

ETIENNE BALIBAR'S MARXIST SPINOZA

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One can liberate and recompose one's own body, formerly fragmented and dead in the service of an imaginary and, therefore, slavlike subjectivity, and take from this the means to think liberation freely and strongly, therefore, to think properly with one's body, in one's own body, by one's own body, better: that to live freely within the thought of the *conatus* of one's own body was simply to think within the freedom and the power of thought—all that dazzled me as the incontestable saying of an unavoidable experience and reality I had lived, which had never become my own.¹

The foreclosure of Spinoza seems to me to be significant. Here is a great rationalism that does not rest on the principle of reason (inasmuch as in Leibniz this principle privileges both the final cause and representation). Spinoza's substantialist rationalism is a radical critique of both finalism and the (Cartesian) representative determination of the idea; it is not a metaphysics of the cogito or of absolute subjectivity. The import of this foreclosure is all the greater and more significant in that the epoch of subjectivity determined by Heidegger is also the epoch of the rationality or the techno-scientific rationalism of modern metaphysics.²

My goals in this essay are to highlight the significance of Spinoza's thought as a counter-discourse in the history of modern philosophy and thereby to highlight his significance for contemporary philosophizing. Beginning from the picture of Spinoza and Spinozism in Etienne Balibar's *Spinoza and Politics*,³ I consider how Spinoza offers resources for thinking not only against, but also outside, the dominant paradigms of Cartesianism. Specifically, I present Spinoza as thinking outside mind-body dualism, transcendence and teleology, and the ideology or myth of the ontologi-

cally discrete, radically self-determining and free subject. Most fundamentally, I present Spinoza as a philosopher who endeavors to think naturalistically and phenomenologically; both nominalist and materialist, he is indeed an unusual rationalist. A shorthand for the orientation of the reading presented here is that it is non-Neoplatonic and non-Hegelian to the core. Properly understood as a profoundly non-Cartesian thinker, Spinoza emerges as a vital philosophical forebear in matters of affectivity, freedom, and materialist approaches to history and politics. Balibar's work is significant for its incisive presentation of these elements of Spinoza's philosophy. At the same time, however, he departs from Spinoza toward a normative account of democracy and a distinctly Marxist teleology of history. His interpretation is provocative, in sum, both for its interpretive acuity and for its divergence from Spinoza.

Spinoza, Our Contemporary

If the claim that texts have afterlives, not lives, is true, Spinoza's afterlife is increasingly robust among continental philosophers. The significance of Spinoza's philosophy for Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, and other figures in German Idealism is well known. Nietzsche, too, cites Spinoza as a philosophical forebear and engages his thought. Thinkers as central to contemporary continental conversations as Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Etienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, and Antonio Negri, have all taken Spinoza as an important interlocutor. The collective work of Althusser and Balibar published as *Reading Capital* (1968) stands as a primary text in this series; Deleuze's Spinozism extends beyond his Spinoza books, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (1968) and *Spinoza: Philosophie Pratique* (1968, 1981).⁴ Macherey's *Hegel ou Spinoza* (1979), Negri's *The Savage Anomaly*,

and Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* are three recent examples.⁵ Less familiar to Anglophone readers but vitally important is Alexandre Matheron, another Marxist, whose work has focused on anthropology and politics.⁶ Fascinating, too, is the growing body of work that views Spinoza as anticipating elements of Freudian psychoanalysis. Althusser, for example, connects Spinozistic *conatus* to Freudian libido, Lacan refers to Spinoza at important points, and several recent volumes have taken up the issue.⁷ Finally, contemporary continental feminist philosophy has also taken up Spinoza as a resource. Moira Gatens's *Imaginary Bodies* (1996) and the subsequent *Collective Imaginings* (1999) by Gatens and Genvieve Lloyd are prominent in that regard.⁸

A distinctive contribution of Spinoza's post-Marxist readers has been to raise the question of how problems of social and political community emerge in conjunction with problems of the constitution of Nature (or God, to invert a famous formula from the Preface to Book 4 of Spinoza's *Ethics*). These commentators put in question our usual prioritization of metaphysical and epistemological questions over social and political questions, but they do not reduce one to the other. As interpreters, they highlight how Spinoza's God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*), with its insistence on immanence and its rehabilitation of extension and affectivity, provides the context for a naturalistic political philosophy. Crucially, for Spinoza, the human subject is not "a kingdom within a kingdom" (*Political Treatise* 1.2), with the result that social and political theory take a materialist turn.⁹ As read by the French commentators, Spinoza emerges as a key ancestor, even a progenitor, of historical materialism. For these decidedly non-idealistic, anti-transcendent and anti-transcendental readers, Spinoza's philosophy provides a way to think about embodied, affective knowers in their concrete interactions and differentiations. Althusser's description of his own discovery of Spinoza, given as an epigraph above, is a classic articulation of the power of this reversal. Seen in the

context of political theory before Marx and in the context of the contractarian tradition, Spinoza stands as a thinker of politics as a science of actual bodies in actual circumstances, not abstract, ideal or universal individuals emerging from the pre-social state of nature. As Balibar observes, Spinoza, faced with the competing claims that human beings are by nature social and that societies are artificial institutions, disrupts the competitive schema to open up a new approach (SP 78). This new approach involves thinking the reciprocal constitution of individuals and societies under the Spinozistic headings of interactivity and communication. Spinoza's aspectival, perspectival way of thinking releases thinking from dualisms.

Balibar's *Spinoza et la Politique* appeared 1985, then in an expanded version and English translation, *Spinoza and Politics*, in 1998. In examining Balibar's approach to Spinoza, I will focus on his sensitivity to Spinoza's materialism, then assess whether he pursues this theme far and radically enough. Balibar uses Spinoza to dismantle the concepts of subjectivity inherited from Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. The Spinozistic subject reinvented by Balibar's study is material in the sense of historically specific and concrete, embodied and affective as well as rational, and, crucially, interactive rather than atomistic and isolated. His reading of Spinoza on community particularly stresses themes of identification, and communication or communicability replace natural sociability and the natural multitude, the masses of traditional Marxist theory.¹⁰ Balibar's reading, however, underplays the significance of Spinoza's nominalism with regard to politics. As a consequence, he attributes to Spinoza the view that democracy is a kind of ideal politics.

Spinoza's approach to the traditional subject is radically negative: the will as the locus of agency, the separation of mind and body, and the boundaries of individuation are all contested in central arguments of the *Ethics*. For Spinoza, there is neither a faculty identifiable

as the will (for all volitions are radically singular, and the faculty is merely an empty abstraction which generalizes singular events under a fictitious universal); the mind is the idea of the body (i.e., the same thing under a different attribute, not a really-distinct, self-subsistent and incorporeal entity); and neither reason nor the affects can be said to originate in an ontologically discrete individual. Spinozistic singulars are configured and reconfigured in, through, and as through bodily interactions, affective imitations, and relations of ideas. What political theory calls individual subjects come to be and pass away through the movement of Nature as a generative network of forces; each subject is a unique event of Nature's occurrence, and subjects cannot be universalized except through political fictions.

Despite the clearly non-humanistic tenor of his discussion, and despite his denial that we are social by nature (i.e., natural necessity and teleology), Spinoza remarks in *Ethics* 4 that there is nothing of greater use to a human being than another human being. Ultimately, for him, the terms "individual" or "political subject," "community" or "collectivity", and "Nature" or "world" express modal, not real distinctions; plainly put, they are ways of apprehending and articulating Nature. Community, on this reading, emerges itself as an occurrence of Nature, an expression of Nature's coming to be and passing away in and as singular individuals in their interactions. In connection with this theme, I shall raise questions about the place of collectivity and teleology in Balibar's reading of Spinoza.

My central differences with Balibar can be stated rather succinctly. Balibar's reading is oriented by two motifs, which I find to be in tension with one another. On the one hand, Balibar is at great pains to stress Spinozistic immanence and multiplicity. On the other hand, his reading is governed by teleology, i.e., the imposition or realization of an ultimate order of nature. The incompatibility of these positions stems from Spinoza's critique of teleology in the Appendix to *Ethics* 1 and his emphasis there on the nominal character of all

attributions of order: "Men prefer order to confusion, as if order were anything in nature more than a relation to our imagination" (Curley 444). Further, where Balibar finds an ideal form or directed process, Spinoza specifically recognizes destruction as part of nature's infinite generativity: "There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed" (E4A1). I see Balibar's reading as moving from a perspicuous account of different aspects of the city and the multiplicity of Nature to a univocal evocation of fundamental structure and dialectical process, if not even resolution. Balibar's Spinoza, in sum, becomes utopian. To raise these reservations is in no way to underestimate the interpretive value of *Spinoza and Politics*. It is rather to underline ways in which Balibar's reading, like all readings, shows its own commitments. Balibar, I think, wishes to put Spinoza's texts to work in the service of democratization and does so with a kind of hope and determinism not found in Spinoza's philosophy.

Spinoza's Materialism

The great strength of Balibar's reading is his emphasis on Spinoza's materialism. "Materialism" can mean two things. First, as a metaphysical thesis, materialism is the claim that everything is a body. Hobbes is the archetypal early modern materialist, writing in the *De Corpore* that everything which is, is body, and that which is not a body, is not: "The world (I mean . . . the whole mass of all things that are), is corporeal, that is to say, body . . . and that which is not body is no part of the universe." For early modern thinkers, this metaphysical materialism or metaphysical physicalism is typically paired with mechanism, the view that bodies come in discrete units and can be described in terms of their motions. Althusser's remarks to the contrary, Spinoza is not this kind of materialist. Nor for that matter is he a mechanist. Balibar's emphasis on communication attests to Spinoza's resistance to mecha-

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nism, and so echoes the Physical Digression of *Ethics* 2, whose main themes are interactivity, composition, and fluidity. If we are to call Spinoza anything from the lexicon of metaphysics, the best term is double-aspect monist. Spinoza argues that there is only one substance or God or nature, expressed in an infinity of attributes, two of which, thought and extension, are accessible to human knowers. These attributes constitute aspects or ways in which substance appears, and they in no way reflect real distinctions.

Spinoza's disregard for the metaphysical questions and associated dualisms typical of the Cartesian context is unmistakable. His approach is dismissive, even insouciant.¹¹ Although the expression "God or Nature" does not appear until the Preface to *Ethics* 4, *Ethics* 1 clearly refuses all forms of metaphysical transcendence and teleology. The doctrine of creation, for example, is directly criticized, and God is said to be the cause of all things in the same way in which he is the cause of himself (E1P25S). Immanence, as theory of causation, thinks causes and effects together, thus eroding the ontological distinction between them. And, finally, reason is stripped of all transcendent and transcendental status.

The other famous dualism characteristic of Cartesianism, that between the mind and the body, is equally rejected. For early modern readers, a primary scandal of *Ethics* 2, for example, was the claim that God has a body, i.e., can be thought under the attribute of extension as well as the attribute of thought. Facing the choices of metaphysical materialism or a spiritualized, idealistic metaphysics, Spinoza, in effect, refuses the choice. By treating thought and extension as attributes of one and the same God or Nature or Substance, Spinoza neutralizes and displaces the terms of the debate. In Spinoza's terms, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E2P7); otherwise expressed, "the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under

that" (E2P7S). As Balibar observes, "The mind-body problem, that major obsession running through the history of philosophy, is eliminated at a single stroke" (SP 106). Spinoza contends that the human mind is the idea of its body (E2P11–13)—not that the mind is the body, but that it is the idea of the body. This means that the mind is related to the body but also distinct. Further, Spinoza denies that the mind and the body interact. For "the mind" and "the body" to interact, "they" would have to exist as (discrete or real) things,¹² and, moreover, "they" would require a common measure or medium, which is precisely what the thesis of the irreducibility of the attributes denies (E1P10).

Ethics 3P2S spells the details of this way of thinking in connection with the claim that the mind and the body do not influence each other. Spinoza writes that:

The decision of the Mind and the appetite or determination of the Body by nature exist together—or rather are one and the same thing, which we call a decision when it is considered under, and explained through, the attribute of Thought, and which we call a determination when it is considered under the attribute of Extension and deduced from the laws of motion and rest. (Curley 497)

For Spinoza, the activity of decision and the affection of appetite or determination are the same; activity and passivity are, to put the point briefly, different ways of thinking about one and the same thing. More generally, thought and extension, reason and the passions, activity and affection or passivity are irreducibly diverse expressions of the same thing. Balibar writes that, for Spinoza,

man's unity is that of single desire for self-preservation, which is simultaneously expressed through the actions and the passions of the body, and through the actions and passions of the soul (that is, through the sequences of movements and sequences of ideas). These sequences are substantially identical, because they express the same individual essence; but they do so differ-

ently, thus expressing the irreducible multiplicity of the orders of natural causality. (SP 106)¹³

For Spinoza, there is no third faculty, the will, linking bodily and mental experience or mediating between affections and decisions. Any event can be described in terms of the series of ideas in the attribute of thought and the series of motions in the attribute of extension. Similarly, every idea is accompanied by an affect. The affect of reason is joy, that of ignorance, sadness. As Balibar puts the point, "There is . . . no reason after the event to add a special act of will or a special effect produced by an emotion in order for [an] idea to pass from the sphere of thought to the sphere of praxis" (SP 108). Just as Spinoza denies the existence of the will as the mediator between the human being and the rest of (passive) nature (E1 Appendix; E2P49S), he denies the existence of the will as a mediator within the human being and as a mediator between continuous self-identity and change. In shifting the discussion to desire, i.e., interactivity and responsiveness, moreover, Spinoza denies the existence of the will as the locus of discrete agency. In the language of the *Political Treatise*, a human being is not "a kingdom within a kingdom" (*Political Treatise* 1.2). There is no incorporeal soul within the body, and there is no ontological basis of individual identity. Spinozistic *conatus* is precisely the idea that I am the ceaseless summation and movement of my interactions, not a stable thing in which accidents inhere. For Spinoza, desire names the fluid interactions of an individual and other individuals, and "Desire is man's essence" (E3P95).

In this analysis, Balibar underlines the critically non-Cartesian orientation of Spinoza's philosophy. Paradoxically, however, Balibar's identification of the mind-body problem as "that major obsession running through the history of philosophy" uncritically invokes "the" history of philosophy. Just at the moment Balibar correctly identifies Spinoza's counter-modern discourse, he reduces the history of philosophy to a series of problems typical of

the Christian and particularly the post-Cartesian tradition. It's necessary here to underline how reading Spinoza seriously—as Balibar does—should reopen the question of "the history of philosophy" and its theologico-political constitution, that is, its configuration around issues of individuation, individual immortality, and transcendence and its determination by institutions of the church and state (e.g., the condemnation of 1277). Balibar is right to argue that Spinoza rejects the idea of the will, but he misses the specifically Christian character of speculations about the will and the ensuing separation from nature. Augustine is the paradigmatic thinker of this division. Spinoza's philosophical orientation emerges not from the Latin Scholastic context but rather from medieval Jewish and Islamic sources whose Aristotelianism is materialist.¹⁴ In this tradition, moreover, the status of ethics and politics as neither given by natural necessity (as in the natural law tradition) nor merely artificial (as in the contract tradition) was a major theme and the subject of considerable reflection. What is needed here is a more materialist, less totalizing, approach to the history of philosophy.¹⁵ While Balibar surely describes the usual version of the history of philosophy, he misses the opportunity to open the question of history and canonicity.

Metaphysical materialism and idealism aside, Spinoza is a materialist in a second, political sense of the term. Spinoza, as revealed by Balibar, philosophizes in response to the political situation of the Dutch Republic, and is exquisitely responsive to public rhetoric and policy. Explaining the title, *Spinoza et la politique*, Balibar stresses the reciprocal implication of philosophy and politics:

The relationship between philosophy and politics is such that *each implies the other*. By posing specifically philosophical problems, Spinoza is not choosing to approach his political concerns by an indirect route, he is not transposing them from their proper place and recasting them in a "metapolitical" medium. He deals in philosophical terms because only philosophy

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can give him the means to know exactly, or, as he would say, "adequately" (cf. *Ethics*, IID4, IIP11, 34 and 38-40; and *The Letters*, LX) the power relations and the particular interests that are at stake in politics. (SP 4)

Ultimately, the import of these points is to raise the question of the relation of ethics and politics to ontology. Specifically, Balibar challenges us to assess the place of social and political philosophy within the canon. Though I cannot argue the point here, my suggestion is that the marginalization of the political in favor of the metaphysical is itself a reflection of theologico-political concerns. From a post-Cartesian perspective, metaphysical and epistemological matters appear as primary, social and political questions as secondary. But the history of Cartesianism is to be found in Augustine, in Latin Scholasticism, and in the exclusion of Averroistic materials from the canon. To the extent that transcendence and immateriality orient our philosophical discourses, social and political philosophy are inevitably cast aside. Where some Marxist and post-Marxist readers invert the priorities to rehabilitate social and political philosophy, Balibar's reading resists a simple inversion and so invites us to rethink the relations of these discourses.

Dialectic, Aspects, and Stability

The heart of Balibar's book is a reading of *Ethics* 4P37, which offers a double genesis of the city or state, once according to the affects and once according to reason. E4P37 reads: "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater." Spinoza offers two demonstrations of this proposition, one according to reason, the other according to affect. The demonstration according to reason emphasizes the reality of connection and the process of becoming more active, that is, less subject to external forces. For Spinoza, human beings have a kind of double drive: to preserve themselves as individuals and to join together with other

individuals of the same nature as themselves and so to constitute a more powerful individual that will, as effectively as possible, mitigate disruptive external causes. The increase in knowledge and the increase in desire express the same movement. There is accordingly no ultimate opposition between individuality and sociability or collectivity. Individuals are, in fact, nothing other than composites of other individuals. In the limiting case, if we make enough connections, no externality remains; the composite individual is the union or connection of infinite diversity. Balibar comments that it is here that:

objective solidarity begins to take shape. Since no individual is rigorously like any other, each having his own temperament, multitude is then synonymous with exchange...and with free communication between irreducibility singular beings. (SP 96)¹⁶

Returning to this theme of the reasonable city in Chapter 5, Balibar underlines Spinoza's nominalism. As much, however, as Spinoza views the concrete individual as the only existing thing and disdains "humanity" or the "human species" as abstractions, Balibar emphasizes that:

this nominalism has nothing to do with atomistic individualism: to say that all individuals are different (or, better, that they act and suffer in different ways) is not to say that they can be isolated from one another. The idea of such isolation is simply another mystificatory abstraction. It is the relationship of each individual to other individualities and their reciprocal actions and passions which determine the form of the individual's desire and actuate its power. Singularity is a transindividual function. It is a function of communication. (SP 108)

Here, clearly, Balibar is attempting to defuse accusations of a Marxist privileging of the multitude by stressing the internal diversity and irreducible differentiation of the city, indeed, of its component individuals. Again,

To desire the good of others as a function of my own good (and thus to anticipate my own good

through the good of others), so as to be able to use others and to be used by them, is therefore in no way to desire that others should be like me, should act like me and adopt my opinions. On the contrary, it is to desire that they should be different, develop their own powers and know what is of use to them more and more adequately. In other words, the City that is rationally conceived and constructed through the daily activity of its members is indeed a collective individuality . . . but it is not founded on uniformity. Thus it is itself the means by which each man can affirm and strengthen his own individuality. (SP 110)

This is a subtle, Spinozistically-inflected interpolation of the traditional Marxist emphasis on the masses or multitude. Transindividuation is clearly an effort to think outside the polarities of individual and multitude, to avoid replacing the atomistic, pre-existing subject of classical contractarianism with the masses of Marxist ideology, such that one is constituted by and as the other. It is also an attempt to think about individuation through metaphors of interaction and motion, rather than self-identity and ontological integrity.¹⁷

The demonstration of *Ethics* 4P37 according to the passions, in contrast, emphasizes subjection to external causes. This state of powerlessness is the state of sadness, in which individuals are moved by contradictory affects and imagine freedom as freedom from affectivity. Individuals living under the sway of the affects desire that others should love what they love and live according to their temperament. When, however, others love what we love, the result is ambivalence, inasmuch as we embrace the confirmation but fear that the satisfaction of the other's desire will come at the expense of our own. As a result, we fluctuate between love and hatred, and this fluctuation renders the affectively constituted city intrinsically unstable. Notice that this mass is affectively communicative, i.e., interactive; as Balibar observes, "When individuals represent their interests to themselves, that is, when they think and act, they do so in imaginary forms that are always already in collective forms (sto-

ries that bear the hopes and fears of a group)" (SP 120).

As Balibar emphasizes in his reading of E4P37, the rational and the affective genesis of the City coexist: "They represent two aspects of a single complex process or, if you prefer, two moments in a single dialectic. Every real city is founded simultaneously on both an active genesis and a passive genesis" (SP 112). The rational agreement is free, in the sense of liberating or emancipatory, while the affective agreement, founded on imaginary concurrences, is ambivalent and unstable. No city, in other words, can exist on a purely rational basis, and no city can exist on a purely affective basis. Given the power of the affects, the city must specifically regulate and govern affects. Balibar's phrase is that the city "polarises" affects, directing and stabilizing them so that individuals are induced or compelled to act "as if" they were guided by reason. The City does this by affective means, e.g., the proper myths of universal civic religion.¹⁸

From this standpoint, the institution of the city is a transformation of the actual powers of the mass of individuals. Balibar identifies this transformation as internal, namely, as a process in which the passive, ignorant mass comes to know itself and so to be active (SP 120). Where the passive mass, subject to fear and hope alternates between submission and revolt and, subject to fortune, oscillates between under and over-estimation of its own power, the active mass, through its self-knowledge, is able to correct the effects of fortune. These corrections may take different forms in different circumstances, but the overall trajectory is a management of affectivity. This trajectory is the problematic point. Balibar writes:

When the mass is fully active (that is, perfectly instituted), then the State has achieved what for Spinoza is the absolute of power—internal stability, which approximates in human terms "a kind of eternity". But this concept clearly corresponds to a "striving" (a tendency) rather than to a static state. That is why, paradoxically, the fact that the *TP* remained unfinished has a theoretic

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cal advantage: instead of a theory of democracy, what we have is theory of democratization, which is valid for every regime. The modalities employed may vary, but there is always one fundamental mechanism which is always the same and to which Spinoza continually returns. This is the circulation of information. (SP 121)

This paragraph is in tension with itself, and the tension is between Balibar's ideal future and Spinoza's descriptive praxis. Balibar first hypothesizes the fully active mass, as if affective passivity can be eradicated, and stability, as if the motions and flux of interaction could be regularized; eternity here is the perfectly ordered future. Balibar then invokes the idea of process, that is, of striving and incompleteness. In this context, what is Balibar's reference to striving and to a tendency but the importation of teleology? The striving of which he speaks is intrinsically ordered to democracy. Spinozistic striving, by contrast, is fully affective and so infinitely variable, with no particular destiny. Similarly, Balibar's "fundamental mechanism" of communication can amount to nothing other than privileging of one mode or aspect over another, but it is difficult to see how Spinoza, the thinker of infinite attributes and infinite modality, could affirm this. Thus, while Balibar avoids the totalization of democracy by referring to democratization as a process, that process assumes both an origin and an end. As such, it is at odds with Balibar's own appreciation of the multiplicity and heterogeneity—the singularity—of Nature. We are passing, it seems to me, from the Spinozistic language of multiple aspects and perspectives to the Marxist language of dialectical process and resolution.

Two further commitments can be discerned here. First, it seems that Balibar envisions communication—interaction—as essentially harmonious rather than discordant. This is clearly utopian, and we need only remember Chapter 16 of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, with its evocation of the conflictual character of Nature, or his discussion of the relative character of good and evil in the Preface

to *Ethics* 4, to question such a reading.¹⁹ Nature occurs, Spinoza argues, and its process is unceasing coming to be and passing away. Nature's configuration and reconfiguration occurs through destruction and conflict as well as concord. Second, in proposing the transition to a rational state, Balibar appears to presume that enough knowledge is possible, and to assume that the process of communication will produce something like adequation. If the motto for Spinozistic politics is, according to Balibar, "as many people as possible, thinking as much as possible," Balibar seems optimistic about the expansion of the thinking public.²⁰ In this respect, he both underplays the power of the passions and overestimates the reach of the intellect's power to apprehend nature. The Appendix to *Ethics* 1, which emphasizes the inevitability of prejudice, i.e., the power of the affects and the social imaginary, cuts against this hope. Prejudice is inevitable, for Spinoza, because knowledge is finite, and because desire and appetite are vivid to us. Spinoza writes that "all people" are "inclined by nature to embrace" the teleological myth and so do out of native ignorance and appetite. Having accepted this myth, all prejudices follow, and follow inevitably (*Ethics* 1 Appendix, Curley 440).

This said, it is perhaps no surprise that Balibar takes Spinoza to conflate Nature and History. While Balibar's critique of the ontological separation of Nature and History (i.e., post-Augustinian politics) closely echoes Spinoza, Balibar's conflation of Nature and History is more Marxist than Spinozan. Here, again, Balibar's own text exhibits tensions. On the one hand, Balibar presumes the possibility of totality, i.e., closure in speaking of all possible configurations. For Balibar, Spinoza's Nature or History is:

a history without purpose, indeed, but not without a process, not without a movement of transformation (that is to say, no particular transformation is ever "guaranteed"). By analysing all the possible historical configurations of the "dialectic" between reason and passion that struc-

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tures the life of the City, we come to know human nature itself—and thus nature in general. But politics is the touchstone of historical knowledge. So if we know politics rationally—as rationally as we know mathematics—then we know God, for God conceived adequately is identical with the multiplicity of natural powers. (SP 122)

For Spinoza, however, history is a finite, perspectival, and also committed account of Nature. No intellect, not even an infinite intellect, adequates Nature's absolute infinity, for even an infinite intellect is infinite only in kind,

not absolutely (Letter 12). Thus Nature is either multiple and generative—infinite and unlimited by anything outside itself, to use Spinoza's expressions—or is knowable with full adequation, that is, regularized and stabilized. Balibar's own position is an attempt to overcome Nature's infinite variability. At this point, Balibar exceeds Spinoza's own sense of the finitude and partiality of politics and philosophy. Balibar's reading, at this juncture, is instructive for its fidelity to Spinoza and for its departures.

ENDNOTES

1. Louis Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition. Part 1: Spinoza," in *The New Spinoza*, ed. by W. Montag (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 11–12.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well," in *Points...Interviews, 1974–1994* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 265.
3. Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique* (Paris: PUF, 1985); *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowden (New York: Verso, 1998). I cite the English version as SP.
5. Giorgio Agamben's essay "Absolute Immanence," in *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), explores this in a particularly interesting way.
6. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Lire le capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), trans. Ben Brewster as *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970); Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1968); Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero, 1979); Antonio Negri, *L'anomalia selvaggia. Saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (Giangiaco Feltrinelli Editore, 1981). English translation by Michael Hardt as *The Savage Anomaly* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), originally *La comunità che viene* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991). Another recent source is Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power. Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (New York & London: Verso, 1999).
7. See, e.g., Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969).
8. See, e.g., Yirmiyahu, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Oliver Bloch, ed. *Spinoza au XXIème siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1993). A famous passage in Lacan occurs in the concluding chapter of the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977). There, the subject is Hegelian dialectics and transcendence. Lacan quite correctly sees Spinoza refusing the logic of Christian sacrifice. Interestingly, he observes that Spinoza's position is "not tenable for us" (p. 275).
8. Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Moira Gatens and Genieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings. Spinoza Past and Present* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
9. Texts are from Carl Gebhardt's *Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg, 1925) and several recent translations: Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), vol. 1, which I have occasionally modified; Samuel Shirley's translations, presented in *The Letters*, ed. by L. Rice et al. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995); Shirley's *Theologico-Political Treatise*; and the *Political Treatise*. I cite texts from the Ethics by book, then axiom (A), proposition (P), and/or scholium (S); thus Ethics 2, Proposition 7, Scholium is E2P7S. Where a

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- further specification is needed, I give the page number from Curley. I cite the *Political Treatise* as TP.
10. Though limitations of space preclude an exploration of the topic, Balibar's emphasis on the affective constitution of subjectivity and community is a kind of dialogue with psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically-informed political thinkers (e.g., Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe).
 11. E.g., Spinoza's discussion of the imagination in his early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and his Preface to *Ethics* 5.
 12. *Ethics* 2P48S observes that the faculties are "either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings, or universals, which we are used to forming from particulars. So intellect and will are to this or that idea, or to this or that volition as 'stone-ness' is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul." See also the parallel discussion in Letter 3. On bodies, see the so-called Physical Digression of *Ethics* 2, which follows the Scholium to Proposition 13.
 13. In view of this irreducible heterogeneity, Spinoza cannot, pace Deleuze, be called a parallelist. On this, see Pierre-Francois Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: PUF, 1994).
 14. See W. Zev. Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 151-72, and Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Gersonides' Radically Modern Understanding of the Agent Intellect," in *Meeting of the Minds*, ed. by Stephen F. Brown, *Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale* 7 (Tournhout: Brepols, 1998).
 15. As Althusser notes, to see the significance of Spinoza, "one must at least have heard of him" (*Essays in Self-Criticism* [London: New Left Books 1976]). *Mutatis mutandis*, we should consider Spinoza's predecessors more carefully.
 16. The passage continues: "The result is a permanent tension between two sequences of ideas and movements. But this tension has no meaning as long as we imagine it as a static confrontation. In fact, it is nothing other than the struggle of individuals who have no pre-established goal to transform their own collective temperament. At this point, it becomes clear that it would be a mistake to interpret Spinoza's notion of the preservation of the body politic as ideologically conservative. On the contrary, the more the body politic, that individual of individuals, develops its own powers, the more the real-imaginary complexity of social relationships as Spinoza conceives it is revealed as a principle of mobility" (SP, p. 96). As above, the evocations of tension and mobility are, if not ideologically conservative, overly deterministic and utopian.
 17. Balibar expands on the theme of transindividuality in later essay, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," *Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis* 71 (Delft: Eburon, 1997). See also the commentary of Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd in *Collective Imaginings* (Routledge 1999).
 18. This is discussed more extensively at SP, p. 98.
 19. "By the right and established order of Nature I mean simply the rules governing the nature of every individual thing, according to which we conceive it as naturally determined to exist and to act in a definite way. For example, fish are determined by nature to swim, and the big ones to eat the smaller ones" (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, chapter 16). It should also be noted, as well, that this text, unlike all other "contractarian" accounts, sanctions deception in the pursuit of self-preservation, for no one can alienate his or her own natural right. As an example of Spinoza's treatment of good and evil, consider the following: "As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare one thing to another. For one and same thing can, at the same time, be good, bad, and also indifferent. For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf" (E4 Preface).
 20. Further, paradoxically, it seems here that Balibar comes close to depicting reason as governing the passions. In fact, the affective correlates of knowing are happiness and joy, whose power transform other affects. For Spinoza, one affect changes another.

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