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In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was at the forefront of modernity, though not quite modern yet. The disproportion concerned a crisis that would burst out in 1672: a crisis of the bourgeoisie, the protagonist of modernity. Following Antonio Negri, Baruch Spinoza is the philosopher who was able to go beyond the crisis from within. After all, Spinoza is a thinker of immanent production and liberation, the thinker of the multitude. However, the critical year of 1672 remains in the shadows of Spinoza's and Negri's work. Both seem to consider 1672 under a certain ambiguity. It is precisely this ambiguity that we will trace in order to advance the philosophy of crisis and multitude. By understanding 1672, we will be able to orient ourselves better in modernity, together with Spinoza and Negri. This essay brings us back in the disproportion of history: revolution.
Keywords: multitude; bourgeoisie; Antonio Negri; Baruch Spinoza.

Revolução em 1672? Sobre a filosofia de uma desproporção na história

No século XVII, a República Holandesa estava na vanguarda da modernidade, ainda que não fosse totalmente moderna. A desproporção provocaria uma crise que transbordou em 1672: uma crise da burguesia, a protagonista da modernidade. Seguindo Antonio Negri, Baruch Spinoza foi o filósofo que foi capaz de ultrapassar a crise a partir de seu interior. Afinal, Spinoza é um pensador da produção imanente e da libertação, o pensador da multidão. No entanto, o ano crítico de 1672 permanece na sombra das obras de Spinoza e de Negri. Ambos parecem considerar 1672 com uma certa ambiguidade. É precisamente esta ambiguidade que iremos traçar para fazer avançar a filosofia da crise e da multidão. Por via de uma melhor compreensão de 1672, poderemos orientarmo-nos melhor na modernidade, juntos com Spinoza e Negri. Este ensaio leva-nos de volta à desproporção da história: à revolução.
Palavras-chave: multitude; burguesia; Antonio Negri; Baruch Spinoza.

Revolution in 1672? On the Philosophy of a Disproportion in History

Thomas van Binsbergen*

1. If revolution emerges from a disproportion in history, then perhaps we should study the philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). According to Antonio Negri, "studying Spinoza means posing the problem of disproportion in history". These are the opening words of Negri's seminal work, *The Savage Anomaly*, which precisely investigates "the disproportion between a philosophy and the historical dimensions and social relationships that define its origins".[1] As argued by Negri, inside this critical disproportion, the thought of revolution arises as "the true philosophy of *Krisis*," namely a philosophy that lives in the present crisis yet goes beyond it, "a philosophy of the future". Besides, for the Spinozist and thinker of immanence, the thought of revolution is necessarily revolutionary since the power of thinking equals the power of acting, following the infinite complexity of "God *or* Nature" (*Deus sive Natura*). It is why Spinoza named his magnum opus the *Ethics* and entitled its final part "Of the power (*potentia*) of the intellect, *or* of human freedom". Revolution requires philosophy to be in history as a disproportion, an anomaly. This is exactly the problem.

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1 Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly. The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 [1981]), 3.

2. The anomaly is firstly a Dutch anomaly. The Dutch nation was an exceptional nation in the seventeenth century, living the miracle of a golden age. In 1579, it invented itself following a treaty called the Union of Utrecht – supposedly the constitution of the Dutch Republic –, after which it declared its independence from Spanish rule in 1581. Evidently, the redemption of freedom was rooted in the Renaissance ideal of invention and the humanist myth of independence, both converging in an ideology of the market as the primary site of societal production and construction. However, the appropriation of economic accumulation through commercial socialization significantly remained external to modern state-building, considering the Republic's weak constitution and highly decentralized institutions. In other words, the Dutch nation was running before it could walk, embracing "this disproportion between the constructive and appropriative dimensions," the Dutch anomaly.[2]

3. Accordingly, Spinoza and his fellow Dutch citizens were confronted with a social and economic crisis from the 1660s onwards and with a political crisis in 1672. Negri calls the crossing in 1672 of one crisis by another "ambiguous," but he does not elaborate.[3] The ambiguity is just repeated. Negri advances that the events and results of 1672 "do not represent the decisive moments of the crisis" while arguing that through the year 1672 Spinoza's philosophy becomes "the reconstruction of the historical conditions of revolution".[4] How can the crisis of 1672 not be a decisive moment if it critically shapes the thought of revolution? Or perhaps we should turn the question around: how does 1672 support revolution without being final? It must be that the ambiguity lies in 1672 itself. Therefore, we first need to understand what exactly happened in 1672. We will then be able to orient ourselves

2 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 7. On the economic development of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, see, for instance, J. L. Price, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan Education, 1998), 39-60; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism. A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2017 [1999]), 88-94; Pepijn Brandon, "Marxism and the «Dutch Miracle»: The Dutch Republic and the Transition-Debate," *Historical Materialism* 19, n.º 3 (2011): 106-146.

3 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 8.

4 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 18 and 204.

better with Spinoza and Negri in the present crisis. Finally, this means coming to be in the disproportion of history: revolution.

4. The imagination is how we perceive the world and how, at any given time, we consider ourselves in thought. It is what Spinoza appropriately calls "the first kind of knowledge" and it is how the Dutch nation conceived itself as historical. First, a suspension of the Inquisition in the Habsburg Netherlands was achieved in 1566. The built-up frustration of the Protestants immediately gave way to the "Iconoclastic Fury" (*Beeldenstorm*), an attack on the Catholic imagination. Next, under the guidance of the Prince of Orange, the theological-political campaign turned against the Habsburg king to claim freedom from tyranny. Accordingly, the "freedom-loving" nation resurrected through the so-called Dutch Revolt, the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), after which ideological conflict openly erupted within the nation itself. Finally, most provinces went on without a Stadtholder, that is, the governor of every province. Even more, since the provinces concerned shared the same Stadtholder, the Republic largely fell without an official ruler, the head of state. This is when the patricians called "regents" managed to get a better hold of power, promoting a regime of "True Freedom" under Johan De Witt. Yet, after an admittedly victorious revolt and a boastful episode of freedom, this glorious history of the Dutch nation was put to an end in 1672 by an unexpected rebellion.

5. Spinoza, too, did not anticipate the rebellion. Instead, he was still working through the history and imagination of the Dutch Revolt and the project of freedom. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), he proposed conceiving freedom in terms of the "freedom of philosophizing," that is, the political freedom that involves critique and vice versa. In doing so, Spinoza spoke the language of the Dutch nation, referring to the previous theological-political campaign:

> The States of Holland [*Ordines Hollandiae*], so far as we know they never had Kings, but only counts [which were incidentally the Habsburg kings], to whom the right to rule

> was never transferred. [...] They [the States] have always reserved for themselves the authority to remind the counts of their duty, and retained for themselves the power to defend this authority of theirs and the freedom of the citizens, to avenge themselves on the counts if they degenerated into tyrants [...]. So by no means did they fail in their duty to him [the count] when they restored their original state, which had almost been lost.[5]

Hence, while approving of the destiny of the Dutch nation, Spinoza formulated the rule that "the form of each state must necessarily be retained and that it cannot be changed without a danger that the whole state will be ruined".[6] By contrast, Spinoza's description of the period of "True Freedom" in the *Political Treatise*, written after 1672, was quite different in tone and message from his description of the Dutch Revolt:

> The Hollanders thought that to maintain their freedom it was enough to renounce their Count [the head of state to whom "the right to rule was never transferred," see the citation above] and cut the head off the body of the state. They didn't think about reforming it, but left all its members as they'd been set up before, so that Holland remained a county without a Count, or a body without a head, and the state itself remained without a name.[7]

This time, Spinoza did not advance the conservation of some original form of government but instead reproached the Dutch nation of not reforming the actual body of the state. After all, during the period

5 Baruch Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise" [1670], in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), chap. 18, 331.

6 Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," 331.

7 Baruch Spinoza, "Political Treatise" [1677], in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), chap. 9 §14, 594-595.

concerned, the political body was without a head, and correspondingly, state power became invisible. Eventually, the regents failed to maintain authority and secure order in society. They were not able to decide on the Dutch nation's history, its destiny. In retrospect, it is, of course, easy to explain 1672: "The sudden overthrow of the Republic did not result from the fact that it wasted time in useless deliberations, but from the defective constitution of the state and the small number of its regents".[8] Still, what actually happened for this state to be "overthrown"? How did the "Year of Disaster" exactly look like?

6. Disaster always arrives too quickly and from all sides. In 1672, the general economic decline was topped by the collapse of several markets, and English, French, and German armies all attacked the country.[9] The Dutch Republic was propelled into severe crisis and war. Anyway, states are generally at greater risk with regard to their citizens rather than their enemies, as Spinoza did not cease to repeat.[10] In order to understand the danger and disaster of 1672, we should therefore concentrate on the citizens of the Dutch Republic, namely the people constituting the state of the Dutch nation or, thus, national politics.[11]

7. The best way to measure the political activity of citizens during the "Year of Disaster" is by studying the rich pamphlet literature. Pamphlets were very popular in the Dutch Republic and, in 1672, flooded the market with political commentary on the depression and war while accusing the regents of incapability in favor of the prince of Orange.[12]

8 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 9 §14, 595.

9 Jonathan Israel, *Spinoza, Life and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 861-866.

10 Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," chap. 17, 296; Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 6 §6, 534.

11 The national politics of the Dutch Republic has often been described as "Hollandocentric," Spinoza, from his side, did not see any problems with a nation modeling itself on its most prominent tribe, on the contrary (see Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 8 §3, 566): "The Patricians are commonly citizens of one city, which is the capital of the whole state, so that the Commonwealth or Republic takes its name from that city, as the Roman republic once did, and as the Venetian, Genoese, etc. do now. But the Republic of the Hollanders takes its name from a whole province, with the result that the subjects of this state enjoy a greater liberty."

12 Michel Reinders, "Burghers, Orangists and «Good Government»: Popular Political Opposition during the «Year of Disaster» 1672 in Dutch Pamphlets," *The Seventeenth Century* 23, n.º 2 (2008): 318-326; Michel Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium. Popular Print and Politics in the Netherlands 1650–72* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 18-28.

Most importantly, pamphlets were mostly written and read by the ordinary citizens of cities, "burghers," The burghers were the people who fought for freedom during the Dutch Revolt and became the property owners comprising the middle classes and the core of the Dutch nation.[13] Some burghers were even elected to participate in the aristocratic state and govern their cities together with the patricians. Most burghers, however, were not incorporated into statehood (*imperium*), even though they contributed to constituting the aristocracy, being worthy of government but not elected. These burghers were not even feared as the vulgar (*vulgus*) but looked down upon as the national plebs (*plebs*).[14] They would not take satisfaction with simply another ruler, the prince of Orange, but instead continued pamphleteering for their own rights and institutions. As defenders of the Dutch nation, they demanded their part and did not want to be mixed up with foreigners or the poor. Even more, these burghers hated the regime of the regents who profited politically from the freedom and wealth that burghers had gloriously achieved, corrupting the pristine origins of burgher existence. Thus, indignation was raging, and riots broke out now that depression and war were threatening the nation.

8. On 20 August 1672, disaster made room for rebellion and drama. A so-called "mob" savagely killed the leader of the regents together with his brother. The dead bodies of Johan and Cornelis De Witt were put on trial by the crowd and dismembered piece by piece, methodically but madly, just as the regime of "True Freedom" had been.[15] At that point, even the cautious Spinoza allegedly put up a placard: "*Ultimi barbarorum*"![16] He was taken by disgust and fear for the vulgar, the ignorant masses, "complete barbarians [who] allow themselves to

13 Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century. The Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2002]), 158-160; Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium*, 5-11. For a broad historical overview of the term "citizen" in the Netherlands, see Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans, eds., *Burger. Een geschiedenis van het begrip 'burger' in de Nederlanden van de Middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

14 Marilena Chaui, "Quem tem medo do povo? A plebe e o vulgar no *Tratado político*" [1995], in *Política em Espinosa* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003), 276-282.

15 Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium*, 165-168.

16 Israel, *Spinoza, Life and Legacy*, 884.

be deceived so openly and to turn from subjects to slaves, of no use to themselves".[17] The full weight of the theological-political complex was coming down. But the concerning mob was not simply a crowd of common people. The men who actually killed the brothers De Witt were wearing uniforms and had firearms. They were members of the city militia, as can be observed in the contemporary writings by Adriaen Overvelt or Petrus Valkeniers or the drawings by Romeyn de Hooghe or Jan Luycken.[18] In other words, burghers killed the brothers De Witt since the city militia was a burgher institution.[19] Originally the heroes of the Dutch Revolt, these armed forces had lost much of their national status and thus recruited mostly from the plebs, forming a police of petty bourgeoisie. This institution expressed the negativity of the rebellious burgher movement taking revenge. It is the force driven by the existential unrest animating the bourgeoisie as a whole, the protagonist of modernity.

9. Here, we come across Negri again and his starting hypothesis concerning the origins of modern politics:

> The modern absolutist state, in its specific figure as a machine-state, was formed and consolidated through a total transformation, an upheaval, one might say, in its relations with civil society; on the other hand, the historical necessity of this development was founded on the crisis of the revolutionary project of the Renaissance bourgeoisie.[20]

Although Negri focuses on early modern France, the analysis counts for the rest of Europe as well: modern rationalization leads the state into a logic of self-righteous automation, processing "civil society"

17 Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," chap. 17, 301.

18 Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium*, 162-165.

19 Paul Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer. De schutterijen in Holland, 1550–1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

20 Antonio Negri, "Problems of the Historiography of the Modern State. France, 1610–1650" [1967], in *Spinoza: Then and Now* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 178.

through bourgeois desires following Renaissance ideals and humanist myths. The state becomes a machine absolutely emancipated from any personal sovereignty, while society is left to arrange for civil freedom by itself, namely by a social contract.[21] Hence, a gap emerges between the state and society that becomes the playing field of the bourgeois police, that is, a space of negativity where savage violence is justice, ideologically twisting reality. It is by this negativity that the modern state is formed and consolidated, and corresponds to the bourgeois crisis animated by a national plebs with revolutionary ambitions. Enormous ideological force carries these political ambitions, involving the aspect of faith and thus advancing a theological-political imagination of state sovereignty in terms of nationhood. With this, society is turned into a closed social totality as concluded by a self-legitimizing contract under the highest instance, whether some God or "the market," This is the religion of the bourgeoisie, which could be described in Negri's words as an "ontotheological metaphysics of modernity," an ideology that eventually posits a kind of divine sovereignty and theological necessity.[22] But this religious argument is circular and only seeks excuses for going nowhere.[23] As a result, the bourgeoisie's revolutionary ambitions fail continuously and its "politics of transcendence" suscitates just rebellion, just negativity. We read with Negri that the bourgeoisie is "forever separated from the capacity to be revolutionary, to possess the world, and stuck in an existence which nevertheless constitutes a perennial, indefinite attempt to regain unity".[24] Bourgeois thought, as inaugurated by Cartesianism, desperately seeks to overcome the contradiction that it continuously realizes: the story of the dialectic.[25] This is also the story of the bourgeois revolution of "True Freedom" that imploded in 1672 as it got stuck in the negative dialectic of depression

21 Negri, "Problems of the Historiography of the Modern State," 154-156.

22 Antonio Negri, "Politics of Immanence, Politics of Transcendence. A People's Essay," in *Spinoza: Then and Now* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 127.

23 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 15.

24 Antonio Negri, *Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project* [1970] (London: Verso, 2007), 208.

25 Negri, *Political Descartes*, 207; Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 20.

and war. The crisis of bourgeois revolution, as observed in 1672, ends in self-annihilation through a combination of totalitarian, nationalist, and plebeian or "populist" tendencies, accompanied by armed means. It is nothing less than the fascism living inside the bourgeoisie. This is what happens when the present crisis – modernity – closes onto itself. Therefore, the problem is how to powerfully orient oneself in a disproportion of history.

10. This is also what Spinoza tried to do, and this is why he reformulated the issue concerning those barbarians:

> Because all men everywhere, whether Barbarians or civilized, combine their practices and form some sort of civil order, we must seek the causes and natural foundations of the state, not from the teachings of reason, but from the common nature, *or* condition, of men.[26]

Spinoza steps away from the question regarding barbarism or civilization. After all, it is a moral framing that holds us back from philosophically elaborating the problem concerned. Spinoza proposes instead to investigate human nature and, in doing so, develop a better understanding of the state and what is supposedly right in human society. In order to carry out this political investigation – the *Political Treatise* –, Spinoza explicitly cites his former works: the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Ethics*.[27] The *TTP*, on the one hand, studies the issue of the relationship between natural and civil law by advancing the freedom of philosophizing, which is precisely the natural right by which individuals democratically integrate civil institutions. The *Ethics*, on the other hand, studies the issues of how the necessity of the affects amounts to human freedom, the power to act with what is right, namely reason. Eventually, Spinoza remarks in the *TP* that "more people" means "more right":

26 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 1 §7, 506.

27 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 2 §1, 507.

> If two men make an agreement with one another and join forces, they can do more together, and hence, together have more right over nature, than either does alone. The more connections they've formed in this way, the more right they'll all have together.[28]

The composition of "more people" institutes the sovereign right to govern human nature and decide on politics. Spinoza puts it as follows: "This right, which is defined by the power of a multitude, is usually called Sovereignty (*imperium*)".[29] Indeed, Spinoza's political philosophy is a "theory of the masses".[30]

11. Spinoza immediately adds that sovereignty is a right that belongs absolutely to the state: a democracy, aristocracy, or monarchy. The form of government does not matter as long as sovereignty results from a "common agreement," that is, "common rights" to which a multitude arrives "as if by one mind".[31] In other words, the challenge underlying the question of the best government consists of finding out the common in a multitude, namely, a reason for agreeing on one idea of human nature: the multitude's desire for "*human* life".[32] But a challenge would not be a challenge if the outcome was already given. The multitude is not predetermined to discover anything, yet its freedom to engage with the challenge of setting up the best government is definitely necessary, empowering the absolute right of a sovereign state. After all, an "unfree" multitude would mean the end of the challenge of political thought and politics altogether. The opposition itself, however, is irreducible and thus decisive for a multitude:

> For a free multitude is guided by hope more than by fear, whereas a multitude which has been subjugated is guid-

28 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 2 §13, 513.
29 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 2 §17, 514.
30 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 210.
31 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 2 §16, 514.
32 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 5 §5, 530.

> ed more by fear than by hope. The first want to cultivate life; the second care only to avoid death. The first are eager to live for themselves; the second are forced to belong to the victor. So we say that the second are slaves, and the first free.[33]

Does this mean that a multitude is good or bad, barbarian or civilized? No, since the multitude will ultimately always approach this opposition from within a perspective of necessary freedom, the liberatory perspective of the multitude's desire for human life. In this sense, there can only be a "free multitude".[34]

12. Yet, if the opposition is irreducible, how does the free multitude move forward? How does the free multitude become a real force of liberation, an actual movement in history? One suggestion would be through war.[35] After all, Spinoza explains that for a free multitude living under a king, "the army's greatest reward is freedom":

> In the state of nature each person tries to defend himself as much as he can, simply for the sake of freedom. No one expects any other reward for excellence in fighting than that he should be his own [master]. Now in the civil state all the citizens collectively ought to be considered as just like a man in the state of nature. So when they all fight for their state, they're looking out for themselves and devoting themselves to themselves.[36]

Accordingly, the multitude of all citizens – a collectivity that might be called "the people" instead of "the vulgar" – should be armed since only

33 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 5 §6, 530.

34 François Zourabichvili, "L'énigme de la «multitude libre»," in *La multitude libre. Nouvelles lectures du* Traité politique, ed. C. Jaquet, P. Sévérac and A. Suhamy (Paris: Amsterdam, 2008), 72; Antonio Negri, "Concerning the Concept of Multitude," in *Spinoza: Then and Now* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 55.

35 Zourabichvili, "L'énigme de la «multitude libre»," 77.

36 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 7 §22, 554-555.

citizens will fight for their civil state as for their natural freedom, their natural power. Yet, one may also ask: does this multitude not risk eventually "fighting for its slavery as it would for its survival," the survival of its monarchical state?[37] The war concerned seems to be a war between civil states relating to each other as humans in the state of nature. Such civil states would then appear as individual bodies with a proper right and law to defend. This inevitably reintroduces the theological-political complex and the idea of the multitude as a single nation. As a result, the war is understood as a national war of independence. Indeed, Spinoza is careful: "In war there can be no more honorable or greater incentive to victory than the image of freedom".[38] The immanent desire for freedom and power during warfare might quickly lapse into merely retracing an "image of freedom," some original freedom of the nation. In a monarchy, the history of freedom tends to point toward the past as a national war of independence. However, this is not the history that Spinoza tells after being confronted with the crisis of 1672. This crisis was more complex considering that it not only involved war – potentially a new national war of independence – but also the economic depression of market socialization. War and depression are interrelated through the problem of production, a modern problem posed by the bourgeoisie. As Negri knows, this problem most radically came to light in the work of that "Dutch bourgeois man," and, importantly, it relates to nascent capitalism, the child of modernity.

13. Sooner or later, a crisis in society will translate into a crisis in politics. This was the case in 1672, which was a crisis of government, of aristocratic government. Therefore, the historical challenge of the free multitude should be analyzed in that political context. Spinoza remarks the following on the absolute aristocracy in which a whole multitude effectively rules and is thus free:

> The only reason its rule is not in practice absolute is that the multitude is terrifying to its rulers. So it maintains

37 Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," preface, 68.

38 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 7 §22, 555.

> some freedom for itself. If it doesn't claim that freedom for itself by an explicit law, it still claims it tacitly and maintains it.[39]

In an aristocracy, the multitude remains quiet, somewhat perplexed: citizens are eligible for government, but the majority of them are never elected. This part of the multitude which contributes to sovereignty without participating in its right inevitably becomes the plebs. The aristocratic paradox divides the multitude and leads it towards contradiction. This is where the opposition between the free and "enslaved" multitude is pushed to the limit. The multitude is not just fearful but really "terrifying". The whole crisis pivots around this critical point of negativity, namely the plebs, a collectivity of individuals who are made to believe that they could be elected. Hardly a collectivity. Indeed, the question becomes whether the plebs will join collectively in hope or perish in solitude and fear. Will the plebs continue to think that it is "a dominion in a dominion"? Or will it realize that it is a positive part of the multitude and a multitude itself, a free multitude? This is the historical challenge posed by the petty bourgeoisie to the whole bourgeoisie and to society at large. The petty bourgeoisie can be turned into a force to liberate society and human life, but it can also lose itself in negativity and yield fascism and death. This is how, in 1672, rebellious burghers killed off a golden age.

14. Slowly, it becomes clear what the multitude in an aristocracy is keeping quiet, namely, the power of a free multitude. The rulers are terrified of the freedom by which the multitude may recompose sovereignty. For this, however, the multitude will need to invest in the common, the immanent desire of human life, rooted in Spinoza's doctrine of conatus, a philosophy of causa sui – the problem of production. Moreover, the multitude will need to be led "as if by one mind". But what is this one mind? Could it be democracy? Democracy is the form of government that includes the free multitude immediately and thus

39 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 8 §4, 567.

has the sovereign right to recompose itself absolutely. It surely is a terrific thought.[40] It is a thought of infinite production and eternal construction. Appropriately, it is a thought that Spinoza did not work out, leaving the *TP* unfinished in the chapter on democracy. This is where the *TTP* comes in again as a guide for ongoing debate: the freedom of philosophizing. Negri incisively states that "the multitude is an *ensemble of institutions*, always alive".[41] The freedom of philosophizing is precisely the right by which institutions are made democratic and alive. Absolute democracy is all about the joy of freely philosophizing. Still, we should remain careful. The multitude hosts, by definition, many ideas on government and is not necessarily led by one mind. This is why it can only be led *as if* by one mind.[42] Opposition and conflict will stay at the heart of the multitude. The struggle to be led "as if by one mind" is ongoing. It is a historical struggle of reckoning with society's institutions, and thus, it involves the question of how to organize the law and the theological-political complex. In other words, how to make sure that a multitude keeps following that one mind? This is ultimately a problem of constitution, which arises within the multitude. It is how the Dutch "crisis of constitution" came about, bringing the nation and bourgeoisie back on its knees.[43] Finally, it is the problem that Negri addresses by the concept of constituent power. This concept makes us think the power of the multitude, the strength of the multitude, namely the strength by which constituent power engages in revolutionary struggle. Through constituent power conflict and law move forward together by reiterating the struggle.[44] Constituent power takes the shape

40 Yes, the common – let's say communism – is a body and democracy its mind!

41 Negri, "Politics of Immanence, Politics of Transcendence," 136.

42 Through the freedom of philosophizing, the multitude is led to manifest itself in terms of "transindividuality," as argued in the eighth chapter of my PhD dissertation "Spinoza, Critique and Freedom: The *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* and its Contemporary Readers," On the multitude's transindividuality more generally, see Etienne Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluti mente ducitur*" [2018], in *Spinoza, the Transindividual* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 92-136.

43 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 16.

44 Filippo Del Lucchese, "Machiavelli and Constituent Power: The Revolutionary Foundation of Modern Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, n.º 1 (2014): 20.

of "permanent revolution".[45] It makes us think the strength of the multitude productively by opening up the imagination to the common and to an organization as if by one mind, by conceiving the strength of the multitude in the figure of "the unity of the multitude".[46] In this sense, the multitude reveals by its strength to be a "subject," ready to decide.[47] However, nothing is certain in history. Unity can fail and develop in a historical tragedy. This is exactly the lesson of 1672 when the Dutch bourgeoisie suffered a defeat from which it would never recover. On the other hand, it is precisely this crisis that placed the bourgeoisie as a class on the map, namely, a class with proper interests, proper challenges, proper problems. In this context, the problem of production and constitution truly became the problem of the multitude: the challenge to compose a class and organize the struggle for liberation and human life. But the awareness comes too late. Negri puts it as follows: "Class awareness cannot adequately perceive itself: it grasps itself as a lack of hope after having passed through the experience of crisis and undergone it as destruction".[48] Similarly to the nation, class does not seem to be a concept as it rather responds to subjective experience and to the ambiguous rules of the theological-political complex. Once again, we have to recognize that modern politics is messy.[49]

15. Seemingly, Spinoza has something to say on this issue:

> If someone has been affected with Joy or Sadness by someone of a class, *or* [*sive*] nation, different from his own, and this Joy or Sadness is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the universal name of the class or

45 Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies. Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999 [1992]), 187.

46 Negri, *Insurgencies*, 308.

47 Negri, *Insurgencies*, 318.

48 Negri, *Political Descartes*, 237.

49 Much of the mess has probably to do with the context in which the modern theory of constituent power was introduced. Shortly before the French Revolution the Abbé Sieyès argued in *What is the Third Estate?* (1789) for the sovereignty of the nation, by which he understood the Third Estate, the third "class" under the Ancien Régime. In this sense, the power of the multitude was linked to both nation and class.

> [*vel*] nation, he will love or hate, not only that person, but everyone of the same class or [*vel*] nation.[50]

Thus, the idea of class implies the idea of nation, which can even work as an alternative name. Both are general ideas that merely attest to a shared understanding by particular minds. Class or nation do not actually think the common. Rather, it is through the interplay of affects that thought is determined in a more or less powerful way, a way that could lead the multitude as if by one mind. It is at the level of the affects that a multitude operates, and it is only at this level that liberation and revolution take place. Still, revolution is also a historical process of struggle that we inevitably understand through the experience of particular minds and through general ideas. Therefore, is there a "universal" name that nevertheless could put us on the right track *today*? Is there a more powerful way to organize our very experience, experience itself? Accordingly, ontology and history converge in the project of a "rationalism of the experience".[51] This is precisely how the Political Treatise came to be, that is, through Spinoza's experience:

> I am fully persuaded that experience has shown all the kinds of State which might conceivably enable men to live in harmony, as well as the means by which a multitude ought to be directed, *or* restrained within definite limits. So I don't believe reflection on this subject can come up with anything not completely at variance with experience, *or* practice, which hasn't yet been learned and tested by experience.[52]

50 Baruch Spinoza, "Ethics" [1677], in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 520 (E3p46).

51 Pierre-François Moreau, *Experience and Eternity in Spinoza* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021 [1994]), 271.

52 Spinoza, "Political Treatise," chap. 1 §3, 504.

So, how shall we name this experience, *or* practice? Could it be "the proletariat"? The experience that owns nothing and lives and works solely for society – necessarily a critical value in the political economy. The practice that is determined by the desire for human life: the immanent production of humanity. The name that accompanies the composition of the multitude into effectively a working class, a subject of constituent power, engaged in revolutionary struggle. Spinoza's rationalization of experience – a philosophy of power – opens up the bourgeoisie to the proletariat through joy accompanied by the idea of history reaching beyond the present crisis: "love of time".[53]

16. Let's come back to the beginning and reiterate the question of a disproportion in history. Let's revolutionize the revolution itself. After all, the crisis of 1672 has shown us a failed revolution, namely the revolution of "True Freedom". Spinoza experienced the failure of the bourgeoisie in history but nevertheless persevered in a philosophy from within this failure – an immanent philosophy of historical disproportion. In his corresponding study of the bourgeois multitude – an anomaly in modern philosophy – Spinoza elaborated the disproportion as a new proportion. This is precisely the ambiguity that has its roots in 1672. The new proportion is nothing less than a new reason based on the disproportion of historical experience. It is a new proportion between experience and praxis, between subjectivity and constitution. It is a new reason for revolutionary struggle but this time from within the free multitude. Accordingly, the multitude is more than a concept since it is also a subject, and it is more than a subject since it is also a concept. Following Negri, Spinoza resists "the negation of any possibility that the multitude may express itself as subjectivity".[54] Nevertheless, Spinoza thinks the multitude as "the concept of present crisis, recast as the concept of collective liberation".[55] In other words, Spinoza keeps the

53 Negri, *Insurgencies*, 334.

54 Negri, *Insurgencies*, 325.

55 Antonio Negri, "Spinoza's Anti-Modernity," in *Subversive Spinoza. (Un)contemporary Variations*, ed. T. Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 91.

disproportion open and conceives of "praxis without teleology":[56] a plan within modernity for going beyond it. In Spinoza, theory and praxis come together in a "philosophy of the future".[57]

17. We can make it a prime number. Something to count on by one and all. Once more, revolution.

56 Negri, "Spinoza's Anti-Modernity," 90.

57 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 228.

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