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Spinoza—cosmopolitanism for the love of multitudes

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Abstract: This chapter sketches out the journey Spinoza makes from formal being to the concept of infinite machine understood as the inexhaustible source of a post-foundational fostering power in the world. I show the genetic link between the mind as fosterer of affects, and the city of such minds as the fosterer of multitudes. Spinoza (echoing Hobbes and Machiavelli) feels that the methodology appropriate to multitudes must begin from the perspective of power. I claim that Spinoza's Tractatus politicus, deploys such a methodology in which the multitude forms a particular moment of the political process. I advance an alternative methodology, still focused through the lens of power, which discloses the possibility of the super-multitude.

1. Introduction—Spinoza and foundations

How can the arch-determinist Spinoza even be thought in relation to a post-foundationalism which prizes radical contingency, the eternal un-grounding of every attempt to construct a foundation (Machart 2007)? For that matter, how can Spinoza be thought as an author who offers at least in some respects a non-totalizing and post-foundational theory of cosmopolitanism? One angle of approach is to follow the manner in which Spinoza constructs an excessive un-grounding at the level of what he terms modes, defined as affections of substance, or that which must be conceived through and in another. We cannot possibly do justice to the real depth of Spinoza's metaphysical insights here,² but in this preliminary section will sketch out the journey he makes from a formal being to the concept of infinite machine understood as the inexhaustible source of a nourishing, fostering power in the world, and from this to dual ideas of the mind as fosterer of affects, and the city of such minds as the fosterer of multitudes. In the subsequent sections we will argue that while an analysis of modes is appropriate to affects, Spinoza (echoing Hobbes and Machiavelli) feels that the methodology appropriate to multitudes must begin from the perspective of power. We claim that Spinoza's unfinished work, the *Tractatus politicus*, deploys such a methodology in which the multitude forms a particular moment of the political process. In the final substantive section we advance an alternative methodology, still focused through the lens of power, which we hope accentuates further the currency of Spinoza's political theory.

Multitudes or pluralities are a leitmotif of post-foundational thought.³ This introduction of ‘multitude’ above is merely indicative and does not do justice to the positive construction of this character of being. Let us step back once more and sketch out our journey to the multitude by means of an instructive series of transitions.

Firstly, Spinoza moves from formal being, understood broadly as the apparently ephemeral nature of our ideas and motive intentions, to the idea of a formal essence. Drawing we claim on Stoic ideas, he considers capacities to do, such as a capacity to walk, as a property which is actualised as an event. Cato can walk, but he does not always walk, and when he does walk nothing is added to the definition of Cato—he always could walk. There is something verbal that has intervened. Something happens through the body but is not itself a body. Spinoza then proceeds to the limit, for he considers the properties of *Deus sive Natura*, which he argues are infinite, and wonders about how these are actualised. His response is that they too are infinite; infinite events of God or Nature, two of which he isolates and names *Thinking* and *Extending*. These events of God or Nature are likewise verbal, but from the finite perspective their occurrence appears unchanging—they simply are incorporeal intensions of substance. It is useful to regard these incorporeals as not unlike a Cartesian normed-3space (x, y, z axes) with one significant augmentation: the incorporeal space is adverbial; it is more tensed, more relaxed here and there. Thus Thought and Extension not only order the world according to clarity and speed of ideas and bodies, but also accounts for transitions in these.

Secondly, Spinoza examines the case of a finite body considered as a certain speed or clarity relative to all other bodies. He takes this body and passes to the limit—the limit of speed, following Bruno it would seem, is rest; the limit of clarity is, by parallel reasoning, distinctness. Rest is not taken as a kind of inertia internal to separate substance, rather to retain unity in substance it is considered counterintuitively as the relative permittivity of substance to motion (rest stands as the reciprocal, not the product, of motion). This leads to the idea of machine, understood as this permittivity but manifested for us as resistance, as the existential conatus or endeavour to persevere in being.

Thirdly, the discussion of machines as sites of motive and ideational events in God or Nature leads Spinoza, following Descartes, to argue that as God or Nature is constant and immutable, the whole set

of machines cannot *qua* whole change, such that every local change is compensated across the whole face of the universe. This is the general equilibrium. Considering all these infinitely many finite machines Spinoza then passes to the limit: what would an infinite machine do? Every finite machine expresses natural right (*ius*), that is, it expresses the power (*potentia*) it has according to its laws (or capacities, *potestates*) in so far as this power extends. In the general equilibrium this power must come from other finite machines and must go to them, either effectively or used up against their resistance.⁴ In the limit case the infinite machine is both source of its own native power and inexhaustible i.e. it pours its power into the world without dissipation or diffusion. It is now understood that the infinite machine coincides with God or Nature, for it is self-caused and as self-caused its very essence is its power (EIP34).⁵

We thus return to substance in act anew and can conceive of the attributes of substance as the source of this inexhaustible power in the world. It is a power which is of the same order as the attributes and so is not *in* Thought and Extension but appears with them. In other words it is incorrect to assign the infinite machine to one idea or place; rather, the infinite machine may be found variously at all points that the attribute in question exhibits infinite power. These points are the formal essences already considered as tensions of the attribute. These points are incorporeal forms which impel transitions into the corporeal world. They are loci in which bodies are bound to congregate in compositions of great speed and clarity, but these loci are not the compositions. Spinoza's epistemic argument proceeds by claiming that these formal essences in Thought are the condition of consciousness, and in particular they are the condition of each human mind. He claims that each human has, without necessarily realising it, within them an idea of the greatest clarity and distinctness which is the modal expression of their formal essence, and this is the *idea Dei* that is native to each. It is a move which is a key marker in the transition to the idea of the modern liberal subject as having irreducible value in its own right. We can perhaps trace from Duns Scotus to Spinoza the claim that each prince has both an ordered power (*potentia ordinata*) which is lawful and subject to completeness and coherence, and an absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) which is the 'divine right' to intervene in and alter that order. Spinoza grants each human the divine and absolute right to intervene in the world.⁶ If every city, or *imperium*, is the multitude of its citizens in ever shifting alliance and conflict, then each such city may also be considered abstractly as

the sum of these point-like powers. Indeed, we claim that following Spinoza's logic of peace in concord, that city of powers is but one: the *imperium intuitivum*.

Yet is this native power, as Hegel might claim, an infinitely empty power—'the coldest, flattest death'?⁷ It is indeed true, as Leibniz already could remark, that an infinite power is meaningless unless it is directed to some purpose. Spinoza however does not exit this impasse by reverting to free will. The total application of this power in every direction at infinite speed occurs according to natural laws just as much as the application of finite power. Spinoza rather seems to pursue a different route and to argue for a new kind of mutative endeavour in which the site of the formal essence is now conceived as home in which a multitude smaller machines are fostered, composed, decomposed, recomposed. Spinoza attains absolute freedom but does not rest; he returns again to the world and regards the multitudinous affects that condition being under a new light. Whereas before we might have considered individuals bombarded by extraneous determinations and multitudes of these, the multitudes are discovered as 'interior' to consciousness itself and a fruit of its free power. Being as experience of finitude is taken up as a tool in the grasp of the mind and is examined afresh. The engagement with the nature of power of both kinds presents us with the means to examine being as a product of power considered as such. In our mind's eye we turn from an impossible rational endeavour to enumerate the infinite multitude and intuitively touch upon the contours of power itself, seeing in these the structure and possibilities of political multitudes. Our argument is that this new perspective as much drives a reappraisal of the affects (human emotions) as it does the multitudes of the city.

We claim it is plausible to regard Spinoza as determining foundations at every stage only to pass to their limit and go beyond them. He has passed from our unrealised ideas to the absolutely free individual, but now once more faced with paradox (a freedom which is applied in every direction according to determinate laws) he once again passes beyond to the multitude. The multitude may be considered in this way post-foundational, for it is the necessary product of the limitations of a foundation. But it must be emphasised that this move may only be made joyfully if we understand the exact processes by which the multitude is generated. For, as Spinoza claims, a thing is only correctly defined by its generation.⁸

2. Fostering multitudes

If we put aside technical difficulties in Spinoza's mechanical conception, we may perfectly correctly assert that *if* his mechanical outlook is adequate, *then* this bipolar explanation of the world suffices for the rational person to deal with her world. She may examine the static properties of a given machine and those machines with which it interacts, and take into account the power of the infinite machine as it pours into the world from its various sources. It is an analysis which is relatively straightforward at the level of the *corpora simplicissima*, increasing in difficulty until we may only outline in broad strokes the significance of the revelation of our infinite power in the *imperium intuitivum* (that is, in the Spinozan form of a cosmopolis in which each is the source, not just the relay, of political power conceived as the trans-humanity's self-production). As a consequence we have no trouble accepting Spinoza's repeated conclusion that matters are too complex for any finite individual to comprehend clearly and distinctly, and that as such *politics* has to be approached in a somewhat conservative manner, drawing on an underlying knowledge of the rectitude of God or Nature's power in this sphere.

So we have a set of *fundamental 'natural' laws* which for Spinoza in principle *completely* describe natural right in the world, but which concepts/tools are limited by their wielders in their finitude. At one level we ought not to require any further such natural laws—what else should we do?—but nevertheless there is a *third* level of fundamental description that is fruitful and vital—a level involving foetal powers, affections, confusions. And this level, this mode of description and its 'laws' are essential and useful over the widest range of phenomena of radically different characters, from human passions to political multitudes. This is the surprising truth of the *Ethics*, that beatitude is only the ethical moment *par excellence* because it is the *Moment*, that about which the ethical machine shall turn, and so but the starting-point of *praxis* which demands a methodology or ethos over against the *logos* of ideas and the *pathos* of bodies. Were we to choose a more modern term of the study of this methodology, we would be inclined to oppose to this bipolar structure of (a) the statics, or analysis of existence, and (b) dynamics, or analysis of essence, a third mode of description (c) the theory of affects, or of the power of multitudes, of excessive (as opposed to absolute) power in the city. If the modern world has been locked in a battle between essentialism and existentialism, is not Spinoza the herald of a third ethics, which as a consequence we venture to name *excessentialism*.⁹

So as we have claimed, when Spinoza assists in our transition to the idea of the infinite machine we are not assigned simply a beatific role, staring in eternity at the face of God or Nature dominates Part V *Ethics*, but beneath there is something else bubbling. It is this something else which ensures the incompleteness of the transition to the beatific vision and the necessity of return; a return which mirrors the excessive essentialising of substance's existence by its attributes. This 'something else' is marked by Spinoza's use of the term '*fovere*', which means to foster, but is deeply entwined with the word 'foetus', this latter granting the conception greater vitality.

In what follows we would like to explore a bit further the consequences of our reading of the Spinozan formal essence of a thing as a habitat for affections; a place where bodies swarm and generate. To do this, we are going to have to think in terms of these swarms of affects, these multitudes, and so step out of the 'classical' or clear and distinct methodology we have hitherto attempted to develop. We have come to realise that our ethical task is to foster multitudes; now we must understand what it is that we are fostering, just as the farmer must understand the fruits of her field. We will attempt, in a somewhat freer fashion, to expand on Spinoza's theory of multitudes from the post-foundational perspective of this book and in so doing, recover cosmopolitanism from within the multitude itself. Our aim then is to conceive of multitudes *sub specie potentiae*. This treatment, we apologise in advance, must be somewhat cursory.

3. The role of the multitude in the political process

Our aim as we have said is to consider multitudes from the perspective of power. It is a question firstly of determining how multitudes fit or otherwise within power structures. It is worth remarking that multitudes have a strange double life in the political realm. Multitudes tend only to be noticed as a qualitative comparison between multitudes, for example between the city's authorities and the mob. As Balibar writes,¹⁰ from the perspective of authority the mob is to be feared as an irrational mass lacking coherence and unity of mind. So the multitude becomes anchored in that point of uprising at which cusp, from the perspective of the existing ordered power, the cancellation of itself is considered negatively not as a rationally understood determination but as a political passion. The existing order, the social contract, is in the process of coming undone—to turn a concept of Nancy, being un(k)notted.

Yet as it recedes, the ordered power continues to determine the nature of what is revealed, even if only as a passion, as something irrational, as something which lacks a nature that is being expressed and so lacks power. What is it? It is nothing coherent; it is not any thing; nothing can be said of it. Thus when ordered power is confronted by the multitude, it cries in frustration at the limitations of its ordered perspective: ‘what is truth?’ In this moment it endeavours to mark out its difference from the multitude, even as the inherence of multitudes to political orders is made plain. This cry is impelled by the revelation of the ubiquity of multitudes. Accordingly it is inappropriate to equate the ‘appearance’ of the multitude with the multitude itself—so reinstating the foundational moment of politics—and post-foundationalists thus name the qualitative remarking of the multitude as ‘the event.’

A consequence of locating multitudes within every political process is that we may place a different emphasis on the sense of ‘multitude’ from that of Hardt & Negri. To the extent that their notion of multitude can be identified, it stresses that ‘multitudes are ‘new figures of struggle and new subjectivities...produced in the conjuncture of events’¹¹ and are not merely negative but positive powers of production. Our emphasis stresses the radical dispassion of Spinoza’s viewpoint in which good and bad multitudes only make sense from the relative context of ordered power. The mob is not something other than the city for the city itself is a mob, just a mob expressing different conditions of power. The ‘mob’ here is just the ‘state of nature’ and it is everywhere. It is thus more correct to say that there are struggles in any city and ‘new subjectivities’ produced, but that what arises when one multitude is revealed to another is not a struggle at all: the two powers have nothing in common. What occurs is that the individual bodies of one multitude fall under the sway of the other—they *behave* differently (this is the redistributive aspect). Any struggle occurs at the level at which individual bodies behaving differently now interact differently with surrounding bodies. We have a prior cause (power) and posterior cause (corporeal behaviour) in the manner in which Spinoza himself thinks of prior causes i.e. technically if not actually. This dispassionate view of politics as multitudes, nothing but multitudes, allows us to guard against (a) privileging one political phenomenon as somehow foundational to another, (b) assuming that a good political phenomenon is immune from the perceived failings of its bad relation. These considerations lead us back to the multitude’s role in the *Tractatus politicus* as the name of a cancellation and revelation of power.¹² Insofar as the multitude becomes remarkable and feared by the

city's rulers, it is at this moment of transition, in much the same way as Spinozan physics depends not on motion and rest, but on perceiving differing ratios of the two. If we tack then very closely to this moment of transition for the time being, we remain sensitive to the affective experience of the multitude from the perspective of ordered power, and so of its appearance as political irrationality. It is precisely because power, which *per* Spinoza pertains to reason and intuition, cannot be said of the multitude that we find its place: it is *neither* ordered nor absolute power, therefore it *is* neither. And this third 'power' which is neither is the very impotence of the multitude. The multitude is perceived as a defect of the city; an inefficiency. *Pace* Hardt & Negri it is not strictly productive at all for production with its iron laws is all about ordered power. Yet because no actually existing system of ordered power is so perfect as to be an absolutely effective political machine, there is always the multitude being exuded somewhere from the apparatus of ordered power. The political thinker realises this, and realises that the appropriate mode of proceeding is not to crush or exclude multitudes (which merely breeds them) but to incorporate them within a greater political whole. We can see this already in the work of Machiavelli, who regards corruption—within Aristotelean terms a degeneracy of the state—as an integral part of the principality's survival.¹³

In his *Tractatus politicus*, Spinoza moves from a consideration of the ordered construction of the imperium and, we claim of the *imperium intuitivum*, to a consideration of the manner in which the imperium is defined (i.e. generated) by the multitude as a *democracy* (TPII§17).¹⁴ The ordered imperium and the *imperium intuitivum* are not cast aside—they are necessary conditions of our consideration of the multitude, which latter resolves upon them in the last analysis—but are rather taken up into a political process that may be schematised as follows:

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

A regular syllogism, one might say. We have used the word *impotentia* to mirror *potentia*, but from the foregoing it should be understood that this impotence is not absolute, but emerges from the particular nature of each machine. Indeed, insofar as humans are multitudinous, their impotence negates, that is determines, *ius* as the imperium called democracy at the same time as their common power, the power which is ultimately the brute sum of individual machines, is the constituent power of that imperium. We

thus have grave concerns about any theory of constituent power which relies solely on the power, and does not take the negative seriously. As Spinoza himself writes “*posse non existere impotentia est*” (EIP11 Alt. Proof). We claim it is easiest to grasp this conception of the political process by analysing its cases, as indeed Spinoza does, albeit within the classical garb of the Aristotelian political tract.

The above schematic suggests a number of scenarios of transition between political states, which transitions express variations in natural right. Put another way, the amount of natural right in a closed political system is constant, but we must look to where this right is coalescing and so tipping the imperium from one state to another (crisis). The scenarios may be enumerated thus:

- (1) From multitude to radical democracy (TPII§17)—here no transition occurs as the multitude simply acts as itself without any formal structuring. It is an entirely horizontal structure relying on balance of individual powers not being disturbed (a confusion of states) thus provoking a crisis.
- (2) From multitude to democracy or aristocracy (TPII§17)—this is the expression of common right in which the common natures of the individuals of the multitude is projected into an idea of an imperium. It is provoked by a crisis or decision of the multitude, this decision, will, or assent, constructing a common notion of the people that negates the uncommon and defines itself in general. It thus constitutes an ordered power.

It is critical to realise that, in contrast to the transition from multitude to monarch below, the appointment of a council of sufficient size is for Spinoza so important because the appointees have the greater chance of representing the common nature of the imperium. To emphasise, the transition is marked causally by a generalisation of certain, specific material features of the multitude at the expense of the rest – what is transferred, power, is not confused but well ordered..

Note not only how the particular distribution of the multitude becomes regulated in the law-like generality of the imperium, but how the exchange/transfer of powers between multitude and imperium, being a confusion of the general and the particular, is it itself particular i.e. the

passage from multitude to imperium (or the reverse) is not subject to general laws, but is itself particular or confused.

- (3) From ordered power to absolute power (TPX§1)—here Spinoza talks about a single leader being appointed to ensure the security of the imperium, who in order to do so must enact laws which are contrary to the common nature of the imperium as such (being rather in favour of the security of the one). The imperium is in “great peril” and we reach the crisis of dictatorial power as “absolute”. When we discuss the transition from multitude to monarch we will likewise see the role of fear in the confusion of powers in a singularity, but at least in this scenario Spinoza feels a regulatory element of mediation has occurred through the council.
- (4) From absolute power to multitude (TPVII§25)—Spinoza details a number of reasons for the collapse of absolute power into the natural order and the loss of the state, such as the death of the monarch, abdication and so forth. These cases of absolute power are opposed to the scenario in which sovereignty or right rests with a “free multitude” which ensures the continuity of the monarchy by election, birth-right etc. But we should not overlook Spinoza’s comparison with the Hebrew imperium, in which the replacement leader is chosen by God (theocracy). This is not merely an historical aside; once we understand the fostering nature of the eternal part of the mind in relation to the multitude of affections, we can perhaps see a different relation between the absolute power and the multitude in which the latter are encouraged to freedom (a tendency markedly opposite to the general direction of travel of monarchs, which Spinoza is at pains to remedy with his idea of popular will in monarchic appointments).

It should also be noted that we may pass in the inverse rotation, though with more difficulty:

- (5) From multitude to absolute power (TPVI§4 and VII§25) – this case is marked in opposition to the transfer from multitude to aristocracy. As we say above, that transfer of power was of a specific power determinable by the common nature of the multitude, and the security of the imperium rested on the commonality of this imperium as an expression of the multitude. The passage from multitude to absolute power is characterised by fear, and here Spinoza seems to be drawing on Hobbes quite closely. Thus the cause of the imperium is an affect, with the result

that the monarch expresses not a common nature but a confused idea, which in Spinoza's model is as it should be because the monarch, as singularity, should be a *complexion* of an infinite infinity of modes.

(6) From absolute power to ordered power (TP§30) – this possibility Spinoza largely discounts, arguing that monarchic power collapses on the multitude (cf. (4) above). Nevertheless he cannot pass over one case which indirectly indicates the possibility of a constitutional monarchy i.e. one which falls back on an aristocracy with a regulative function on absolute power. This is the case of the Aragonese “Seventeen”, an institution set up on the counsel of the Pope when he, as singularity, was asked by the people of Aragon to choose for them a new monarch. Spinoza praises this Pope as a true “Vicar of Christ” because he advises against monarchy but when this is not accepted he fosters or supervises their free choice of an institutional arrangement of control of absolute power, thus integrating the multitudinous basis of monarchic power with the aristocratic order in a complete political process. We wonder whether this supervisory function is indeed the political mirror of the fostering role of the singularity of the mind with respect to its own affective multitude.

(7) From ordered power to multitude (TPVIII§§3-5) – in these fascinating passages Spinoza both asserts (a) that the sovereignty invested in a council is that which approaches absolute sovereignty the most save a thorough democracy united in its mind, but (b) that the ordered power of the council is directly imperilled by its *fear* (an affect) of the multitude. The transition in question therefore seems at once that which is least likely, but which most closely rests on the passionate model of the human mind which Spinoza advances.

The core lesson from all this is that the multitude is not a political state as such, but a moment in the political process which is *revealed* as itself only during moments of revolt.

4. The political process seen as phenomenon of the multitude

The triadic schematisation, while revealing, actually remains somewhat ordered and static, and this suggests that it is also inappropriate for describing the multitude's power from its own perspective. We

thus advance a complimentary diagram which places emphasis on the transitions of the multitude by reference to degrees of *potentia* and *potestas* considered within a finite political process:

<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

By way of explanation, we attempt to illustrate how the multitude constitutes a flux out of which various imperia arise.¹⁵ It should be emphasised again that it is only abstractly that the multitude is completely separated from the other imperia; for Spinoza the multitude flows through the other imperia at all times, complicating the material structure greatly. The axes are named “(Free) *Potentia*” and “*Existing Potestas (authority)*” but this is rather cumbersome. As to the former, we could simply note that if we speak of *potentia*, then if we wish to isolate *free potentia* then we must refer to that which is free in exercising power, which per EIP34 is God, and His power is his essence. Thus (Free) *Potentia* taken in its ‘self-standingness’ is a synonym of God’s essence. We have elsewhere¹⁶ defined *Existing Potestas* as an incoming enacting transition distributed over the ideas (or bodies) expressing a formal essence. There can be a tendency to disregard *potestas* as ‘polemical’ and undesirable,¹⁷ but Spinoza’s whole system unsurprisingly turns on *potentia* expressing *potestas*,¹⁸ and in the finite case of *potentia* expressing common and particular natures in their conative resistance to destruction,¹⁹ up to a point of over-determination. It would seem strange that as a result *potentia* enters into the diagram on both axes, immediately and mediately, but that it is transition that makes the whole difference is rather Spinoza’s whole point. Accordingly, we could just as well write:

(Free) Potentia = essence

Existing Potestas (authority) = existence

As we know, Spinoza, following Descartes, regards God (or Nature) as respectively immutable or constant, so we must take the limit case for all finite things as follows:

existence/essence = constant

The constant, however, disguises the specificity of one factor which has hitherto been assumed, and which is the existential consciousness of resistance or endeavour to persist in being. By ‘assumed’ we mean that it is simply rolled up into the constancy of the machine as defined, but the essence/existence

conception we derive from the multitudes begs the question of whence the *Free Potentia* arises. We are now in a position to suggest that the *Free Potentia* is the excess of determination to act, that is, every action is partly the natural activity of this particular thing (its natural right) and partly this particular thing's having to resist (the excess of this natural right, which is excess or liberated *potentia*), thus:

Incoming Free Potentia (Pot_{in}) => thing in act => Natural Right + Excess (Outgoing Free Potentia)

where:

$$Pot_{in} = Natural\ Right + Excess$$

There are three destinies for this *Excess*: (i) it is re-appropriated by the resisting machine as it transits to greater perfection; (ii) it is appropriated by another machine, to its own benefit; or (iii) it is appropriated by no machine, because no machine present has the *potestas* to reintegrate such power in the plane, and so it liberates itself. We will expand on this in due course.

Spinoza, for his part, will write this concept according to its affective appearance as the three primary affects as follows (EIIIP11 Sch.):

$$Incoming\ affection = desire + [pleasure\ or\ pain]$$

This interpretation allows us to see why Spinoza includes both desire (or appetite) and pleasure/pain within the basic structure of affective consciousness. The very impotence of any thing requires that something exceed its determination to act and be liberated, either in a constructive or destructive manner depending on whether the affected thing can adequately contract this excess and so be determined to more intense action. It is worth noting how Spinoza holds pleasure and pain not to be perfections (reality or power) in themselves but nothing, which is easier to see in the case of pain because "*privatio nihil est*" (EIII Def. Em.3 Expl.).²⁰ Remember, this is not an altered interpretation of existential consciousness, but the same material process discussed in the main part of this work now regarded from the perspective of the multitude.

We can judge the ethical constancy or actually expressed virtue of a thing by assessing:

$$Actually\ expressed\ virtue = Natural\ Right/Pot_{in}$$

In the case that *Natural Right = Pot_{in}* there must have been no conative struggle, which tells us that the machine we are dealing with is most virtuous and so unsurprisingly the limit case infinite machine. What we actually have is the Natural Right of the thing in question being nothing other than its completely successful attempt to express its *potentia*-liberating nature (an excessential machine); so *Pot_{in} = Natural Right = Excess*²¹ which is to say that in such a machine all these terms are confused as *Free Potentia* where desire is pleasure. *There cannot be too much joy; it is always good* (EIVP42). The apparent conflict between constancy and excessence really only arises because of the difference of levels, infinite and finite: God may be the efficient cause, but each finite thing considered alone is but an inefficient cause of any whole effect.

Now, with a little thought we may observe that if we could take a finite thing and hold its characteristic proportion constant:

- (1) any increase in its existence will necessarily bring about an increase in essence; and
- (2) any increase in essence will bring about an increase in its existence.

However, we cannot always hold a particular thing constant and so excess occurs as transition in the phenomenal sense illustrated in Figure 2 to greater or lesser power of acting (hence we have not said 'its essence').

With our Figure we actually start in the middle, in the State of Nature that is the multitude; the beginning of the arrows at the origin relate only to the degrees of power in both senses in play. There is no necessary development from origin to any particular imperium within a political 'process'. It can be seen that in the static imperium of monarchy, increases in *potentia* that may occur at once assist the monarchy for example by increasing its glory (wealth, arts), but reaches a point of transition in which either the monarchy is affectively re-founded (fear) by increasing authority, or we pass into open revolt of radical democracy. The multitudinous imperium is a state in flux which we suggest experiences ecstatic freedom with only a delayed upswing of authority-over-self as it approaches the next crisis point. As discussed above, Spinoza sees in this the expression of the generality of the multitude – its common nature – in the transfer of that common power to an aristocratic or formal democratic representative authority. This is the end of a spectrum of increasing self-authority for the multitude

which, Spinoza is open about, involves dragging along the recalcitrant and defending the new-born imperium against e.g. monarchists (TTPIV).²² Why then does the *potestas* fall away at this point? This is because as Spinoza affirms, the wise are freer in the civil imperium²³ than in the State of Nature (EIVP73). The effect of this transition, which the diagram disguises, is that the concretisation of authority is counteracted by the increasing freedom that is offered to the citizens, an increasing freedom, however, which may well begin to undermine the authority, with effects on citizen's power, and lead to a collapse back into the multitude.

In this diagram we have added a fourth imperium which Spinoza implicitly discounts, namely that imperium in which the multitude continues to expand its immanent authority to itself in a progress parallel to that of the individual to intuition. This 'supermultitude' is so conscious of its own power that, we conjecture, it begins to form its own substance and in so doing breaks out of the cycle of the political process that Spinoza ordains. We must not deny the role of *potestas* here, by falsely regarding authority as bad *in se*. External authority is to be rejected, but *authority*, self-authorship, continues to inform the multitude systematically. Consequently, when we see *potestas* increase, we are not increasing tyranny which is but one form of authority, but increasing the generic quantum of *potestas* which we must surely admit can only occur in the multitude and not in the isolated and limited realm of the fearful tyrant. While it thus makes intuitive sense that a supermultitude should be most free, its conjectural power, the very power of defining its own concept for itself, becomes also its most powerful determination (EI Def.7), and until the crisis point it is this power 'immanating' from the constituents of the multitude with respect to each other which is its own authority. This 'immanation' occurs, we suggest, because the maximal confusion of the nature(s) of the multitude approaches at the limit 'clarity and distinctness' and so confuses itself most completely with each thing. At crisis, the supermultitude in a sense explodes; an explosion which may be better understood by an analysis of the complexity it involves. The result is a return to the whole process, but not this process; the supermultitude has become free substance and so determines itself as condition of imperia—as a new political process. There is, in short, a *metabolis*, an overthrow of the *Idea Dei* itself in favour of a new Idea. Let us not however, fall into the trap of regarding these two distinct Ideas as occupying an empty conceptual space of possible worlds; on the contrary it is evident from this model that the latter Idea is born of the former, but born

not in the re-productive sense of identity with genus such that we could speak of the advent of an *Idea multitudinis*, of the accidental nature of the given distribution, but precisely in the accidental sense that it escapes its own genus and recognises itself as a re-distribution through substantiality: the *Idea Iustitiae*. Thus we say that the explosion out of politics into the cosmopolitical is likely followed, as a result of substantialization, by coalescence in an Idea (or multiple Ideas?).

5. Excessentialism and the cosmopolis regained

Let us return now to the excess, and what happens in case (iii)—the case where no present machine is capable of re-appropriating the excess in order to transit to a greater perfection. This is actually not a correct description of what has happened. Lawyers have a piece of jargon for what happens to property which falls between all owners as un-owned; it is called *bona vacantia* and in England & Wales for example *bona vacantia* reverts to the archetypal political singularity or *potentia absoluta*, namely the Crown. Something strangely similar, we conjecture, is going on in Spinoza's modelling of the political process, but to see this we have been forced to have a 'wild idea.' We were struck that the existential/essential plane as such could only account for the excess to the extent that it did not exceed what was given i.e. it was always assignable to some existence, or more formally there was one to one correspondence between a given degree of essence and a given degree of existence. The excess could not get out, and it could not get in—it was, as Spinoza wrote, nothing, and only relevant in dealing with the imaginary realm of affects or passions. It therefore occurred to us that rather than trying to solve this paradox we should apply the method of transitions once again and so pass to the next plane in which excess was accounted for as product of contradiction. After all, have we not said that the multitude stands forth ontologically because it resolves on both singularity and its non-appurtenance to the generality. It became dialectically necessary, we felt, that excess stands alone over against existence and essence. Or, more crudely, in our mind we simply tipped over Figure 2 and added a third axis; a third axis, however which creates genuine problems for thought.

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

On this bridging diagram, we have posited the third axis to show at what we are trying to grasp with excess, but only to discard the characterisation. What we discern here is that the liberated excess literally

swerves away from the world, but, unlike the Epicurean gods and just like Marx's *Kapital*, this excess remains deeply interested in the world's affairs as it coalesces in associations and forms singularities which begin to pour *free potentia* back into the world, distorting *Thought* and *Extension* in the manner discussed in this work. This is the rebirth of substance, and we thereby glimpse why Spinoza was uncomfortable saying 'One' of substance (see again his *Letter 50*); all substance is logically confused as One, but remains a multiplicity. We have, in fact, recovered *grosso modo* now from the perspective of the multitude the construction of the *imperium intuitivum* in which actually localisable singularities create cosmopolitical vortices around which other machines are drawn and impelled.

The arrow indicating the 'patristic surplus' attempts to indicate that liberation occurs in a significant degree under aristocratic and formal democratic modes of government, although what is liberated has greater difficulty in coalescing in any stable state (it refuses ethics, one might say). 'Plumes' also occur from the radical democratic, and least of all monarchic, imperia. In this affective plane determined by excessence, we might therefore site the following political forms above those identified in Figure 2:

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

The problem with Figure 3 is that we expect the *Excess* to behave in exactly the same way as the *Existential* and *Essential* axes; that it too should proceed to infinity in a straight line. Yet if the *Excess* has as its characteristic a return of the simplicity of *Deus sive Natura*, and so is raised up into that substance, surely we should expect its geometric character to be other than that which Spinoza ascribes to the attributes obliquely in EIP15 Sch. The analogy with the Epicurean swerve indicates that we are indeed dealing here with the cause of the swerve, namely the self-sufficiency of the circulating point that is a substance (or atom). It seems to us that what our *Excess*-axis should be doing therefore is imputing this primary rotation into the *Existence/Essence* plane. But again, we should not regard this as a rotation around the origin (around the *Excess*-axis) because this would simply twist the plane around on itself, perhaps adding a degree also of amplification (or growth) producing a spiralling plane like a corkscrew of infinite progress. Here we find that the difference between Spinoza (and Marx) and the Epicureans is that the swerve is primary only in power, and not in its priority in the causal series from Creation: this difference is that the rotations are impelled into the world by their creation materially by

that world (e.g. humans attain beatitude). Is it not more correct therefore to regard the points of rotation as being located in the *imperia* of the plane, consequently, if one can imagine this, producing a plane which is all twisted up here and there. To coin a phrase, we have an *Excess* the centre of which is everywhere and the limit of which is nowhere.

Once again considering variations in this twisting, we might ask about the degree of rotation and whether in the absolute case the rotating elements as it were lift themselves up into little monadic spheres that are, *per* Spinoza, a logically indistinguishable multiplicity (a complication) of such spheres which he calls substance (that is only improperly called One or single). We cannot stress too highly the relation between this complication and the confusion and mutilation of the ideas of finite existence—by the method of transition we come to regard this complication as the equality of all substances in God or Nature as ‘One’ is nothing other than finite confusion taken to its limit, whereby God’s rationality derives simply from being most confused (equality itself). In other words, the mediate complication that is the very essence of transition as passage from ordered generality to singularity encounters its counterpart, the immediate complication, which is the transition of confusion to a generative complication. A dialogical method (paradox or metabasis) encounters a physical method (transition proper as essential differentiation of the multitude), not simply to face each other in opposition, but constitutively. Why? For the core of metabasis in its ability to draw power out of existing structures and pass beyond—to accelerate away from them we might say analogously—is that it presents this released power, that was tied up in existence, to the multitude, and in so doing instigates that very transition of the multitude to substantiality. Thus when dialogical metabasis meets physical transition it is in such a way that each is condition and power of the other; that is, attribute encounters substance just as substance encounters attribute and they turn upon themselves and together liberate themselves (the *causa sui* as freedom itself²⁴). This moment of excess constitutes the third method, a properly ethical method, of fostering becoming by means of overthrowing existence and essence: the excessive method of metabolism.

Now through this sketch, we invite the reader to consider this reformulation of the cosmopolis in an excessive geometry constituted by these self-overthrowing spheres perfect in their kind, and how this

'world' would look from the perspective of such a substance as it writes its concept upon the face of the universe.

<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

What cannot be represented here is the manner in which the plane surface in fact reflects the characteristics of the substance, leaving a vortex of infinite depth below. This leaves us with two presentations of the world—one discrete, one continuous—which thus refer us to a third that is neither (Leibniz's *analysis situs*). As we have noted before, there is only so far one can go with a still doggedly geometric representation, for it seems to offer little of revelation when considered with respect to *Essence* and *Existence*, save perhaps that the siting of such a substance in concentrations would presumably start dragging in other machines to the relevant imperium e.g. from the monarchic and radical democratic imperia to the aristocratic imperium (imperialism). In this extremely loose way, however, we hope to have indicated certain outgrowths of this manner of thinking about multitudes that may direct us to further investigations with better tools at hand. What we wish to stress is that Spinoza's approach to political theory involves an interrogation of the causes of political being, which causes are the intimate relation between *potentia* and *potestas*. This investigation is only possible because Spinoza has prepared the mind in the *Ethics* by a process which leads ultimately to an inversion of the relation between individual and multitude—what was once experienced as external passion now is brought within and fostered as the condition of political becoming. A Spinozan cosmopolitics is pursued for the love of multitudes.

6. Final remarks

For Spinoza politics is born of being but is not being. Refusing to abandon himself to an apotheosis of being, Spinoza brings to being's constitution the free individual as the source of power, but not yet of politics. Politics is a very specific relation of being insofar as the individual coexists, as she must to grow, with other individuals in their multitude. Accordingly, while each individual is by right the source of the power that makes the political, the political only is political because no human has the natural right to comprehend every other individual: individuals are granted the privilege of political finitude in experiencing others affectively in their collective activity. We might say then that as a species of being,

politics appears as the materiality of human interaction—a materiality capable of great mutations. The merit of Spinoza’s approach is to have deliberately left being behind through the development of concepts, only then when the full ramifications of such developments are made clear, to return to being on an intuitive basis. It allows Spinoza to approach political being in its specificity by deploying those concepts—or tools—best suited to the task, namely power as both *potentia* and *potestas*, considered here according to the finite deployments of essence and existence. Accordingly Spinoza offers not an Aristotelean typology of political being but an engagement with the causes of its mutation, whereby we begin to grasp political being as anything but homogenous. Political being, it turns out, may at once be a field of political experiences and be twisted, ruptured, fraying at the edges. In this move Spinoza lies perhaps in spirit closest to Badiou’s *metapolitics* in its claim that behind political difference there are iron ontological laws to be discovered. Where they perhaps depart is that by returning to being from freedom, Spinoza does not denigrate being as mere delusion, for he understands that the multitude ‘out there’ is now internalised within the individual that fosters the multitude. Spinoza *loves* multitudes and he loves them because of the second conatus—the endeavour to mutate the individual; to persist in becoming. The determinate proportionality of temporal flux (duration) and variations in the intensity of the order of things is precisely that—a proportion—and so twofold. What is experienced as political mutation finds its site in human conscious in such a way that we realise that the mutations of the multitude are none other than the mutations of consciousness itself. The structural nexus of consciousness and multitude constitutes the very possibility of (i) perception of multitudes at all (political consciousness); (ii) participation in multitudes (class consciousness); (iii) cognizing mutability in political being (consciousness of what Badiou calls according to his own register the *futur antérieur*). As to this last point, it is only because being was momentarily abandoned that we have experienced mutability in consciousness, and it is because this journey has been undertaken that we know the multitude, which operates according to the same laws as consciousness, is capable of the same journey to absolute freedom.

This of course brackets off the material conditions at play for any given multitude. Spinoza is fully appreciative of the role of conceptual developments in determining the outcomes for consciousness and multitude. Just because the multitude is capable of passing to freedom according to the transitions

described herein, trusting in these transitions and their occurrence—becoming obsessed with political being as the question that must not be forgotten—is a dead end. The logical relation is between the transitions of political being and construction of political concepts (tools). A consideration of what Spinoza’s philosophy offers for a post-foundational political ontology remains somewhat mutilated if one does not also take into account this necessary logical counterpart of the mutations of being. It is an appreciation of this by Deleuze, an author Marchart does not assign to his canon of post-foundational political thought, which flows partly from Deleuze’s own engagement with Spinoza (though heavily fleshed out by Leibnizian philosophy). At the level of political philosophy, the accounting for both aspects of logic means a consideration of the interlinking of individuals and multitudes, of individuals of various stages of consciousness and multitudes at various stages of political expression. What interests us therefore is the consideration of the political process as a whole, as that process which turns on the material determinants of the distribution and degree of right. By degree we mean as before the degree of power in so far as it prevails, but the nature of confusion and mutilation indicates the importance of paying close regard not only to the general distribution of power, but also the local states and structures of the bodies in play i.e. the fluidity of these bodies, their capacity for receiving impressions and to carry these about the social circulation. Indeed, we maintain that there is a sense in which when Spinoza presents us with three political orders (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy) he is not giving us a political menu, but actually recommending all of them at the same time and so recommending a material process in conflict with itself that therefore mirrors the conflict of the natural order that interpenetrates it *qua* multitude. This, however, must be work for another time.

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² The reader is referred to *Spinoza, Right and Absolute Freedom* (2015: Routledge, Birkbeck Law Press), for a detailed exposition of Spinoza's argument for freedom and natural right.

³ Cf. Marchart (2007:112).

⁴ This is one of the major criticisms of Spinoza's model, and of Descartes', and it was taken apart by Newton in the Second Part of his *Principia*.

⁵ References to the *Ethics* follow the customary practice of part number in roman script first, followed by a proposition number in arabic script, and then abbreviations for demonstrations, scholia, corollaries (being, Dem., Sch., Corol.) etc.

⁶ Cf. eg. Boulnois (2012), and de Muralto (2002).

⁷ *Phänomenologie*, (1969(III):331) §591. Cf. also Derrida (1982:83) and Badiou on Spinoza and death (2009:198,268-270).

⁸ Cf. an analysis of Spinozan definition and generative geometry in Gueroult (1974:486).

⁹ Indeed while the excess seems to appear only late in the order of reasons, with multitudes, its origin is incredibly deep. One might even say it is primordial, for the logic of excess is already found before God or Nature even is constructed. It is, along with essence and existence, sub-divine or sub-natural.

¹⁰ Étienne Balibar (1997) *La crainte des masses*, Galilée, Paris, especially the chapter '[Spinoza, l'anti-Orwell—la crainte des masses.](#)'

¹¹ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000: Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA) p.61.

¹² In this way 'multitude' operates like a full affect: it combines a confused idea 'the mob' with a qualitative transition, indicating a failure to grasp the true cause.

¹³ Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli *The Prince* ch.xix. Machiavelli however turns against corruption in the sense of 'vice' in his *Discourses* (Machiavelli, Allan Gilbert trans. (1989)).

¹⁴ References to the *Tractatus Politicus* use the chapter number in roman script, followed by the paragraph in square brackets.

¹⁵ To emphasise, this flux is not originary, for on inspection the multitude is a set of singularities, but for the purposes of politics it is treated as a phenomenon having agency.

¹⁶ Cf. our 2015, ch.2.5.

¹⁷ It is also historically inaccurate—Cicero for example uses *potestas* to name the residual collective authority of the turbulent people of Rome in opposition to the *auctoritas* of the Senate (*De Legibus* 3.28).

¹⁸ Deleuze was one thinker who remained alive to the integration of *potestas* within *potentia* (cf. e.g his *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (1990:218).

¹⁹ Spinoza uses natures and that which *in cuius potestate est* somewhat interchangeably, for example in EIP2, EIV Pref. and elsewhere.

²⁰ This refers to the *Definitions fo the Emotions* at the end of Part III *Ethics*.

²¹ To be clear, this machine works for one purpose only: generating an excess, and to the extent that it prevails, to that extent it exceeds by natural right.

²² TTPIV refers to Chapter IV of the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*.

²³ i.e. an aristocracy with a large council or alternatively a formal democracy.

²⁴ *Ethics* I, Def.1.