is another question, entirely independent of the question of right.

the fact of certain changes in relations of force: in the state of nature, for example, every human being is supposed to promise obedience to whomever takes their life in their hands;⁴¹ in the same way, as soon as a conquest or civil war makes it possible for a usurper to take power [*pouvoir*] by force (and the majority of *commonwealths*, it should be noted, are *commonwealths*⁴² by acquisition),⁴³ whoever agrees to openly reside in the country is *ipso facto* bound to obey this new power, and the usurper then becomes the legitimate sovereign.⁴⁴ But this legitimation after the fact, far from being based on a 'right of the stronger' that would justify anything at all, can only take place in just half of the cases: namely, only when one passes from an S_1 situation to an S_2 situation, and never when one returns from S_2 to S_1 . It is legitimate to submit to the stronger in order to escape the state of nature when one finds oneself there or finds oneself back in it again, because the return to this state erases all prior obligations, leaving intact only the obligation of seeking to leave it; but it is illegitimate to make use of one's power [*puissance*] in order to return to the state of nature, even in the transitory form of civil war or the risk of civil war, for there is no society to be found there. If the English, after the victory of the Revolution, had the duty to obey Cromwell, it remains true that Cromwell *did not have the right* to make Revolution, and was damned for having done so.⁴⁵

It is true, inversely, that, according to Spinoza, leaders that govern according to reason have the best chances, all things being equal, to actually preserve their power [*pouvoir*], and consequently to preserve it legitimately.⁴⁶ But, on the one hand, their excess of legitimacy comes from the excess of *power* [*puissance*] that the rationality of their methods of government confers on them, not from that rationality itself. And, on the other hand, it turns out that all things are not equal: if a new Genghis Khan invaded a small Spinozist republic with overwhelming forces, he would have the right

⁴¹ L XX, 1–3; 127–8.

⁴² ['commonwealths' in English in the original.]

⁴³ L XX, 10–14; 130–2. And 'Review and Conclusion', 6–7; 491.

⁴⁴ L 'Review and Conclusion', 7; 491.

⁴⁵ We have not mentioned salvation and damnation because Hobbes does not make use of these concepts in order to ground his theory of right. But they do constitute supplementary sanctions. Consider *Leviathan*, Chapters XXXVIII and XLIII: there is no reason to think that Hobbes didn't have this in mind there, and plenty of reasons to think that he did. And it is certain that, based on Chapter XLIII, Cromwell would be damned: he committed the worst of all possible sins, and, since he was far from having repented, his belief that Christ was the Messiah meant nothing.

⁴⁶ TP III, 7; CWS II, 520.

to invade it, as well as the right to oppress its inhabitants for as long as they remained too terrified to resist him. It is not that Spinoza means to justify any tyrant, nor even to justify anything in general; he simply says that the sole source of all sovereignty resides in the power [*puissance*] of the people.⁴⁷ And if the people accept obeying a tyrant, whatever their motives, so much the worse for them. But so much the worse for the tyrant if the people wake up; for a small minority, even if it is well armed, can do nothing to stop, and consequently has no right to stop, a multitude unified by a common desire and which is no longer restrained by fear.

If one wants to have the theoretical means to condemn all insubordination, it is thus Hobbes' path that one must follow, not that of Spinoza; one must affirm Rousseau's first proposition and make no use of his second proposition, and not the inverse. That Rousseau, for his part, followed the same path without reaching the same conclusions, and that this difference in conclusions prevented him from seeing that Hobbes preceded him on this path – well, that does not amount to a contradiction: a necessary condition is not a sufficient one. But, it must be admitted, it does raise other problems.

⁴⁷ TP II, 17; CWS II, 514.

The Theoretical Function of Democracy in Spinoza and Hobbes

I. I do not intend to treat the question of democracy in Spinoza and Hobbes in its totality, for it is much too vast.¹ It is well known, for example, that Hobbes preferred monarchy to democracy, whereas the opposite is true for Spinoza. And it would be easy to show in detail how Spinoza, on this point, goes to the trouble of refuting one by one the arguments put forward by Hobbes, drawing much inspiration, moreover, from the refutation already given of them in Pieter de la Court's *Politike Weegschal*.² But this is not the aspect of the problem that I will examine here; I will be content to presuppose it. The problem I would like to raise concerns not the judgement passed by Hobbes and Spinoza on the practical advantages and disadvantages of democracy, but the theoretical role democracy would ultimately play in their respective doctrines of the foundations of political legitimacy in general. Put differently: to what extent, in both Hobbes and Spinoza, is the recourse to democracy indispensable for founding theoretically the legitimacy of all other forms of sovereignty? And we will see that, on this subject, Hobbes and Spinoza followed trajectories at once parallel and

¹ [Originally published as 'La fonction théorique de la démocratie chez Spinoza et Hobbes', *Studia Spinoziana* 1 (1985): 259–73; republished in Matheron 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

² [Pieter de la Court was a Dutch political thinker and economist, an early and avid supporter of republicanism. In 1660 he and his brother Johan wrote *Consideratien en exemplen van Staat*, which Pieter subsequently revised as *Consideratien van staat ofte politike weegschaal*. This second edition is often referred to simply as *Politike Weegschal*. The *Polityke Weeghschael door V.H.* is listed among the books found in Spinoza's library after his death. 'V.H.' is 'van Hove', an alias of de la Court; this is the 'wise Dutchman' to whom Spinoza approvingly refers in *TP* VIII, 31 (CWS II, 579). On the de la Court brothers and Spinoza, see Haitsma Mulier 1980, esp. chs. 4–5; and Curley, CWS II, 506 nn. 13, 579 nn. 26, and 763–4.]

inverse: parallel with regard to their premises and inverse with regard to their conclusions.

But in order to really understand the meaning of this problematic, we must first say a few words about its origin. This origin, in a sense, precedes the very appearance of the notions of sovereignty and social contract. It is to be found in a very old principle traditionally taken as a commonplace: the principle according to which a political community *as such*, insofar as it is a *collective person*, has the highest conceivable human authority over its own members. Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, tells us that the consent of the entire multitude has more power [*pouvoir*], in legislative matters, than the authority of the prince itself, for the prince is only authorised to legislate to the extent that it represents the multitude, insofar as it assumes its juridical personality (*in quantum gerit personam multitudinis*).³ To be sure, in Aquinas, there is neither sovereignty nor social contract. But, as soon as these two notions appeared in correlation, they would combine with this traditional principle in order to make possible the establishment of the common problematic that Hobbes and Spinoza would have to take up.

This problematic was most systematically established by Grotius. In fact, contrary to what Rousseau would say in Chapter V of Book I of the *Social Contract*, Grotius knew very well that, in order for a people to give themselves a king, they must first constitute themselves as a people. What misled Rousseau is that Grotius treated the question in two places, and by beginning with the end. But, in Chapter V of Book II of *De jure belli ac pacis*, Grotius *explains*, precisely, how a people is constituted. It is constituted by a contract of association: a group of heads of family convene among themselves to form a political society with the aim of ensuring civil peace and common defence, and each of them transfers to the *community as such*, for all that concerns this end, the natural right that had directed their own actions – it being understood that each decision made with a majority of voices will be presumed to express the will of the community itself, such that we are, *ipso facto*, in a democracy. Under these conditions, in conformity with the traditional principle, the people expressing themselves by the voice of their assembly necessarily has the highest conceivable human authority over its own members. In the present context, this means absolute sovereignty. The people is sovereign, just as each individual was in the state of nature. The sovereignty of the people is necessarily absolute in terms of its content, since it is extended by definition to the totality of public affairs; and it is necessarily absolute in terms of its duration, since nothing can put an end

³ ST I-II q.97 a.3.

to it except the voluntary decision of the people itself. But the people *could* decide to transfer this absolute sovereignty that it has over its own members to somebody else in whatever way it sees fit: whatever one possesses absolutely can be given to whomever one likes, totally or partially, with or without conditions, and this goes for power [*pouvoir*] as well as for property. Whence the possibility of a contract by submission, all of whose aspects had in fact already been explored by Grotius in Chapter III of Book I. The sovereign people, if it wishes, can transfer unconditionally the totality of its sovereignty to a king or to an aristocratic council, which will then become absolutely sovereign without restriction. But it can also, if it wishes, transfer the totality of its sovereignty with certain conditions that the king or council will be obligated to respect. In that case, the sovereignty of the king or the council will be absolute in terms of its content, but no longer in terms of its duration, at least if we had specified that sovereignty would be lost in the event that it violated its obligations. And lastly, the people can decide to transfer only a part of the attributes of sovereignty and to keep for itself the remaining part (reserving for itself, for example, the right to establish taxes), in which case there would no longer be any absolute sovereignty in any sense. All the possibilities are thus open: due to the very fact that democratic sovereignty is necessarily absolute, other forms of sovereignty can be absolutely anything whatsoever; everything depends on the clauses of the contract.

Now this is the problematic with which Hobbes and Spinoza found themselves confronted. They both agree with Grotius, and for analogous reasons, on the necessarily absolute character of democratic sovereignty: on this point Spinoza did not invent anything new. But the conclusions they draw from this are very different than those of Grotius. Concerning other forms of sovereignty, Hobbes and Spinoza both strive to reduce all of the solutions to a single one, either absolutist, or anti-absolutist. This could be accomplished in two ways: either by denying Grotius' thesis according to which monarchy and aristocracy derive from democracy, or, on the contrary, by maintaining and reinterpreting this same thesis. Hence in principle there are three possible positions, which we can summarise in the following way: 1) Other forms of sovereignty are derived from democracy, which, consequently, necessarily transmits to them its absolute character. 2) They are not derived from democracy, but they are constituted in exactly the same way, and consequently, for the same reasons, they are necessarily absolute. 3) They are derived from democracy, and consequently, since they are *only* derivations, they can never be absolute. Logically, there would indeed be a fourth conceivable position, but it was not taken up. In fact, Hobbes passed

from the first position to the second, while Spinoza, by way of a conceptual transposition that constitutes the entirety of his originality, passed from the second to the third.

II. The first position is the one Hobbes takes in *De Cive*. I do not believe, by the way, that he adopted it wholeheartedly. Rather he was *forced* to adopt it in order to eliminate a difficulty that his theory of the social contract, such as it was expounded in this work, was strictly incapable of resolving. A difficulty, to be clear, that only concerns commonwealths by *institution*; I will completely leave aside commonwealths by acquisition, which pose no problem.

As for the commonwealths by institution, the mechanism of the social contract laid out in Paragraphs 6 and 7 of Chapter V appears to be very simple: it is defined only in terms of the *transfer of right*. Individuals, by an agreement that they make with one another, hand over to one person or assembly, in order to allow the latter to assure civil peace and common defence, the right that they naturally had to use their own forces as they saw fit. From which it follows that all sovereignty, whatever it may be, is necessarily absolute in terms of its content: the end in view of which we enter into a contract would be unrealisable if the totality of public affairs did not depend upon a single will, and whomever wills the end implicitly wills the means. Any division of sovereignty is thus ruled out. But this in no way implies, and Hobbes will clarify this in Paragraph 13 of Chapter VI, that we are forced to obey the sovereign *in all matters*, which no theorist of absolutism, incidentally, had ever maintained. On the one hand, in fact, we have the right to resist the sovereign if it wishes to kill us or if it orders us to commit suicide: we agreed to give it the means *to kill others*, but not to kill ourselves or to let ourselves be killed, for every agreement of this type is automatically nullified and cannot be included in the social contract. And on the other hand, much more generally, we can conceive of an infinite number of cases where our disobedience would not take from the sovereign any of the powers [*pouvoirs*] that the social contract obligates us to grant it. For example, Hobbes says, if the sovereign condemned my father to death and I was ordered to execute him, I have the right to refuse. For the sovereign will, in any event, find specialised professionals to do the job: I am committed to granting it the means to execute all of those condemned to death, possibly including my father, but I am acquitted from all of my obligations on this point by paying my taxes – with which the sovereign can recruit its executioners.

Now it is here, precisely, that the difficulty appears. For, according to Hobbes, and this is a crucial point, the sovereign *has every right*, even if we

are not obligated to respect all its rights: it has the absolute right, for example, to put me to death if I refuse to execute my father; and, in doing so, it will not commit any injustice against me. But, if this is so, it is, at least in *De Cive*, for a *purely negative* reason: it is because the sovereign *does not* take part in the social contract, which was finalised only among subjects, and because consequently the sovereign is not committed to anything. Whoever has not given up any rights has every right, as in the state of nature. But why, exactly, is it *logically impossible* for the sovereign to take part in the social contract? For, after all, when we have rights, we always have the right to give them up. It is true, to be sure, that the sovereign cannot agree to anything incompatible with the exercise of its sovereignty: if it promised, for example, not to raise taxes without the consent of its subjects, this promise would be null, for it would mean that it both accepts and does not accept sovereignty, and one cannot *will* what is logically contradictory. But what would happen if it agreed to something that did not prevent the exercise of its sovereignty *in any way*? Why could it not, for example, agree never to make the sons of those condemned to death carry out the execution? Or, more generally, why could it not agree never to punish those who disobey an order that they were not obligated to obey? This would now no longer be contradictory and, in the strict logic of Chapters V and VI of *De Cive*, the agreement would be valid. And yet its result would be catastrophic. For, if this was the case, the authority of the sovereign would indeed remain absolute in terms of its content, but it would cease to be so in terms of its duration: if at any point it happened to violate its agreement, there would be a breach of contract, subjects would be considered free from their obligations, and we would return to the state of nature – which it was precisely a question of avoiding. Thus it must be admitted that the social contract of *De Cive*, taken on its own, did not constitute a juridical instrument perfectly adequate to the end that it was intended to realise, and that it would be necessary, consequently, to complete it with something else.

Now this complement is what Hobbes adds in Chapter VII. And he does so, precisely, by making recourse to the hypothesis of an *originary democracy*. Every political society by institution, he tells us, is *necessarily* democratic at first. This is not always a matter, to be sure, of a historical priority, but it is indeed a matter of a logical priority. From the mere fact that individuals always come together to appoint a sovereign, even if this sovereign must ultimately be a king, they are implicitly committed to submitting themselves to the decision of the majority. And consequently, from this fact alone, they have established a democracy, even if it only lasts for a split second. Now, in the particular case of democracy, it is *obvious* that the sovereign cannot take

part in the social contract; for the sovereign is the assembly of the people as a *collective person*, which did not exist in the state of nature, and with which, consequently, individuals would not have been able to enter into a contract. Thus, in fact, the democratic sovereign *cannot have any obligations*. It is true that, if the assembly of the people then transfers sovereignty to a king or to an aristocratic council, this king or this council can, at that point, claim to make an agreement with the assembly – but only with it, and not with each subject taken individually, since it is with the assembly of people that it enters into a contract. But as soon as sovereignty has been transferred, the assembly of people as a collective person ceases to exist. Now one cannot have any obligations towards a person that no longer exists. Thus, in any case, the king or the council is free from all obligations as soon as it becomes sovereign. But the subjects are obligated to obey it, for they agreed *amongst themselves* to obey the assembly of the people, which had precisely ordered them to obey the king or the council as they would obey the assembly itself. And so: necessarily originary democracy necessarily transmits to other forms of sovereignty its absolutely necessary character.

But it is true that, from Hobbes' own point of view, this solution was hardly satisfying. One could show (but I am not going to do this!) that it contains at least ten or so logical fallacies, and that almost all of them come from the doctrine of juridical personality that had not yet been elaborated in *De Cive*. But, in any event, is it obvious that for Hobbes there would have been something extremely embarrassing about this *theoretical* privilege accorded to democracy: it was paradoxical to make the legitimacy of the best form of sovereignty be derived from the very worst form. And this was, I believe, at least one of the reasons Hobbes had to reformulate his theory of the social contract in *Leviathan*.

In Chapter XVII of the *Leviathan*, in fact, the social contract is no longer defined only in terms of a transfer of right: it consists above all, and essentially, in an *authorisation*, which only *implies* a transfer of right. To authorise somebody to carry out an action in my name, as Hobbes had explained in Chapter XVI, is to recognise that action as my own: it is to assume total juridical responsibility for it in the case where one whom I have chosen to represent me carries it out. This absolutely does not mean that I give up the right to do this action or not; quite the contrary, I keep it, and it is *in virtue of my own right* that my representative will act, not in virtue of their right: I *grant the utilisation of my own right* to them, which, precisely for this reason, remains mine. The only right that I give up is that of contesting being the author of this action if it is done. And the social contract is the generalisation of this mechanism: subjects come together (which, as in every

convention, has *irreversible* juridical effects) to *authorise all of the actions of the sovereign without exception*, provided that the sovereign declares or lets it be known that these actions have some relation with civil peace and common defence (which of course the sovereign will always do). From which Hobbes deduces in Chapter XVIII that the sovereign, as was required, cannot have any obligations; but this is no longer for the same reason as in *De Cive*, and originary democracy no longer has anything to do with it: this is because, if the sovereign agreed not to perform a given action, but then did so, this would not be *its own action*, but that of each of its subjects, and consequently it will not have violated any convention. Materially, the sovereign has the right to do anything without committing any injustice, because, *juridically, it does not do anything*.

As for the transfer of right implied in authorisation, it comes quite simply from what we are committed to by some (but not all) of our actions. In fact, each time that the sovereign gives me an order, this means that it takes a right away from me in order to have the means to ensure civil peace and common defence. Everything thus happens, juridically, as if I myself had declared that I was giving up this right in view of this end. This will have, just as Chapter XVI had clarified, exactly the same effects as a declaration to give up common rights, no more and no less. Whence Hobbes can conclude in Chapter XXI that authorisation does not obligate us any more or less than the social contract of *De Cive*: since one cannot be obligated to commit suicide, I retain the right to resist the sovereign if it wishes to kill me, although I have authorised it to kill me; and since every agreement is null if it does not have a relation with the end in view of which it was contracted, I retain the right to disobey the sovereign if my disobedience does not take from it the means to ensure civil peace and common defence, although I authorised the sovereign to potentially punish me for it.

In *Leviathan*, then, Hobbes was able to resolve the problem of *De Cive* by eliminating any reference to the hypothesis of an originary democracy. From the point of view of the theory of legitimacy, all forms of sovereignty are on exactly the same level: they are all equally absolute, not because they are derived from democracy, but because they are all instituted by the same act of unlimited authorisation – which, this time, is juridically impeccable and no longer needs any complement. Simply put, it is *preferable* to institute a monarchy when we can do so.

III. Given all that, what will be Spinoza's position? It is well known, to be sure, what a massive conceptual transposition he undertook regarding the notion of right. Right, according to Spinoza, just is power [*puissance*], and

this is meant literally: to say that I have the right to do an action is strictly equivalent to saying that I desire to do it, that I have the physical and intellectual capacities to do it, that no external obstacle prevents me from doing it, and that consequently I actually do it. I will not elaborate on this point here, but will instead take it as given. Now this new conception of right is used by Spinoza to reinterpret Hobbes' theory of the social contract and to destroy it from within. And I believe that he does this in two stages: in the *TTP* he translates the social contract of *De Cive* into terms of power, but with results that are somewhat similar, at least theoretically, to those of the *Leviathan*; and in the *TP* he translates the social contract of the *Leviathan* into terms of power, but with results that are somewhat similar to those of *De Cive*. Similar, to be sure, given this transposition – which, in another sense, turns everything upside down.

In Chapter XVI of the *TTP*, the social contract is defined exclusively in terms of the transfer of right, as in *De Cive*. This is why, moreover, Spinoza can still speak of a contract. But the *transfer of right*, here, means the *transfer of power*. All we have to do is substitute the terms: a group of individuals living in the state of nature decide by a common agreement to transfer to a sovereign all the power that each previously had at their disposal to defend themselves individually; they decide, in other words, to create once and for all, and irreversibly if possible, a new relation of forces that will grant this sovereign an irresistible power. Here, Spinoza takes the example of democracy, but he clarifies a bit further along that this is only an example: all of the consequences that I deduced from my hypothesis, he says, apply word for word to all other forms of sovereignty without exception.

And indeed, these consequences allow Spinoza to resolve the problem of *De Cive* quite simply, without any recourse to an originary democracy. From the hypothesis put forth by Spinoza, in fact, we immediately deduce that the sovereign, whoever it may be, is not obligated to do anything and that the subjects are obligated to obey it in all matters: for if they had wanted to force it to make a commitment that would juridically obligate it, they would have had to keep for themselves enough forces to constrain it to respect it, which, precisely, they did not want to do, since, hypothetically, they had transferred all of their power to it. But, despite the expression *obey in all matters*, subjects, in reality, will not have any more obligations than in *De Cive* or in *Leviathan*; for they are only obligated to obey, here and now, what is *in fact* asked of them here and now; and it is very unlikely that sovereigns, whoever they may be, would give orders that are *too absurd* (for example, ordering that all those condemned to death be executed by their own sons): they are generally not so stupid to be ignorant of the fact that, if they did this, the

country would soon become ungovernable, and that they would thus lose the irresistible power that defined their sovereignty – which, again, makes us fall outside of the scope of the initial hypothesis. Spinoza simply clarifies, against Hobbes, that the danger is to be feared *even less* in democracy than elsewhere, since it is almost impossible that a great number of human beings would agree to an absurdity of this kind. Thus, in appearance, everything is resolved: from the theoretical hypothesis of the social contract of *De Cive* reinterpreted in terms of power, Spinoza is able to conclude, like in the *Leviathan*, that all forms of sovereignty are on exactly the same level in terms of their foundations. Democracy is *preferable* because subjects are more free in it, but, concerning the question of the foundations of legitimacy, it does not enjoy any theoretical privilege.

And yet, the question would come up again. For the preceding conclusions are only valid *to the extent that* the hypothesis of Chapter XVI is in conformity with reality. Now, Spinoza tells us, at the beginning of Chapter XVII, that this theoretical hypothesis is never *entirely* verified in practice, though it is always more or less approximative. It was an *abstract* hypothesis, which ignored the resistances of human nature, just as the theory of falling bodies ignores air resistance. In reality, nobody can ever transfer the totality of their power to anybody whatsoever; in all existing societies, subjects, in fact, always retain enough force to make their sovereign afraid. Now we must indeed take into account, in a second stage, what had initially been neglected in the first approximation. And under these conditions, a first problem arises that Spinoza would partially treat in the remainder the *TTP*: what is it exactly that is transferable? And as for what is transferable, how are we to make it so that it is transferred irreversibly in practice? But this problem raises another much more fundamental problem, about which Spinoza does not say a word in the *TTP*: when all is said and done, *what exactly is a transfer of power?*

Spinoza analyses this notion in the *TP*. But the result of this analysis is, at first glance, rather surprising. In fact, if I transfer my power to others, I clearly fall *under their power*. Now, Spinoza tells us, in Paragraph 10 of Chapter II, that we fall under the power of others in only two kinds of cases: either when others have chained us up, disarmed or imprisoned us; or when we *desire* to act according to their desires because they have succeeded in inspiring fear or hope in us. But the first case has nothing to do with a transfer, since our will does not play any role in it. In the second case, by contrast, our will does play a role: we voluntarily put our own powers at the disposal of others. But, in reality, is this truly a *transfer*? No, certainly not. Since our power, physically, remains ours: we do not give it up, we keep it, and it is

precisely because we keep it that others need us in order to realise their own ends. However, here we have something rather similar to *authorisation* in the *Leviathan*. In the *Leviathan*, as we have seen, I authorised others to act in my own name by granting to them the utilisation of a right that remained mine; others used this right by doing something; what they did was actually done by me, juridically speaking; and I do not have the right to contest what was done. Now, if we replace *right* with *power*, and *juridically* with *physically*, it becomes very clear what is happening here: I grant to others the utilisation of a power that remains mine; others utilise it to bring something about; what they bring about, was brought about by me, physically; and I cannot contest having done it, obviously. The only difference with the *Leviathan* is that this equivalent of authorisation is *never* irrevocable: as soon as I cease to hope or to fear, I cease to put my power at the disposal of others, and they can no longer do anything.

But this equivalent of authorisation, when it is given at the same moment by a large number of individuals to one and the same person, does indeed have as its *consequence* a *transfer of power*, just as the authorisation of the *Leviathan* implied a transfer of right. For it modifies relations of force. The one who benefits from it, as long as they benefit from it (but not a moment longer), has at their disposal a power great enough to inspire fear and hope in each of the members of the group taken individually, and consequently to determine them to grant the usage of their individual power all over again: authorisation entails a transfer, which itself reproduces authorisation, etc. And this is what is expressed in the *genetic definition of sovereignty* which is given to us in Paragraph 17 of Chapter II: the right of sovereignty is the right defined, not by the power of the sovereign, but by the power of the *multitude*. The possessor of sovereignty, we might say, is not the sovereign, but is the multitude itself; the sovereign is only its *bearer*: it bears it to the precise extent that the multitude agrees to put it at its disposal. Without the multitude, the sovereign would not be able to do anything and thus would no longer have any right: all that it does as sovereign is in reality done by the multitude, exactly like all of the actions of the sovereign in the *Leviathan* are those of its subjects by right. But, to be sure, contrary to what happens in Hobbes, this equivalent of authorisation is not given *once and for all for all* the actions of the sovereign: it is given, at each moment, to each of the sovereign's particular actions, from the mere fact that the majority of its subjects actively or passively agree to cooperate. And it is precisely for this reason that the *TP* no longer speaks of a social contract: political society is not created by a contract, it is engendered and re-engendered at each moment by a consensus that must be perpetually renewed.

Now this reinterpretation of the social contract of the *Leviathan* in terms of power is what will lead Spinoza, without any paradox, to rediscover the thesis of the priority of democracy of *De Cive*. This is even a matter, most of the time, of an historical priority, as Spinoza says in Paragraph 12 of Chapter VIII. But this frequent historical priority is itself explained, much more profoundly, not only by a logical priority, but by an *ontological* priority – a bit like how substance is prior in nature to its affections. Spinoza indicates this in Paragraph 5 of Chapter VII. Nobody, he tells us, ever willingly gives up authority to another: the ambition for domination and envy are universally widespread passions. Consequently, he adds, the multitude would never transfer sovereignty to a single human being or to a couple of them if it could itself bring about concord on its own terms. Whence it follows that the existence of every non-democratic regime is explained by the conjunction of two factors: on the one hand, the power of the multitude that *desires* to live in common concord, which consequently *tends* to find a common ground among all of its members, which thus *tends* to organise itself democratically; and, on the other hand, external causes that prevent it from realising this tendency directly, and which force it to satisfy it by winding paths, by making recourse to a mediator. Every political society thus has two causes: a democratic *conatus*, which, all things being equal, would open onto an institutionalised democracy, and external causes that modify this *conatus*, sometimes by giving it non-democratic affections. Now, since right is identical to fact, every causal explanation is at the same time *juridical legitimation*. Thus, indeed, as in *De Cive*, the legitimacy of all other forms of sovereignty are derived from the legitimacy of democracy.

But the difference from *De Cive* is that these other forms of sovereignty can *never* be absolute. In *De Cive*, in fact, originary democracy was the *transitive* cause of other regimes: it disappeared right after having produced its effects, by transmitting to it the totality of its characteristics. Whereas by contrast in the *TP* it is a matter of an *immanent* cause: the origin is always there, since the democratic *conatus* is always at work; if not, there would no longer be a State. Whence it follows that in every non-democratic regime, sovereignty is necessarily divided (in fact, and thus in terms of right) between its possessor and its bearer. It is not, to be sure, a question of a vertical division: all the attributes of sovereignty are indeed in the hands of a single person or assembly. But it is a question of a horizontal division: putting each attribute of sovereignty to work depends, in each particular case, both on the decision of the sovereign and on the active or passive acceptance of that decision by the multitude. In a monarchy, this is obvious: kings are always naked, as Paragraph 5 of Chapter VI emphatically explains. But

aristocracy, too, as Paragraph 4 of Chapter VIII explains, must take popular pressure into account, even if it is expressed in an informal way: it is *much closer* to the absolute, but does not attain it, even in its most perfect form. Only democracy can attain it, since, in democracy, the possessor and bearer of sovereignty coincide. Every particular form of sovereignty can be defined as being the power of the multitude *insofar as* it is borne by someone: *potentia multitudinis quatenus*; but only *potentia multitudinis quatenus a multitudine ipsa tenetur* is absolute sovereignty.

Spinoza and the Breakdown of Thomist Politics: Machiavellianism and Utopia

It might seem that nothing is more straightforward than the first two paragraphs of Chapter I of the *Political Treatise*.¹ Spinoza, rejecting his predecessors wholesale, divides them into two groups: the philosophers, on the one hand, whose many theories have as a common denominator their being perfectly inapplicable; and the ‘politicians’ on the other hand, who, without any theory, knew how to draw from their own practice a certain number of lessons that were very pertinent but too limited in scope. And his ambition, proclaimed in the next five paragraphs, is to present for the first time a theory that would be adequate to practice. A banal pretension, it might be said: what political thinker did not propose to overcome the opposition between a doctrinaire irrealism and an unprincipled empiricism? But there are a thousand ways to undertake such an overcoming; Spinoza’s, as we will see, involves an approach ‘as difficult as it is rare’! And above all, banalities themselves have their histories: the dichotomy in question here, far from having always been insisted upon as though it went without saying, only gained its meaning in light of a problematic that, in the seventeenth century, was entirely novel. The interest of these two paragraphs emerges precisely when we give an account of this problematic, coupled with a reflection on its genesis – and at the same time, implicitly, with a reflection on the conditions of the possibility of Spinozism.

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‘Philosophers’, Paragraph 1 says. Which ones? All of them, apparently. If not, Spinoza would have spoken of ‘some’ of them, or of ‘the majority’ of

¹ [Originally published as ‘Spinoza et la décomposition de la politique thomiste: machiavélisme et utopie’, *Archivio di Filosofia* 1 (1978): 29–59; republished in Matheron 1986, 2009 and 2011. See Appendix 2.]

them. A bit further on he would use that kind of language, but only with regard to their ethics (*plerumque pro Ethica Satyram scripserint*), being careful to specify that what he says about their politics admits of no exception (*nunquam Politicam conceperint*, etc.).²

Now this doesn't come without some problems; for at first glance, the content of this initial paragraph hardly seems to lend itself to such a generalisation. Spinoza, in a first step, indicates to us what constitutes, according to him, *the* theoretical foundation of *the* politics of philosophers; his description, once we allow for the requirements of polemic, ultimately provides a good account of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas; but it is hard to see how it would apply to Hobbes, who was, nevertheless, a philosopher – one whom Spinoza could not have failed to consider, and who is impossible to place in the category of practical 'politicians' of whom he would speak in Paragraph 2. It gets even stranger: Spinoza, in a second step, declares that this erroneous theoretical foundation always condemned the politics of philosophers to being merely a chimera, useless anywhere outside of Utopia or in the golden age. With regard to Saint Thomas alone – leaving aside, that is, the comparison that is coming – it is strictly speaking possible to make sense of this kind of appraisal, even though it is a bit surprising. But the comparison with Thomas More, who will be made to play here the role of a universal archetype – doesn't this amount to a serious interpretive error? And that the equation 'Saint Thomas = More', combined with the preceding equation 'Hobbes = Saint Thomas', leads us to conclude that 'Hobbes = More' – isn't this just absurd?

There must be some explanation. And the conclusion to Paragraph 1, where Spinoza invokes a certain state of public opinion (*creditur . . . aestimantur*), already starts to suggest as much: it is *internal to a given cultural configuration*, by virtue of the great divisions that had taken shape therein, that what separated these philosophers appeared inessential when compared to what united them in their opposition to something else. Paragraph 2 will enable us to see this more clearly. But Paragraph 1, taken in itself, initially gives the impression that it can only legitimately be referring to Thomist politics.

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With this granted, and if one agrees to abstract from the vehemently pejorative character of the terms employed, there is nothing incorrect in this

² *TP I*, 1; *CWS II*, 503–4; *G III*, 273.

paragraph. This is true above all in its first half, which concerns the *theoretical* foundations of the *practical science* that, according to Saint Thomas, is politics.

Spinoza first of all highlights the anthropological, and ultimately ontological, presupposition that grounds at once the possibility and the necessity of this kind of science. The philosophers, he writes, consider the ‘affects’ by which we are torn (*affectibus, quibus conflictamur*) as vices that humans fall into by their own fault.³ If you look at this closely, you will see that there is no caricature here. The affects in question are, evidently, passive affects. But Spinoza in no way means to say to the Thomists that the passions, as such, are vicious: the relative clause *quibus conflictamur* does not constitute an explication, but rather a determination; it is a matter, not of passions in general, but of *those among them* ‘by which we are torn’, or ‘of which we are victims’, or ‘which we suffer’, that is, it is a matter of what the Preface of Part III of the *Ethics* called, in a phrase which is almost perfectly reproduced here, ‘human impotence and inconstancy’;⁴ the thesis criticised is thus indeed that of Saint Thomas, for whom the passions are only a moral evil when they are *praeter moderationem rationis* [not moderated by reason].⁵ Now from this perspective, the word *vitia* [vices] is particularly well chosen. There is vice in anything whatsoever (*in qualibet re*), Saint Thomas says, as soon as it is *disposita contra id quod convenit naturae* [disposed in a way that does not agree with its nature],⁶ where the natural norm in relation to which this disposition could be considered disorderly is defined in terms of the end towards which the thing, given its specific form, naturally inclines as its own good.⁷ Taken in this broad sense, vice has a cosmic significance: if celestial bodies, by virtue of the perfect harmony of their matter with their form, always realise their end impeccably, those of the sublunary world, by contrast, whose matter remains potential for other forms, only ever succeed imperfectly.⁸ But, in the human being, a new factor steps in to exacerbate this flaw: namely, free will, which is exercised over the choice of means,⁹

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Ethics* III, Praef.; CWS I, 491. Translation modified. [‘Humanae deinde impotentiae et inconstantiae . . .’ (G II, 137). Curley’s translation drops the language of ‘inconstancy’: ‘And they attribute the cause of human impotence, not to the common power of nature, but . . .’.]

⁵ ST I-II q.24 a.2.

⁶ ST I-II q.71 a.2.

⁷ ST I q.5 a.5.

⁸ ST I q.66 a.2.

⁹ ST I-II q.13 a.6.

and which makes possible the voluntary establishment of a *morally* vicious passional disorder¹⁰ into which one falls *by their own fault*. A universal teleology, within whose framework a freedom of election capable of disturbing it ‘plays a role’: the description is correct, even if it is rather summary – and it goes right to the heart of the matter. If we restrict teleology to the case of the human being alone, it would also characterise Descartes. By contrast, it does not seem appropriate for Hobbes, the strictly determinist philosopher. But for now, let us simply note that Spinoza, if he speaks of ‘fault’, does not explicitly mention the indeterminacy of the will; this will make it possible, if it turns out to be necessary, to expand the scope of his remarks.

Having highlighted this presupposition, Spinoza goes on to expose its epistemological consequences, which he contends are absurd. Any speculative (or ‘theoretical’) science, Saint Thomas well understood, following Aristotle, is a science of the necessary; but since he holds that this necessity is teleological, it can only be encountered *in the things themselves* when they really attain their proper end. This is the case for celestial bodies; on their subject, at least in principle, a rigorous speculative science is therefore possible.¹¹ In the sublunary world, by contrast, necessity is only realised *ut in pluribus* [in the majority of cases];¹² the speculative sciences that could take this world as their object (for example meteorology,¹³ which Spinoza will invoke at the end of Paragraph 4) are therefore – and this, to be sure, is already erroneous – condemned to a lesser rigour. But in the case of human actions, even this possibility disappears: one can speculatively know the nature of the human soul, by deducing the natural ends of each of its parts, and hierarchising these ends, but nothing can be concluded when it comes to what operations will actually follow from them; in this context, *ut in pluribus*, it is the deviations that are the rule. Nothing prevents one, it is true, from *betting on human maliciousness* and, based on observed facts, making predictions that are all too often correct; astrology, to the extent that passional disorders depend on the body insofar as the latter submits to the influence of celestial bodies, with the help of demons, can go very far in this regard; but this kind of knowledge has no *theoretical* value, since every human being, in principle, has the means of resisting temptations and regulating their passions with reason:¹⁴ whatever one grasps about human action in this way amounts

¹⁰ ST I-II q.24 a.1.

¹¹ ST II-II q.95 a.5.

¹² ST I q.115 a.6.

¹³ ST II-II q.95 a.5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

to empiricism, pure and simple. Since the end is the ultimate principle of intelligibility, the disorders that oppose it are unintelligible in themselves, and they therefore elude speculative science. This does not mean that they cannot be made the object of another science. But that science would be very different: the only thing that it would intellectually conceive about a deviation is its relation to the norm from which it strays; to know it is to determine for what reasons it must be avoided, which is to say how exactly it is *bad*. And thus, we can make sense of Spinoza's appraisal: for, *from his point of view on the matter*, knowledge of evil, which is necessarily inadequate,¹⁵ is nothing other than a sad or hateful affection;¹⁶ by saying that this knowledge consists in mocking it, weeping over it, or censuring it (*ridere, flere, carpere*), one has, without any exaggeration, exhausted its entire content.¹⁷

Spinoza even adds a supplementary specification. For he knows quite well that, according to Saint Thomas, that which is disorder at the level of this or that species of creatures becomes intelligible when related to the total order;¹⁸ not always, of course, the total order of *created things*,¹⁹ in relation to which there objectively subsists a shadowy zone that includes not only the acts of the human free will but also the fortuitous physical events of the sublunary world.²⁰ Rather the order that includes everything is that of *divine Providence*,²¹ which encompasses predestination and reprobation²² and infinitely exceeds the order of secondary causes. To understand this is to pass from the point of view of profane philosophy to that of theology, to which Spinoza alludes in speaking of those who 'believe they . . . reach the pinnacle of wisdom' (*sapientiae culmen attingere credunt*):²³ an almost literal transcription of Saint Thomas' formula according to which theology *maxime dicitur sapientia* [is said to be the wisest],²⁴ insofar as it gives us the highest knowledge of the highest cause. But, Spinoza notes, this shift in perspective doesn't change anything about how one considers human disorders: given that the order of predestination and reprobation, which alone would make it possible to give an account of these disorders, is absolutely inaccessible

¹⁵ *Ethics* IV, 64; CWS I, 583.

¹⁶ *Ethics* IV, 8; CWS I, 550.

¹⁷ *TP* I, 1; CWS II, 503; G III, 273.

¹⁸ *ST* I q.103 a.7.

¹⁹ *ST* I q.105 a.6.

²⁰ *ST* I q.115 a.6.

²¹ *ST* I q.22 a.2.

²² *ST* I q.23 a.1–3.

²³ *TP* I, 1; CWS II, 503; G III, 273.

²⁴ *ST* I q.1 a.6.

to us²⁵ and thus could not give rise to any speculative knowledge except for that of its existence, and given moreover that it does not do away with free will,²⁶ the philosophers who ‘want to seem particularly holy’ (*qui sanctiores videri volunt*)²⁷ by declaring themselves to be theologians really have nothing more to say on the topic than anyone else. Only, their normative attitude becomes even more pitiless, since it is propped up by a perfect good conscience: it now consists in ‘cursing’ (*detestari*)²⁸ transgressions in the name of God; Saint Thomas demonstrates rationally that the damned deserve an eternal punishment,²⁹ and the blessed, far from experiencing any compassion for their suffering, rejoice in contemplating them.³⁰ This, according to Spinoza, is hatred in its pure state.

That said, this ‘theological’ or philosophical hatred has a positive counterpart, and Spinoza identifies it immediately. Practical science does not directly want to be a science of evil, but a science of the good; since it only treats deviations in their relation to the norm, it is the norm itself that constitutes the essential object of its study. But what could such a study amount to? Spinoza bluntly says: it amounts to praising ‘in many ways a human nature which doesn’t exist anywhere’ (*humanam naturam, quae nullibi est, multis modis laudare*).³¹ In terms of affect, everything is clear: the praise is the joy that we experience in imagining an action by which another seeks to please us,³² and it is indeed certain that the philosophers rejoice in the idea of a humanity that entirely regulates its own desires. But the manner in which Spinoza characterises the intellectual content of this kind of science is also clear. From Saint Thomas’ point of view, he seems to say, any science bearing on a natural being consists in defining the specific form of that being, then deducing the ends towards which it is naturally inclined, and then determining, based on this, the operations necessary for the perfect realisation of these ends.³³ When these operations are necessarily carried

²⁵ *ST* I q.23 a.5 ad. 3.

²⁶ *ST* I q.23 a.3 ad. 3.

²⁷ *TP* I, 1; *CWS* II, 503; *G* III, 273.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *ST* *Suppl.* III q.99 a.1.

³⁰ *ST* *Suppl.* III q.94 a.1–3.

³¹ *TP* I, 1; *CWS* II, 503; *G* III, 273.

³² *Ethics* III, 29 *Schol.*; *CWS* I, 510.

³³ This is precisely the method Spinoza criticises in Letter XIX to Blijenbergh: ‘we express all the singular things of a kind (e.g., all those which have, externally, the shape of man) by one and the same definition, and therefore we judge them all to be equally capable of the highest perfection which we can deduce from such a definition’ (*Ep.* XIX [to Blijenbergh]; *CWS* I, 359). ‘[Ea] omnia [. . .] quae externam hominum figuram

out by the being in question (either always, or most of the time), the science of which they are the object is speculative, with more or less rigour. When it is a matter of human operations that are not necessarily carried out, even though carrying them out would be necessary in the highest degree for our happiness, the science that concerns them is practical. But one might hold that there is no fundamental methodological difference between these two kinds of disciplines; they both rely, according to Spinoza, on the same error: simply put, in the first case, we position ourselves so as to posit at the beginning that which we know is to be discovered at the end, whereas in the second case, where the ends with which we begin are directly determined by our desires, their conflict with reality is more conspicuous. A practical science, from this perspective, indeed consists in the 'theoretical' knowledge of *what would happen if the human being* – just like, ostensibly, celestial bodies – were naturally determined always to act according to the ends we assign to it: it is the *speculative science of a nature that doesn't exist*, and of which we know, by hypothesis, that it will never exist *as nature*, even among those who would voluntarily conform to it. With regard to real human nature, which, as the philosophers wish to ignore, is subject to an entirely different necessity, nothing remains for them to do except to bewail it (*eam, quae revera est, dictis lacessere*)³⁴ in the name of a theory that contradicts it.

In speaking in this way of *theoria* with regard to the practical sciences, as he explicitly does at the end of Paragraph 1, Spinoza perhaps distorts Aristotle, but he does not falsify Saint Thomas. In fact the latter tells us that a practical science, even if it is radically distinguished from a theoretical science in terms of its object, can remain, in spite of everything, speculative *secundum quid* [secondarily], in one of two ways: either *quantum ad modum sciendi* [with regard to the mode of knowing], as when the architect considers a house not by thinking of the manner of constructing it, but *definiendo et dividendo et considerando universalialia predicata ipsius* [defining, analysing and examining its universal predicates]; or *quantum ad finem* [with regard to the end], as when the architect examines *qualiter posset fieri aliqua domus* [how a house can be made], by proposing to conceive of the rules of construction that best accord to this or that hypothetical case, but without their reflection being motivated by an actual project to be undertaken.³⁵ It is clear that

habent, una eademque Definitione exprimimus, et idcirco judicamus, ea omnia aequae apta esse ad summam perfectionem quam ex ejusmodi Definitione deducere possumus' (G IV, 91).

³⁴ TP I, 1; CWS II, 503; G III, 273.

³⁵ ST I q.14 a.6.

any practical science, insofar as it is a science, must pass through these two stages so as not to be caught off guard when the moment of its application arrives. But it is also entirely clear that, so long as one does not have at one's disposal either workers or raw materials suited to the operations so conceived, applying it would be impossible. Now, according to Spinoza, such is always the case in the practical sciences, which have as their object no longer *factio* (Aristotle's *poiesis*), but *actio* (*praxis*);³⁶ for the prescribed operations are confused with the work to be promoted (the perfection of an ideal human nature), while the worker, for their part, is confused with a raw material naturally determined by something entirely different (the real human being). The philosophers who seek to conceive, not of humans as they are, but of humans such as they would like them to be (*homines namque, non ut sunt, sed ut eosdem esse vellent, concipiunt*),³⁷ will never surpass the 'speculative *secundum quid*' stage of their practical science: they are condemned to impotence.

This is what Spinoza declares in the second half of Paragraph 1: the practical sciences, *to the precise extent* that they claim to be practical, are rendered practically useless by their lack of scientificity.

It is true that one must distinguish between ethics and politics. The former, for the philosophers just discussed, consists 'for the most part' (*plerumque*) in satire.³⁸ That it would have to be satire is clear given the preceding. That it would be so 'for the most part' is also clear. For, on the one hand, the normative appraisal of passional disorders requires a preliminary study of the passions themselves, such as they actually function, and on the assumption that one accepts that they are in themselves neither good nor bad; those who sought to undertake such a study (including Saint Thomas) had been able, here and there, to glimpse some useful truths. And, on the other hand, everything depends on the relation that one establishes between 'science of evil' and 'science of the good', the latter being in no way absurd insofar as it is a simple description of the life of the wise. But politics, which is separated from a theory of passions on which it would have to be grounded, does not itself admit of any exceptions: the politics conceived by philosophers could *never* be called on to be put to any practical application (*nunquam Politicam conceperint, quae possit ad usum revocari*).³⁹

³⁶ The 'practical' in Saint Thomas encompasses both the 'poietic' and the 'practical' in Aristotle's sense. (See *ST I-II* q.57 a.4.)

³⁷ *TP I*, 1; *CWS II*, 503; *G III*, 273.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The expression *ad usum revocari* refers, once again, to a very specific Thomist doctrine. According to Saint Thomas, as we know, all voluntary human action (and thus all *praxis*) has the following structure: the apprehension of the end by the understanding determines, on the side of the will, the *intentio finis* [end-directed intention];⁴⁰ the latter then incites the understanding to seek out means (the cascade of subordinate universals and particulars in the practical syllogism), in a deliberation (*consilium*)⁴¹ that generally terminates in the discovery of many possible solutions, to each of which it grants an *assensus* [agreement]⁴² that itself determines the *consensus* [consent] of the will;⁴³ then the conflict between these contradictory *consensus* leads the understanding to render a judgement (*judicium* or *sententia*)⁴⁴ regarding the best solution, resulting in the choice (*electio*) made by the will;⁴⁵ finally, moved by this choice, the understanding transforms its judgement, initially formulated as an indicative, into an imperative prescription, or *imperium*,⁴⁶ which determines, on the side of the will, the *usus*,⁴⁷ that is, a practical application. The practical sciences, by virtue of their teleological structure, thus quite naturally have a place reserved for them in the process, and which they will actually occupy if everything goes according to plan: the correct end being posed, the means that follow from it are destined to be ‘called on’ (*revocari*, Spinoza says) at the level of the *consilium*, in order to figure as one of the minor universals in our practical syllogisms. And if everything goes according to plan to the very end, what was called on in this way will, once the *imperium* pronounces on it, be invested in a *usus*: either into an individual *usus* following from the *imperium* that we address to ourselves, or, if it is a matter of politics, into a collective *usus* following from the *imperium* addressed by a prince to its subjects. Now it is the latter possibility that Spinoza disputes: Thomist politics (like all others, as we will see) is absolutely incapable, he thinks, of giving rise to the investment of which its nature is supposedly capable; by this fact, it is contradictory, like a square circle or a chimera.

The error begins, although it is still barely visible at this level, with the investigation into what Spinoza will call, in Paragraph 7 of the same chapter,

⁴⁰ ST I-II q.12 a.1.

⁴¹ ST I-II q.14 a.1–2.

⁴² ST I-II q.15 a.1 ad. 3.

⁴³ ST I-II q.15 a.1.

⁴⁴ ST I-II q.13 a.1 ad. 2.

⁴⁵ ST I-II q.13 a.1.

⁴⁶ ST I-II q.17 a.1.

⁴⁷ ST I-II q.16 a.1; q.17 a.13.

the 'causes and natural foundations of the state': it consists in seeking them out on the side of the 'teachings of reason' (*ex rationis documentis*).⁴⁸ *Natural law*, discovered by reason, prescribes us, according to Saint Thomas, to pursue the ends towards which our human nature is inclined: ends common to all beings (self-preservation), human ends (perpetuation of the species, education of offspring), ends of reason itself (to know the truth about God, to live in society in order to be able to attain and distribute this knowledge);⁴⁹ and it prescribes us, of course, to subordinate inferior ends to those of reason as means, that is, to practise all the virtues.⁵⁰ Since the realisation of inferior ends demands an *industria*⁵¹ for which the human being is not itself sufficient,⁵² and neither are its activities with those of others organised in concert,⁵³ and the acquisition of the virtues demands a *disciplina* that can only come from others and must begin with the 'discipline of the laws',⁵⁴ we therefore must live, not just in society, but in *political* society. If we set aside the teleological and normative interpretation, Spinoza, it will be noted, rejects *none* of these *documenta rationis*: for Spinoza *as well*, reason teaches us that its own demands, which are *also* to know the truth about God⁵⁵ and to communicate it to others,⁵⁶ are only realisable through the mediation of the State.⁵⁷ But if this, according to Spinoza, is indeed the reason why the wise accept the State and seek to improve it, it is not *the cause of the State's existence* – quite simply because reason, for the majority of human beings, is powerless, and its demands have practically no effect. The true cause, Paragraph 7 specifies, must be derived 'from the common nature, or condition, of men', that is, from the play of passions.⁵⁸ Beginning from here, methodologically, everything diverges. If political society is causally explained by the play of interactions between human beings subject to passions, the science concerning it will have for its object the different forms of self-regulated equilibrium that these interactions can take on. If, by contrast, society is explained by the end that reason assigns to it, the problem will be of knowing how it

⁴⁸ TP I, 7; CWS II, 506; G III, 276.

⁴⁹ ST I-II q.94 a.2.

⁵⁰ ST I-II q.94 a.3.

⁵¹ ST I-II q.95 a.1.

⁵² ST Suppl. III q.41 a.1.

⁵³ ST I q.96 a.4.

⁵⁴ ST I-II q.95 a.1.

⁵⁵ *Ethics* IV, 28; CWS I, 559.

⁵⁶ *Ethics* IV, 37; CWS I, 564–5.

⁵⁷ *Ethics* IV, 41; CWS I, 570. *Ethics* IV, 73; CWS I, 587.

⁵⁸ TP I, 7; CWS II, 506.

must be governed in order to assure a 'common good' that must be defined as the set of conditions enabling the greatest possible number of its members to become virtuous – virtue in that case being the end of legislation.⁵⁹ To which will be added the revealed divine law, according to which this natural common good must itself be subordinated to the supernatural common good. And from this, according to Spinoza, chimeras are born.

At first glance, this appraisal seems unfair. It is true that the political regime that Saint Thomas judges to be the best (his *optima politia, bene commixta* [optimal, well-mixed polity]⁶⁰) hardly seems to be realisable. It is however deduced, quite directly, from the end he assigns to the State. Since it is a matter of leading human beings to virtue, the best means of achieving this will evidently be to entrust the government to those who have already acquired it: *the most virtuous at the summit* (for monarchy best imitates the order of divine providence), and, in order to assist them, an aristocracy composed of *the most virtuous*; and since, on the other hand, this reign of virtue must be accepted by the non-virtuous that one wants to educate, the best means of achieving this will be to borrow something from the democratic principle by making the king and the members of the aristocracy elected by all the people and from among all the people, it being understood that the people would choose them *based on their virtue*.⁶¹ Spinoza was quite right not to believe in the possibility of such a regime. But if it was *for this reason* that he identified Thomist politics with More's *Utopia*, he would have been gravely mistaken about Saint Thomas' intentions. For the latter himself declared that his *politica bene commixta* was not realisable as such under any and all conditions: indeed, God, when providing the Hebrews with the institutions that would most closely approximate it, took care to reserve itself the task of nominating the supreme leader, rather than leaving it to the people, and not to grant that leader a truly royal power [*pouvoir*], for *Judaei crudeles erant et ad avaritiam proni* [the Jews were cruel and prone to avarice];⁶² in general, monarchy is no longer appropriate if the king is too exposed to the vices that give birth to tyranny,⁶³ just as a corrupt people itself no longer deserves to designate its own magistrates.⁶⁴ Political science thus does not aim to impose this *politia* that it nevertheless presents as the best: its task is

⁵⁹ ST I-II q.96 a.3 ad. 2.

⁶⁰ ST I-II q.105 a.1.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² ST I-II q.105 a.1 ad. 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ ST I-II q.97 a.1.

to serve as a normative standard for the purposes of defining and classifying the different regimes according to whether they approximate or diverge from it (*definiendo et dividendo*, etc.), and then to determine in what types of situations each of them might be viable (*qualiter posset fieri*). At the very bottom of the scale lies tyranny, the *omnino corruptum* [completely corrupted] regime,⁶⁵ a near-void of politics. But no one is ever forced to be a tyrant. Even in the worst of situations, something of the ideal norm would hold: from the democratic principle there would remain the prohibition against acting as an usurper, that is, against violating the rules of legitimacy (succession to the throne, etc.) that benefit from a popular *consensus* attested to by custom; from the rule of the most virtuous there would remain, for the leaders, the double obligation that they take as their end the common good rather than their personal interests and that, when they need to impose duties on subjects in view of this same common good, of distributing them according to a proportional equality⁶⁶ – this negative distributive justice meaning that everyone, after each duty is discharged, must remain able to occupy as before their place in the social hierarchy proper to the regime.⁶⁷ Of course, this is without taking into consideration the obligation that one must always respect the divine law,⁶⁸ and consequently accept the indirect sovereignty of the Church.

And so, Saint Thomas is not More. And perhaps Spinoza knew this, for his ambiguous phrase (*Politicam conceperint* [. . .] *quae pro Chimaera haberetur*) could be taken to mean that the *optima politia* ‘would be thought a Fantasy’ by the very same ones who propose it: a methodological chimera, which one must keep one’s eyes fixed on in order to hold onto what each situation makes possible.⁶⁹ But then, why declare that there is *nothing* there that one could ‘call on in view of a *usus*’? Because the minimal norms that subsist in all cases are too general to serve for something [particular]? If that is what Spinoza thought, he once again would have misunderstood the meaning of Thomist politics. For political science, insofar as it is deduced as a conclusion from natural law, is, according to Saint Thomas, *precisely supposed* to state nothing other than the universal rules that will thereafter need to be particularised. Saint Thomas, unlike More (and Spinoza!), never drew up a detailed plan of the City, even of its best regime – not because he was

⁶⁵ ST I-II q.95 a.4.

⁶⁶ ST I-II q.96 a.3.

⁶⁷ ST II-II q.61 a.3.

⁶⁸ ST I-II q.96 a.4.

⁶⁹ TP I, 1; CWS II, 503; G III, 273.

incapable of doing so, but because he did not think that was his task. The work of particularisation falls to political leaders themselves: to those who establish positive laws, which must themselves be derived from natural law, but *by way of determination* and not as a conclusion.⁷⁰ Natural law defines the limits within which the legislator must work, and political science only specifies these limits; but, within their framework, it belongs to the prince to assess what conforms to the common good here and now, taking into consideration the particular character of this or that people, circumstances of time and place, what is possible *secundum consuetudinem patriae* [according to the customs of the country],⁷¹ etc. Science, at that point, cannot and must not be of any use. What takes the reins there is the *intellectual virtue of prudence*, which political leaders need in the highest degree.⁷² It is via the mediation of prudence that the passage from knowledge of the *universalia principia* to that of the *singularia* on which they must act proceeds;⁷³ taken in the broad sense (in the form of *euboulia* [deliberating well], which is one of its potential parts⁷⁴), prudence enables one to discern, at the level of the *consilium*, which among the truths established by practical science can serve as the minor universals for the present case, and to complete it by minor particulars; taken still more broadly (in the form of *synesis* [judging well according to common law] and *gnome* [judging well according to general law], its other two potential parts), it makes possible a good *judicium*;⁷⁵ taken in its proper sense, at the level of the *imperium*, it is what disposes one to make good prescriptions.⁷⁶ Without this mediation, of course, political *praxis* is abandoned to an unregulated empiricism, at the same time that the corresponding practical science is left at the level of speculation *secundum quid*: Thomist politics breaks down. But with its help, practical political science is indeed invested in a *usus*. We are, it seems, at antipodes with Utopia.

Now, is Spinoza unaware of this? Certainly not. But *it is precisely this mediating role of prudence that he contests*. In these two paragraphs, full of Thomistic reminiscences, he does not once utter the word, and this is not by chance. For prudence, which disposes us to properly determine the means conducive to the good end,⁷⁷ evidently requires that we are disposed

⁷⁰ ST I-II q.95 a.2.

⁷¹ ST I-II q.95 a.3; q.97 a.2.

⁷² ST II-II q.47 a.10–12; q.50 a.1.

⁷³ ST II-II q.47 a.3.

⁷⁴ ST II-II q.51 a.1.

⁷⁵ ST II-II q.51 a.3–4.

⁷⁶ ST II-II q.47 a.8.

⁷⁷ ST II-II q.47 a.7.

to pursue this same end; and this good disposition towards the good end is what the moral virtues give rise to.⁷⁸ It is thus impossible to be prudent if one is not morally virtuous,⁷⁹ and the reverse is also true.⁸⁰ This is, ultimately, the condition of applicability of Thomist political science: if the role of the laws must be to render human beings good,⁸¹ the only thing that could guarantee that they actually play this role is *the virtue of the leaders*⁸² – including in our imperfect societies, where the distribution of powers [*pouvoirs*] rests on entirely different criteria. *And here, according to Spinoza, we have the chimera*, independently of any comparison with More. It is a chimera in the strong sense, denoting a logical contradiction: since the leaders are human beings like everyone else, if they were virtuous (that is to say, led by reason) always or most of the time, all the others would be as well, the City would become pointless, and there would no longer be either laws or leaders; and this is a dream, the dream of the golden age, where politics would have no reason for being; if there are States, it is because the majority of human beings are enslaved by their passions, and consequently, except for extremely rare exceptions that cannot be relied on, this is the case for princes too. Politics conceived as practical science is a contradiction in terms, because it requires a condition of applicability which, if it were realised in spite of its impossibility, would make its object disappear. To believe it is applicable by placing one's trust in virtue, Spinoza indicates at the beginning of Paragraph 6, is invariably to devote oneself to failure and to lose the State.

Spinoza can thus conclude: in all sciences 'that have a *usus*' (*quae usum habent*), that is, in all practical sciences, *theoria* is more or less pushed aside by *praxis*; but in politics, 'it is believed', it is pushed aside the most – which is why 'it is believed' that the philosophers are absolutely unsuited for concerning themselves with public affairs. Saint Thomas would respond that political *praxis* is perhaps, unfortunately, very far removed *in fact* from *theoria* – and that this would moreover be a supplementary reason as for why philosophers and theologians have something to say on the question – but that this is not the case *in principle*: the passional disorders of leaders are only ever 'vices that they fall into by their own fault', from which they could, with the aid of grace, be liberated at will in order to become virtuous and prudent.

⁷⁸ ST II-II q.47 a.6.

⁷⁹ ST I-II q.58 a.5.

⁸⁰ ST I-II q.58 a.4.

⁸¹ ST I-II q.9 a.1.

⁸² ST I-II q.9 a.1 ad. 3.

This is precisely what Spinoza denies. Everything thus depends on accepting or rejecting this initial presupposition.

What remains, in this conclusion, is the allusion to a *public opinion* that 'believes', quite seriously, in the fundamental inapplicability of the politics of philosophers and theologians. No doubt there was a time when everyone accepted the contrary, at least in principle and in discourses, but that time is past. Now it is the existence of such an opinion, whose origin is explained to us in Paragraph 2, that enables us to understand the generalisation that Spinoza makes: Hobbes = Saint Thomas = More.

* * *

'Politicians',⁸³ Paragraph 2 says. It is evidently a matter of *practitioners*, since Spinoza, immediately afterwards, declares that they are criticised for their methods of government. But not all of them, since it is specified that their detractors accuse them of being 'shrewd rather than wise',⁸⁴ without calling their competence into question; that is, included under this rubric are only those who know their trade. And among these, the end of the paragraph concerns only those who 'have written [. . .] about political affairs'.⁸⁵ Ultimately, the target is thus a certain discourse that competent practical politics, independently of any *theoria*, maintains about itself. A 'Machiavellian' discourse, essentially, even if Spinoza is far from purporting to reduce the thought of the master to that of his popularisers: the object of *The Prince*, according to Paragraph 7 of Chapter V of the *TP*, is to shed light on (in the end, perhaps, to show the dangers of such a regime) the reasons for which, necessarily, all

⁸³ [Translation modified. The Latin is *politici* (G III, 274). Curley translates this as 'Political Practitioners'. He writes: 'There is no happy choice for *politicus*. Wernham and Shirley both opted for "statesman," which doesn't easily fit contexts where Spinoza says *politici* have a reputation for cunning and the pursuit of private or partisan interests. "Politician" has those negative connotations, but our politics being what it is, fails to suggest the positive characteristics Spinoza attributes to *politici*: a deep understanding of public affairs, grounded in personal experience and a knowledge of history, and a concern for the interests of the whole community. [. . .] Spinoza's model is Machiavelli, who he thinks knew a great deal about human nature and public affairs, was wise in his judgments, and cared deeply about the city he worked for' (CSW II, 648–9). Elwes, Jessop, and Maccall translate *politici* as 'statesmen' as well. Matheron somewhat more naturally writes '*politiques*', explicitly elucidating the practical character of the individuals in question by qualifying them as *praticiens* in the next sentence; this would have been redundant if we had followed Curley's translation, so we have chosen to simply render it as 'politicians'.]

⁸⁴ *TP* I, 2; CWS II, 504.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Translation modified.

absolute monarchs *multitudini* [. . .] *insidiari magis, quam consulere cogitur* [‘set traps for the multitude, rather than look out for their interests’],⁸⁶ and it is precisely with this formula that Paragraph 2 of Chapter I characterises the behaviour of the ‘politicians’ that is criticised (*hominibus magis insidiari, quam consulere*), but which, as we will see, they are absolutely forced to adopt. Whatever the real goal of *The Prince*, and this is all the more true with regard to the *Discourses* (favourably cited in Paragraph 1 of Chapter X of the *TP*), there was, in the seventeenth century, a whole current inspired by it, and it is this current that is at stake in Paragraph 2.

This is a complicated appraisal. First there is the point of view of a certain common opinion: politicians, ‘it is thought’, try to trap human beings rather than look after their salvation, and ‘are judged’ to be more shrewd than wise. Next comes a description in four points, for which Spinoza himself is responsible: politicians, in fact, believe in the wickedness of human beings (*vitia fore, donec homines*); in order to prevent it (*Humanam* [. . .] *malitiam praevenire*), they make recourse to the ‘arts’ (*artibus*); it is experience that has taught them these arts by a long *usus*; and these are the arts that humans are in the habit of using under the influence of fear rather than under the guidance of reason (*magis metu, quam ratione ducti*). Spinoza, then returning to the common opinion and teaching us thereby who the ‘they’ are that ‘think’ and ‘judge’, shows how this behaviour explains the criticisms mentioned above: it is no surprise that the theologians, who want sovereigns to govern according to the same rules of piety to which individuals are subject (*secundum easdem Pietatis regulas, quibus vir privatus tenetur*), consider politicians as enemies of religion – that is, ‘they’ are the Thomists, and all those who, following their example, make the common good depend on the virtue of leaders. After which Spinoza returns to his own point of view: these politicians, when they have written about their own practice, have never taught anything that strays from the *usus* (*quod ab usu remotum fuisset*); for it is in this way that things really happen.⁸⁷

The four traits by which Spinoza characterises the behaviour of politicians, and by which he also characterises the knowledge that they have of this behaviour, might seem to amount to a pure and simple juxtaposition; there is not, at first glance, an obvious link between moral pessimism, recourse to the ‘arts’, empiricism and motivation by fear: one might be a pessimist without fear, an empiricist without pessimism, utilise the ‘arts’ based on a rational science, etc. But this assemblage finds its unity in the

⁸⁶ *TP* V, 7; CWS II, 531; G III, 297.

⁸⁷ *TP* I, 2; CWS II, 506; G III, 274.

category under which politicians are thought *by their enemies*: that of a 'skill in deception'. Spinoza does not contest that this is the key to their attitude, even if he judges it absurd to condemn them for this reason, as the theologians do; and since, moreover, he insists on their lucidity, he must reckon that *they think of themselves* as their enemies think of them, simply reversing the moral judgement that the latter pass on them. Now this might seem bizarre. And yet, it is all perfectly correct. It is absolutely true that, if these different points only appeared in Machiavelli within a much more complex thematic, everyday Machiavellians, for their part, conceived their 'art' in this way, and under the same unifying category: our Paragraph 2 could very well have served, for example, as an introduction or conclusion to Gabriel Naudé's *Considérations politiques sur les coups d'État*.⁸⁸ But it is also entirely true that this unifying category, which they take on by contenting themselves with turning the negatives into positives, comes to them from the theologians. And, at the end of the day, *from Saint Thomas himself*, who thus seems to have preconceived what would result from an eventual breakdown of his politics.

The condition of applicability of Thomist politics, we have seen, is the prudence of leaders. From which one might conclude that, if the latter fall into vices opposed to that intellectual virtue (intellectual vices which always accompany moral vices), their political *praxis* would be placed at a maximal remove from *theoria*. It matters little what the opposing vices are, by default: imprudence is timeless, and it's nothing to brag about; those who let themselves go never amount to theoretical adversaries. But the two vices of excess, as Saint Thomas describes them, pretty well characterise what the Machiavellians would eventually advocate. And their description coincides point-by-point with what Spinoza says about the 'politicians'.

The first of these two vices is the 'concern for the flesh' (*prudentia carnis*).⁸⁹ The practical equivalent to the speculative vice by which reason

⁸⁸ And also in a multitude of other French Machiavellians, though we have not read all of them; a comparative analysis of them can be found in Étienne Thuau's *Raison d'État et pensée politique à l'époque de Richelieu* (Thuau 1966). If one were to summarise in a dozen lines the tenth chapter of that book, in which the author takes the point of view of this current as a whole, one would end up, more or less, with Paragraph 2 of Chapter I of the *TP*. And the author certainly did not do this on purpose!

⁸⁹ [*Prudence de la chair* is a standard French translation of *prudentia carnis*, as for example in St Paul's Letter to the Romans 8.6: 'nam prudentia carnis mors prudentia autem Spiritus vita et pax'. The translation of this passage in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible reads: 'To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.' We have opted for 'concern for the flesh', which

allows itself to be led, in a syllogism, to a false conclusion that seems true,⁹⁰ it consists, during the intellectual preparation for action (*consilium, iudicium* and *imperium*), in the skill of mobilising means in view of an end that is not the true good, but only an apparent good.⁹¹ And we know that any worldly good that is not ordained by God falls under this rubric. If the worldly good in view of which we calculate is considered by us ‘the ultimate end of all life’, this is ‘concern for the flesh’ *simpliciter*, and it is a mortal sin; if we consider it merely as a particular end, to which we wrongly devote ourselves excessively by putting it ahead of our later salvation, but without for all that ‘showing contempt for God’, this is ‘concern for the flesh’ *secundum quid*, and it is a venial sin.⁹² It is clear that any political leader who, with extreme competence, governs in view of their own glory or of the increase of their power [*pouvoir*] without concern for the common good, or in view of the purely temporal common good of the City without ordering it towards the salvation of the souls of its subjects, is rendered guilty of this sin in one or another of its two forms. Spinoza, in Paragraph 2, does not refer to this ‘vice’ by the name that Saint Thomas gives it, but he employs an equivalent expression: refusing, for reasons we have seen, to use the word ‘prudence’, he instead speaks of ‘wisdom’ – which anyway is authorised by Saint Thomas, for whom *prudencia est sapientia in rebus humanis* [‘prudence is wisdom about human affairs’];⁹³ and those ‘concerned with the flesh’ thus become those politicians that one judges ‘more shrewd than wise’ (*potius callidi, quam sapientes*). Moreover, ‘*callidus*’ [cunning] is quite often used in an analogical sense.

The second vice is *astutia* [trickery]. The practical equivalent of the speculative vice by which reason is led to a true or false conclusion based on false premises that have the appearance of truth, it characterises those who, in the service of some end, good or bad, arrange means that ‘are not true, but counterfeit and false’ (*utitur non veris viis, sed simulatis et apparentibus*):⁹⁴ means, in other words, that consist in *making it seem like* one is employing means that in reality one is not employing, with an efficaciousness proportionate to one’s capacity to mislead others. *Astutus* are thus those who *dolos excogitat*,⁹⁵ *dolus* being a genus whose species include lying, perjury, fraud and treason.

captures the negative sense of this *prudencia* in a way that the almost univocally positive English word ‘prudence’ would not have.]

⁹⁰ ST II-II q.55 a.3.

⁹¹ ST II-II q.55 a.1.

⁹² ST II-II q.55 a.2.

⁹³ ST II-II q.47 a.2.

⁹⁴ ST II-II q.55 a.3.

⁹⁵ ST II-II q.55 a.4.

The *astuti*, Saint Thomas says elsewhere, ‘lay traps’, or ‘utilise pitfalls’ (*insidiis utantur*).⁹⁶ Now this is absolutely prohibited in all circumstances: one never has the right to mislead others, even with good intentions, even for their own good;⁹⁷ at most it is sometimes permitted *not* to reveal the truth.⁹⁸ And this is also true, without any attenuation, for political leaders in the exercise of their functions: even with the enemy and in times of war, *uti insidiis* are forbidden;⁹⁹ and with even greater reason they are barred from ‘laying traps’ for their own people. And this is precisely what the ‘politicians’ of whom Spinoza speaks in Paragraph 2 do (*hominibus insidiari*). And this time, Spinoza gives this ‘vice’ its Thomist appellation in Paragraph 3 of the same chapter, where *callidus* and *astutus* appear as two species of *acutus* (*viris acutissimus, sive astutis, sive callidis*) – this generic term, applied to Machiavelli himself in Paragraph 1 of Chapter X of the *TP* (*acutissimus Florentinus*), thus designating any person who, moved by a passionate (not necessarily bad) desire, demonstrates great ingenuity in the discovery of means to satisfy it.

Now these two vices, according to Saint Thomas, fall under a type of purposiveness that brings into play exactly the four aspects of the behaviour of ‘politicians’ as Spinoza described them.

First of all, in fact, if the ‘concern for the flesh’ and *astutia* are opposed to true prudence, they come very close to *art* (*ars, or technē*). For the relation that they establish between means and ends accords with a type of activity that more closely resembles *poiesis* than *praxis* strictly speaking. An action, Saint Thomas says, can be ordered towards an end in two ways: either as its end *per se* (victory, for example, is the end ‘in itself’ of battle), or as its end *per accidens* (if, for example, we steal in order to give to charity).¹⁰⁰ In the former case, its moral qualification comes entirely from its end; in the latter case, by contrast, there are in reality two different actions, which are simply externally coordinated, and which must be evaluated separately: one who steals in order to commit adultery sins twice, whereas one who steals in order to give to charity only commits one sin.¹⁰¹ It is clear that, in our two vices, it is the second type of relation that plays a role: stealing in order to give to charity is an elementary form of *astutia*, giving to charity in order to acquire vain glory is an elementary form of *prudentia carnis*, and stealing

⁹⁶ *ST* II-II q.55 a.8 ad. 3.

⁹⁷ *ST* II-II q.110 a.3.

⁹⁸ *ST* II-II q.110 a.3 ad. 4.

⁹⁹ *ST* II-II q.40 a.3.

¹⁰⁰ *ST* I-II q.18 a.7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

for adulterous ends participates in both at once; this is why *astutus* is not justified by its end when it is good, just as those 'concerned for the flesh' sin less seriously when the means that they employ do not involve 'showing contempt for God'. Now, the relation of an end *per se* to its means is a relation of form to matter: battle has for its matter an ensemble of activities that, considered individually, would have no meaning, and the form that gives them their intelligibility and sense is the intention of securing a victory; this is an end that is present and which acts from the start, like the growth of an animal, even if a certain amount of time is necessary in order for it to be fully actualised. By contrast, the relation of an end *per accidens* to its means resembles the relation maintained between an effect and its external efficient cause: theft is an action which is itself sufficient, with its matter (the ensemble of particular gestures comprising it) and its form (the intention of taking another's good); charity is another; and the first of these two actions, being entirely a condition for the possible accomplishment of the second, remains ontologically independent of it; the end is not present in the means, it succeeds it in the course of time; one could realise the same end by other means, or other ends by the same means; simply put, the agent links them together externally by making use of the one in order to produce the other. But is this not the very difference that distinguishes *poiesis* from *praxis*? In the latter, the action does not have its end outside itself, the work to be realised merges with the overall structure of the operation that accomplishes it, and the matter merges with the partial activities that constitute it; in the former, by contrast, the action has its end outside itself, in a work that will subsist after it: the matter is nothing more than the materials, and the activities that inform it pass over from the side of the external cause, that is, the tools utilised by the artisan. 'Concern for the flesh' and *astutia* are thus, ultimately, *techniques*: no longer the realisation in ourselves, at each moment, of a life conforming to the human essence, no longer an aid supporting others for this same end, but the art of producing in time, out of a given human material (we become an object for ourselves, or others) and the instruments we have at our disposal (our words and our actions), certain results external to these instruments (other actions, our own or those of others), which we utilise as instruments in order then to produce other results (still other actions), etc., whatever the final goal might be. More precisely, *astutia* is the technique of the *manipulation of human beings*: the art of utilising the ends of others in order to make them serve our own, taking care to conceal our objectives; the artificial here is at the same time artful. This is a form of practice that is commonplace today, but which was an abominable perversion for Saint Thomas.

But, second, these ‘arts’ can only be *empirical*. The architect has a *theoria* to guide them: the ‘speculative’ knowledge ‘*secundum quid*’ of the house and the universal rules that make it possible to construct it. The prudent has one as well: the moral science, at once ethical and political (and also ‘economic’, and maybe even ‘military’),¹⁰² that makes them know the ends of human nature and the universal means that it requires; given this, their empirical knowledge is there to be particularised. But those ‘concerned with the flesh’ and the *astutus*, who want to do the same work as the architect on the same matter as the true prudent, have no objective norm to regulate them: there is no *practical science of perversions*, owing to a lack of any natural end that would be required to serve as its principle. So they find themselves reduced to the situation of a prudent one who somehow managed to ignore everything from moral science, including its first foundations: they can observe human beings in all conditions, take note of the way in which they most often react in this or that case, deduce which means are probably best to realise their own projects in this or that kind of conjuncture, and they may even obtain dazzling success, but, to the extent that human actions *in fact* do not fall under any necessity, they will never go further than that – at least so long, Spinoza adds, as there is no non-teleological *speculative science* of the determinism that really holds sway over real human beings. And yet, as their frequent recourse to divination demonstrates,¹⁰³ their needs, in this domain, are immense.

For, third, they are dominated by *fear of the future*. Stealing in order to give to charity, giving to charity for glory, stealing for the sake of adultery – all that was still elementary: one might also plan an action intended to prepare the way for a theft, another action to prepare the way for this action, and so on; and adultery itself might be a means of obtaining something else again. Once we accept the principle of calculating for the future, of artificially organising actions that are naturally independent of one another in view of ensuring that each prepares the way for the next, no natural norm constrains us any longer, and we have no reason not to plan out our lives in an increasingly long-term manner. From which, since nothing is certain, a constant anxiety arises. This *sollicitudo rerum futurarum* [solicitude about the future], according to Saint Thomas, is a serious sin. If our ultimate end is eternal salvation, we have no need to make plans for the future; every day is sufficient unto itself: let us think of the harvest during the summer, and the vintage during the autumn, but let us not be concerned with the vintage

¹⁰² ST II-II q.50 a.3–4.

¹⁰³ ST II-II q.95 a.2.

during the summer.¹⁰⁴ We must occupy ourselves with our tasks here and now, by keeping our eyes fixed on what matters, and hope that God will provide the rest.¹⁰⁵ Even on the political plane, from this perspective, the common good is today's concern, not tomorrow's: there is no question of being provisionally derailed so as to better secure it later on. Pure *praxis*, not contaminated by *poiesis*. But, precisely, one 'concerned with the flesh' has something else as their ultimate end: namely, temporal goods that, by definition, are obtained and lost in the course of time;¹⁰⁶ they are thus afraid of lacking them;¹⁰⁷ they want to acquire as much as possible in order to be reassured, and they will be all the more reassured the more they are protected from far-off risks: this is *avaritia*, in the broad sense, which lies at the origin of this kind of vice¹⁰⁸ – including, potentially, in princes. And since the obstacles that one is afraid of encountering in the acquisition of worldly goods most often come from other human beings, they are what one mistrusts most of all; in order to frustrate their malevolent projects in advance, one therefore constructs the most tortuous schemes: one becomes *astutus* by seeking, as Spinoza says, to 'anticipate men's wickedness'.¹⁰⁹

So, fourth, it is by a *wager on human wickedness*, the very same which the Machiavellians will later be accused of by their adversaries, that this system of behaviour ensures its own closure. It is in this way that one runs the least risks: better to take too many precautions than not enough. It is also in this way that one has the least chances of being wrong in one's predictions, at least in the long run: if the predictions based on this postulate have no value in individual cases (due to free will), they are all too often statistically accurate, above all when they concern the fortunes of a collective, and we have seen that it is this that explains the partial success of astrology.¹¹⁰ It is in this way, finally, that one must consider human beings if one wants to practise the art of manipulation on them: virtuous human beings would not stand a chance. Everything comes full circle.

The portrait, in the negative, is thus already painted in these great lines by Saint Thomas. And in this portrait, taken positively, the Machiavellians will recognise themselves. There is no question, of course, of reducing Machiavelli to this skeleton: if indeed he claims these different traits for

¹⁰⁴ ST II-II q.55 a.7.

¹⁰⁵ ST II-II q.55 a.6.

¹⁰⁶ ST II-II q.55 a.7 ad. 2.

¹⁰⁷ ST II-II q.55 a.6.

¹⁰⁸ ST II-II q.55 a.8.

¹⁰⁹ TP I, 2; CWS II, 506.

¹¹⁰ ST II-II q.95 a.5 ad. 2.

himself, he integrates them, once again, within a much larger whole; Spinoza knows this, and leaves suspended the question of the true meaning of the Florentine's work, including that of *The Prince*. But *Machiavellism*, as an ideological current of the first half of the seventeenth century, would itself be defined in this manner. The circumstances had changed quite a bit since Saint Thomas: not only had political practice definitively left behind the principles he espoused (which had always more or less been the case, even though its 'vices' had for a long time been opposed to prudence by 'defects' rather than by 'excesses'), but it had become conscious of this difference. And happily conscious.

On the one hand, in fact, what had emerged was the double ambition to make the State autonomous from below and from above: to free it from the shackles of the Church, and to ensure at the same time its independence in relation to the feudal hierarchies on which it traditionally rested. From this perspective, 'bringing down the great ones' became an essential objective: with regard to those among the great who have not shown themselves to be unconditionally docile, the prince 'must be on guard against them, and fear them as if they were open enemies';¹¹¹ political power tends to take itself as its own end, everything else only being means to it. And, on the other hand, the breakdown of the old order and the emergence of new social relations made Thomist anthropology appear increasingly illusory: the human being is not naturally integrated within an order, it does not naturally incline towards ends that exceed it and in view of which it would always be possible to regulate it. Human beings, by nature, are egoistic individuals, who naturally aspire to 'satisfy their desires'¹¹² for wealth and power [*pouvoir*]; and this to infinity, for, animated by the 'fear to lose', 'it does not appear to men that they possess securely what a man has unless he acquires something else new'.¹¹³ Consequently it is impossible to trust them: 'because they are wicked',¹¹⁴ it is necessary to treat them like they would treat us. New ends, and a new conception of the human material that one is obligated to utilise in order to attain them: the foundations of Thomist politics no longer respond to the problems posed by this double mutation; it is no longer a question of proposing as the ultimate objective the reign of virtue, nor even of realising such an objective by means of virtue. The 'politicians', by reflecting on their own practice, thereby came, in the name of their exigencies and of what

¹¹¹ P IX; 40.

¹¹² P IX; 39.

¹¹³ DL I, 5; 19.

¹¹⁴ P XVIII; 69.

they believed to be their 'experience of men', to openly reclaim the right to an intelligent practice not based on *theoria*. And the categories under which this practice could be thought at its own level were already available, elaborated by Saint Thomas: it sufficed to invert the signs. What was thereby reclaimed was *the right to the 'concern for the flesh' and to 'astutia' as the only possible methods of government.*

The right to the 'concern for the flesh' was reclaimed, first and foremost, in order to be freed from the shackles of the Church. The ends of the State are purely temporal; bearing no relation to the salvation of souls, they are not even ordered as if towards a superior end: 'it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation'.¹¹⁵ The right to the 'concern for the flesh' was also reclaimed in order to be freed from a certain conception of the common good that identified it with an order conforming to distributive justice, or 'proportional equality', that it was forbidden to violate.¹¹⁶ The common good no longer proceeds through a hierarchy thought to follow from the very nature of society: nothing is natural; there are only the great, who 'desire to command and oppress the people', and the people, who 'desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great';¹¹⁷ and the prince can inflect this relation of forces according to the demands of the conjuncture, 'making and unmaking', 'giving reputation and taking it from' the great 'at his convenience'.¹¹⁸ The common good *at first* (and since nothing is certain, this 'at first' really becomes permanent) passes through the maximal reinforcement of the power of the sovereign, who alone is capable of stabilising these fluctuations: 'let a prince win and maintain his state';¹¹⁹ since this is *the end of practical politics*, 'the means will always be judged honourable, and will be praised by everyone'.¹²⁰ No doubt, in 'hereditary principalities', perhaps one could achieve this objective by governing in conformity with traditions¹²¹ ('secundum consuetudinem patriae', Saint Thomas had said); but the States that the Machiavellians of the seventeenth century were after, given the innovations introduced by their leaders (above all Richelieu), turned out in fact to be in a situation more analogous to that of Machiavelli's 'new principalities'. In any case, this was not merely a

¹¹⁵ P XV; 61.

¹¹⁶ See above, nn. 50–1. [ST I-I q.95 a.4; ST I-II q.96 a.4.]

¹¹⁷ P V; 39.

¹¹⁸ P V; 40. Translation modified.

¹¹⁹ P XVIII; 71.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ P II.

question of means: the essential thing was not to lose sight of the end, and to act intelligently in view of it.

This implies the right to *astutia*. For, from the moment that one endeavours to overturn the traditional hierarchies, to lower some and elevate others in order to consolidate one's power [*pouvoir*], one is dealing with a very formidable opponent, and without any guarantee of the future. So long as one could govern *secundum consuetudinem patriae*, the problems would not be too serious: subjects swear fidelity to the prince, the prince promises to respect their privileges, and the system more or less works; or, in any case, that's how things appeared. But the difficulties start to pile up: one must be able to continually obtain the obedience of subjects, but without necessarily respecting their previous rights; and in order to do that, it is absolutely necessary to *make them believe*, as long as is possible, that one intends to respect them. Violence is indispensable, but it is not sufficient. And it is useless to try to *explain rationally* to the subjects that what one wants to do conforms to the general interest, that they will benefit from it down the line, or that their descendants will benefit from it; for the people are stupid: apart from a narrow elite (to whom, in fact, it is crucial to reveal the truth in books that only they will read¹²²), they see only their egoistic interests in the short term, and so this is how one must grab hold of them. One must thus mislead the people, manipulate them, utilise their passions in order to make them serve ends that have been hidden from them: to the strength of the lion, there must be added the cunning of the fox.¹²³ From which we get, in the Machiavellians, a whole literature concerning the *arcana imperii*, or, according to the typical French translation of this expression, the 'secrets d'État' ['State secrets']: a codification of the *insidiae* [treacheries] designed to establish the prince's domination. Spinoza mentions two of these *arcana* in Paragraph 31 of Chapter VIII of the *TP*:¹²⁴ he obviously does not endorse them, but he reckons that monarchs would necessarily need to employ them to the extent that their State were not organised according to the scientific institutional model that he proposes. The first consists in going to war in order to make the king appear indispensable; Machiavelli, in fact, had said that war must be the principal preoccupation of a prince worried about his authority,¹²⁵ and this theme would be abundantly developed by

¹²² On this contradiction internal to French Machiavellianism, see Thuau 1966: 390–1.

¹²³ P XVIII; 69.

¹²⁴ The *imperii arcana* mentioned twice in this paragraph are not 'secret expenditures of the State', but 'State secrets' in the French Machiavellian sense.

¹²⁵ P XIV.

his disciples. The second consists in impoverishing one's subjects in order to make them more docile; Machiavelli, for his part, actually thought the opposite,¹²⁶ but he did say that, among subjects, the rich are more dangerous for a prince than the poor,¹²⁷ and he was often interpreted along these lines; this idea, in any case, by means of Machiavelli's vulgarisers, would reach its apex in Richelieu's celebrated formula: 'All politicians agree that, if the people were too much at ease, it would be impossible to keep them within the bounds of their duty.'¹²⁸ But the most important of these *arcana* for a monarchy (the *regiminis Monarchici summum* [. . .] *arcanum*) is highlighted by Spinoza in the Preface to the *TTP*: it is the political use of religion. We know what Machiavelli says about this,¹²⁹ and it would be the *leitmotif* of his imitators: far from the State being ordered towards God, instead – the ultimate sacrilege – it is religion that must serve as an instrument of the State, as needed, in order to deceive the crowds. This is not yet a denunciation of the mystifying role of religion; it merely testifies to it. But the *theory of ideologies*, such as Hobbes and Spinoza elaborated them, indeed had its origin in political *astutia* – and consequently, indirectly and negatively, in Saint Thomas himself.

This then is the *art* of 'politicians': a set of 'rules for the governments of princes',¹³⁰ designed to provide them with what Spinoza will call, in Paragraph 3 of Chapter I of the *TP*, the 'means by which a multitude ought to be [. . .] restrained' (*media, quibus multitudo* [. . .] *contineri debeat*).¹³¹ It is a purely empirical art, founded on a 'long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones'.¹³² An art motivated by the fear of an always uncertain political future, and which must furnish the prince with a 'capital from which profit can be drawn in times of adversity'.¹³³ An art, finally, that rests on the postulate according to which 'the end that each has before him [is] glories and riches',¹³⁴ and which tends to 'anticipate', as Spinoza says, the 'wickedness' that can result from this universal egotism. If Machiavelli's thought, to repeat ourselves once more, is profound indeed, Spinoza rightly carried on the Machiavellian compendium. This is how

¹²⁶ P XVI.

¹²⁷ P IX; *DL* I, 5.

¹²⁸ Cited in Thuau 1966: 352.

¹²⁹ *DL* I, 11–15.

¹³⁰ P Dedicatory Letter; 4.

¹³¹ *TP* I, 3; *CWS* II, 504; *G* III, 274.

¹³² P Dedicatory Letter; 3.

¹³³ P XIV; 60. Translation modified.

¹³⁴ P XXV; 99.

Machiavellianism, which was constituted, at least in part, by its adversary's gaze, turned against those adversaries the weapons that it had taken from them. They were deadly weapons: for the Machiavellian gaze, in turn, would break down the politics of the philosophers.

* * *

We have known all along who 'they' were that judged the 'politicians'. Now we know who it is that judges the philosophers: the public opinion alluded to at the end of Paragraph 1 is that which the Machiavellians inspired. These are the two poles around which the field of political ideology is organised. Of course, this does not rule out attempted compromises between the two, which may even be what one finds for the most part; but the problematic that organises them only gains its sense by virtue of this great divide. Now, if this is right, we can see that *all* (non-Spinozist) political philosophies can be considered as falling prey to the same illusion, and that what distinguishes them from one another appears inessential *in relation to the Machiavellian challenge*. For in one form or another, all of them, including that of Hobbes, remain attached to the only type of *theoria* that was thinkable before Spinoza, and of which only the Machiavellians radically disputed that it could be put into *praxis* at all: that is, politics conceived, in general, as a *practical science* – even if the norms on which one claimed to found it were no longer those of Saint Thomas. And we can also see that, from the point of view of anyone that takes the Machiavellian challenge seriously, More's *Utopia* itself appears as *the truth of all philosophical politics*.

Faced with an already existing 'Machiavellian' *praxis*, Thomist politics, purporting to remain faithful to the demands of its *theoria*, must become *Utopia*: this is very nearly what More says himself – quite independently of Machiavelli, it goes without saying – in the first part of his work. Facing the problem posed by the increase of theft, he has Raphael Hythloday declare that simple repression is unjust and insufficient: the role of a government concerned with the common good is to positively set up the external conditions for virtue; in order to render human beings just, in order to remove the temptation to seize others' goods, it must 'enable every man to earn his own living';¹³⁵ Saint Thomas couldn't have said it better himself. Now if everyone was far from earning their own living, this was the result, in England, of two causes: on the one hand, the existence of a lazy nobility and the mass of parasites that it maintained in order to secure its own glory;¹³⁶ and on the

¹³⁵ U 16.

¹³⁶ U 16–18.

other hand, the *enclosures*, owing to the greediness of that same nobility.¹³⁷ Vain glory and *avaritia*: these two aspects of universal egotism lie at the origin of all evils. And the rulers in no way cared to remedy this situation as they should have – far from it. Not due to imprudence; on the contrary, they were very calculating. But they were themselves caught up in the cycle. The end in view of which they calculated, without any relation to the common good, was solely the reinforcement of their own power: aggressive foreign policy,¹³⁸ and the increase of the public treasury at the expense of individuals domestically;¹³⁹ ‘concern for the flesh’, Saint Thomas would have said. With regard to the means that they employed, those amounted to *astutia*: tortuous diplomatic schemes,¹⁴⁰ stratagems designed to levy the greatest taxes possible on their subjects.¹⁴¹ We even find, precisely, two of the three *arcana* that Spinoza mentions, along with an equivalent of the third: ‘a make-believe war’¹⁴² in order to impose new taxes, it being understood that ‘a king can never have enough gold, because he must maintain an army’;¹⁴³ impoverishing the subjects, for the sovereign’s ‘safety depends on keeping them from getting too frisky with wealth and freedom’;¹⁴⁴ finally, diffusing a juridical ideology (it is not made clear, to be sure, whether anyone yet had the audacity to connect it to religion) according to which ‘all property belongs to the king, and so do his subjects themselves’, and that the king ‘can do no wrong’.¹⁴⁵ Hythloday concludes that traditional political philosophy no longer had any grip on this conscious and organised *praxis*. And More himself, who figures as an interlocutor in the dialogue, must admit that ‘there is no place for this school philosophy which supposes every topic suitable for every occasion’;¹⁴⁶ he does, however, suggest the possibility of a compromise, but Hythloday rejects it: as soon as a virtuous person is ready to play this game, their virtue ‘will be made a screen for the knavery and folly of others’.¹⁴⁷ The philosophy of the Schools, ultimately, has *no place* here: there is strictly nothing more for it to do.

¹³⁷ U 18–20.

¹³⁸ U 28–30.

¹³⁹ U 30–2.

¹⁴⁰ U 18–20.

¹⁴¹ U 28–30.

¹⁴² U 31.

¹⁴³ U 32.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ U 34.

¹⁴⁷ U 37.

Or rather there is, but only on the plane of fiction. If one wanted to maintain the validity of *theoria*, it was necessary to free it from the constraints of *usus* and make it open onto an imaginary *praxis*. Since it had become clear that it could no longer be applied anywhere, even in terms of its most minimal requirements, it had to be applied . . . *in the land of nowhere*. So the word 'Utopia' was invented; and probably the thing itself as well, for never before had the problem been posed with such acuity, not even by Plato. But, under these conditions, there is no reason why one shouldn't realise the *maximal* requirements of *theoria*. And, in fact, the utopian regime is precisely Saint Thomas' *optima politia*, with the sole difference (which might not even be one, since Saint Thomas never elaborated on this point) that the aristocracy includes two tiers: the magistrates (the syphogrants) are elected by all the people and from among them on the basis of their virtue; they elect from among their own ranks the superior magistrates (the tranibors) who form the governor's council; and the governor is chosen on the basis of their virtue by all the magistrates from four candidates put forward on the basis of their virtue by all the people and from among them.¹⁴⁸ All of this implies, of course, that *theoria* changes its sense: in Saint Thomas, the *optima politia* was a regulative norm that was not designed to be applied as such, but from which one would draw inspiration by retaining, in an inferior form, everything from it possible given the real situation; More, on the other hand, instead of adapting it to this or that real situation (a project which he knows must be definitively abandoned), *provides himself* with the imaginary situation in which it would be possible to apply it fully. And everybody knows what that meant: the most perfect regime would be possible *if and only if private property did not exist*, for that is what lies at the origin of the universal egotism that makes any good government impossible. After which, this condition supposedly realised, More proceeds to particularisation: from the universal principle, one must derive by way of determination (and no longer by conclusion), by accounting for equally imaginary circumstances of place and time, a detailed positive legislation – which Saint Thomas never allowed himself to do. It is not a question, by the way, of claiming that the abolition of property is really possible: More, within the dialogue, recites to Hythloday the Aristotelian and Thomistic arguments against such abolition,¹⁴⁹ and Hythloday does not refute them; what *Utopia* simply teaches is that, wherever this abolition is possible, the political problem can be given its optimal solution, whereas wherever it is not, the problem cannot be solved at all. And in fact, More

¹⁴⁸ U 47–8 (see ST II-II q.66 a.2.).

¹⁴⁹ U 38–9.

specifies, if the community of goods does not lead to any strife among the Utopians, it is because at the same time they benefit from a whole philosophical education¹⁵⁰ – an education that they are thus apt to receive, and well disposed to take to heart; virtue only reigns in the absence of property, but the absence of property, in turn, presupposes all the moral and intellectual virtues. Now this brings us back to Saint Thomas: if human beings had remained *in statu innocentiae*, he declares, the community of goods would not give rise to any discord among them,¹⁵¹ for then they would possess, like Adam once did, all of the virtues.¹⁵² The condition for the realisation of the perfect Thomist regime, according to More, is thus something like *the state of innocence prior to the fall*. Without grace, it must be said, since the Utopians never received any revelation¹⁵³ – which presents its own problems, and justifies Spinoza's drawing the connection between *Utopia* and the golden age. But, if one adopts Hythloday's point of view, there is no other alternative than between such a golden age and our irreversibly Machiavellian world.

We could, of course, oppose More to Saint Thomas: a politics of the state of innocence against a politics adapted to the condition of fallen humanity. In the same way, Aristotle and Saint Thomas are opposed to Plato, with whom More aligns himself.¹⁵⁴ But it is clear that, *confronted by Machiavellism*, this opposition loses all its pertinence. The problematic remains unchanged. The human being prior to the fall and the Thomist person after the fall, in relation to the Machiavellian, look very similar: purposive nature, free will, the perpetual possibility of ordering everything according to reason. The same conception of politics as a practical science follows from both; at most, Spinoza might say that More is to Saint Thomas (as Plato to Aristotle) what the Plato of the *Republic* is to the Plato of the *Laws*. And even if the *Republic* provides us with the key to the *Laws*, still, from this perspective, it is More who appears as the more lucid of these two thinkers; he at least understood what was, strictly speaking, the condition of applicability of this practical science, which is at the same time the cause of its inapplicability: a politics made for a 'golden age', in which human beings, living under the guidance of reason, would no longer have any need for the State.¹⁵⁵ In this context, ultimately, *Utopia* indeed seems to be the truth of Thomist politics.

¹⁵⁰ U 64–77.

¹⁵¹ ST I q.98 a.1 ad. 3.

¹⁵² ST I q.95 a.3.

¹⁵³ U 93–107.

¹⁵⁴ U 37.

¹⁵⁵ What Spinoza says in this regard in Paragraph 1 simultaneously contains an implicit *ad hominem* argument: the city of the *Republic* represents a kind of golden age before

But is it also the truth of Hobbes' politics? Yes, in spite of appearances to the contrary. For if Hobbes is almost entirely opposed to Saint Thomas, he is not opposed to him *on the precise point* that defines the great dividing line. In one sense, he does the opposite of More: faced with the contradiction between Thomist *theoria* and Machiavellian *praxis*, instead of providing an imaginary *praxis* suited to *theoria* which is retained as such, he rearticulates *theoria* from top to bottom in order to place it on the level of *praxis*. But he does this within the framework of the same problematic: his *theoria* is still a practical science; it always consists in determining the true end of human nature, in deducing the means necessary for its realisation, and declaring the use of these means *juridically and morally necessary*. It's just that the end has changed.

This is why there are, in Hobbes, two ways of considering the human being: 'man as matter' and 'man as artificer'.¹⁵⁶ Regarding the human being as matter, Hobbes gives us a purely speculative science, which he deems to conform to the norms of Galilean science, and which accounts for the objective necessity to which the real actions of real humans are submitted, corresponding perfectly to the Machiavellian description; from universal egotism,¹⁵⁷ he deduces, as we all know, what would happen in the state of nature: the war of all against all.¹⁵⁸ But at this point, the human being as artificer is called on to reflect on itself insofar as it is matter, in order to understand the end that it pursues qua human being and to determine the means of achieving it. In relation to Saint Thomas, of course, the hierarchy of the three kinds of natural inclinations is inverted: it is self-preservation that becomes the supreme end,¹⁵⁹ animal movements¹⁶⁰ are means in its service, and reason (now conceived as verbal calculation¹⁶¹) is itself an instrument in the service of animality. But the normativity persists in this inverted Thomism. There is a *natural law*, which *obliges* us to do whatever is indispensable to our preservation and which *prohibits* us from doing otherwise.¹⁶² If the human no longer has free will, its passional disorders are likewise no longer 'vices that humans fall into by their own fault'; for the law

its degeneration; but, Plato himself, in the *Republic*, says that there were no cities in the golden age; thus . . . etc.

¹⁵⁶ L Introduction, 2; 4.

¹⁵⁷ L VI.

¹⁵⁸ L XIII.

¹⁵⁹ L XIV, 1; 79.

¹⁶⁰ L VI, 1; 27.

¹⁶¹ L V.

¹⁶² L XIV, 3–4; 79–80.

is there, inscribed within its nature, it cannot but know it, it *must* draw from it what the law is seen to logically imply, and it will be guilty if it fails to do so – guilty of a logical absurdity.¹⁶³ And it is from this law that there follows the (normative) necessity of entering into a social contract unconditionally granting absolute power to a sovereign.¹⁶⁴ The ‘natural causes and foundations’ of the State are thus indeed deduced from the ‘teachings of reason’, and the critique Spinoza levied against ‘the philosophers’ in Paragraph 1 of Chapter I of the *TP* also applies to Hobbes.

Whence, according to Spinoza, the ‘utopian’ contradiction to which any approach of this kind must necessarily lead. No doubt the condition of applicability of Hobbesian politics no longer consists in the virtue of sovereigns: such virtue would be preferable, but it is not indispensable, for at any rate the worst of tyrants is better than the best of civil wars. But what is absolutely required is *the virtue of the subjects*. The ‘human as artificer’ *must understand* that the ‘human as matter’ can only find peace in constraint; it *must understand* that this constraint will only be possible if the sovereign unconditionally has a massive force at its disposal; it *must therefore understand* that it has the duty to participate in constituting this force by itself obeying the sovereign unconditionally.¹⁶⁵ But the human as artificer and the human as matter are one and the same human being: isn’t saying that each has the duty to provide the sovereign with the means to repress others, the same as saying that all have the duty to provide it with the means to repress themselves? A paradoxical demand, but one that nevertheless constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition of any good *politia*. Among the ‘duties of the sovereign’ mentioned in Chapter XXX of *Leviathan*, there is one whose importance is truly vital: ensuring the political education of the subjects¹⁶⁶ – that is, ultimately, teaching them Hobbesian political science. And the subjects, Hobbes clarifies in responding to an obviously Machiavellian objection, are absolutely capable of understanding this science:¹⁶⁷ if one rationally demonstrates to them that, since their nature is such that the conditions of their own survival must be imposed on them by force, that their interest, when properly understood, is therefore to give this force to the sovereign by recognising its absolute power [*pouvoir*], they will grasp the deduction; and, since they want to survive, they will comply with the obligation that it imposes on

¹⁶³ L XIV, 7; 81.

¹⁶⁴ L XVII, 2; 106–7.

¹⁶⁵ L XVIII, 8–15; 113–15.

¹⁶⁶ L XXX, 2–14; 219–26.

¹⁶⁷ L XXX, 6; 221–2.

them. But in that case, Spinoza says, how could they so comply if they did not *already* live under the guidance of reason? Their nature, consequently, would then no longer be such that it would need to be constrained by force: the State would be useless, and the object of Hobbesian political science would disappear. Utopia and the golden age, once again: thus the equation 'Hobbes = Saint Thomas = More' is justified.

Hobbes probably would have had some kind of response to Spinoza. But this is how Spinoza saw things. The first lines of Chapter XVII of the *TTP* indicate to us that the considerations in the preceding chapter concerning the absolute power of the sovereign were still only at that level where Hobbes remained, *mere theoretica*; now, he adds, *praxis* can be organised (*praxis ita institui possit, ut . . .*) in such a way as to draw it ever closer to the theory; but one surely cannot count on the scientific education of subjects to organise *praxis* in this way.¹⁶⁸ Instead, it would be necessary to put in place an institutional system that would necessarily determine them, based on their real passions, to perform actions that would reproduce that same institutional system; in this way sovereign power would *truly* become absolute. And Paragraph 5 of Chapter VIII of the *TP* repeats the same thing with regard to the particular case of aristocracy. Whatever the regime, there are coherent institutional systems that, as conditions for the applicability of absolutism, will substitute for virtue. Now clearly it is a *theoria* that would teach us about these institutional systems. However, it is a *theoria* that would have *nothing to do with practical science*: no longer a determination of the norms that *praxis* must follow, but a *purely speculative* science that would take *praxis* itself as its *object*: an objective (that is, 'scientific', in the modern sense) knowledge of the determinism that governs the real conduct of human beings subject to passions, from which the different possible types of self-regulating political systems are deduced.

And this, at the same time, and no doubt in conformity with the teachings of the real Machiavelli, makes the 'Machiavellian' *arcana* look like pathetic pragmatic formulas. What substitutes for virtue *also* substitutes for them in order to 'maintain the State'. And with greater efficacy. For the manipulators, to paraphrase a famous line, are themselves manipulated – and what matters is that it works. Trapped in poorly arranged institutional structures, they are condemned, in the long run, to see turned back against them the means that they were determined to use in order to try to master a situation whose real mechanisms escaped them. The self-regulating structures conceived by Spinozist science, on the other hand, will necessarily

¹⁶⁸ *TTP* XVII, 1; CWS II, 296; G III, 201.

determine the manipulators, without their even needing to know it, to do what is required in order for the objectives of those very structures to be achieved; and this, for the benefit of all. What the artifices of the 'politicians' could never successfully carry out, the objective *astutia* of institutions will accomplish.

In this way the opposition between the 'philosophers' and the 'politicians' is surpassed, by a radical subversion of each of these terms. Today one might call it 'a change of terrain'.¹⁶⁹ But in order for it to have been possible for this challenge to be overcome, it was necessary that it existed historically. It was Machiavellianism, born of a reflection on the contradictions of a 'practical science' that it was itself capable of breaking down, that led Spinoza to overturn the traditional political problematic. And in the first two paragraphs of Chapter I of the *TP*, Spinoza himself seems to have been aware of this.

¹⁶⁹ [See Marx 1969: 387. This phrase was popularised, in particular, by Althusser and his students in the 1960s to characterise transformations in the history of scientific knowledge wherein an authentic scientific problematic is born out of a particular ideological conjuncture. Althusser, for his part, takes this language directly from the Joseph Roy translation of *Capital*, which is rather idiosyncratic, but nonetheless encouraged the kind of interpretation produced by Althusser that emphasises a radical discontinuity between Marx and bourgeois political economy.]

Appendix 1: Interview with Laurent Bove and Pierre-François Moreau¹

Laurent Bove: *Your reading of Spinoza, whether one follows or disputes it, is today a major reference in Spinozist scholarship. When did you begin working on Spinoza and what, at that time, was the state of scholarship on the Dutch philosopher?*

Alexandre Matheron: I began studying Spinozism in 1949 when I enrolled in a *diplôme d'études supérieures* (the equivalent of a master's degree today) and wrote a thesis on Spinoza's politics. From what I can tell, it was the first on the subject. It was, however, very bad: it was purely and simply a very dull paraphrasing of the *Political Treatise* and the final chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. But my main concern wasn't Spinoza, really. At that time, I was a member of the Communist Party (which was still at the time very Stalinist), I had just joined, and I was looking for a philosopher that could be considered a precursor to Marx. I was looking to treat this question in a dogmatic Marxist way: beginning with productive forces and relations of production, moving on to political structures, ideological currents, class struggles etc., and finally arriving at philosophy . . . To be clear, I did not do that in my master's thesis, but I planned on doing it afterwards . . . and, of course, I never did! I began to think of my actual dissertation when I was already an assistant professor at the University of Algiers, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. The state of Spinoza scholarship in France, at the time, was basically non-existent. I remember being invited, a few years later, to a preparatory meeting with [Louis] Althusser for a seminar on Spinoza that was supposed to take place (and which never happened) . . .

¹ [Originally published as 'À propos de Spinoza', with Laurent Bove and Pierre-François Moreau, *Multitudes* 3: 169–200; republished in Matheron 2009. See Appendix 2.]

LB: *What year was that?*

AM: I no longer recall what year it was, but it was after the publication of *Reading Capital*.² [Pierre] Macherey was there, [Alain] Badiou as well, and I already knew their names. And it was also before May '68.

LB: *So, around '65 to '66?*

AM: Yes, surely. Well, that day Althusser had given us a bibliography with only [Victor] Delbos³ and [André] Darbon⁴ on it: nothing more than what we had already read when preparing for the *agrégation* when Spinoza was on the list of authors.⁵ There were also copies of [Ferdinand] Alquié's course,⁶ an article by [Robert] Misrahi on Spinoza's politics, and I do believe that was pretty much it. Moreover, when I went to ask Gueroult for a bibliography he said to me: 'There is no bibliography! They're all jackasses except Delbos and [Lewis] Robinson!'⁷ So there was practically nothing, and it stayed like that until around '68.

LB: *In the bibliography of Individu et communauté chez Spinoza, you cite Sylvain Zac . . .*

AM: Ah yes, that's true. Zac, with his dissertation in 1962, was the first to revive Spinozist scholarship,⁸ but then, we had to wait until around '68. And so if you look at my bibliography in *Individu et communauté*, there's almost nothing there.

LB: *When one compares your bibliography to the bibliography of a student beginning a study on Spinoza today, naturally . . .*

² [Althusser et al. [1965] 2015.]

³ [Delbos 2005.]

⁴ [Darbon 1946.]

⁵ [The *agrégation de philosophie* is a highly competitive exam administered annually in France wherein students complete written and oral examinations on a predetermined set of philosophical problems and figures. Upon successfully completing the *agrégation*, a student is officially licensed to teach in the French university system. To this day the *agrégation* constitutes a rite of passage for the most advanced students in the academy. From 1900 to 2000, Spinoza appeared among the authors that students were tested on fifty-four times – more often than Hume, Rousseau or Hegel (Schrift 2008).]

⁶ [Alquié 2017.]

⁷ [Robinson 1928.]

⁸ [Zac 1963.]

AM: There is a fundamental difference, clearly . . . Then in 1968, the big book by Bernard Rousset was published,⁹ which came before Gueroult's . . .¹⁰

LB: *And Gilles Deleuze . . .*

AM: Deleuze was a little bit later.¹¹ Gueroult's book came out at the end of '68, Deleuze's at the beginning of '69 (it is dated '68, but it didn't appear in bookstores before '69).

LB: *But given that your book was already finished by then, Rousset and Deleuze didn't play a role in your work?*

AM: Rousset and Deleuze didn't play any role, I didn't know them at all. Gueroult was what we called my sponsor at the CNRS: I went to see him from time to time, and he spoke to me a lot about the book he was working on. But there were of course so many things that I didn't understand about his claims: for example, he certainly must have spoken to me about substance having one attribute (given the importance of this idea for him),¹² but I retained absolutely none of it. Absolutely none. By contrast, one point that I did retain, and that I made use of in my dissertation, was the extreme importance of the difference between the idea that we are and the ideas that we have. That stuck with me. But otherwise, concerning my dissertation, Gueroult's book on Spinoza, as far as I knew it from hearsay, didn't really help me much at the level of content. In any case, my subject matter only partially overlapped with his: eighty pages of about 600 in *Individu et communauté*. Methodologically, however, his comments on my work helped me a lot; and the method that he employed in his book on Descartes – I don't like the book on Malebranche as much – was truly exemplary for me: I wanted to work like that!

LB: *You also cite [Jean-Paul] Sartre, whose name appears again in the bibliography of Christ et le salut des ignorants. That's two times we find Sartre . . .*

AM: Sartre's role in the *Christ* book was very limited: I said that, in Hebraic theocracy as seen by Spinoza, a sort of 'fraternity-terror' reigned; and I cited

⁹ [Rousset 1968.]

¹⁰ [Gueroult 1968.]

¹¹ [Deleuze [1968] 2005.]

¹² ['substance à un attribut'. See above, Chapter 2, note 2.]

Sartre on only this point.¹³ By contrast, in *Individu et communauté*, in my treatment of Spinoza's theory of the passions, I thought more deeply about the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: the passage from the serial to the group actually gave me some ideas.

Pierre-François Moreau: *Let's take a step back. In '49 there was nothing, and you wrote a master's thesis that was, as you put it, very bad. In '66, you wrote the dissertation that you would go on to defend in '69. What happened in the meantime?*

AM: I taught at the University of Algiers from 1957 to 1963; and, once I chose my dissertation topic, I obviously started working a lot on Spinoza. And – since my hierarchical superiors couldn't care less what we did in our classes – I often taught courses on Spinoza. In these courses, there were many things that went over my students' heads, but that I went on to include in *Individu et communauté* . . .

P-FM: *So it was then that you decided on your dissertation?*

AM: That is when I thought of it. I then spent five years at the CNRS writing my two dissertations, but it was while I was at the University of Algiers that the main ideas came to me.

P-FM: *Had you initially considered writing your dissertation on something else?*

AM: No, not really. Except for a brief moment when I was still very Stalinist (and very young) and I said to myself: 'I have to do something on the eighteenth-century materialists', because that seemed 'politically correct' to me, as we said at the time. But I very quickly found that Spinoza was much better than d'Holbach or Helvetius – towards whom, by the way, I am still today quite sympathetic, but even so, there is a major difference between them!

LB: *Brunschvicg wasn't helpful for you at all.*¹⁴ *You never speak of him.*

AM: No, Brunschvicg wasn't helpful at all. I basically forgot about Brunschvicg. And I also forgot to mention that, among all of the old authors

¹³ [Matheron 1971: 24–5. See Sartre [1960] 2004, esp. Book II, Part II, Section 3. (Matheron's reference: *passim*.)]

¹⁴ [Brunschvicg 1923; 1951.]

that wrote on Spinoza, there was only one who was immensely enlightening for me: this might seem paradoxical, but it was [Pierre] Lachièze-Rey and his book *Les origines cartésiennes du Dieu de Spinoza* [*The Cartesian Origins of Spinoza's God*].¹⁵ It was, I believe, the first to have said that 'naturing nature' and 'natured nature' are one and the same nature considered as 'naturing' and as 'natured'.¹⁶ Today, this has become a commonplace, although not everybody has really understood it. But for me, that was illuminating, since I had never thought of that before.

P-FM: *You were on the editorial committee of La Nouvelle Critique for a time, weren't you?*¹⁷

AM: No, never. I would surely have agreed to be a part of it if they had asked me to, but they never did. What is true is that I wrote an article for *La Nouvelle Critique* in the 1950s that was really terrible – although I was in good company, since it was co-written with Michel Verret and François Furet – on [Louis] Aragon's *Les Communistes*.¹⁸ It was really bad, obviously: very, very Stalinist.

LB: *When you finally considered doing a dissertation on Spinoza, it was practically at the same time that [Jean-Toussaint] Desanti's book came out.*

AM: It came out even before then. *Introduction à l'histoire de la philosophie* [*Introduction to the History of Philosophy*] was published, I believe, in 1956.¹⁹ Yes, I found it extremely interesting.

LB: *That was the book that you had considered writing while you were working on your master's thesis, right?*

AM: Yes, that's right; I considered doing something like that. And after reading it, I thought about continuing in that direction. I imagined writing a first 500-page volume on productive forces, relations of productions, the class struggle in Holland, etc., and then a second 500-page volume where I

¹⁵ [Lachièze-Rey 1950.]

¹⁶ [That is, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. See *Ethics* I, 29 Schol.; CWS I, 434.]

¹⁷ [*La Nouvelle Critique* was the official journal of the *Parti communiste française*. It was published from 1948 to 1980. It was highly peculiar to publish an essay on Spinoza in this journal, given its Marxist, and at times even Stalinist, orientation.]

¹⁸ [Furet et al. 1950]

¹⁹ [Desanti [1956] 2006.]

would finally get to Spinoza. But as soon as I started to work on my dissertation I completely gave up on that first volume. And besides, I was no longer a Stalinist by then.

LB: 'By then' – that is?

AM: From 1957 onward. I was no longer a member of the Party. I joined again from '64 to '78; but all my sympathies were with the opposition, as much with Althusser as with [Georges] Labica, and with my students and former students who ran the journal *Dialectiques*. I simply remained a Marxist in the broad sense.

LB: *At the same time, you continued to cite Desanti's book and, you've told me, you cited it all the more happily as Desanti distanced himself from it . . .*

AM: Yes, yes, I always cited Desanti, if only to remind him that the book he had written – and of course he denied it – was very good. It is the best Marxist work on the history of philosophy that I have ever read, along with [Antonio] Negri's.²⁰

LB: *Even in the distinction Desanti draws between the materialist and the idealist tendencies in Spinoza?*

AM: No. The obligation to distinguish in each philosophy a contradiction between two poles, a materialist and an idealist pole – that no longer does much for me. Now, the fact that one can distinguish, within the same philosophy, different poles, and conflicts between different tendencies, that's a different story. But the idea that all of that must always be understood on the basis of a single and eternal contradiction that would be 'the red thread of the history of philosophy',²¹ as Lenin said, no, I no longer believe that so much. Not unless we give a much broader meaning to the word 'materialism', since after all, when Engels defines materialism as the conception of 'nature just as it is, without foreign addition',²² that could apply to Spinoza, but it's also not what we ordinarily call materialism.

²⁰ [Negri 1991. See 'L'Anomalie sauvage d'Antonio Negri', in Matheron 2011.]

²¹ [Lenin 1962: 341.]

²² [Engels 1987: 478–9.]

LB: *Does that mean that Desanti's book is ultimately less valuable for what it teaches us about Spinoza than for its Marxist analysis of the historical conditions of Spinoza's Holland?*

AM: I wouldn't say that. Its analyses, which are at any rate quite insufficient in the eyes of an historian (they are above all too programmatic), still teach us something all the same, if not about Spinoza himself, then at least about the way in which a set of problematics that he dealt with were articulated, problematics on the basis of which he had to reflect, and which thus define certain conditions for the possibility of the appearance of something like Spinozism in Holland rather than elsewhere. Negri has shown the same thing, from another point of view, but one that overlaps with Desanti's. And there was supposed to have been a second volume that would have dealt with Spinoza himself, but it was never published.²³ I am sure that it would have been very good, and quite different from the first volume.

LB: *Another question about Desanti's text. He said, at bottom, that it was useless for a materialist to hold onto Spinoza's third kind of knowledge.*²⁴

AM: He said that?

LB: Yes.

AM: Wow! Well, I had forgotten that. And perhaps that is a significant forgetting. For my part, I have always thought the opposite. It is true that I was much more interested in the fifth part of the *Ethics* from the moment I took my distance from the Communist Party. But I recall that, when I was still studying for the *agrégation*, a group of philosophy students decided to publish a pamphlet encouraging people to read *Humanité*; and I wrote an article where I did a comparison between *Figaro*, which lied, *Le Monde*, which only gave knowledge of the first kind, *France-Observateur*, which at least had the merit of sometimes giving knowledge of the second kind, and

²³ [Desanti's book, which was extremely popular in its day, was supposed to have been followed up by a second volume that never appeared. Today, in the PUF re-edition of the book, one will find a draft of the second volume recently discovered in the Desanti archives. See Desanti [1956] 2006: 277–99.]

²⁴ [See Desanti [1956] 2006: 118–20. For example, Desanti writes: 'But then why does Spinoza, who is so passionate about rational thought, add this form of knowledge to the other two? Why did he believe to find in it the supreme "guarantee" of knowledge and the instrument of "salvation"?']

Humanité, finally, which alone gave knowledge of the third kind! The whole group found the article very amusing, but, ‘all the same’, they wouldn’t publish it! All that is to say that I’ve always been interested in knowledge of the third kind . . . But I tended, it’s true, to think that it prefigured what Mao Tse-Tung called the ‘practical stage of knowledge’;²⁵ and to think, too, that Spinozist eternity prefigured the life of a militant, which seemed to me to be the best example of the adequation of our existence to our essence – an adequation that I regretted not being able to achieve myself, since I was, in fact, a very bad militant! Luckily for me, that didn’t last long. But from the start I had grasped that knowledge of the third kind was not just something essential in Spinoza’s system, but something that could be lived, and which could *truly* bring us a kind of salvation.

LB: *When Desanti says that Spinoza is a bourgeois thinker, does that still ring true to you?*

AM: No. But I did start out thinking like that. But it went without saying for me that Spinoza went as far as one could possibly go on every issue while still being a thinker of the bourgeoisie; and then eventually I realised that he had gone so far that he was no longer implicated in any relation with the bourgeoisie at all. At the start, then, I began studying Spinoza because I saw in him somebody who had the great merit, beyond the limits imposed on him by his class position, of being a precursor to Marx; and now, instead, I tend to see in Marx somebody who had the great merit of being one of the successors of Spinoza in certain domains.

P-FM: *Those who work on Spinoza today have at their disposal a much more ample body of literature than you did. They also discuss the dissertations of foreign researchers, since there has been a Spinozist revival outside of France. At the time, you knew very few foreign commentators, or you didn’t think much of them. The people you cite in your dissertation, for example [Joseph] Dunner . . .*²⁶

AM: That book is totally bogus. But I also did read some good foreign books while working on my dissertation: [Lewis] Feuer’s book,²⁷ for example, I found quite interesting.

²⁵ [Matheron perhaps has in mind Mao’s distinction in the 1937 essay ‘On Practice’. See Mao 1965: 295–309.]

²⁶ [Dunner [1955] 1995.]

²⁷ [Feuer [1958] 2017.]

P-FM: *And had you read Leo Strauss at the time? You don't cite him.*

AM: No, I wasn't familiar with that part of Strauss's work.²⁸ I had read his book on Hobbes,²⁹ but I wasn't familiar with his book on Spinoza. I read [Harry Austryn] Wolfson,³⁰ of course, whom I didn't really mind, but who wasn't particularly inspiring. His approach just wasn't the same as mine, but it nevertheless taught me some things, since I was extremely ignorant in matters of Jewish philosophy.

P-FM: *Did you have contact with other Spinozists?*

AM: No, nobody; I didn't even know that there were any. Or rather yes, there was Marianne Schaub; when I came to Paris, we met for a drink, but we didn't end up speaking much about Spinoza.

P-FM: *What about Sylvain Zac – did you know him personally?*

AM: No, I only met him after I had finished my dissertation, a bit before I started teaching at Nanterre, where I worked as a *maître-assistant* (the equivalent of a *maîtres de conférences* today) from '68 to '71. I always had a good relationship with him; he was a very likable guy!

P-FM: *Who was your dissertation advisor?*

AM: I had asked [Henri] Gouhier because I thought Gueroult wasn't advising dissertations. Gouhier, in the end, looked after my complimentary dissertation; for the main one he sent me to [Raymond] Polin, who neither helped me nor got in my way.

P-FM: *So, really, you only knew Gueroult because he was your sponsor at the CNRS?*

AM: I had read his books, but we only knew each other personally through the CNRS; and I only saw him in that context and on the day of my defence, because he was on the jury. We never talked about anything except Spinoza.

²⁸ [Strauss [1930] 1997.]

²⁹ [Strauss [1936] 1996.]

³⁰ [Wolfson 1934.]

Except once he went off – I don't remember why, now – on a diatribe against Alain Peyrefitte, and I listened to him very politely, but that's it.

P-FM: *Did you see him again after your dissertation?*

AM: I never saw him afterward. We sometimes wrote each other, or spoke on the phone. He asked me, for example, to write a review of his book, which I did,³¹ but I never saw him again in person.

P-FM: *What is surprising is that people see you as Gueroult's closest disciple, not just intellectually, but as somebody who must have had a close personal relationship with him.*

AM: Yes, I know. And in fact some people have thought that I must have been somehow responsible when Gueroult was not so kind to them . . .

P-FM: *As though you had been pulling the strings . . .*

AM: Yes, it's grotesque. Not only is it false, but in each of those cases, I didn't even know about what was happening at the time, and only found out much later. In fact, Gueroult never said anything nasty about any colleagues to me . . . Ah, I almost forgot: he once, very briefly and very allusively, spoke ill about somebody whom I did not know at all at the time, not even their name.

LB: *Between Desanti and Gueroult, it was Gueroult who would play a larger role for you.*

AM: Methodologically, yes.

P-FM: *Did the fact of being in Algeria play a role in the conception of Spinoza that you developed? You were right in the middle of a war . . .*

AM: Perhaps; it is possible that it played a role, in particular, in my chapter on the theory of the passions. Some of my formulations evoked what the partisans of 'French Algeria' might have said about the Algerians.

P-FM: *And you were conscious of this?*

³¹ [Matheron 1972.]

AM: Yes, at least once, in the passage where I explain how the ambition for glory turns into the ambition for domination and envy: we start out wanting to please others by being of service to them, then we want them to conform to our desires, and finally we want to dispossess them of their goods. After this explanation I said that the resistance put up by our victims 'is felt by us as the worst kind of ingratitude', and I summed up this state of mind by adding: 'after all that we've done for them!' This kind of formulation could be heard almost every day at Algiers in the mouths of the French.

LB: *In your discussions with Gueroult, did you ever discuss the political Spinoza?*

AM: No, never; that didn't interest him at all. And I think that he never even spoke to me about Spinoza's politics; so I don't know exactly what he thought of it. But when I was at Algiers, there was a really good professor, Ginette Dreyfus, who was totally Gueroultian; and one year when the *Political Treatise* was put on the *agrégation* programme, she thought it was a shame because, as she put it, 'it's not interesting'. And I suppose Gueroult thought the same thing. In any case, when I showed him my work each year (since, as he was my sponsor at the CNRS, I had to submit it to him), he made all kinds of observations, praises, critiques, etc., but he never said anything about the chapters on politics. Clearly, it did not interest him at all.

LB: *Did Gueroult's reading seem to you to repress the theme of power [puissance]? Had you already asked yourself this question?*

AM: No. And it's very curious. For at the very beginning of the first chapter of *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, I had immediately arrived at the idea to which I am returning right now: substance as pure activity; and the idea came to me from Lachièze-Rey, the great idealist; I cited his formulation concerning Extension as 'spatialising space, and not spatialised space'. To be clear, for Lachièze-Rey, this idea of an active Extension, which he rightly attributes to Spinoza, was 'in reality' untenable, and Spinoza 'logically' would have had to be an idealist. But I didn't follow him there. And from the first pages of *Individu et communauté*, I tried to justify this concept of substance as pure activity – basing my position, moreover, not at all, like today, on the *Ethics* (because I didn't yet see it in the *Ethics*), but only on the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, on the theory of genetic definition. Since to understand is to understand genetically, and since being and knowing are ultimately the same thing, I immediately concluded that, for Spinoza, being is genesis and productivity. But after having said that, I moved on to

something else. And I can say that after having read Gueroult, I actually more or less repressed this idea – in large part, I think, under the influence of his notion of *substance à un attribut*. Moreover, for that matter, I never really denied it, but I stopped thinking about it. More so than anywhere else, the notion of *substance à un attribut*, on the condition that we transform it – speaking not of substance having one attribute, but of *the one* substance, *considered* under one attribute – this notion might, I think, really account for the method Spinoza followed in the first propositions of the *Ethics*. But, in every other case, it just slowed me down; and it was only in the '80s that I returned to my initial idea, starting with the moment when I began to 'sublate' Gueroult (so to speak).

P-FM: *Before beginning your dissertation, or while writing it, had you been influenced by other important books in the history of philosophy or the history of ideas?*

AM: As for important books in the history of philosophy, I read everything that one read at the time. I had a lot of admiration for [Henri] Gouhier,³² [Étienne] Gilson,³³ and [Victor] Goldschmidt³⁴ as well (he shared with Gueroult a common concern for structures). And also, curiously (or maybe not so curiously, at the end of the day), there was Lévi-Strauss.³⁵ One time, right in front of me, Zac said to somebody else: 'Matheron did for Spinoza what Lévi-Strauss did for systems of kinship.' And I think that's true, in particular, with respect to the combinatorial on the basis of which I reconstructed the constitutions of the *Political Treatise* and the theocracy of the *TTP*. I even, when comparing Spinozist monarchy and aristocracy, spoke of 'symmetrical and inverse' structures; I got that from Lévi-Strauss.

LB: *There was also [C. B.] Macpherson's book . . .*³⁶

AM: Yes, that greatly influenced me, but in regard to Hobbes – perhaps wrongly, since now that seems to be out of fashion . . . But I always found that it wasn't bad; and reading it was kind of illuminating. Moreover, I spent

³² [Gouhier 1948.]

³³ [Gilson wrote dozens of works on the history of philosophy, in particular on medieval thought and its relation to early modern philosophers. In Chapter 4, above, Matheron cites Gilson 1952.]

³⁴ [Goldschmidt was an important scholar of ancient philosophy. By this point in time his most widely read work was Goldschmidt 1947.]

³⁵ [Lévi-Strauss 1969.]

³⁶ [Macpherson 1962.]

a long time working on Hobbes, since, when I arrived at Algiers, it was on the undergraduate reading list; and since I had a passion for it, I arranged things so that I would return to it very often . . .

LB: *Before you came along, following the tradition dating back to the eighteenth century, Spinoza was identified with Hobbes politically. Were you aware that you were introducing a strong distinction between the two?*

AM: I think that in English-speaking countries, one had effectively always thought Spinoza's politics on the basis of Hobbes. In France, where there also wasn't much better on Hobbes at the time (beyond Polin's book³⁷), things were a little bit different. Some people thought that Spinoza's politics was an uninteresting and clumsy variation of Hobbes' politics, but that, fortunately, it didn't have any relation to the rest of his philosophy. Others, by contrast, opposed the liberal contractarianism that they wrongly attributed to Spinoza to the theory of the 'right of the stronger' that they wrongly attributed to Hobbes, etc. In any case, the majority of these comparisons relied on misinterpretations.

LB: *Were you familiar with Madeleine Francès' book?*³⁸ *You don't cite it . . .*

AM: Yes, of course. I found it interesting, but I didn't get much out of it, given what I was doing.

LB: *Let's turn more directly to Individu et communauté, considering in particular the notions of individual and conatus. When looking through your articles and Individu et communauté, one notices that the cybernetic model comes up frequently. There are often expressions like 'a totality closed upon itself that perpetually reproduces itself';³⁹ you use the notion of 'relative autonomy', 'self-regulation', 'self-regulating system' or 'self-regulating communication', or even 'self-regulated structure' . . . Is this not an influence of that era, of the cybernetic vision that was dominant starting at the end of the '40s?*

AM: It is possible, but, in fact, I had read pretty much nothing about cybernetics. These ideas were in the air . . .

³⁷ [Polin 1953.]

³⁸ [Francès 1937.]

³⁹ [See Matheron [1969] 1988: 22, and *passim*.]

LB: *There was a book by [Jacques] Guillaumaud from 1965 on cybernetics and historical materialism published by Éditions Sociales.*⁴⁰ *And at the beginning of his book Sylvain Zac cites a work by [Raymond] Ruyer.*⁴¹

AM: I didn't read any of that stuff. But these are ideas that are easily applicable to Spinoza; we can speak of self-regulation in Spinoza; political systems are indeed for him self-regulated systems . . .

LB: *But doesn't Spinoza distance himself from the problematic of preservation, even if he speaks of it a lot in the Political Treatise, in favour of a logic of the pure indefinite productivity of the real? And isn't the cybernetic model linked to a logic of preservation?*

AM: I don't believe that Spinoza abandons the logic of preservation. It is obvious for him that, to the extent that we act, we preserve our being: everything that produces effects thereby preserves its being, since the effects that it produces cannot be in contradiction with its nature. I did not give this up because I don't at all think that Spinoza gave it up. But I think, and I have always thought, that the notion of preservation in the strict sense, in the biological sense, is much less important in Spinoza than, for example, in Hobbes: Spinoza never reduces the preservation of our being to biological preservation. It is true that, in a sense, the *Ethics* could, at the limit, have been written without it being a question of preservation, but only of 'the power [*puissance*] to exist and to act'; but this would prevent the deployment of the power to exist and to act having as a *consequence* (but not as an end, to be sure) self-preservation and self-regulation. Simply put, there are different models of self-regulation, there are different ways of preserving oneself: there is a static self-preservation where one is reproduced identically, on the model of the Hebrew State; and there is a dynamic self-preservation where one is reproduced by raising oneself each time to a higher level, on the model of the States of the *Political Treatise*. It is the same thing for individuals: there are individuals that preserve themselves in the strict sense, in a narrow manner, and others that preserve themselves by always developing and increasing their productivity all the more; and as soon as adequate ideas start to play an important role in our mind, it is this second form of self-regulation that takes over. But I don't believe that this calls into question the notion of self-regulation itself: the free human being, who lives under

⁴⁰ [Guillaumaud 1965.]

⁴¹ [Ruyer [1952] 2016.]

the guidance of reason, strives to produce all the effects that follow from their nature as a free human being, and *from this very fact*, they tend to preserve their nature as a free human being.

LB: *The central notion of the individual hasn't really changed much for you since the time of Individu et communauté.*

AM: No, I don't believe so. Except that in *Individu et communauté* I said some things that now seem to me to be a bit too specific, in that they only apply in particular cases. Today, if pushed, I would simply say that an individual is a set of bodies that interact with one another according to a particular system of laws that is different than other systems.

LB: *The problem is the status of laws in the communication of movement . . .*

AM: Yes, because members of a political society do indeed communicate movements (if only when they speak to one another), the result being the reproduction of political society. And these movements are regulated by laws, including civil laws.

LB: *It is the communication of movement that makes up the unity of an individual.*

AM: Yes, according to certain laws different than those of other individuals. Right now, for example, we are in the process of communicating movements according to the laws that were specified at the beginning (the laws of the interview) and which are different than the laws by which people typically communicate their movements. In the same way, the three of us form a little embryonic individual . . . But in *Individu et communauté*, I tended a bit too much to want to give a physico-mathematical model to *all* kinds of individuals: I tended to think, in principle, that everything could be mathematised, whereas in fact the exchange of words . . .

P-FM: *That was all the rage at the time . . .*

AM: Clearly, I know. Incidentally, the one time Desanti spoke to me about my book, he said: 'it is very astute, your model . . .'. Today, I would say that it only works for particular cases.

LB: *Was it your work on the notion of individual that led you to the political conceptions you would go on to develop, or rather did you go from a conception*

of politics to a conception of the individual in general? This notion really is very politically productive. Did it come from politics?

AM: I don't really remember anymore, but I do think that I wrote the chapters on politics before the first part. I drafted the first part last, I think.

LB: *It is very interesting to know that the concept of the individual comes from politics.*

AM: Yes, for sure. In the first part, I sketched out a kind of analogy between the constitution of physical individuality and what I still called (specifying that it was not a contract) the social contract: I called it the 'physical contract'.

LB: *Another question about individual essence, which is very closely linked to what we're talking about. Do you think that there is a difference between individual essence and singular essence?*

AM: No, I never thought they were different.

LB: *This individual essence, which is characterised by a certain relation among bodies and which is constitutive of an individual, is the law of the production of individuals. On the basis of the notion of the individual, the central concept that would produce creative effects in your work was the principle of imitation . . .*

AM: Yes. For Spinoza it is fundamentally by affective imitation that human individuals can themselves form a political individual.

LB: *But as soon as one speaks of an individual essence, does one not re-establish an inter-individual history?*

AM: I wouldn't go that far. Conditions of appearance and conditions of functioning are not exactly the same thing, which goes as much for human individuals as for political individuals. One must distinguish between the external conditions that make possible the appearance of the individual in question, the external conditions that make its maintenance in existence possible, and the laws of the individual's *internal* functioning, which defines its essence. But, to be clear, it is true that it *belongs to the essence* of the individual human being to be capable of affective imitation and thus to live in interaction with others.

LB: *Is the question of history not already present, as such, in the very question of the human individual?*

AM: Of course. And I'll remind you (because in general it is not often noted) that, in *Individu et communauté*, I already had some rather precise ideas on the matter. I devoted a whole chapter to trying to reconstitute (and I found it hard to believe that Spinoza himself would not have thought of this), by juxtaposing a particular set of texts, if not a theory of history – this would maybe be too much – then at least a theory of the purely internal development of a given society, considered in abstraction from external causes. I combined the two great laws of development mentioned by Spinoza (the passage from democracy to aristocracy and to monarchy, and the passage from barbarism to civilisation and to decadence), I reconstructed the details of their interactions by using all kinds of texts taken from the political works and the *Ethics*, and I envisaged all the possible cases above all by working out a developmental schema that went from primitive democracy to Turkish despotism passing by way of Dutch or Venetian aristocracy. But really I figured that this would interest almost nobody outside of André Tosel.⁴² By contrast, in *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, I envisaged a Spinozist conception of history from a different angle: I tried to reconstruct, no longer a Spinozist *theory*, but the manner (not theoretical and not theorisable) in which Spinoza concretely represents the history of western humanity as a whole, and, in particular, on the basis of the innovative role of Christianity. There, obviously, I focused much more on the external conditions. It was a different approach. And I think it got a bit more attention.

LB: *The question of passions is central in your work. Before you came along, one hardly ever spoke about it from the point of view of its political productivity.*

AM: Yes. You would always find, to be sure, a chapter on the theory of the passions; but generally, one would write that chapter, and it wouldn't be utilised in what followed . . .

LB: *The question of the passions is linked to that of the immutability of human nature. In Spinoza, human nature is everywhere the same. In your articles, you took on the question of Spinoza's supposed conservatism, for example in 'Masters*

⁴² [André Tosel (1941–2017) was a French Marxist philosopher who studied with Althusser at the *École normale supérieure*. He wrote extensively on Marxism and Spinoza.]

and Servants in Classical Political Philosophy', or in 'Women and Servants in Spinozist Democracy'⁴³ . . .

AM: Those are two different things. As for the former, Spinoza clearly thinks that there has always been desire, love, hate, etc., and that, in this sense, human nature is and always will be the same. But the different combinations of passions, what Moreau calls *ingenia* (I subscribe completely to his analysis of the notion of *ingenium*),⁴⁴ can vary infinitely from one individual to another, from one society to another, and throughout the course of history. By comparing the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*, we can find, in the Hebraic State and the Spinozist States of the *Political Treatise* such as they might exist, very different forms of *ingenia*, including at the individual level. There are always the same passions, but they function differently because they are arranged differently – which depends to a great extent on historical and institutional context. But that one day human beings will cease to love, to hate etc., even partially, is absolutely ruled out, because they will always be affected by external causes. And even supposing that one day all human beings live together under the guidance of reason, the fact remains that they will still have the same passions, even if their combinations are different; only, these will no longer be what guides them.

LB: *Politically, this means that you can only speak of communism at the level of the communication of sages in the third kind of knowledge . . .*

AM: Yes, I had already arrived at the idea that there could not be a communist society if everybody was not a sage! But we can also say that there is more or less communism everywhere that people, in their relations with others, comport themselves as 'free human beings' in Spinoza's sense.

P-FM: *When Spinoza says that we have already seen all possible forms of political experience, might one not object that the party-form is a form that he had not yet been able to envisage?*

AM: Yes, that's true. But if we were to speak to him of political parties, perhaps he would have identified them as sects. When he says in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* that the members of a sect reject as enemies of God all those who don't belong to it, and consider as God's chosen all those who do

⁴³ [Included as Chapter 17 in this volume.]

⁴⁴ [See Moreau 1994b, Part II, Chapter 4.]

belong, even the worst scoundrels – if we leave God aside, that sounds a bit like a political party, or maybe even a mafia . . .

LB: *On the basis of the logic of imitation, you speak of the political productivity of indignation . . .*

AM: Yes, that is something that I had not considered at all initially. I was quite struck by, but had somehow repressed, what Spinoza says at the beginning of Chapter VI of the *Political Treatise*: human beings will always live in political society because they come together either under the effect of a common fear, or in order to avenge some damage suffered in common; but human beings always fear solitude, thus, etc.; and in order to justify this, Spinoza refers to the passage in Chapter III where he had said that human beings group together, not at all to form a political society, but on the contrary, in order to overthrow a terrible government, when the fear that this government inspires in them changes into indignation. I made a slight allusion to this in *Individu et communauté*, concerning popular insurrections against kings: I had said that, when the sovereign goes a bit too far, subjects, under the influence of indignation, line up against it ‘according to a process analogous to that of the social contract’ (what I called the social contract, which was not a contract), but I didn’t make a big deal out of it. Later I returned to this point. I was reproached, actually, for having reconstructed a theoretical genesis of political society by totally abstracting from reason, calculation, etc.; now, in reality, I didn’t *completely* abstract from this; and when I reflected on it, I realised that, actually, if we have indignation play a role (which I didn’t do at the time) we can *truly* abstract completely from utilitarian calculations. For in the state of nature, to the extent that human beings are capable of experiencing indignation, there is never simply *one* human being that fights with *an other* in order to dominate them or take what they have: there are others who intervene, who ‘interfere in what isn’t their business’, in a sense; and based on the similarities that they might have with one or the other, they take sides with one or the other, by way of indignation against their adversary; and ultimately, it is in this way that we can explain, without any calculation, how an embryonic political society is formed.

LB: *Don’t you think that Spinoza, like Machiavelli, thinks that there is a memory of freedom?*

AM: Yes, of course . . .

LB: *But then, couldn't there be a positive indignation?*

AM: Yes and no, for we must not confuse the *affect* of indignation with that to which it might lead us. I obviously think that Spinoza might have been quite favourable to a revolution; but in any case, he said that indignation is always bad as an affect: it is necessarily bad *for those that experience it*, since it is a form of hate; and for society, no matter what positive results it might lead to, there is always a very heavy price to pay.

LB: *When Spinoza writes in Proposition 51 of Part IV of the Ethics that indignation is necessarily bad, one gets the impression that he says this with regret; and at the same time, he does so in order to, from this point of view (and this is what is curious), oppose to it an ideal, abstract conception of superior authority . . . Can we take these two positions literally, that is: bad indignation on the one hand, and this 'abstraction' on the other?*

AM: Yes, we can. Spinoza tells us that 'when' (we must insist on the 'when') the sovereign punishes a delinquent out of a desire to maintain peace in the City, this is not motivated by indignation, but by *pietas*, that is, a desire born from reason. There is indeed an abstraction here, and no doubt a certain irony; for Spinoza knows full well that the motivations of sovereigns and judges are very different. But this is also a verification *a contrario* of his claim; since 'when' it so happens that judges are motivated by indignation, that risks leading to enormous juridical errors, and is thus very bad.

LB: *Do you think that there is an evolution in Spinoza's thought on the question of indignation?*

AM: From the *Ethics* to the *Political Treatise*? No, I don't see the slightest trace of that. In any case, when one regime is replaced by another by a burst of indignation, this always has negative effects, even if the ultimate outcome is rather good; and if it is rather good, this always comes from there having been not *only* indignation, but also positive affects (enthusiasm for freedom and justice, love of one's homeland, etc.) and at the same time a lot of reflection. It is true that Spinoza doesn't explain himself much on this point. But he would certainly say that indignation brings about negative consequences, if only because it blindly takes hold of *some people* that are not really responsible, and this has repercussions. And in any case, in Chapter V of the *Political Treatise* he says that even if it only takes hold of *some people*, at the most it will dispose of tyrants without getting rid of the

causes of tyranny, which are institutional. So I think that Spinoza would have no doubt approved of the French Revolution, but certainly not of the September Massacres: he would not have seen any difference between that and the massacre of the brothers De Witt. But, to be sure, Spinoza also knows very well that we cannot do away with indignation insofar as there are causes that sustain it, and that we therefore have to 'make do with it'. I think that, for him, it is an original defect of political society, which we can only neutralise as much as possible. This is clear in the constitutions of the *Political Treatise*; they aim to ensure that human beings are motivated by positive affects and that indignation plays as little a role possible – that it is no longer an indignation against particular people, but an *abstract* indignation against those who deserve to be punished *in general*, regardless of whoever they may be. But whether or not indignation is abstract, in any case, it is the original sin of the State.

LB: *So then, is the State-individual bad by nature?*

AM: Not entirely; but there is something in its birth that it never completely rids itself of, no more than we ever completely rid ourselves of our infancy.

P-FM: *It's counter-balanced by other things . . .*

AM: Well yes, very greatly counter-balanced, as much as possible. Because a State that was founded solely on indignation would not even last. At the limit, we talk about small groups that form in the state of nature, like in the Wild West, for example, in order to lynch a criminal . . .

P-FM: *Now we're back at Sartre . . .*

AM: Yes: these are political societies *in statu nascendi*, but which don't last.

LB: *The fusion falls apart . . . This reflection lets us move on to the question of the relations of forces between exploiters and exploited. You cite [Nicos] Poulantzas on the 'material condensation of relations of forces' that is the State, saying: 'Spinoza could have said that' (in 'Spinoza and Power', published in La Nouvelle Critique [and included in this volume as Chapter 14]); but you immediately add that, in fact, relations of force between exploiters and the exploited hardly play a role for Spinoza, at most serving as a backdrop. Your sentence is categorical: 'since "servants" are always, by definition, beaten in advance, the class struggle is not the motor of history'.*

AM: Yes, that is a fact for Spinoza. I'm sure that today he would no longer say that servants are always beaten in advance, but he would maintain that the class struggle is not the motor of history, if only because this idea appeals to a teleology founded upon an internal contradiction. For him, by contrast, every contradiction is always external, even when it appears to be internal.

P-FM: *You said once in a course: there are lots of things that can draw Spinozism and Marxism together, but the problem of contradiction is truly the ultimate dividing line between the two.*

AM: Yes. For Spinoza, contradiction can be internal, but only topologically. There are contradictions *in* society, in a trivial sense, in the sense that they are localised there, but they are always external *with respect to the essence of society*. For Spinoza, this is *a priori*: there can be no contradiction *in the very essence of things* (and the contrary is also entirely true *a priori*). Now there can be contradiction in what Spinoza calls the 'actual essence' of a thing, that is, in this essence as it comes to be actualised with the support of external causes – such support is indispensable for all finite modes, but it can also produce effects *contrary* to this actualisation. A political society, for example, is an individual composed of individuals that are *never* completely integrated within it: they have relations with the external environment, and this produces certain passions in them; they have among themselves inter-individual relations more or less independent of the functioning of society as a whole (with corresponding passions); they form among themselves smaller groups that are themselves also individuals, which are also not completely integrated within the whole, and which thus also have their own passional systems. And all of these more or less contradictory passions reverberate throughout the institutional system of the State: all the same, a certain consensus forms about what the State must be, which thus defines its essence, but actual institutions only partially agree with this essence; and there are always things that are tendentially incompatible with it, and which are thus, within society itself, like foreign bodies. This makes it so that all political constitutions always have something hybrid about them.

P-FM: *That is why, in the Hebraic State, the very worm in the fruit, namely putting the Levites in charge instead of the firstborns,⁴⁵ was an interiorised external provision. We might initially describe the Hebraic State, leaving this aside, and introduce it after the fact as what would eventually ruin it. A Marxist would say*

⁴⁵ [See *TTP* XVII, 96–7; *CWS* II, 317–18.]

that if this would eventually ruin it, it is because it was part of the very essence of the State; and that it would be mystificatory to describe the State entirely first, leaving it aside . . . Who do you think is right here, Spinoza or Marx?

AM: I couldn't say . . . But Spinoza, in any case, would respond that 'if this would eventually ruin it', *this is proof* that it was not part of the essence of that State, and that it is mystificatory to make the worm be born of the fruit. Moreover, the same problem comes up again concerning the human individual, concerning its individual essence and its *ingenium* . . . There is, clearly, a relation between the *ingenium* of an individual and its individual essence; and it might even be the case that the *ingenium* is totally compatible with it, that it is integrated with it, and under those conditions we can say that the individual essence is enriched by the *ingenium*. By contrast, an individual essence can also be actualised through an *ingenium* that is unsuitable for it. Harmful passions can engender habits (this is what we call vices); and these passional habits indeed consist in that the parts of the body communicate their movements according to laws that are more or less in contradiction with those that define the essence of the individual. So that, at the limit, we might say, regarding the same set of parts that make up our body, there are many individuals that coexist: there is the individual that we are, and there is the individual that this sort of graft forms, this or that passional habit that is not integrated with our essence itself. We might say in this sense that there are many individuals within us, as many as there are types of passional hybrids.

LB: *Which nevertheless form one and the same individual, due to the fact that they communicate their movements according to laws, which, themselves, are comprehended within perseverance. We can then call conatus what potentially integrates these contradictions through which a being perseveres in its being, but which hasten its demise. The positivity of conatus thus integrates the contradiction (which can kill the individual) within the very interior of its ingenium.*

AM: Yes; that is indeed the passional *conatus*. I really like what you have written on this subject.

LB: *I want to return to 'Masters and Servants in Classical Political Philosophy', where you show that the 'great ancestors', Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, 'have said clearly and with a remarkable consistency: there are, fundamentally, two kinds of human beings'. But this lucidity, in their thought, is accompanied by the ideological effort to justify this fact in the 'juridical' sphere. You claim that*

Spinoza says the same thing, but while stripping it of the ideology that accompanies it.

AM: Yes, he says what is, but without saying that it is good. But his political constitutions do not rule out the disappearance of servants: they are not indispensable to the functioning of these constitutions. Under constitutional monarchy, for example, which is characterised by the total absence of landed property and the generalisation of the commercial economy, we might very well conceive that each busies themselves with their little family business, and that there is such prosperity that servants themselves might in turn acquire their own. I even imagined one day in a class (and this amused my students) what might have become of the industrial revolution in a Spinozist society, in particular under the economic regime of monarchy. Under those conditions, things would have played out completely differently: there would not have been a proletariat, and so also no capitalism, since there would not have been any great property owners to chase the peasants off the land; and there would have been, by contrast, a much more rapid development of science and its investment in technology, which would have allowed small family businesses to avail themselves of much more sophisticated equipment, with computers as early as the nineteenth century, full automation, etc.: everybody would have been able to have what was theirs without needing servants, and they would have been able to group together little by little in cooperatives in order to lead to a kind of self-administered socialism!

P-FM: *The small family business is where one only exploits one's wife and children . . .*

AM: One could also work towards equality . . .

LB: *Towards equality? In the article 'Women and Servants in Spinozist Democracy'⁴⁶ you spoke of a 'bourgeois and phallogocratic' world . . .*

AM: Yes. Spinoza thinks that, insofar as men are subject to passions, women will be dominated by men; moreover, he doesn't know why, he bases himself solely on what he calls experience. We can understand this to mean that, under the regime of passion, there must necessarily be a struggle for power [*pouvoir*] within each couple (like everywhere else). But Spinoza only says that it is men

⁴⁶ [Included as Chapter 17 in this volume.]

who have by and large always prevailed; he does not say that it is good, but he thinks we cannot change it, and that political institutions have to ‘make do’.

LB: *The only possible overcoming of this situation being the work of reason . . .*

AM: Yes, of course. This is why I am totally opposed to those who say that, according to Spinoza, only humans of the masculine sex can become ‘free men’ in the sense of the *Ethics*: quite the contrary, in Chapter XX of the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza says explicitly, with respect to the marriage of those who live under the guidance of reason, that what’s best is for it to be based upon the freedom of the mind *utriusque, viri scilicet et faeminae* (the freedom of mind of man *and of woman*).⁴⁷ The ideal marriage, for him, is one that is founded on the freedom of mind of *both spouses*, freedom as he had defined it. Thus the *homo liber* of the *Ethics* can very well be a woman, *homo* being taken here in the generic sense. And since Spinoza poses the question of marriage concerning *all free human beings*, we must indeed suppose that there are about as many of them in each of the sexes.

LB: *That is the only line in Spinoza on which we can base this interpretation.*

AM: Of course, but he didn’t write very much else on this question.

P-FM: *Against whom do you say all this?*

AM: I think that somebody once accused me of having ‘obscured’ the sexism that fundamentally characterises Spinozist ethics on the whole, and had then justified their claim by taking up (without naming me) the analysis that I had given of the reasons why, according to Spinoza, *men subject to passions* necessarily want to exclude women *from political power* [pouvoir], but they acted as if this were a matter of the reasons why *Spinoza himself* (and, according to him, all men living under the guidance of reason) excludes them *from the community of free human beings*. I didn’t think that was really *fair play*,⁴⁸ neither towards Spinoza nor towards me.

LB: *If we imagine a society that is increasingly rational (in the sense of Spinozist political rationality), we can then imagine a political hope for liberation. But you say that this remains entirely problematic and that we can only hope. You even*

⁴⁷ [*Ethics* IV, Cap. XX; CWS I, 591.]

⁴⁸ [‘fair play’ in English in the original.]

say that this hope is outside the system. So is it not, according to you, involved in conatus itself? Is conatus not a principle of hope?

AM: Yes, it is a principle of hope, but nothing guarantees that it will succeed, because human beings are only a very small part of nature.

P-FM: *Why did you work on the subject Le Christ et le salut des ignorants? I believe that it was that book that was most often attacked. Not anymore, since it is now a reference for those who work on Spinoza; but twenty years ago it was called a Marxist book, a Christian book . . . a bit of everything. The question that you treat in this book was totally absent from Spinozist studies. You created a whole domain of research.*

AM: The question of the salvation of the ignorant interested me, but I no longer know exactly why I was led to it. I was irritated, clearly, by those for whom it went without saying that Spinoza was lying when he said he believed in the salvation of the ignorant. It seemed to me both that Spinoza couldn't lie (this would be contrary to his own ethics) and that, when he believed something without being able to demonstrate it, he must have seriously reflected on the question. And since Spinoza himself explicitly links the question of the salvation of the ignorant to that of the identity of Christ, this necessarily led me to examine all the texts of the *TTP* where he speaks of Christ, and one thing led to another: to his historical context, and to the historical antecedents of that context, etc.

P-FM: *There was a will to consider the TTP as a philosophically serious text.*

AM: Yes, I always thought that about it; it was even an *a priori* for me.

P-FM: *And you never again took up the type of analysis found in Christ? A certain number of your articles take up again, with rectifications, the analyses of Individu et communauté, but not those of Christ . . . So you don't remember exactly why you wrote this book – and it had no sequels!*

AM: Indeed.

P-FM: *What about the book you are currently writing?*

AM: There are many that I was supposed to write. But I'm very lazy. I already wrote a chapter of a book on the *Treatise on the Emendation of*

the Intellect. I hope to finish it before they take Spinoza off the *agrégation* programme, during the next year . . . As for the rest, which deals with the *Ethics*, I don't know if it will be one or many books. There is one that is pretty much ready, in the sense that all I have left to do is write it out 'in good French': it deals with eternity, based on a course that I gave and which was developed from an article on eternal life and the body.⁴⁹ If I put all of that together in a single book, that's what would come out. Then there is another question that I've been concerned with a lot these past few years (and it is moreover the subject of lectures I have given, not all over the world, but at least in Brazil and Mexico): it has to do with the first propositions of the *Ethics*, and of their genesis starting with the first dialogue of the *Short Treatise* – which, for me (and this is also how Lachièze-Rey and Delbos see things, but not Gueroult or [Filippo] Mignini⁵⁰), is the point of departure for everything. A second stage is constituted by the *Short Treatise* properly speaking, a third by the first Appendix to the *Short Treatise*, a fourth by Letters II and IV to Oldenburg – which I think come after the Appendix to the *Short Treatise* (not everybody agrees) – and a fifth by the first draft of the *Ethics* (we know what its first propositions looked like). And then, finally, the second draft of the *Ethics*. I hope to show that the theory of *substances à un attribut* is perfectly applicable to all the works prior to the *Ethics*, which from this point of view are completely Gueroultian; it is only starting with the *Ethics* (and perhaps even from its second draft) that we must no longer speak of *substances à un attribut*, but of substance considered under an attribute. The gist of what I want to show is that there is a simultaneous progression of the conception of the total intelligibility of the real (of which Spinoza becomes more and more clearly conscious) and of an ontology of power (which by the way was never fully developed), and that the two are absolutely linked. The result is that, in the first propositions of the *Ethics*, we can isolate distinct levels of inductive science, which are the condensations of these different steps that Spinoza took in order to arrive at these propositions. I distinguish in the first eight propositions and their scholia three levels that are more and more intuitive: one is constituted by the propositions themselves, another by some of the propositions and some of the scholia, and the third by the two scholia to Proposition 8. And we again find these same three levels in the proofs for the existence of God, the third level leading directly to an ontology of power – so that, if we develop to the end the implications of the final proof (the one given in

⁴⁹ [Included as Chapter 5 in this volume.]

⁵⁰ [See Spinoza 1982.]

the Scholium to Proposition 11), we see that the result is almost identical to Proposition 16 (which concerns the infinite productivity of substance). So that we can conclude that, for Spinoza, the existence of God, and consequently also its essence, is productivity, and nothing else; productivity is far from being just a property that follows from the essence of God posited in advance – or at least, that is what Spinoza was tending towards. We can *conclude* this, and not simply proclaim it, as I did in *Individu et communauté*, and as has often been done subsequently (independently of me, by the way, but rather under the influence of Deleuze and Negri). After which I would like to show all the effects that this has in the *Ethics*, including the first propositions of the second part, up to Proposition 9, since there we still remain within the general ontology. If I were to write a single book, this would make up its first part. The second would concern eternity. And between the two, I'm not sure: I might call it *The Avatars of Conatus*, comprising a synthesis of various articles, since I wrote a lot on these questions, including on political *conatus*. But God, insofar as it is explained by external causes, has yet to grant me enough time!

LB: *Since the power of an individual being lies in the effects of its productivity, when you wrote Individu et communauté, did you imagine becoming the leader of a Spinozist school?*

AM: Clearly, my secret hope – I didn't dare avow it to myself – was that I would be immediately recognised and accepted by everybody, but that didn't happen.

LB: *Your secret hope was to write this book a few minutes after your birth . . .*⁵¹

AM: Maybe that will happen, if my individual essence is re-actualised in a far-off future! But seriously, that book was totally ignored or despised for a very long time, except by a few people – and I am infinitely grateful that you two were among them . . .

P-FM: *The existence of the Cahiers Spinoza and the Spinozist network that formed around 1977 multiplied the diffusion of your work. But even by that*

⁵¹ [In his article 'Spinozist Anthropology?' Matheron writes: 'we can conceive of beings whose reason develops more easily than ours (beings, for example, who would be capable of understanding Spinoza's *Ethics* five minutes after their birth) . . .' (Matheron 2011: 22–4).]

point, your work was well known by word of mouth. I remember when I passed the agrégation in 1972 that Spinoza was on the programme and it was clear, for our generation of agrégatifs as for our teachers, that Spinoza interpretation meant Gueroult and yourself. I remember a discussion between Althusser and the students where Althusser cited both of your names. Somebody said: 'ah yes, Matheron, you must read *Individu et communauté*. The Christ text is less important for the agrégation.' And Althusser added: 'In Gueroult one finds all the propositions of the Ethics, even those that Spinoza forgot. But between Gueroult and Spinoza, nothing happens. Whereas between Matheron and Spinoza, something is happening.'

AM: Deleuze was also very influential. I always greatly admired Deleuze. He is a genius; and what's more, a funny genius!

P-FM: Deleuze greatly influenced those outside the Spinozist milieu. I wonder if, for those who work on Spinoza today, Deleuze is not instead considered as a stimulant for the mind, somebody who had intuitions about a certain number of subjects . . .

AM: Some extraordinary intuitions . . . including some about Spinoza!

LB: However, it was less Expressionism in Philosophy than other works by Deleuze that sparked Spinozist studies (in particular I am thinking of *Difference and Repetition*,⁵² where Spinoza is hardly at stake at all). The specificity of your work on Spinoza is its ability to provoke its opening and prolongation, as if we were with you (and this must be said in a Deleuzian way!) within Spinozist processes of endless productivity . . .

P-FM: What strikes me is that the most recent works on Spinoza, by Henri Laux,⁵³ Laurent Bove,⁵⁴ Chantal Jaquet,⁵⁵ Johannis Prélourentzos,⁵⁶ myself⁵⁷ – all have theses that are rather different from each other, but always within a framework that your work ultimately defined. And that seems clear even outside of France. When we hear young foreign Spinozists come here to speak, it is clear that this is

⁵² [Deleuze [1968] 2001.]

⁵³ [Laux 1993.]

⁵⁴ [Bove 1996.]

⁵⁵ [Jaquet 1997; 2018.]

⁵⁶ [Prélourentzos 1996.]

⁵⁷ [Moreau 1994b.]

characteristic of the French school, and also that it is necessary to pass through it for all those who want to be rigorous. For everyone at the École normale supérieure, it is clear that Matheron is the principal reference for contemporary Spinozist research.

Appendix 2: Chronology of Works by Matheron

The following chronology of Matheron's publications is, to the best of our knowledge, complete.

† appears in *Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle. Études sur Spinoza* (Matheron 1986).

‡ appears in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique* (Matheron 2011).

° appears in translation in *Scritti du Spinoza* (Matheron 2009).

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1969 *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

1971 *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza*, Paris: Aubier Montaigne.

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