

Spinozan Politics abstracts

Spinozan Politics (I): “The Multitude and Biopolitics”

Chair: Filippo Del Lucchese

Thursday 9:45-11:15 WIN 0-05

Negri’s reading of *Multitude*. The Disarticulation of History and Ontology

Vittorio Morfino

The concept of multitude is the core of the well-known theorico-political trilogy written by Negri and Hart, *Empire*, *Multitude*, *Commonwealth*, however Negri’s elaboration about this concept emerges within his work on Spinoza, is developed with his interpretation of Spinoza. A close reading of Negri’s texts from the *Savage Anomaly* to *Insurgencies* will allow us to grasp the fundamental coordinates of this reading and the device of transformation/ treason of Spinoza that allows it to work as a revolutionary prophecy: the disarticulation of ontology and history.

The Problem of Mass Desire and the Multitude: a Re-reading of Spinozan Pessimism

J.D. Taylor

Spinoza's democratic political thought uniquely determined not how a state might rule its people, but rather how the rule – or will – of the people might be best served in a state. Yet although his endorsement of the multitude's collective power remains consistent over his political writings, its overall objective shifts, as this paper analyses. In the *Ethics*, the democratic state must serve freedom, based on the common agreement of reasonable men (E4P18S); by the *TTP*, men's natural right is desire alone, a more unpredictable force swayed by hope and fear, best served by a collective surrender of sovereignty to the democratic state (TTPxvi; also Letter 50). By the unfinished *TP*, the objective of the civic state is no longer the common advantage of free men, but civic security and stability. The will of the people becomes both the fundamental basis and gravest threat to a stable commonwealth.

Contemporary political theorists of power, particularly those within Post-Marxism, have increasingly turned to Spinoza to expound new, optimistic and revolutionary theorisations of constituent power and desire as defining political subjectivities (Negri, Balibar, Deleuze, and less explicitly Badiou). The post-Althusserian 'Spinozan Turn' reflects a crisis of Marxism and Anarchism to provide a new materialist democratic horizon for socialism, yet such a turn falters into 'indignation' and 'discord' if it cannot first theorise the role of the democratic state

in constituting and managing mass desire, rather than its inverse. This paper uses Spinoza's conception of the state to introduce an aporia for critical theory: the problem of shaping mass desire, and its relation to the state, either as counter-power or constituent power. This is pertinent in an era of destabilising politico-economic systems, ecological collapse, rising religious fundamentalisms, and a deterritorialised global political dissent which has yet to mount a sustained challenge to neoliberalism.

Spinoza's Biopolitics

A. Kiarina Kordela

My talk begins by approaching Spinoza's conceptualization of political power as a system that negotiates authority and freedom in ways that parallel his theological distinction between fearful obedience to biblical laws and the love for God. This intertwining of authority and freedom anticipates contemporary conceptualizations of political power (notably, hegemony), including biopolitics, while, importantly, forcing us to revise radically the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics. For, by being predicated on a monistic relation between body and mind, as well as on the "third kind of knowledge"—as the kind of knowledge in which the mind conceives of the body *sub specie aeternitatis*—Spinoza's conception of biopolitics has as its object not the biological body (Foucault) or "bare life" (Agamben) but, as I argue, the relationship of the human being to eternity and to its distorted underside: the fantasy of immortality.

Spinozan Politics (II): "Spinoza and the Social"

Chair: Dimitris Vardoulakis

Friday 9:30-11:00 ABG024

The Temptation of Immanence. The Place of Spinoza in Georg Simmel's Thought

Nicola Marcucci

The theoretical and political relevance of Georg Simmel's critique of modern law, of formal ethics and capitalism has attracted increasing attention. A large set of historical works has focused on his multiple philosophical influences. Even if the presence of Spinoza in Simmel's work is widely shown by hundreds of quotations and by a large set of references to some of the *topoi* of the Dutch philosopher, his theoretical relevance has not been shown yet. The first reason is certainly the lack of interest that historians of sociology have shown to Spinoza's thought. The second is the ambivalent and mostly polemical uses that Simmel has made of Spinoza's thought. I propose to interpret this presence mainly focusing on two

concepts: immanence and reciprocal action. My aim is to show how Simmel's critique of modern formalism met in several ways Spinoza thought but, at the same time, his interpretation was deeply influenced by that of German idealism and by its critique of abstraction and lack of individuality in Spinoza's metaphysics. Only by focusing on this double movement of appropriation and stigmatization can we adequately appraise the strong influence of Spinoza in Simmel's social thought.

On *Conatus* and *Cupiditas*. Anthropological and Social Aspects.

Lorenzo Vinciguerra

Some interpreters of French neo-spinozism (Matheron, Negri, Bove, Lordon) have been reading Spinoza's system starting from the third part of the *Ethics*, moving from the doctrine of *conatus*. The doctrine of *conatus* becomes a new beginning in Spinoza system giving birth to a new foundation of the social and political science. Assuming that *conatus* doctrine is the effect of Spinoza's ontology, in which nothing can be considered a substance, the paper shows through the notion of *determinatio* in which way the modal essence of human *conatus* exists by nature always related to the others, according to the complexity of his individual body.

The Modernity of Political Treatise

Chantal Jaquet

In modern political thought, Spinoza's *Theological and Political Treatise* is most famous than *Political Treatise*. Besides its sulphurous reputation, it sounds new, for it appears like a brilliant defence of Democracy, while *Political Treatise* seems to be more traditional because of its accounts on different kinds of regimes, including Monarchy and Aristocracy.

Nowadays, it is quite the contrary. *Political Treatise* is considered as Spinoza's major political Writing, namely because it puts an end to Contractual Thought and introduces the concept of Multitude. It is a basic reference for many Political Philosophers, such as A. Negri, who want to change society. This reverse is amazing because *Political Treatise* is far from being a revolutionary writing. For instance, the conception of Democracy, that excludes women and servants in last chapter, has nothing to do with our present representation of that regime. One can ask then what are the causes of such a change. Our purpose is so to explain the reasons why *Political Treatise* is nowadays a source and a reference for contemporary political thought.

Spinozan Politics (III): “Equality and the Law”

Chair: Filippo Del Lucchese

Friday 11:30-13:00 WIN 0-04

What Does Spinoza Mean by Equality in the *Theological-Political Treatise*?

Beth Lord

It is claimed that one of Spinoza's contributions to the Radical Enlightenment is his endorsement of equality, usually taken in the moral or political sense. However, in the *Theological-Political Treatise* his appeals to equality are ambiguous. Equality appears to be both natural and artificial, both good for peace and bad for sovereignty. Our "equal right" extends from the state of nature into the civil state, and yet no one should be compelled to "serve his equal". The *Ethics* compounds the uncertainty over this matter. There, Spinoza's metaphysics makes way not for the moral equality of persons, but for their profound inequality, based on a hierarchy of our natural powers. How should equality figure in politics and ethics if, as Susan James has recently argued, the *Theological-Political Treatise* describes the society in which the ethical and liberating purpose of the *Ethics* can be realized? What does Spinoza mean by equality, and what kind of equal society - if any - does Spinoza think we should aim for? In this paper I will discuss the meaning of equality in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, and suggest that understanding equality in economic terms, rather than moral-political ones, can help us to address these questions.

***Jura communia as anima imperii*: the Symptomatic Relationship Between Law and Conflict in Spinoza**

Filippo De Lucchese

Spinoza is often praised by modern scholars as a revolutionary author, providing a metaphysics which either integrates or even substitutes a strictly Marxian political discourse. Yet Spinoza doesn't seem to endorse in his politics any idea of radical change, or even to express a preference for social transformation. A theory of revolution seems to be the blind spot of Spinozism. In this paper, I will argue that a traditional theory of revolution is actually impossible within Spinoza's philosophy. In fact, the idea of radical change is alien to Spinozism insofar as this philosophy involves an unorthodox concept of the causal relationship between law and politics, and in particular between law and conflict, intended as the basic phenomenon of politics. By discussing some key texts and the problems involved in their translation into modern languages, I will maintain that the relationship between law and politics must be interpreted through some categories of Spinoza's ontology, and in particular through the mind/body relationship. My thesis is that, although a proper theory of revolution is absent, the connection between *jus* and *polemos*/politics can be comprehended

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in a radically revolutionary way, both from the point of view of subjective rights and of objective law.

Freedom and The Axiom of Inequality

Dimitris Vardoulakis

I will argue that the Axiom to *Ethics*, Part IV presents power as fundamentally based on inequality. I will argue that Spinoza's conception of inequality responds to three positions: the Christian conception of freedom (e.g. in Augustine), the transcendental conception of freedom (e.g. in Kant) and the contractarian conception of natural law (e.g. in Hobbes). Finally, I will show how a similar conception of power can be found in Nietzsche.

Spinozan Politics (IV): "Politics and the Subject"

Chair: Dimitris Vardoulakis

Friday 14:00-15:30 ABF001

Balibar on Transindividuality: A Critical Spinozism

Sophie Laveran

Regarding Spinoza, Étienne Balibar combines two approaches: as a historian of philosophy, he takes part in the debates on textual interpretation, especially in discussions concerning the relation between individual and society; as a political theorist, he updates Spinozan concepts and methods by integrating them into his own reflection on modernity and post-modernity difficulties. One of the best illustrations of such interpenetration is how the concept of "transindividuality", borrowed from Simondon, is both the key word for his explanation of Spinoza's politics as beyond the traditional antinomies between liberalism and organicism, and the basis for his post-Marxist analysis of the processes that determinate the construction of identities. Thus, we are brought to raise at least two questions:

- 1) How does Balibar reach the conclusion that Spinoza's conception of social life can't be reduced to individualism nor holism, but derives from a general theory of communication – a "relational ontology"?
- 2) What results does Balibar obtain by involving these matters into his critical work on individual and collective identifications in general?

Therefore, the purpose of this contribution will be not only to examine Balibar's reading of Spinoza and its relevance, but as well to appreciate the stakes of his "Spinozist" approach of contemporary problems. As a particularly instructive example, I will focus on his study of national imagination, and the Spinozan echoes that resonate through it; by doing so, I will also emphasize the role of Balibar's Spinozism in his distancing from Marxism.

Towards a Conceptual Morphology of Political Subjectivity

Caroline Williams

This paper utilises Spinoza's thought in order to develop a morphology of subjectivity. Whilst Spinoza clearly does not have a concept of the subject within his philosophical system, I claim that his notion of the conatus assists in a thinking of the genesis of the space of the subjective. Close examination of the mobilisations of Spinoza by Jane Bennett and Judith Butler throw the need for such a morphology into fresh relief. It also allows me to place Spinoza and Foucault's conceptions of power in conversation with each other.

Right and Time on the Political Ontology of Spinoza

Sebastián Torres

Spinoza's *Political Treatise* appears at first sight like an exposition that does not include the temporal as an historical dimension of the political, reiterating the structure of the classic treaties about the forms of government. Working on Morfino Vittorio's research on the problem of temporality in Spinoza's ontology, I will show how the *Political Treatise* establishes a fundamental relationship between time and right to help us understand the democratic sense of the power (*potential*) of the multitude and the idea common right. My intention is to start from Spinoza to investigate some of the contemporary discussions about rights in Latin America, in the context of current emancipatory struggles.

Thursday, 6th June

Time/Room	WIN 0-02	WIN 0-03	WIN 0-04	WIN 0-05	ABG024	ABF003	ABF001
9:30-9:45	OPENING WELCOME WINDSOR AUDITORIUM						
9:45-11:15	PsyAn. & CT (I)	Bodies (I)	Higher Ed (I)	Spinoza (I)	Identity (I)	Latin America (I)	
11:15-11:45	Break						
11:45-1:15	Representation (I)	Nancy (I)	Futures Decon. (I)	Critique (I)	L. Bros (I)	New Amateur	
13:15-14:15	Lunch						
14:15-15:15	Pragmatism (I)	Historical Subj. (I)	Soul at Work (I)	New Mats (I)	Representation (II)	PsyAn. & CT (II)	
15:15-15:45	Break						
15:45-17:15	Identity (II)	Feminism (I)	Justice	New Mats (II)	Critique (II)	Higher Ed (II)	Bodies (II)

Friday, 7th June

Time/Room	WIN 0-02	WIN 0-03	WIN 0-04	WIN 0-05	ABG024	ABF003	ABF001
9:30-11:00	New Mats (III)	Nancy (II)	Feminism (II)	Bodies (III)	Spinoza (II)	Higher Ed (III)	
11:00-11:30	Break						
11:30-13:00	Representation (III)	Historical Subj. (II)	Spinoza (III)	Futures Decon. (II)	Pragmatism (II)	Soul at Work (II)	Latin America (II)
13:00-14:00	Lunch						
14:00-15:30	Representation (IV)	Identity (III)	Nancy (III)	Feminism (III)	PsyAn. & CT (III)	Critique (III)	Spinoza (IV)
15:30-16:00	Break						
16:00-17:30	L. Bros (II)	Soul at Work (III)	Higher Ed (IV)	Futures Decon. (III)	Bodies (IV)	New Mats (IV)	