

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



# Anarchist Readings of Spinoza

Daniel Colson

Daniel Colson  
Anarchist Readings of Spinoza  
1998

1libertaire.free.fr  
Article published in Réfractations, No. 2 (Summer 1998) pp.  
119–148.

**usa.anarchistlibraries.net**

1998



# Contents

I. Bakunin and Proudhon . . . . .	5
II. The Marxist Interpretation . . . . .	20
III. Another Reading of Spinoza . . . . .	27



longer a matter of uses or captures, but of sociabilities and communities<sup>141</sup>.

Contrary to the political city of which Negri dreams, the philosophical and libertarian emancipation that one can read in Spinoza ceases then to be founded on fear or anguish, reward and punishment. As Proudhon and Bakunin wanted, it ceases to rely on the State and to entrust it with the task of taking the place of reason to those who have none, to the majority, to the slaves<sup>142</sup>. Renouncing all external coercion, even when this coercion claims to be enlightened, emancipation can arise “from relationships that are directly and naturally composed”, “from powers or rights that naturally add up”<sup>143</sup>. It can claim to be born directly from individuals and collectivities (which are themselves individuals), from their capacity to transform, compose and recompose ad infinitum the “plane of immanence or of always variable consistency” of what is<sup>144</sup>.

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>142</sup> SPE, pp. 245–247.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>144</sup> SPP, p. 171.

## I. Bakunin and Proudhon

As the number of publications attests, one can observe, for quite a few years now, a renewed interest in Spinoza. This re-discovery is not only academic and, to a large extent, contrasts sharply with the rationalist and idealist interpretation that, in France at least, had managed to neutralize a thought that had long been too sulphurous to take its place in the official aisles of philosophy. The originality of this re-evaluation is its doubly political character: in its content, as we shall see; but also in its reasons for being and in the meaning it takes on in the context of the end of the century.

Kant or Spinoza; in a caricatural way, we could say that these two philosophers served as flags for a whole generation of philosophers and intellectuals who were more or less swept up in the vast movement of contestation of the sixties and seventies and who, once the winter of reaction had come and Marxism had failed, had to reconvert to more reliable ideals: Kant, for the majority, anxious to forget the harshness and cynicism of the times behind the pretenses and well-tempered values of democracy and humanism<sup>1</sup>; Spinoza for others, orphaned and inconsolable Marxists, anxious to preserve the revolutionary ideals of their youth, and who thus joined the meager cohort of Spinozists and Nietzscheans, accustomed to many other catastrophes.

By invoking one or more possible libertarian readings of Spinoza, the following study pursues a limited objective. It would like to take stock of the way in which the main anarchist theorists have been able to apprehend this philosopher and, in a provisional way, to explore a possible encounter between anarchism and Spinozism, which is felt to be possible, on the libertarian side as well as on the side of the Spinozists who are

---

<sup>1</sup> Habermas étant sans doute l'exemple le plus spectaculaire de ce retour à Kant.

the least inclined to take the trouble of reading the anarchist authors and texts<sup>2</sup>.

Presumably Bakunin never had the time nor the will to read Spinoza directly or in depth. He knows him, however. He sometimes quotes him, and his most philosophical texts are not without being marked by the influence of this philosopher. In Bakunin, one can thus distinguish at least two apprehensions of Spinoza.

A youthful apprehension, mainly through Schelling's first philosophy<sup>3</sup> which, in a diffuse way, never ceases to inspire his thought; as shown by the type of freedom he claims<sup>4</sup>, his constant denunciation of free will and, above all, his materialistic conception of nature and the world.

Deus sive natura, God or nature. There would thus be, in Bakunin, two possible readings of Spinoza:

On the one hand, a theologian Spinoza, certainly atypical, but a theologian nonetheless, for whom God is identified with nature, with substance, but always in the form of a first and transcendent principle, an absolute and infinite cause of an infinity of finite beings, irretrievably returned to the nothingness of their finitude.

On the other hand, an atheist Spinoza, silent inspirer, via Schelling and Diderot, of a conception of nature thought in the form of a "universal, natural, necessary and real combination, in no way predetermined", of an "infinity of particular actions

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luc Bonet, "Spinoza : un philosophe "bon à penser" pour l'anarchisme", dans *le Monde libertaire*, n° 915, 1993 et, du côté spinoziste, A. Negri, *l'Anomalie sauvage, puissance et pouvoir chez Spinoza (AS)*, PUF, 1982, pp. 192, 308, 332–333. Mais aussi les matérialistes français, en particulier Diderot.

<sup>3</sup> Mais aussi les matérialistes français, en particulier Diderot.

<sup>4</sup> « En obéissant aux lois de la nature [...] l'homme n'est point esclave, puisqu'il n'obéit qu'à des lois qui sont inhérentes à sa propre nature, aux conditions mêmes par lesquelles il existe et qui constituent tout son être : en leur obéissant il obéit à lui-même. » *Œuvres complètes*, Champ libre, VIII, p. 201.

elements of knowledge or elements of work (rather thought on a physico-mathematical model)<sup>137</sup>; 2) to relate these compositional experiences or actions to the ever more complex and extended forms of interiority that constitute human compounds; by selection in Deleuze's Spinoza, selection of "bodies that suit our own, and that give us joy, that is to say, increase our power"<sup>138</sup>; by internalization of the relations of work in Proudhon, an immemorial internalization (at the origin of humanity as well as of each individual) but unceasingly repeated and extended to the infinite plan of composition of human industry<sup>139</sup>.

Body and soul among other bodies and other souls, but "the most powerful of finite modes", and "free when he comes into possession of his power to act", man thus has the power to experiment, to learn to know what is good and bad for his power to act, for his freedom<sup>140</sup>. And it is through this experimentation with the relationships that suit him, inside and outside what constitutes him, with refusals and agreements, with yeses and noes, with associations that are always revocable, that he can extend these relationships to ever wider forms of association, to have an ever more "intense" power, where it is no

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 79, 73. De la Justice est construite autour de la notion d'"équilibre" et, de ce point de vue, les "rapports" et "convenances" propres au travail et à l'industrie sont pensés en termes d'"équation", d'"égalité", d'"accord", etc. Mais la notion proudhonienne de "composition", si importante par ailleurs pour penser les différentes formes d'individualités, relève, comme chez le Spinoza de Deleuze, d'un modèle "chimique" qui permet d'ailleurs à Proudhon, entre autres modèles de pensée, de sortir du seul "plan" du travail, comme l'indique le paragraphe de De la création de l'ordre consacré à la notion de "composition" : "Ainsi le travail, manifestation de l'intelligence et de l'activité humaine, suit les lois de la nature et de la pensée ; il ne se divise pas, si j'ose employer ce langage chimique, en ses parcelles intégrantes, il se dédouble en ses espèces constituantes. "De la création de l'ordre, Rivière, p. 329.

<sup>138</sup> CC, p. 179.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Justice, t. II, pp. 15, 79 et 127.

<sup>140</sup> SPP, p. 144.

Deleuze's Spinoza, signs and experience are needed: signs or ideas as "dark precursors" of common notions<sup>132</sup>; experience or experimentation as a prerequisite for all thought, for all reappropriation of power and thus for all freedom<sup>133</sup>. For Proudhon, signs and action are necessary: signs or ideas as a priori, certainly deceptive and a source of slavery, but whose origins can be found and which, in relation to what produces them (acts, facts, instinctive thought), can allow man to free himself and to think for himself<sup>134</sup>; action as a condition of signs and thought, as the foundation of power and freedom<sup>135</sup>. In both cases, the approach is the same: to start from signs as the immediate and future condition of a free thought by oneself (or in oneself for Deleuze) but to go back immediately to the source of all thought and all freedom: experimentation for Spinoza, action for Proudhon and, after him, for the main currents of the libertarian movement.

It is true that Proudhon (in *De la Justice* at least) tends to link this action to work alone, "one and identical in its plan (and) infinite in its applications, like creation itself"<sup>136</sup>, whereas for Deleuze's Spinoza the "plan" of human experience, "a plan of immanence or consistency, always variable", is "Nature" as a whole. But, in the two approaches, as different as they may be in other respects, it is indeed a question: 1) to situate this human experience or action on a plane of infinite composition, through relations that Spinoza calls common notions (thought on a physico-chemical and biological model) and Proudhon

<sup>132</sup> Au plus profond du mélange obscur des corps "là où se poursuit " le combat entre les servitudes et les libérations ", CC, p. 182.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. SPP, pp. 169 et 161 : " Les notions communes sont un Art, l'art de l'Éthique elle-même : organiser les bonnes rencontres, composer des rapports vécus, former les puissances, expérimenter. "

<sup>134</sup> *De la Justice*, tome III, pp. 69, 71-73.

<sup>135</sup> " Que pouvons-nous attendre de l'homme [...] ? – Une seule chose, des actes " " La réflexion, et par conséquent l'idée, naît en l'homme de l'action, non l'action de la réflexion ", *ibid.*, pp. 72 et 71.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

and reactions". A nature that it doesn't matter then that it is called God or absolute.

In this double and contradictory apprehension of Spinoza, we can thus find the ambiguity of the contemporary interpretations of this philosopher, and first of all of the meaning that we should give to the famous formula of the *Ethics*, *Deus sive natura*.

God/or nature; are they two equivalent definitions of the same reality; the substance, infinite, absolute, distant and vertical cause of all that exists?<sup>5</sup>.

God/i.e., nature; is the concept of God, on the contrary, only the conventional starting point of a thought process that transforms it into something else, into a new perception of the world that is ours? A radically immanent world, where the efficient cause of scholasticism is transformed into a cause of itself<sup>6</sup>, where, as Bakunin wanted, necessity can finally be transformed into true freedom<sup>7</sup>.

*Deus sive natura*, God/or nature. Beyond the words, we must indeed choose, through a third possible translation of Spinoza's famous formula, a resolutely disjunctive translation, certainly erroneous, but which, paradoxically, perhaps gives the meaning of Spinoza's choices in the face of Descartes and the thought of his time, of the choices and the commitment

<sup>5</sup> Sur la double causalité dont la pensée de Spinoza peut faire l'objet, " l'une horizontale constituée par la série indéfinie des autres choses, l'autre verticale constituée par Dieu ", cf. G. Deleuze, *Spinoza philosophie pratique* (SPP), Éditions de Minuit, pp. 78-79, et Y. Yovel, *Spinoza et autres hérétiques*, Seuil, 1991, pp. 208 et sq

<sup>6</sup> G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 78

<sup>7</sup> "Je suis un amant fanatique de la liberté [...] j'entends la seule liberté qui soit digne de ce nom, [...] la liberté qui ne reconnaît d'autres restrictions que celles qui nous sont tracées par les lois de notre propre nature ; de sorte qu'à proprement parler il n'y a pas de restrictions, puisque ces lois [...] nous sont immanentes, inhérentes, constituent la base même de tout notre être, tant matériel qu'intellectuel et moral." (Op. cit., VIII, pp. 291-292)

implied by the current interest in his texts and the meaning they can take for us.

\*\*\*

For a long time, Proudhon ignored Spinoza. His reading books, carefully catalogued from 1838 to 1844, never mention him. He is absent from *De la création de l'ordre* (published in 1843), although this book devotes two large parts to philosophy and metaphysics. With the exception of rare allusions, in passing, in the *Economic Contradictions*, it was not until 1858 and his great work *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* that Proudhon finally engaged in a critique of Spinoza; to the extent of all that could bring together, and therefore oppose, the two thoughts, and in a way that manifested a direct and attentive reading of the texts. Quoted several times, Spinoza is the object of three critical developments; in the fourth study, about the problem of the State; in the seventh, about the absolute; in the eighth, about conscience and freedom.

Of these three criticisms, it is certainly the first one that is the most severe and the most expeditious. Proudhon places Spinoza alongside Plato and Hegel, on the side of despotism<sup>8</sup>. 11] "Saint of philosophy", persecuted by all the Churches, Spinoza knew, with Machiavelli and Hobbes, how to free himself from the shadows and the dominations of religion. But "by unlearning the Gospel" he was content to "recall destiny", the *fatum* of the Ancients, Plato's reason of State<sup>9</sup>. Necessity and reason are the unbearable conceptual couple that Machiavelli, Hobbes and Spinoza reinvent; a couple that justifies the "most appalling despotism"<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, because it obeys the principle of necessity, the State escapes all judgment, all distinction between good and evil. It "has the right to govern, if necessary by violence, and to send, even for the

<sup>8</sup> *De la Justice*, Rivière, t. II, p. 184

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, t. II, pp.182 et 180.

<sup>10</sup> t.III, p. 22.

logical, rather than geometrical Ideas"<sup>126</sup>. And ethics itself, this specificity of human power, is also, in what finds it as in its implementation, a "test" of a physico-chemical order<sup>127</sup>.

3) Freedom finally. Folded back on what is, on the upstream of the possible, the different forms of individualities that human existence can take on can well embrace the infinite totality of the material determinations, be from part to part material. Contrary to the appearances and to the idealist a priori of a dualistic thought, they are in no way reduced to the natural forces, to the non-human (even to the inhuman). On the contrary; it is thanks to this stubborn return to what founds and constitutes his existence, to the material infinity of possibilities, that man can claim access to a world of freedom, to a human world, a world of his own, a world where, ceasing to be separated from his strength, he finally becomes master of his power to act. As Deleuze writes:

"What defines freedom is an "interior" and a "self" of necessity [...]. Man, the most powerful of finite modes, is free when he comes into possession of his power to act [...]"<sup>128</sup>

Power, freedom, power to act, interior, "self", even if the theoretical references are different, we thus find the vocabulary and perspectives of Proudhon:

"If man thinks for himself, if he produces his ideas as his right, he is free."<sup>129</sup>

This is the goal, for Proudhon as for Deleuze's Spinoza, the Spinoza of knowledge by common notions<sup>130</sup>. And the question implied by this common goal is also the same: how to think for oneself? How to produce one's own ideas and law?<sup>131</sup> For

<sup>126</sup> SPP., pp. 129 et 156

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>129</sup> *De la Justice*, t. III, p. 71.

<sup>130</sup> Sur ce point, cf. CC, pp. 180 et sq.

<sup>131</sup> Sur le lien, chez Spinoza, entre "droit", "éthique" et le modèle physique et "biologique" qui sert à les penser, cf. SPE, p. 236.



into an abstract and general entity (the “power of being”), Deleuze reintroduces it at the center of Spinoza’s analyses, in each body (and in each soul) and in its most material sense (physical, chemical, biological).

Thanks to the force and the multitude, what the political interpretation of Spinoza had tried to separate, nature and second nature (Negri), the human and the non-human (Matheron)<sup>120</sup>, Deleuze’s Spinoza brings them together again:

“One Nature for all bodies, one Nature for all individuals, a Nature that is itself an individual varying in an infinity of ways.”<sup>121</sup>

As Deleuze again says, the “plane of nature” “does not at all separate things that would be said to be natural from things that would be said to be artificial.”<sup>122</sup> Plan of immanence and unity of composition<sup>123</sup>, or, in Bakunin’s vocabulary this time, “universal combination [...] of an infinite number of actions and particular reactions that all these really existing things incessantly exert on each other”<sup>124</sup>, the processes of composition and decomposition of bodies and souls all obey, human or non-human, a physicochemical model<sup>125</sup>. Even the common notions which, starting from the most universal ones, command the rational and geometrical architecture and development of Ethics, are also, in their construction, not only a “mathematics of the real or of the concrete”, but above all “physico-chemical, or bio-

---

<sup>120</sup> Op. cit., p. 147 : “ Il y a donc des communautés biologiques élémentaires qui, parce qu’elles se fondent sur ce qui, en l’homme, n’est pas spécifiquement humain, peuvent englober aussi des animaux et des choses : communauté, par exemple, entre le paysan, sa famille, ses bêtes, son champ et ses idoles. Mais ce n’est pas d’elles que pourra jamais naître la sociabilité authentique, qui a une tout autre origine. “

<sup>121</sup> SPP, p. 164.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 167.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., et p. 155.

<sup>124</sup> Oeuvres C., VIII, p. 201.

<sup>125</sup> SPP, p. 58. Sur cette idée non métaphorique de “ modèle “, pensée au plus près du mode ou de la modalité, cf. SPE, p. 236

most minor causes, citizens to their deaths”<sup>11</sup>. 15] “Balanced” by the sole and hypothetical prudence of the sovereign in the face of an always possible revolt of the governed, the forms of government, for a long time monarchic or aristocratic, may become democratic, but they never cease to obey the reason of State, the political reason.

The second criticism is no longer aimed at Spinoza’s political works, but at the Ethics, his major philosophical work. It could be summarized by this formula of Proudhon:

“Spinoza [...] begins [...] with an act of faith in the absolute.”<sup>12</sup> We find Bakunin’s critique. As for most philosophers, Spinoza’s error is in his starting point. As a “principle of illusion and charlatanism”, the absolute can be “incarnated in the person [...], in the race, in the city, in the corporation, in the State, in the Church”, but it inevitably ends up in God<sup>13</sup>. That Spinoza, in the Ethics, begins directly with God is therefore to be credited to his extreme rigor, but the rigor of a “great spirit deviated by the absolute”<sup>14</sup>.

“Spinoza [...] begins [...] with an act of faith in the absolute.”<sup>15</sup> We find Bakunin’s criticism again. As for most philosophers, Spinoza’s error is in his starting point. As a “principle of illusion and charlatanism”, the absolute can be “incarnated in the person [...], in the race, in the city, in the corporation, in the State, in the Church”, but it inevitably ends up in God<sup>16</sup>. That Spinoza, in the Ethics, begins directly with God is therefore to be credited to his extreme rigor, but the rigor of a “great mind led astray by the absolute”<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Proudhon reprend ici presque mot pour mot le *Traité théologico-politique* (TTP), ch. XX.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., t. III, p. 173.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 185 et 175.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., t. III, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 185 et 175.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

This error of the beginning is not only philosophical. For Proudhon, it is directly at the root of Spinoza's political conceptions, of his inevitable celebration of despotism and the reason of State. Indeed, faced with the absolute, an infinite being, what can man do from the depths of his finitude, from the slavery of his passions? Nothing, except to submit to "an iron discipline organized on the double principle of theological reason and reason of State"<sup>18</sup>.

"Spinoza, who thought he was making the ethics of humanity, has remade, more geometrico, the ethics of the Supreme Being, that is, the system of political and religious tyranny on which humanity has lived for sixty centuries. He has been accused of atheism: he is the most profound of theologians."<sup>19</sup>

The third criticism, perhaps the most debatable, is at the same time the most interesting, for three reasons: 1) because, in approaching the question of freedom, it is at the heart of the Spinozist problem, the problem of the couple necessity-freedom; 2) because, in thinking to detect a contradiction in Spinoza's system, Proudhon opens, in his eyes, a flaw in this system, in the necessary (and therefore despotic) sequence of its developments; 3) because, in so doing, Proudhon is led to make explicit a whole dimension of his own conceptions of freedom and, perhaps, the links that these have with Spinozism. Let us recall the essence of Proudhon's thesis. Faithful to his habit of paradox and counterpoint, Proudhon claims to show: 1) how Descartes, a supporter of free will, constructs a theory that ends up denying it; 2) how Spinoza, a denier of free will, proposes, on the contrary, a theory that necessarily assumes it<sup>20</sup>.

Descartes philosopher of despotism, Spinoza philosopher of freedom. Beyond the interest that such a thesis may have

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 177–178.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 376

souls, on the side of an infinity of infinitesimals<sup>119</sup>. Better still, because it is interior to each body and each soul, and thus to all bodies and all souls, the multitude ceases to be attached only to human realities, to human individuality and to the narrowness of its passions. From within everything, it embraces the totality of bodies and souls, the totality of individualities, whether human or non-human.

2) The force in the second place. "Bodies (and souls) are forces," Deleuze tells us, and it is "as such" that 1) through relationships between an infinity of parts they are defined as a multitude; 2) that they are caught (souls and bodies) in "processes of composition and decomposition [...] according to whether their characteristic relationships agree or disagree. In a few words, this force that Proudhon demanded from Spinoza, which he himself identified with the resultant of any compound, and which, in Negri, had been transformed

---

<sup>119</sup> Sur le caractère quantitatif (et non numérique) de la composition d'un mode, sur l'idée d'une infinité d'ensembles infinis et, pis (Deleuze, après Spinoza, étant toujours prêt à aggraver son cas sur le champ de tir des mathématiques appliqués), l'idée d'"infinités plus ou moins grandes" (selon la puissance des modes), cf. SPE, pp. 183 et sq. La remarque de Deleuze peut laisser penser que la "multitude" ne caractérise que le "corps" et non l'âme que Deleuze n'introduit (par deux fois) qu'entre parenthèses. Mais, pour Deleuze, même la multiplicité ou la multitude des "corps simples", extérieurs les uns aux autres, a son répondant dans l'âme, dans la mesure où l'"extension" n'est pas un privilège de l'étendue et que la pensée a elle-même "des parties modales extensives, des idées qui correspondent aux corps les plus simples", SPE, p. 174 ; sur ce point, cf. également R. Bouveresse, Spinoza et Leibniz, l'idée d'animisme universel, Vrin, 1992, pp. 67 et sq. Ce problème du rapport entre le corps et l'âme (problématique du XVIIe siècle) me permet d'indiquer que c'est très volontairement que je m'expose dans l'ensemble de ce texte au reproche de "naturaliser" Spinoza et donc de naturaliser la lecture libertaire de ce philosophe. Sans doute le matérialisme radical de l'anarchisme (en particulier chez Bakounine) m'y autorise-t-il, et le contexte actuel rend-il nécessaire cette insistance. Mais, sans le montrer ici, je voudrais indiquer que cette "naturalisation" (peut-être outrancière et inquiétante pour certains), contrairement aux apparences, laisse toute sa place à la "conscience", à la "pensée" et bien sûr à la "raison".

will form a whole, i.e. a third body, if they compose their respective relations in concrete circumstances. And it is the highest exercise of the imagination, the point at which it inspires the understanding, to make bodies (and souls) meet according to composable relations.”<sup>116</sup>

It is undoubtedly in this text, compact and abstract and yet so Proudhonian in its form and content, that the encounter between a philosophical and libertarian reading of Spinoza and anarchist thought proper appears most clearly; in three major ways:

1) In the first place, with regard to the multitude. Without doubt, the quotation marks Deleuze uses serve to mark a certain distance, to signify that this is a notion proper to the author he prefaces and that this word is not part of Spinoza’s main concepts<sup>117</sup>. But they also serve to show how, by using the word multitude and reintroducing it into the heart of Spinoza’s philosophy, Deleuze completely transforms its initial political meaning. If, for Proudhon, the individual is a group, a compound of forces or powers that differs only in degree from all the other compounds (minerals, plants and animals)<sup>118</sup>, Deleuze’s Spinoza says no different. With Proudhon and against Negri, the multitude ceases to be the hypothetical and elusive horizon of a revolution to come; it is already there, within reach, in us and around us. The multitude is no longer the final and unifying synthesis of all human individualities led by a single soul, on the side of the infinitely great (the “constitution of being”); it is demultiplied into an infinity of multitudes, within an infinity of bodies and

---

<sup>116</sup> AS, p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> Comme le remarque Balibar, la notion de multitude est totalement absente de l’Éthique, présente dans le TTP mais le plus souvent de façon péjorative ; et c’est seulement avec le TP qu’elle acquiert une signification politique nettement affirmée, op. cit., pp. 67 et sq.

<sup>118</sup> Voir plus haut.

for an anarchist ear, and even before considering the strength of Proudhon’s intuition, one can only be surprised by its apparent inconsistency. How can Spinoza, the philosopher of the absolute, of necessity and of the reason of State, who very logically refuses any meaning to free will, be at the same time the philosopher of freedom, a freedom inherent in his system? Carried away by his taste for provocation, Proudhon is led to develop a paradoxical argument.

Enemy of free will, Spinoza is only so because he is first of all a consequent Cartesian. By affirming with Descartes the absolute necessity of Being (God), Spinoza is content to show the inconsistency of a thought that claims to be free, since, apart from God himself, such a system excludes all freedom<sup>21</sup>. But this incoherence of Descartes, which Spinoza brings to light from Descartes’ system, is found again, reversed, in Spinoza’s philosophy, this time under the gaze of Proudhon. How can Spinoza deny free will, since, in the Ethics, he claims to show how man, a degraded and miserable creation of the divine omnipotence, subjected to the darkness and illusions of the passions, can nevertheless “go up the current of necessity” that produced him, free himself from the passions that hinder and deceive him, access “freedom at the expense of the necessity it subordinates to itself”<sup>22</sup>?

“You have to see it to believe it; and how can Spinoza’s translators and critics not see it? The Ethics, which everyone knows as a theory of necessity in God, is at the same time a theory of man’s free will. The word is not there, and it is fair to say that the author believes nothing of it; but since when do we judge a philosopher exclusively by his words?”<sup>23</sup>

This is probably the closest we can get to Proudhon’s intuition, the intuition that Spinoza can say something other

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 371

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 371 et 375.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

than what he seems to say to his nineteenth-century readers; the intuition of another meaning of Spinozism, masked by the “Descartes system” and by two centuries of more or less blind translations and criticisms; a meaning that would appear to Proudhon’s half-perceptive eye only as a contradiction. Contradiction in Spinoza, but contradiction (or hesitation) in Proudhon himself. Indeed, in his demonstrative and rhetorical ardor, Proudhon does not succeed in removing from his sentences the ambivalence which seizes him suddenly. Is the affirmation of freedom (free will) that he thinks he detects in Spinoza a simple contradiction of his system or, on the contrary, as he says further on, its necessary consequence?<sup>24</sup> Is Spinoza only Descartes’ disciple, an uncompromising and rigorous disciple who would go to the extreme conclusions of his master’s system, or on the contrary the genius inventor of a new theory, of an “unequaled originality”?<sup>25</sup>

“Since when has a philosopher been judged exclusively by his words? One can better measure, one hundred and fifty years later, the great difficulty Proudhon had in making his intuition explicit. To do so, he would have had to return to the Latin text and give Spinoza a kind of attention and personal disinterestedness that were neither in his temperament nor in his habits. Above all, he would have had to go to the end of his criticism of the translators and critics of his time, because in spite of the acuity of his vision and his own qualities as a bloodhound or hunting dog, he was indeed doubly imprisoned by this translation and this criticism: imprisoned by the text of E. Saisset’s text, particularly calamitous<sup>26</sup>; prisoner of a French interpretation of Spinoza concerned with reducing the latter to being only a continuator of Descartes, a sectarian of the absolute, an

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>26</sup> La traduction de 1840. Sur son utilisation par Proudhon, cf. *ibid.*, p. 374.

make up nature, human passions, no more than the individualities they affect, are “an empire within an empire”<sup>113</sup>. Because they are caught between forms of inferior individualities which are composed in them and forms of superior individualities into which they can enter, the different human individuals are themselves only a modality of the infinite forms of individuals which, in various degrees and by successive interlocking, compose the existing world<sup>114</sup>.

“That is why Spinoza cries out: you do not know what you are capable of, in good and in bad, you do not know in advance what a body or a soul can do, in such and such an encounter, in such and such an arrangement, in such and such a combination.”<sup>115</sup>

\*\*\*

In his preface to the French translation of Negri’s book, Deleuze summarizes his own way of reading and understanding Spinoza and, in a way, given the circumstances, his own way of conceiving of politics in Spinoza this way:

“Bodies (and souls) are forces. As such, they are not defined only by their random encounters and clashes (state of crisis). They are defined by the relationships between an infinite number of parts that make up each body, and that already characterize it as a “multitude”. There are thus processes of composition and decomposition of the bodies, according to whether their characteristic relations agree or disagree. Two or more bodies

<sup>113</sup> Cf. *éth.* III, préface ; et *éth.*, IV, prop. 4. “ Il est impossible que l’homme ne soit pas une partie de la Nature et qu’il ne puisse pas subir d’autres changements que ceux qui dépendent de sa seule nature et dont il est la cause adéquate. “

<sup>114</sup> *éth.*, II, prop. 13, scol. Sur l’idée d’emboîtement, cf. G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 47.

<sup>115</sup> G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 168. Sur les implications concrètes d’une telle conception des choses, cf. le slogan de mai 68, “ La police avec nous ! “ ou l’expérience, que chacun a pu faire, de ce que “ devient “ un anarchiste lorsqu’on lui donne ou qu’il accepte un brassard de membre d’un service d’ordre quelconque (sans parler d’une kalachnikov).

We don't even know what a body can do. Balibar is right to underline, against Negri, how the Spinozist human individuality is in no way comparable to a subject, a consciousness or a person. He is right to explain that the object of the Ethics is not the individual (in the modern sense of the term), but "the form of individuality"; right to affirm, after Proudhon, that "every human individuality is caught [...] in the in-between of the inferior forms of individuality that are composed in it, but do not dissolve in it for all that, and of the superior forms of individuality into which it can enter [...]"<sup>111</sup>.

But Balibar is wrong to reduce this immense game of composition of possible individuals to the narrow passionate and affective field of inter-human relations (theory of passions), to entrust to it, not without a certain approximation, the task of constituting, in a transversal way, human subjectivity and to think thus to assure, better than Negri, the transition to the multitude of the political<sup>112</sup>.

Because they are caught not in the in-between but in the in-between-mile of all the other relations and individuals that

---

<sup>111</sup> Op. cit., pp. 87 et sq ; et G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 166 : " Chaque lecteur de Spinoza sait que les corps et les âmes ne sont pas pour Spinoza des substances ni des sujets mais des modes. "

<sup>112</sup> Balibar a l'art de résoudre les difficultés en affirmant sereinement, y compris dans le même concept et à la façon de son maître Lénine, deux choses contradictoires. Il parle, par exemple, sans sourcilier, d'" obéissance-non obéissance " ou d'" état-non état ", *ibid.*, p. 63 ; il est vrai qu'en son temps une célèbre revue anarchiste, *Noir et Rouge*, avait fini, de façon très proche mais avec l'excuse d'un authentique désespoir théorique, par parler de " groupe-non groupe ". Dans ce qui nous occupe ici, Balibar se contente d'observer comment " en réalité, sans que disparaisse l'idée d'individualité (c'est-à-dire de stabilité d'un composé), sans laquelle il n'y aurait pas de désir ni de force (conatus), c'est le processus même, le réseau affectif traversant chaque individu [...] qui devient bientôt le véritable objet (ou le véritable sujet) ", p. 89. L'incapacité de Balibar à faire disparaître l'" individualité " (mais sans expliquer pourquoi) suffit à montrer en quoi l'étroit champ clos du réseau affectif est incapable de rendre compte de la réalité (" en réalité ") et de la façon dont l'existence humaine se situe dans cette réalité et peut la transformer.

unrepentant rationalist and idealist, a pure logician, enemy of all experience, of all experimental approach<sup>27</sup>.

Soul for mens, passions for affectus, general for common, etc., how, with such a translation, could Proudhon have escaped an idealist and Christian reading of a text which, written in Latin, takes great care to use the vocabulary and the categories of thought of his time? Under Saisset's misleading pen and Proudhon's distrustful eye, Spinoza is not content to appear as an heir of Christian gnosis and its metaphysical theory of the Fall and Redemption<sup>28</sup>. 30] His thought seems to fit naturally into a catharsis and a dualism just as traditional: freedom against necessity, knowledge opposed to the passions of the body, the soul as a spiritual principle of salvation and freedom.

But it is here, however, within his misunderstanding of Spinoza, that Proudhon's analysis is most interesting, for the question he asks of him, and for the answer that this question implies:

"I ask Spinoza, then, how, if everything happens by divine necessity, after the increasingly weakened vibrations of this necessity have given rise to souls engaged in the bondage of the passions, how, I say, does it happen that these souls regain, by means of their adequate ideas, more strength to return to God than they received at the moment of their existence, if by themselves they are not free forces?"<sup>29</sup>

Free forces, free will, no doubt Bakunin is not completely wrong in reproaching Proudhon for his frequent idealism, his fascination for Kant's categories and his unfortunate tendency to sometimes make human consciousness and freedom an a

---

<sup>27</sup> Sur cette interprétation idéaliste et rationaliste de Spinoza, cf. R. Misrahi, *Éthique*, PUF, 1990, pp. 9–10 et P.-F. Moreau, *Spinoza et l'expérience*, PUF, 1994, pp. 227 et sq.

<sup>28</sup> *De la Justice*, III, p. 373.

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

priori and transcendental, absolute faculty<sup>30</sup>. But if Proudhon really had to succumb to his idealist inclinations, it was certainly at the time of his reading of Spinoza, of this rationalist and logician Spinoza being invented by the French tradition. But this is not the case. Proudhon asks Spinoza a completely different question. He is not satisfied with the abstract freedom presented to him by Saisset's translation, that zero degree of freedom that Proudhon nicely calls "dry communion, the hypothesis of freedom while waiting for freedom"<sup>31</sup>. But, at the same time, he shows how he himself refuses to be satisfied with the metaphysical emptiness that the theory of free will usually implies<sup>32</sup>. His problem is no longer that of free will, conceived in the form of an abstract and transcendental faculty, a priori and general, but on the contrary that of the force or rather of the forces capable of producing man as a conscious and free being. Indeed, in Proudhon's eyes, what Spinoza's system invincibly presupposes, in the same way as his own system, is not the absolute, abstract, metaphysical freedom that Bakunin and Malatesta will denounce, but forces and powers, these "free forces" of which he asks Spinoza how he can ignore the existence in order to think of the liberation of man<sup>33</sup>.

\*\*\*

How can we think of these prior and founding powers? How can they give life to a freedom that is sufficiently radi-

<sup>30</sup> Sur cette critique de l'idéalisme de Proudhon, cf. *Oeuvres complètes*, IV pp. 317 et 437. Sur cette affirmation a priori de la conscience humaine chez Proudhon, cf. *De la Justice*, t. III, pp. 339–340. Sur la fascination de Proudhon pour cette dimension "absolutiste" de la conscience humaine, alors même qu'il s'en fait pourtant le critique impitoyable, *ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>32</sup> Sur ce point, cf. J. Préposiet, *Spinoza et la liberté des hommes*, Gallimard, 1967, p. 297.

<sup>33</sup> "Spinoza ne sortira pas de là. La puissance est la condition préalable et productrice de la connaissance ; elle n'en est pas l'effet [...], elle est la condition de l'exequatur donné à l'idée, qui par elle-même est inerte, indifférente à sa propre réalisation", *Justice*, t. III, p. 375.

of linear time or dialectical time (so foreign to Spinoza). In the libertarian interpretation of Spinozist duration, past and future, upstream and downstream, merge in an untimely present where everything is given, where duration depends on the multiplicity of things, virtual and formal, where, contrary to the scholastic understanding of these terms, the virtual is not less real than the formal, the power less real than the act. It is in this sense that the Spinozist "bottom" and the libertarian "depths" of which Archinoff and Proudhon speak, are very precisely a surface, an already-there, a present, patient and impatient, where everything is always there as possible, a present where "everything is possible". It is also in this sense, below or parallel to libertarian thought proper, that Spinoza can be brought closer to the very Leibnizian G. Tarde, for whom it was appropriate to refuse to consider beings or individuals as "first strains", as "absolutely first data", but only as "emergences" presently existing from an infinity of other possible emergences, other "possibles", struggling against each other to exist<sup>109</sup>. It is finally in this sense, closer to us, that the conceptions of Spinoza can be brought closer to a whole dimension of the thought of G. Simondon for whom "the individuation of the beings does not exhaust completely the potentials of individuation", for whom "the individual [...] exists as superior to himself, because he conveys with him a more complete reality, that the individuation didn't exhaust, that is still new and potential, animated by potentials"; a reality that G. Simondon calls "nature", that is to say the "reality of the possible, under the species of this apeirôn from which Anaximander makes come out every individuated form"<sup>110</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> Sur ce point, cf. J. Milet, *Gabriel Tarde et la philosophie de l'histoire*, Vrin, 1970, p. 154 ; et, sur sa rencontre avec une lecture "libertaire" de Spinoza, G. Deleuze, *SPP*, pp. 124 et 110.

<sup>110</sup> G. Simondon, *l'Individuation psychique et collective*, Aubier, 1989, pp. 215, 194 et 196.

individuals as they exist at present to what constitutes them as individuals, from the closed field of political passions to the obscure and infinite bottom of the realities they mask, from the immediate given to the infinite from which it comes as a finite composition and thus as a singular expression of an infinite otherness.

The philosopher and libertarian Spinoza, does not claim less of the revolution than his political enemy brother, but for him the revolution to come is not downstream, in the emptiness and the arbitrariness of a political constitution whose materiality would be reduced to the only passions of the human nature. It is upstream, in the infinity of “possibilities” of which the present forms of individuation are only a current expression, the one from which we start<sup>105</sup>. As B. Rousset and contrary to the emptiness and material poverty of the imagination of the political, these possibles or potentials, upstream of human individuality, the foundation of what it can, are neither the unreal and erroneous products of the imagination nor simple virtualities (in the scholastic sense of the term)<sup>106</sup>. 113] “Practical possibilities”, “really possible”, they are “implied” in the “infinite being” where human experimentation unfolds<sup>107</sup>. They exist “by implication” in a duration that is identified with “movement” and “life”, or, in Deleuze’s vocabulary, on a “plane of immanence or consistency, always variable, and which does not cease to be reworked, composed, recomposed, by individuals and collectivities”<sup>108</sup>.

That the Spinozist possible can be thought upstream of the present moment, or that the Spinozist future can be thought in the past, is only absurd or paradoxical on the register

<sup>105</sup> Sur la notion de “ possible “ chez Spinoza, cf. B. Rousset, “ Les implications... “, op. cit., pp. 12 et sq.

<sup>106</sup> Sur la critique spinoziste du “ possible “ de la scolastique, cf. G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 89 et SPE, p. 194.

<sup>107</sup> SPP., pp. 19 et 14.

<sup>108</sup> B. Rousset, “ Le réalisme... “, p. 177 et G. Deleuze, SPP, p. 171.

cal to merit being called free will? We know (or should know) Proudhon’s answer, which can be summarized as follows.

1) Power and freedom are inseparable. All power is freedom; all freedom is power. And it is under this double aspect, indissociable, that the one and the other are, together, the “preliminary and productive condition” of any exercise of reason<sup>34</sup>.

2) Condition, this power and this freedom do not come from an a priori and transcendental faculty, nor from a preliminary and founding human nature. Like reason and like all the properties that man can develop, they are themselves a “resultant”<sup>35</sup>; the resultant of a compound of other powers<sup>36</sup>, themselves resultants of other compounds, other forces, etc. What Proudhon summarizes by saying that “man is a group”<sup>37</sup>.

3) Hence a first Proudhonian principle. In man, as in all things, what seems to be in principle, in the beginning, comes only afterwards, is only an effect of composition, freedom as the soul, the faculties as the whole of the elements or essences apparently at the origin of the human compound, the unity of creation as the unity of the self<sup>38</sup>.

4) Resulting from a chain and an entanglement of other results, human power and freedom are not for all that a simple effect, determined, reducible to the sum of the forces and the elements which are associated to produce them. They do not enter in any way into a deterministic scheme of causes and effects. They are both more and other, distinct from the forces that make them possible<sup>39</sup>. They are radically new.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “ L’homme est libre, il ne peut pas ne l’être pas, parce qu’il est composé ; parce que la loi de tout composé est de produire une résultante qui est sa puissance propre “, ibid., p. 409.

<sup>36</sup> “ L’homme [...] est un composé de puissances “, la Guerre et la Paix, Rivière, p. 128.

<sup>37</sup> “ L’homme vivant est un groupe “, Philosophie du progrès, Rivière, p. 128

<sup>38</sup> Justice, t. III, pp. 409, 408, 401 et 172.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 408–410.

5) Hence a second affirmation of Proudhon. As a result and as freedom, human power is both a radically new reality, autonomous, bearing its own force, and at the same time the expression of the forces and powers which, by being composed, make it possible<sup>40</sup>. For Proudhon there is no way out of this double affirmation, voluntarily antinomic: radical autonomy of this resultant as its own reality; radical dependence of this resultant in relation to the forces that make it possible<sup>41</sup>.

6) One can thus understand the apparent ambiguity of Proudhon's formulas when, to define human freedom, he speaks of both free forces and free will. As a new power in relation to the powers that make it possible, human freedom fully justifies the recognition of all the characteristics that are generally attached to the notion of free will. Indeed, contrary to what Bakunin thinks and to what some of Proudhon's formulas suggest, the notion of free will and the "intimate feeling" that affirms it are not idealistic<sup>42</sup>. Their idealism is only the effect of their ignorance, the ignorance of what makes them possible, of the forces and the game of composition of forces without which they would be nothing and of which they are nevertheless the autonomous expression<sup>43</sup>.

7) It is in this sense, essential to the whole of Proudhon's analyses, that human freedom or free will can also be trans-

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 411 et 426 : " La liberté est la résultante des facultés physiques, affectives et intellectuelles de l'homme ; elle ne peut donc les suppléer ni les devancer ; sous ce rapport, elle est dans la dépendance de ses origines."

<sup>42</sup> Sur ce " sens intime ", cette " certitude subjective " ou encore cette " phénoménalité du moi ", *ibid.*, pp. 335, 337, 347. Sur un " libre arbitre " non idéaliste, cf. *ibid.*, p. 409, cité plus loin.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 256 : "[...] vous ne sentez votre moi que par le jeu des puissances qui vous constituent" ; pp. 172-173 : "Qu'est-ce, en effet, que ce que nous appelons une personne ? Et qu'entend cette personne, lorsqu'elle dit : Moi ?", etc. ; et p. 407 : "L'homme, parce qu'il n'est pas une spontanéité simple, mais un composé de toutes les spontanéités ou puissances de la nature, jouit du libre arbitre."

of the heart, Negri dreams to see one day the "infinite" finally "organized"<sup>100</sup>

The movement of the philosopher and libertarian Spinoza is of a radically different nature. Strange to a linear conception of time in which Macherey has no difficulty in recognizing, in spite of Negri's denials, the profoundly Hegelian vision of Marxism<sup>101</sup>, it implements a completely different time, multiple and qualitative, which has to do with the duration of things, "with the reality of things that last" of which B. Rousset speaks<sup>102</sup>, and with the relations of composition, recombination and decomposition that increase, decrease or destroy. Rousset<sup>103</sup>, and to the relations of composition, recombination and decomposition that increase, decrease or destroy the power to act of these existing things<sup>104</sup>. If it were necessary, in order to be able to compare them, to convert the duration of the libertarian Spinoza on the temporal register of the political Spinoza, it would be necessary to speak about downstream and upstream. While the political Spinoza proceeds from upstream to downstream, from the bottom of things to individuals, then from individuals to the multitude, one could say that the other Spinoza operates from downstream to upstream, from

---

<sup>100</sup> AS, pp. 339, 156 et 335 : "Émancipation veut donc dire organisation de l'infini [...]. La désutopie est la forme spécifique de l'organisation de l'infini.

<sup>101</sup> Op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>102</sup> B. Rousset, "Le réalisme spinoziste de la durée", dans *L'Espace et le Temps*, Vrin, 1991, pp. 176 et sq. ; et, du même, "Les implications de l'identité spinoziste", dans *Spinoza : puissance et ontologie*, Kimé, 1994.

<sup>103</sup> B. Rousset, "Le réalisme spinoziste de la durée", dans *L'Espace et le Temps*, Vrin, 1991, pp. 176 et sq. ; et, du même, "Les implications de l'identité spinoziste", dans *Spinoza : puissance et ontologie*, Kimé, 1994.

<sup>104</sup> "Spinoza définit par la durée les variations continues de l'existence. " " La durée se dit donc, non pas des rapports eux-mêmes, mais de l'appartenance de parties actuelles sous tel ou tel rapport. " G. Deleuze, *SPP*, pp. 57 et 110. La durée spinoziste est multiple car elle s'attache aux variations de la puissance d'agir et de pâtir propre à chaque corps existant qui est toujours lui-même l'" expression " d'une " essence singulière ". Cf. G. Deleuze, *SPE*, p. 209.



“Proletarians of the whole world, descend into your own depths!” Point of arrival in the Marxist interpretation, point of departure in the philosophical and libertarian interpretation, human individuality and its passions do not only occupy an opposite position in the way Spinoza is read<sup>99</sup>. To this difference of place correspond other oppositions that concern first of all the nature of this individuality and the orientation in time of the process of transformation in which it is engaged.

First of all, the orientation in time. If the political Spinoza proceeds in two clearly distinct times, from the initial pantheism to the individual, then from the individual to the multitude, these two movements operate in a common direction where the time of things comes to coincide with the time of thought, from the past to the future, from the beginning to the end, from the naturalistic and metaphysical origin of the being to its political constitution, “from nature to the second nature”, “from physics to the activity of the man”, from the infinite bottom of the things and the signs (this “obscure complexion” of the existence of which Negri speaks) to the narrow closed field of the human desires, to the battlefield of the politics, where, cry

---

<sup>99</sup> Sans entrer dans une analyse détaillée, indiquons seulement qu’à la lecture quasi chronologique de Negri, transformant, comme on l’a vu, la pensée de Spinoza en une sorte de longue gestation de l’être, s’oppose, doublement, la lecture de Deleuze qui, tout en tenant compte des ruptures et des événements dans la vie et la pensée de Spinoza, montre comment l’Éthique doit d’abord être lue de façon verticale (sous forme de plateaux, les propositions, les scolies, le livre V “coextensif” à tous les autres) et, surtout, comment l’importance des notions communes commande une lecture à rebours de l’Éthique, à partir d’une “expérimentation” immédiate, un “art d’organiser les bonnes rencontres” (Cf. SPP, chap V ; SPE, chap XVII et “Spinoza et les trois “éthiques””, dans Critique et Clinique (CC), Éditions de Minuit, 1993). Dans l’analyse de Negri, les “notions communes” ne jouent qu’un rôle extrêmement marginal, simple “possibilité logique”, instrument de “communication logique”, “solution purement formelle”. AS, pp. 183–184 et 258.

formed into a despotic illusion, into a deceptive and authoritarian absolute, believing itself to be the origin of what makes it possible, transforming the deterministic error of the effect into the equally deterministic error of the cause. The power of human freedom is neither an effect nor a cause but the necessarily autonomous resultant, like any resultant, of a compound of forces without which it is nothing. This is what Proudhon believes must be understood<sup>44</sup>.

8) The last characteristic of Proudhon’s answer, which follows from all the others, but by bringing back, and by looping in an enlarged way, on the scale of all that exists, the balancing and the contradictions which give strength and life to his thought. As a superior power, human freedom can rightly, because of the complexity and richness of the compound that produces it, claim to be free from all external and internal necessity, to claim the absolute<sup>45</sup>. It never ceases to be an integral part of the world that produces it and from which it seems so strongly distinguished<sup>46</sup>. This is for four main reasons.

---

<sup>44</sup> Sur l’ “absolu”, “comme principe d’illusion et de charlatanisme”, cf. *ibid.*, p. 185 et, surtout, p. 409 où Proudhon montre bien l’opposition entre l’immanence et les illusions de la transcendance, entre sa propre conception du “libre arbitre” et la liberté abstraite et illusoire des sectaires de l’absolu. Après avoir montré comment la “force de collectivité” trouvait une “puissance supérieure” dans la société, là où l’on peut parler de “liberté de l’être social”, Proudhon poursuit : “C’est cette force de collectivité que l’homme désigne quand il parle de son âme ; c’est par elle que son moi acquiert une réalité et sort du nuage métaphysique, quand, se distinguant de chacune et de la totalité de ses facultés, il se pose comme affranchi de toute fatalité interne et externe, souverain de sa vie autonome, absolu comme le Dieu, puisque l’absolu divin, un, c’est-à-dire simple, identique, immuable, enveloppe le monde qu’il produit, et que par conséquent il est nécessaire ; tandis que l’homme multiple, complexe, collectif, évolutif, est partie intégrante du monde, qu’il tend à absorber, ce qui constitue le libre arbitre.”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 425 et 407 : “Il ne s’agit plus que de savoir comment [...] l’homme s’affranchit, non seulement de la nécessité externe, mais aussi de la nécessité de sa nature, pour s’affirmer décidément comme absolu.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

A — The human compound does not differ in any way from any other compound, from everything that makes up nature, except in degree of power:

“The living man is a group, like the plant and the crystal, but in a higher degree than the latter; all the more alive, more feeling and better thinking because his organs, secondary groups, are in more perfect agreement with each other, and form a more extensive combination.”<sup>47</sup>

B — The freedom proper to the human compound is itself only the higher degree of a freedom present in any compound, however rudimentary, insofar as freedom is coextensive with the power of beings:

“[...] spontaneity, in the lowest degree in inorganized beings, higher in plants and animals, reaches, under the name of freedom, its plenitude in man, who alone tends to free himself from all fatalism, both objective and subjective, and indeed frees himself from it.”<sup>48</sup>

C — Resulting from an entanglement of powers and spontaneities, human freedom is not a completion. It is a freedom in the making, the intermediate degree of a power and of a higher freedom to be built, from the whole of the constitutive powers of the world and the game of composition that they authorize:

“[...] in any organized or simply collective being, the resulting force is the freedom of the being, so that the more this being, crystal, plant or animal, approaches the human type, the greater the freedom in him will be, the more the free will will have of range. In man himself, free will shows itself to be all the more energetic the more the elements which generate it by their collectivity are themselves more developed in power: philosophy, science, industry, economy, law.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Philosophie du progrès, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>48</sup> Justice, t. III, p. 403.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 433 et p. 409 : “ C’est ainsi que nous avons vu les groupes industriels, facultés constituantes de l’être collectif, engendrer par leur rap-

other interpretation is exactly the opposite. To a political reading that starts from the vast spaces of Spinozist thought, but to transform them into simple horizons and end up in the narrow garden of human passions, it opposes a reading that starts from human individuality, from the apparent simplicity and banality of its psychological functioning, but to open it up to the immensity of nature of which it is only a part, to the infinity of what is and what it can be<sup>96</sup>. Fortitudo (with its double aspect of Animositas and Generositas), Titillatio, Presentia Animi, Humanitas, etc., the long list of definitions (more than seventy) that Spinoza uses to grasp the nuances of human experience can well be borrowed from the most common representations of the XVIIth century, from the most hackneyed treatises of morality and from the voluntarily mechanical use of the theory of passions<sup>97</sup>. Like the scholastic notions or simply the very ordinary Latin that Spinoza uses, they serve quite other purposes, open to quite other realities than what their psychological banality can let us believe. It is in this sense (among others) that Spinoza can be brought closer to Nietzsche:

“The philosopher seizes the ascetic virtues — humility, poverty, chastity — to make them serve quite particular ends, unheard of, very little ascetic in truth. He makes them the expression of his singularity. [...] Humility, poverty, chastity, it is his (the philosopher’s) way of being a Great Living One, and of making his own body a temple for a cause that is too proud, too rich, too sensual.”<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> éth., III, préface ; éth., IV, prop. 4 ; éth., IV, chap. XXXII ; et éth., III, prop. 2, scol. : “ Personne n’a jusqu’à présent déterminé quel est le pouvoir du Corps. “ “ On ne sait pas quel est le pouvoir du Corps.

<sup>97</sup> Sur ce point, cf. P.-F. Moreau, Spinoza l’expérience et l’éternité, PUF, 1994, pp. 379 et sq ; A. Matheron, op. cit., pp. 83–85 ; E. Balibar, op. cit., pp. 87 et sq ; et A. Negri lui-même lorsque, un peu découragé, il observe, à propos du livre IV, comment “ le poids des recueils de morale du XVIIe siècle se fait ici sentir “. SA, p. 262.

<sup>98</sup> G. Deleuze, SPP, pp. 10–11.

## • Anarchy and Multiple Individuality

If the paradox of the political multitude is to be thought from the individual, on the quantitative register of the same (communism), we could say that the paradox of the philosopher's "individuality" is to be thought from the multiple, on the qualitative register of the different (anarchy).

To understand the meaning (physical and conceptual) of this double paradox, it is necessary to cross two centuries, to go for a moment to Ukraine, where anarchy and communism have directly confronted each other. In the book that he writes, hot, in 1921, on the makhnovist libertarian movement, after four years of cruel and multiform struggles in the immense plains of Ukraine, Archinoff concludes thus, solemnly, in counterpoint of the old slogan of the First International:

"Proletarians of the whole world, go down into your own depths, seek the truth there and create it: you will not find it anywhere else."<sup>95</sup>

By its strangeness, this appeal expresses quite well the movement of another reading of Spinoza, a reading apparently strictly philosophical and individual, which seems to want to turn away from politics properly speaking, even though it announces a collective project of a completely different nature.

Archaic psychological foundation of a hypothetical collective future, the human individuality of the political Spinoza is first of all an end, as we have just seen, a long sought-after goal, promising for the future, but which, once found, erases the long wanderings that preceded it. Philosophical and libertarian, the

---

résoudre dans la banale notion de "tolérance". D'une certaine façon, la démarche de Negri est comparable (à l'exception des effets) à celle de Lénine, parti des vastes considérations sur le développement du capitalisme, et qui, dans son testament politique, finit par confier l'avenir de la révolution aux traits psychologiques de Staline, Trotsky et Boukharine.

<sup>95</sup> Archinoff, *Le Mouvement makhnoviste*, Béliabaste, 1969, p. 388.

D — Inscribed, downstream and upstream, in the set of constituent powers of what is, human freedom is both a part and the whole, both "what is greatest in nature" and, as Proudhon writes, "the summary of nature, the whole of nature"<sup>50</sup> :

"[...] man, multiple, complex, collective, evolving, is an integral part of the world, which he tends to absorb, which constitutes free will."<sup>51</sup>

It is in this sense that human freedom, as Proudhon conceives it, can break with the despotic and idealist illusions of Cartesian freedom and assert itself as revolutionary<sup>52</sup>. It is in this sense that it announces the anarchist conceptions to come, in particular those of Elisée Reclus, when he affirms "the intimate link that attaches the succession of human facts to the action of telluric forces", when he explains how "man is nature becoming aware of itself", but also when he affirms in the same page, as close as possible to Proudhon's thought, how "it is from man that is born the creative will that constructs and reconstructs the world"<sup>53</sup>.

So we know the problem posed by Proudhon and his way of answering it. A reader of Spinoza, even an inexperienced one, will not fail to be struck, intuitively, in a vague but certain way, by the proximity (Bakunin would say intimate) that unites these two authors. In what way do contemporary readings of Spinoza, freed from the old idealist and logicist interpretations, allow us to verify or invalidate this intuition?

---

port une puissance supérieure, qui est la puissance politique, nous pourrions dire la liberté de l'être social. "

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>52</sup> "La voilà, cette liberté révolutionnaire, si longtemps maudite, parce qu'on ne la comprenait pas, parce qu'on en cherchait la clef dans les mots au lieu de la chercher dans les choses.", Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>53</sup> É. Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, t. I, Paris 1905, pp. I, II, IV. Sur É. Reclus, cf. J. Clark, *la Pensée sociale d'Elisée Reclus, géographe anarchiste*, ACL, 1996.

## II. The Marxist Interpretation

In the current interest in Spinoza, the Marxist reading occupies an important place, as close as possible to the social and revolutionary concerns of Proudhon and more generally to libertarian thought, but also as far away as possible, as we will try to show. The most visible opposition, and undoubtedly the most decisive, concerns the link that this Marxist reading claims to establish between Spinoza's political texts and the whole of his philosophy. Because, in the eyes of this current, it "is through and through political", Spinoza's thought would not allow itself to be split between texts of pure philosophy and political texts that are partly circumstantial<sup>54</sup>. On the contrary, as A. Matheron has tried to show, Spinoza's political doctrine, because it is homologous to the structure of the Ethics, would alone allow us to think about inter-human relations and especially to construct the concept of individuality so essential to the understanding of Spinoza's thought and to the interest we can have in it<sup>55</sup>. Better, as A. Negri (and as we could say of Marx in other times), it is in his last political work, left unfinished, the so well named Treatise on Political Authority (TP), that Spinoza would finally become himself, that, at the end of a long process of maturation, of promises and crises, his thought would know its completion, the ultimate foundation capable of giving meaning to the whole of his previous writings.

No doubt such a political reading of Spinoza, for whom "the Spinozian innovation [...] makes the imagination of communism true"<sup>56</sup>, for whom Spinozism "is a philosophy of communism", has every reason to confirm Proudhon's objections. And yet, with its genius of sometimes bordering on libertarian po-

<sup>54</sup> E. Balibar, *La Crainte des masses, politique et philosophie avant et après Marx*, Galilée, 1977.

<sup>55</sup> A. Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Éditions de Minuit, 1969, p. 288.

<sup>56</sup> A. Negri, *Spinoza subversif (SS)*, Kimé, 1992, p. 139.

of conatus, and "invest" "the world of passions and historical relations"; while waiting for the TP to complete this first genealogy and to show, by its very incompleteness, how, starting from this "constitution of the individual", from these "formed individuals", from these "individual powers" ("first level of socialization"), "sovereignty and power" are finally "flattened on the multitude and on the processes of constitution of the State starting from the individuals"<sup>91</sup>.

Paradox of Spinoza's political interpretation. Believing itself to be open to the infinity of the multitude, it is led to close itself behind the narrow and uncertain fence of the individual<sup>92</sup>. The collective infinite is transformed into indefinite<sup>93</sup>. And the definite is limited to the conceptual poverty of a subject reduced to the word by word of the moral treatises of the XVIIth century<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> SS, p. 23 ; SA, p. 244 ; SS, p. 25 ; SA, p. 243 ; SS, p. 29. Sur la réduction des essences individuelles humaines, toujours singulières, par définition (éth., II, déf. II ; éth., II, prop. 13, lem. 3 ; éth., III, prop. 57), à une "nature " spécifiquement humaine " qui coupe radicalement l'homme de ce " qui n'est pas spécifiquement humain ", cf. A. Matheron, op. cit., pp. 146 et sq. Sur la difficulté que rencontre Matheron à penser cette notion de " nature humaine ", déterminante pour la suite de son analyse (comme pour Negri), et qu'il définit comme " quelque chose d'intermédiaire ", cf. ibid., p. 38.

<sup>92</sup> Une conséquence que Negri observe lui-même lorsqu'il remarque comment la difficulté à donner une " unité intérieure " à l'individu (lorsqu'on passe du conatus à la cupiditas) rend difficile toute définition de la multitudo comme sujet politique, " de sorte qu'il semble que la multitudo puisse être un sujet politique seulement comme idée de raison ou comme produit de l'imagination ", SS, p. 59.

<sup>93</sup> Un double indéfini en l'occurrence, comme le remarque Negri, puisque la " multitude " est à la fois " insaisissable " dans son " concept " et dans sa " matérialité ", SS, p. 55.

<sup>94</sup> Sur le resserrement des vastes perspectives politiques et révolutionnaires censées être ouvertes par Spinoza, autour de quelques traits psychologiques transformés en concepts majeurs (animositas, pietas, prudentia...), cf. SS, et plus particulièrement p. 60 où l'impuissance à donner un contenu conceptuel et matériel à la " multitude " et la contradiction entre " l'absoluité de la prétention démocratique " et la " liberté " finissent par se

importance of politics, and more precisely of the “subject” of political action.

Indeed, with the writing of the TP and its supposed philosophical translation of books III and IV of the Ethics, it is not only politics and its phenomenology full of fury and superstition that burst into Spinoza’s system. The essential novelty, the “ontological reversal” that, for Negri, finally founds the possibility of a true genealogy of the collective, is the uncovering of the “subject” of this political action<sup>88</sup>; it is the invention of “human individuality” as the primary condition, as the foundation of the multitude and therefore of the constitution of being<sup>89</sup>. For Negri, with the TP and books III and IV of the Ethics, Spinoza finally emerges (not without relapses) from the pantheistic, naturalistic, physical and metaphysical mists of his previous attempts. He can finally “pass from physics to physiology, and from physiology to psychology”; he can finally “go through the genealogy of consciousness”, pass “from ‘conatus’ to subject”<sup>90</sup>. Abandoning the vast pantheistic and metaphysical horizons of the world and of nature, “potentia, the general figure of being”, can finally concentrate in cupiditas, this human form

---

<sup>88</sup> “ Le schéma général du projet étant ainsi posé, Spinoza en vient à traiter spécifiquement de la généalogie de la conscience, du passage du “conatus” au sujet, en termes analytiques. “ AS, p. 239.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 187, 192 et 254 et sq. Pour plus de commodités nous continuons de suivre ici Negri, mais cette analyse pourrait aussi bien, sans grandes modifications, être appliquée à l’ouvrage majeur de A. Matheron (Individu et communauté) où, plus restrictif encore, celui-ci explique comment c’est seulement avec la proposition 29 du livre III que Spinoza se décide enfin à “ trancher le nœud gordien “ en posant “ sans le démontrer “ qu’il s’agit maintenant de la seule “ nature humaine “. “ Par la suite, c’est seulement des hommes qu’il parlera. “ , op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>90</sup> SS, p. 23 ; AS, pp. 234 et 239. Un schéma que, sous une forme différente, on retrouve chez Matheron qui, dans la préface qu’il a donnée au livre de Negri, explique “ comment, chez cet être naturel très composé qu’est l’homme, se constitue progressivement la subjectivité ; comment le conatus humain, devenu désir, déploie autour de lui [...] un monde humain qui est véritablement une “seconde nature” “ , ibid., p. 21

sitions even when it is farthest from them, this interpretation can also seem to largely satisfy the requirements of an anarchist reading; this in three ways.

First, on the question of God and the beginning, the main objection of Proudhon and Bakunin. Against a hitherto largely dominant interpretation, A. Negri’s thesis claims to show precisely how Spielberg’s work is to be understood. Negri’s thesis claims to show how Spinoza manages, in the course of his work, to free himself from God as absolute beginning. For A. Negri, “the Ethics begins [...] in media res. It follows [...] only in appearance the rhythm of a founding abstraction. The Ethics is in no way a philosophy of the beginning. [...] In Spinoza there is no beginning”<sup>57</sup>.

The second reason to be satisfied with the Marxist and political interpretation of Spinoza is the question of force and power. How, Proudhon asked, can Spinoza think of human liberation without necessarily presupposing the existence of free forces capable of such liberation? Here again, some of Negri’s formulas may well seem to satisfy Proudhon’s objection. To human subjectivity, collective and individual, conceived by Proudhon in the form of a compound of forces and powers, responds, almost in identical terms, the way in which Negri’s Spinoza is supposed to think of the subject and subjectivity: in the form of a “subjective continuity” of the “power of being”<sup>58</sup>, a “powerful being, which knows no hierarchy, which knows only its own constitutive force”<sup>59</sup>.

Third and last point of agreement, which follows from the previous one: the refusal of mediation. Against a traditional interpretation that tends, in one way or another, to place Spinoza on the side of Hobbes or Rousseau, on the side of the social contract and of a juridical vision of democracy,

---

<sup>57</sup> AS, pp. 101–102 et 320

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., et SS, p. 49.

<sup>59</sup> AS, p. 49.

Negri claims to establish Spinoza's "juridical positivism"<sup>60</sup>. As Matheron brutally writes in his preface, for Negri's Spinoza, "law is power, and nothing else"<sup>61</sup>. 64] The state (inherited from the old pre-capitalist absolutism), bourgeois society as a democratic counterweight, relations of production as an organization and as a form of command: all these "mediations of the productive forces" are radically rejected by Negri's Spinoza. "65] "In Spinoza, there is [...] not the slightest trace of mediation: it is a philosophy of pure affirmation, [...] it is a totalizing philosophy of spontaneity. How could anarchism, which has made direct action and the refusal of any intermediary, of any representative, one of the essential axes of its thought and practice, not make its own an interpretation for which "the refusal of the very concept of mediation is at the foundation of Spinoza's thought"<sup>62</sup>?

Three good reasons then, for the libertarian thought, to make his own the Marxist interpretation of Spinoza; but three reasons almost too beautiful, which accentuate to the point of caricature the features that we usually recognize to anarchism: its absolute immanentism and the immediacy of its reference points and of its positions; its refusal of any mediation, of any expectation, of any staggering, of any delegation and of any representation; the exacerbated and subjective voluntarism of a utopian vision pretending to submit itself to the reality, immediately and directly. Three reasons which, by their very radicality, are not without arousing just as immediately the mistrust of a movement accustomed, for more than a century — from the Marx of the Civil War in France to the democratic Kampuchea of Pol Pot, passing by the State and the Revolution of Lenin and the Maoist Cultural Revolution -, to other disguises of its positions, to other simplifications, to

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 195 et SS, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

of the TP, passing through a sometimes recurrent succession of "metaphysical", "physical", "baroque" and "mystical" conceptions. Although this chronological reading of the path, or rather of the paths followed by Spinoza in his quest for being, is necessarily retrospective and occupies most of the Wild Anomaly, it is not yet, strictly speaking, the "genealogy of the collective" that Negri claims to bring to light<sup>84</sup>. Pedagogical and interpretative, it aims above all at showing how Spinoza becomes Spinoza<sup>85</sup>. Pre-genealogy at best, or negative genealogy<sup>86</sup> since, from crisis to crisis, it is attached to the Spinozist becoming, this reading, because it knows the end of history, can patiently embrace the wanderings and the hazards that any becoming implies; with its "impasses" and its "blockages", its "approximations" and its "weaknesses", its "ambiguities" and its "confusions", its "uncertainties" and other "errors", "enigmas" and "hypostases"<sup>87</sup>. It can in no way be confused with the genealogy of the collective and the revolution, which, like John the Baptist for Christ, it merely prepares, at best.

In Negri's analysis, the real Spinozist genealogy of the collective and of the revolution is elsewhere. It begins where Spinoza's quest ends, in 1664 or 1665 to be precise, at the time of the second Anglo-Dutch war, when, lost in the contradictions and pantheistic labyrinth of the end of Book II of the Ethics, he makes a veritable epistemological break. It is then that Spinoza finally discovers what he had sensed from the beginning and had been looking for for so long: the

---

<sup>84</sup> Dans sa préface, Negri qualifie cette "lecture de Spinoza" de "lecture du passé", *ibid.*, pp. 32–34.

<sup>85</sup> Sur les ambiguïtés de cette première généalogie, cf. P. Macherey, *Avec Spinoza, études sur la doctrine et l'histoire du spinozisme*, PUF, 1992, pp. 246 et sq.

<sup>86</sup> Au sens où l'on peut parler de théologie négative.

<sup>87</sup> Voir plus haut et (pour les énigmes et les hypostases) AS, pp. 118, 119, 145, 149.

tion, from the multitude (thought under the negative sign of the communism, of the despotism and of the conformism) to make a passage on the side of the demands and of the possibilities of the individual liberation?

We have seen how Proudhon tried to think this paradox, in particular through his refusal to oppose the individual and the group, through his conception of the individual as a compound of powers and his affirmation that the individual is a group<sup>81</sup>. But, in another way, it is not less on the side of the various interpretations of Spinoza, where the multitude and the individual (in the modern sense of the term) are not necessarily where one thinks one finds them at first.

### • Communism and the Multitude of Individuals

Paradox of the political interpretation, first of all, entirely tended towards the emergence of the political and its “constitution of being”: an emergence to come, since it is identified with the revolution, and a constitution in “project” that can only find its full and true expression in the emptiness and incompleteness of the TP<sup>82</sup>. Projected onto the future, it is necessary, however, that this constitution has a present and a past (or antecedents) that justify that we can, at present, speak of it, that can materially found the future existence of the multitude. This present and this past as the genesis of what is being born, as a tension towards the future, Negri tries to grasp them through what he calls a genealogy: the “genealogy of the collective”<sup>83</sup>.

This genealogy has a double face. First of all, it focuses on Spinoza’s approach, on the trajectory of a difficult and discontinuous research, from the “positive utopia”, “mystical” and “pantheistic” of the Short Treatise, to the incompleteness

---

<sup>81</sup> Voir plus haut, première partie.

<sup>82</sup> Comme l’écrit Negri : “ La philosophie de Spinoza est une philosophie sans temps : son temps, c’est le futur ! “ AS, p. 64.

<sup>83</sup> AS, pp. 33, 64, 234, 239.

other stagings of a libertarian practice and vision much more complex and subtle than its most visible manifestations and its most common detractors would like.

\*\*\*

Without entering into an in-depth discussion of Negri’s analyses, it suffices to observe how, in their approach and their conclusions, they tend to verify Proudhon’s worst concerns. In media res, to start from the middle of things, says A. Negri; and, more precisely, to start from the multiplicity of “particular beings” that populate the “world of modes”<sup>63</sup>. But to the radicality of this first and second assertion, which is not the object of any consequent development, is immediately opposed the negative and equally radical abstraction, but developed at length this time, of the third: the refusal of all mediation. A violent and absolute refusal that leads Negri, without transition, to affirm the “unity” and the “univocity” of the “being” of which all these “things” are only the “emanation”, to affirm the “absolute potentiality of the being” as “source” of the “thousand and one singular actions of every being”, to affirm the “compactness”, the “totality” and the “centrality” of a unique being whose modes are only “forms”, “variations” and “figures”, to affirm the “transparency” and the “unifying force” of the being, in short to affirm and reaffirm ceaselessly the “being” or the “divine” as “infinite production of power”<sup>64</sup>.

Between modes and substance there is nothing. This is Negri’s thesis about Spinoza. Or rather, and it is here that Negri’s apparently so libertarian affirmations are infinitely distant from the anarchist project, in this nothing there is the politics that authorizes and demands it, political power, political omnipotence, the absolute of the political denounced by Proudhon.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 176 et 158.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 209 ; SS. p. 16 ; AS p. 333 ; SS. p. 16 ; AS pp. 107 et 211 ; SS. p. 49 ; AS, p. 209.

hon, this almost nothing that makes everything and makes all the difference with the libertarian project. A muffled theoretical echo of the Maoism of the Cultural Revolution, Negri rejects all mediation of being, but it is in order to better entrust to the political alone the formidable prerogative, not only of “mediating” its power and its truth, but also of “constituting” it as “power” and as “truth”, of making it “be”, through its most perfect “constitution”, this “revolution” without “becoming” that is the omnino absolutum imperium of democracy<sup>65</sup>.

In Negri’s Spinoza, “being” and “political subjectivity” are only the two sides of one and the same power, thus verifying to the absurd, the diagnosis without appeal of Proudhon and Bakunin: the ineluctable chain of thought founded on the double absolute of religion and politics, of necessity and arbitrariness, of “absolute necessity” as absolute justification of absolute arbitrariness<sup>66</sup> an absolute in mirror where the communist being is realized directly in the flawless ballet of politics that gives it body, where things and men are effectively condemned to participate in the most appalling of despotisms, in the harmony or (depending on the moment) in the mass vindictiveness of a political staging of bodies and souls that tolerates no deviation, no void, no hesitation, no clumsiness, no dispute, no crisis, no necessarily negative criticism, no necessarily uncertain history, no necessarily groping experience, in short, no becoming.

As Negri writes:

“Spinoza’s actuality consists above all in this: being does not want to subject itself to a becoming that does not hold the

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 339 et 336. SS, p. 22 et “*Démocratie et éternité*” [DE] dans *Spinoza : puissance et ontologie*, Kimé, 1994, pp. 141–142.

<sup>66</sup> Nous éprouvons ici la seconde raison de l’actualité de Spinoza. Il décrit le monde comme nécessité absolue, comme présence de la nécessité. Mais c’est justement cette présence qui est contradictoire. Elle nous restitue immédiatement la nécessité comme contingence, la nécessité absolue comme contingence absolue. “SS, p. 12.

the goals of a milieu, since he solicits in thought forces that evade obedience as well as fault, and draws up the image of a life beyond good and evil, rigorous innocence without merit or guilt. The philosopher can live in various states, haunt various milieus, but in the manner of a hermit, a shadow, a traveler, a tenant of furnished boarding houses.”<sup>79</sup>.

It is true, if we except the explicit reference to Nietzsche, that Deleuze’s distinction may seem at first to be part of a quite traditional interpretation of Spinoza, with on the one hand a program for the multitude, the crowd and the vulgar irremediably subjected to passions and imagination, that a “civilizing” state must guide and manipulate from the outside, and on the other hand the few, the elite of philosophers, hermits and unattached individuals, the only ones capable of accessing reason, on their own, from within, by the force of thought and by their very solitude<sup>80</sup>.

Heretic (for Yovel), deviant (for the last Matheron), great living for Deleuze, anxious to invent a new man who breaks with the man of the mass, of the plebeian, of the crowd and of the herd, no doubt the Spinozist philosopher can claim, from Stirner to Onfray, passing by Nietzsche, Guyau, Libertad and Palente, to echo a whole dimension of anarchism: its individualistic dimension. But how, in a libertarian perspective, could this clear-cut opposition of the individual to the social open to an interpretation of Spinoza that, by relativising or dismissing the political writings, would claim to find in the individuality of the philosopher the place and the principle of a collective emancipation of humanity? By what paradox of the libertarian thought, the collective liberation should precisely move away from the political properly speaking, from the mass ac-

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 10–11. Pour une approche plus développée de qui sépare et rapproche “cité” et “philosophe”, cf. *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, Editions de Minuit, 1968 (SPE), pp. 244 etsuiv.

<sup>80</sup> Sur cette interprétation traditionnelle, cf. Y. Yovel, op. cit., pp. 172–173.



the wise” could claim a collective life free of fear and obedience, but, as A. Matheron, “we would then have a democracy without imperium, and it would no longer really be a State”<sup>76</sup>. Anarchy, then.

“a reading which, in the first instance, would aim at carefully separating what the Marxist interpretation strives to confuse: separating the political writings (with their own particular reasons for being) from the Ethics and other philosophical works (with their own, radically different ends)”

Beyond the easy irony that the logical spirit of theoretical Marxism never fails to provoke, the final conclusion of A. Matheron’s final conclusion, which, like a grain of sand, trips up thirty years of a heavy political interpretation of Spinoza, nevertheless offers the interest of reminding us that another reading of this philosopher is possible; a reading which, in the first place, would aim at carefully separating what the Marxist interpretation strives to confuse: to separate the political writings (with their so particular reasons for being) from the Ethics and the other philosophical works (with their own, radically different ends)<sup>77</sup>; to separate the “absolute form of power”, which can indeed be deduced from the former, from the “philosophy of freedom” proper to the latter.

As G. Deleuze reminds us that because it is subject “to an extrinsic order, determined by passive feelings of hope and fear” and is based on obedience, command and prohibition, fault and guilt, merit and demerit, good and evil<sup>78</sup>, political society, however good it may be, can in no way have the same ends as the philosopher.

“It is certain that the philosopher finds the most favorable conditions in the democratic state and in liberal circles. But in no case he confuses his ends with those of a State, nor with

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>77</sup> Pour une tentative d’explication, cf. l’hypothèse du “double langage” développée par Y. Yovel, op. cit., pp. 170 et sq.

<sup>78</sup> SPP, pp. 146 et 10.

truth<sup>67</sup>. The truth is said of the being, the truth is revolutionary, the being is already revolution. [The becoming manifests its falsity, in front of the truth of our revolutionary being. Today, the becoming wants in fact to destroy the being, and to suppress its truth. The becoming wants to annihilate the revolution; [...] a crisis is always a negative violation of the being, against its power of transformation.”<sup>68</sup>.

And it is spontaneously and unsurprisingly that Negri’s revolutionary enthusiasm revives, as if naturally, the religious references of submission to the absolute that Proudhon and Bakunin had so quickly believed to detect in Spinoza:

“The world is the absolute. We are crushed with felicity on this plenitude, we can only frequent this superabundant circularity of meanings and existences. “You have mercy on everything because everything is yours, Lord friend of life/ you whose imperishable breath is in everything” (Book of Wisdom, 11, 26–12,1) [...] Such is the content of being and revolution.”<sup>69</sup>.

In the context of this study, it is not possible or even useful to analyze in detail the impasses and impotence of an interpretation that, through the concepts of multitude, imagination and individual, tries in vain to give even a material content to politics as “constitution of being”. True to the despotic tradition he claims, Negri is content to mask the terrifying emptiness of his political conceptions behind an interminable pedagogical evaluation of Spinoza’s progress and setbacks on the path to truth: through “discriminations” and “caesuras,” “limits” and “interruptions,” “destructions” and “reconstructions,” “decisive passages” and “critical thresholds”; but also “crises” and “intermediate stages,” “blockages” and “forward” marches ; or again, “approximations” and momentary “weaknesses”, “confusions” and “dissymmetries”, “backward steps” and “accidents”, “uncer-

---

<sup>67</sup> Au sens où “aucun” “devenir” ne peut y prétendre, comme le montre la suite de la citation.

<sup>68</sup> SS, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

tainties” and “internal imbalances”; and then, once again, “set-backs” and “trivialities”, “ambiguities” and “confusions”, “reversals” and “residual reappearances”, etc.<sup>70</sup>, while waiting for the long-awaited final silence of the incompleteness of the TP, where, falsely desolate, the “imagination” of the revolutionary leaders (and other Pol Pots of being) can finally unfold without hindrance.

Proudhon reproached Spinoza for three things: 1) starting from God, from the absolute; 2) linking his political conceptions to this metaphysics of the absolute, thus leading to the “most appalling of despotisms”; 3) being incapable of accounting for the freedom that, paradoxically, his system necessarily presupposes. Under the guise of its revolutionary proclamations, the Marxist interpretation only confirms, to the nth power one might say, the first two objections. But in doing so, and like Proudhon, it cannot but stumble upon the third, a backwards objection, which is astonished by Spinoza’s own text, by what “incredibly” he continues to say despite what he seems to say, despite what he is made to say; a stubborn and stubborn objection that Negri himself cannot help but oppose to his own conclusions:

“If democracy, according to Spinoza, is a constitutive organization of absoluteness (this is Negri’s thesis), how at the same time can it be a regime of freedom? How can freedom become a political regime without denying its own naturalness?”<sup>71</sup>.

Or again, in terms almost identical to Proudhon’s critique:

“How can a philosophy of freedom be summed up in an absolute form of government or, on the contrary, how can an absolute form of power be compatible with a philosophy of freedom? [...] How can absoluteness and freedom be made compatible?”<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>70</sup> SS, p. 14 ; AS p. 155 et passim.

<sup>71</sup> SS p. 47

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

And, a little further on:

“Would we not be in the presence of a totalitarian utopia [...] (where) all distinction and determination vanish?”<sup>73</sup>.

It is difficult to say better and to demand with more force another interpretation of Spinoza.

### III. Another Reading of Spinoza

In a recent text<sup>74</sup>, A. Matheron, one of those who, long before Negri, contributed most to the development of a political and Marxist reading of Spinoza, provides, after years of research and questioning, a final explanation for the incompleteness of the TP, for the non-writing of the final part on democracy, which, according to Negri, is supposed to give the meaning of Spinoza’s entire philosophical approach by its very absence. In a somewhat disillusioned way, A. Matheron wonders whether Spinoza, in his concern to intervene effectively in the political struggles of his time, did not hesitate to divulge a terrifying truth: no longer, as Negri thinks, the joyful secret of the coming liberation and revolution, but, on the contrary, and in an indisputably anarchist sense this time, the overwhelming certainty that “at the very root” of political society and the state there is “something irremediably evil”<sup>75</sup>. For Matheron’s late anarchist Spinoza, and against Negri’s communist Spinoza, there would be nothing to expect from politics, even if it were democratic, since “the elementary form of democracy, according to Spinoza, is lynching” and the “power of the multitude” only seeks to ensure the security of the “conformists” and to repress the “deviants”. Consequently, only a “community of

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> L’indignation et le conatus de l’État spinoziste, dans (sous la direction de M. Revault d’Allonnes et de H. Rizk) Spinoza : puissance et ontologie, Kimé, 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 163–164.