

The Only Materialist Tradition,

Part I: Spinoza

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BEFORE COMING to Marx himself, I must speak of the detour I made, had to make (now I understand why), through Pascal, Spinoza, Hobbes, Rousseau, and perhaps especially Machiavelli.

I had duly read Pascal in captivity (the only book I possessed). I was still a believer, but that was not the reason. What fascinated me was certainly Pascal's theory of justice and force, his theory of relations among men, but especially his theory of the apparatus of the body: "Kneel and pray," which was later to inspire my "theory" of the materiality of ideology (see what Michel Foucault appropriately calls the "disciplines of the body" in the seventeenth century; they have obviously not disappeared since), of the *semblance* I was to rediscover later, that is, further on, in Machiavelli. The theory of the skillful and semiskillful, like the theory of recognition and misrecognition that unbeknownst to me I was to rediscover later in my own sketch of a theory of ideology. What do I not owe to Pascal! and in particular to that astonishing sentence on the history of science, in which the moderns are said to be greater than the ancients only because they stand on the latter's shoulders. But this was not the most beautiful thing there. I found in this sentence a theory of scientific experimentation related not to its conditions of possibility (as later in Kant) but to its material conditions of historical existence, thus the essence of a genuine

theory of history: when Pascal, speaking of new experiments that contradict those of the ancients, utters this extraordinary sentence: "*Thus it is that without contradicting [the ancients] we can advance the contrary of what they said!*" Without contradicting them: because the conditions of our scientific experiments have changed and are no longer the same as those of the ancients. They only made the theory of their own experiments and of the material conditions of experimentation within their own limits. We know of other conditions, that is, limits, certainly much larger, for time has passed and technology has expanded, and we state results and theories quite differently, but without ever contradicting the ancients, quite simply because the conditions of our experiments and our experiments themselves are different from theirs. I did not stop reflecting on this sentence, infinitely more profound than all that the philosophers of the Enlightenment were able to say (which was ultimately very simple-minded, because teleological) about history.

II

But Spinoza, whom I read for a long time without understanding him well, in any case without ever managing to embrace him, was to hold quite different revelations in store for me. I see now, if not what Spinoza really wanted to think and say, then the profound reasons for my attraction to him.

I discovered in him first an astonishing contradiction: this man who reasons *more geometrico* through definitions, axioms, theorems, corollaries, lemmas, and deductions — therefore, in the most "dogmatic" way in the world — was in fact an incomparable liberator of the mind. How then could dogmatism not only result in the exaltation of freedom but also "produce" it? Later I was to formulate the same remark regarding Hegel: again a dogmatic thinker, but one who had led to Marx's radical critique, which Hegel had in a certain way produced or induced. How was this possible? I only understood it later while elaborating my personal little "theory" of philosophy as the activity of the positing of theses to be demarcated from existing theses. I noted that the truth of a philosophy lies entirely in its *effects*, while in fact it acts only at a distance from real objects, therefore, in the space of freedom that it opens up to research and action and not in its form of exposition alone. This form could be systematic or not, but in any event it was in itself "dogmatic" to the extent that every philosophy *posits*, not without reason, but without any possible empirical *verification*, apparently arbitrary theses, which in reality are not arbitrary, since they are a function of the space of freedom (or servitude) that the philosophy intends by *its effects* to open up at the heart of the space of theses already posed by existing philosophies within a given theoretical conjuncture. Under these conditions,

systematic exposition in no way contradicts the philosophical *effects* produced; on the contrary, it can, through the rigor of the chain of its reasons, not only constrict more tightly the space it intends to open, but make the consistency of its own production infinitely more rigorous and more sensible and fruitful (in the strong sense) to the freedom of the mind. And, also following Hegel himself in this matter, I had to understand the reason of Spinoza's theses as theses *antithetical* to those of Descartes, whose *effects* he intended to combat by stepping back, just as Hegel, within the apparently "dogmatic" exposition of his philosophy, intended to combat the effects of Kant's philosophical theses by means of theses opposed to his, and finally to open up a new space of freedom.

Thus I established a rather strict parallel between Spinoza against Descartes and Hegel against Kant, showing that in the two cases what was in play and in struggle was a *transcendental subjectivist* conception of "truth" and knowledge. The parallel went quite far: no more *cogito* in Spinoza (but only the factual proposition *homo cogitat*, "man thinks"), no more transcendental subject in Hegel, but a subject as process (I pass over its [immanent] teleology). No theory of knowledge (that is, no theory of an a priori guarantee of truth and its scientific, social, moral, and political effects) in Spinoza, no theory of knowledge in Hegel, either, whereas Descartes presents in the form of a divine guarantee a theory of the guarantee of every truth and, therefore, of every knowledge — whereas Kant produced a juridical theory of knowledge under the "I think" of the transcendental Subject and the a priori conditions of every possible experience. In the two cases, Spinoza and Hegel managed — and little matter, or rather all the better, that their demonstration was rigorous and therefore apparently "dogmatic" — to disentangle the mind from the illusion of transcendent or transcendental subjectivity as a guarantee or foundation of every meaning or every experience of possible truth. I understood, then, the reason for this apparent paradox, which, if I can say it, comforted me against the host of accusations of "dogmatism" that had been thrown in my face. To know that a philosophy called "dogmatic" and actually having the form of a dogmatic exposition can produce effects of freedom: I had never sought anything else.

From what, then, did Spinoza liberate the human mind — and not through the terms of his theses but through the *effects* of his philosophy? From the illusions of what he called the imagination. The imagination not only rules over the first kind of knowledge, but also over the second, since the "intermediate generalities" — for example, the abstraction of the tree from the reduction of all the impressions of individual trees — are still relatively contaminated by the imagination and the *word* that utters them. The "intermediate" abstractions of the second kind

of knowledge were thus still partially caught up in the illusion of the imagination and of the language directly tied to it.

What, then, became of the first kind of knowledge? I maintained that it had nothing to do with the first degree of a "theory of knowledge," Spinoza never having wanted in that way to guarantee but simply "to state the facts," "stripped of every foreign addition" (Engels). But in order to state the facts, it was truly necessary to strip them of every foreign addition, that of the imagination, which, however—and this is all the difference with Engels—is not presented at all as a foreign addition but as the immediate truth of the very meaning of the given and lived world. This is why I maintained that the first kind of knowledge is not a knowledge at all (the imagination is not a knowledge), but is the immediate world such as we perceive it, that is, as we live (perception itself being an element abstracted from life) under the domination of the imagination, in truth not *under* the imagination but so imbued with the imagination that the immediate world such as we perceive it is strictly indissociable and inseparable from the imagination, the imagination constituting *its very essence*, the internal connection of all its determinations. Perhaps it was forcing Spinoza a little to say that the first kind of knowledge, therefore, the imagination, was the immediate *Lebenswelt*—but this is how I interpreted him.

What, then, was the imagination that thus constituted the essence of our common *Lebenswelt*? Spinoza explained it with exemplary clarity in the appendix to part I of the *Ethics*. The imagination is (1) to put the (human) subject at the center and origin of every perception, of every action, of every object, and of every meaning, but (2) to reverse in this way even the real order of things, since the real order *is explained* (and not "*comprehended*," a subjective if not subjectivist notion *completely foreign to Spinoza*) solely by the determination of causes, while the subjectivity of the imagination explains everything by means of ends, by the subjective illusion of the ends of its desire and its expectations. This is, strictly speaking, to *reverse* the order of the world, to make it walk, as Hegel and Marx will say, "*on its head*." It is to put to work, as Spinoza superbly said, an entire "*apparatus*" (a formula that was to speak volumes when I rediscovered it in proper terms in Marx and Lenin regarding the state), *an apparatus of reversal of causes into ends*. This "apparatus" is truly the world of the imagination, the world as such, the *Lebenswelt* lived in the *apparatus* of the reversal of causes into ends, those of the illusion of subjectivity, of the man who believes himself to be the center of the world and becomes "an empire within an empire," master of the world's meaning (the *cogito*), although he is entirely submitted to the determinations of the world: as a simple determinate part

of the world, a finite mode of substance (as mode of extension and mode of thought, rigorously "*parallel*" modes).

It is in the appendix to part I of the *Ethics* that Spinoza developed his admirable critique of religious ideology, in which the human subject endowed with finalized desires projects himself into God as the original and final cause of the Universe, as the cause (in truth not the cause at all but the origin) of all meaning, that is, of every finality, of the Universe. That every meaning is an *end*, that is, an *eschatology of an imaginary meaning*—what critical depth! I saw in it immediately the matrix of every possible theory of ideology and profited from it, with the difference that I put first (but Spinoza did so, too, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*) not individual subjectivity alone but, if I can say it, social subjectivity, that of a conflictual human group, that is, of a class and therefore of antagonistic classes, what Spinoza, I must admit, doesn't say in so many words, but which he allows to be understood in his history of the Jewish people.

III

What then became of the famous and obscure, in any case misunderstood if not incomprehensible, "knowledge of the third kind"? Spinoza speaks of the *amor intellectus Dei* and of *beatitudo*, and these are no doubt philosophical effects in the head and body of man; but he didn't give—or so it seemed—any concrete example of this so-called "intuitive" knowledge. Now I found an example that was, in my opinion, perfect (and on this point I believe I am perhaps going to surprise people) in the *TTP* in which Spinoza dealt with history, and very precisely the history of the Jewish people. I considered in fact that with this example Spinoza gives us a "case" of knowledge of the "third kind," that is, of the knowledge of an object that is both singular (a historical individual: a determinate people, without precedent or sequel) and universal (we shall soon see in what sense). Spinoza could have given us other examples to consider, for example, a certain singular individual, Socrates (or his wife) or himself (or his spiders). But how is a singular individual also a universal? One might obviously think immediately of Hegel, of the universality that is truly constituted by a determinate people within universal history and not by a certain singular individual who, outside of the community of these people, cannot, unless he is himself the last philosopher (and it is still his belonging to the final individuality of a historical people that confers on him this privilege), attain concrete universality. Now I thought that Spinoza could consider every singularity, including that which took place in the *Lebenswelt* of the imagination, as universal singular individ-

uality. As a *case*, almost in the sense in which the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* writes, "Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist," an untranslatable sentence but one that more or less means "the world is everything that is the case." What is the "case" if not that which comes to pass, if not purely and simply that which "befalls," as if by accident, that is, without origin or end? That which befalls in existence and in being, in the world constituted by similar "falls," by similar "cases," to infinity. That every case (medical or otherwise) is singular, everyone will admit with no difficulty. But that a singular *case* is at the same time *universal* is what constitutes *both* a problem *and* a scandal! Now this is indeed the challenge to which it was necessary to respond theoretically. I would take a detour in order to confront it: the detour of medicine or, if one prefers, that of analysis, but it can just as well be the detour of a people and its singular history, as Spinoza took, for is there anything as singular as the conjunctural case of a historical people that knew a history and absolutely singular conditions from which one cannot by *abstraction* draw out any universal knowledge? It is here that from very far away, I well understood later, it was necessary to confront the simple-minded theses of Karl Popper, for whom history (and Marxism, which presumes to have knowledge of history) and psychoanalysis are not at all knowledges, for they are not empirically verifiable; that is, they are nonfalsifiable!

Let us speak, then, of history, since Spinoza personally invites us to do so, and also of psychoanalysis, since Popper summons us. In history and psychoanalysis there are only "*cases*"; each of them will be suitable without difficulty. And how could it be said better than by Marx himself, who wrote that there is never production *in general*, labor *in general*, and so forth, and that every history is always a singular "case"—and likewise for analysts: they never encounter "the same case" again, but always and uniquely *singular and, therefore, different "cases."* How, then, to pretend to draw out consequences that are *general*, that is, abstract, since every case is concrete and, as opposed to concrete objects (oak trees, beech trees, plum trees, pear trees, etc., as realizations of the concept "tree"), one can never abstract from individual singularities in order to reach the abstract concept of the thing itself? Worse than that: how can one claim to speak about singularity itself in general if one has no previous knowledge of it, if the fact of singularity is not and can never be a "concept," even its own concept? And Spinoza would himself warn us: he speaks of an *intuitio* in the case of "knowledge of the third kind," just as later doctors will speak of a "chronic intuition"; analysts, of *Einsicht* or *insight* (intuitions); and politics, of the meaning of the conjuncture. How to abstract from whatever singular and therefore not comparable intuitions there are? We see that everything in this objection holds up quite well.

Yet Spinoza ignores this objection, just as Marx and psychoanalysis so blithely take exception to Popper. I would simply say something that seems to respond to Popper's objection and to Spinoza's concern: it is only in the individual and social life of singularities (nominalisms), really singular—but universal, for these singularities are as if traversed and haunted by repetitive or constant invariants, not by generalities but repetitive constants—that one can rediscover under their singular variations in other singularities of the same species and genus. Thus, Spinoza rediscovers quite naturally in the singular history of the Jewish people a *constant* that he has treated "in general" in the appendix of part I regarding religion in general, and yet there never exists religion in general in Spinoza, no more than does production in Marx. He rediscovers generic constants or invariants, as one wishes, which arise in the existence of singular "cases" and which permit their *treatment* (whether theoretical or practical, it hardly matters); generic and not "general" constants and invariants, *constants and not laws*, which obviously do not constitute the object of a will to *verification* in an abstract renewable experimental *dispositif*, as in physics or chemistry, but whose repetitive insistence permits us to mark the form of singularity in presence and, therefore, its treatment. It is obviously a question here of a *test* (*épreuve*), which has nothing to do with experimental proof (*preuve*) in the physical sciences, but which possesses its rigor, whether it be in the knowledge and treatment of individual singularity (medicine, analysis) or social singularity (history of a people) and action over history (politics).

Now this is precisely what I thought I had discovered in the *TTP*, which is a knowledge and elucidation of a singular history: that of a singular people, the Jewish people. And it is not an accident if Spinoza can invest in it as the exemplification of a repetitive constant his theory of religious ideology, his theory of language, his theory of the body, and his theory of the imagination, which I thought to be perhaps the first historical form of a theory of ideology.

For at the foundation, in the "third kind of knowledge," we are never faced with a *new* object but simply a new form of relation of appropriation (the word is Marx's) of an object that is *always already there* since the first kind of knowledge: the "world," the *Lebenswelt* of the first kind, is elevated while remaining the same, a concretion of universal singularities in itself, all the way up to the universe or nature and its substantial cause (God). What changes is never the being itself of things (what is a finite mode if not a universal singularity in its kind?) but the relation of appropriation that the human subject enters into with others. In this sense, which will be taken up again by Hegel and Marx, every process of knowledge indeed proceeds from the abstract to the concrete, from abstract generality to con-

crete singularity. In my language I had called that very roughly the passage from Generalities I to Generalities III by means of Generalities II; I deceived myself in that the reality aimed at by knowledge (of the third kind) is not that of a generality but of a universal singularity. But I was indeed on Spinoza's "line" by insisting with Marx and Hegel on the distinction between the "real concrete," therefore, the universal singular (all the "cases" that constitute the world from the beginning of knowledge of the first kind), and the concrete-in-thought that constitutes knowledge of the third kind.

The *TTP*, then, held wonders in store for me—the history of this singular people, living under a singular religion, the Torah, the observances, the sacrifices, and the rituals (I was later to rediscover in it what I then called the *materiality of the very existence of ideology*), with a language determined socially and precisely with these incredible prophets, men who climb the mountain at the summons of the Lord but who only understand in the thunder crash and lightning flash some partially comprehensible words. Then they go back down to the plain in order to submit to their brothers, who themselves know the message of God. The prophets have not understood anything that God has said to them: it is explained to them carefully, and then generally they understand the message of God; except that imbecile Daniel who knew how to interpret dreams but who not only understood nothing of the messages received from God (it was, however, the common lot of all) but, what is worse, would never comprehend any of the explanations the people gave him of the messages he had received! I saw in Daniel the prodigious proof of the stubborn resistance of every ideology to its clarification (and that against the naive theory that was to be the Enlightenment's). Later, following Spinoza and Pascal along this theme, I was to insist strongly on the material existence of ideology, not only on its material social *conditions* of existence (its connection with interests blinded by the imagination of a social group), which one finds first in Rousseau and in Marx and in a number of authors, but also on the *materiality* of its very existence. But I was not going to make an exposition on this admirable *TTP*.

What also fascinated me in Spinoza was his philosophical strategy. Jacques Derrida has spoken a lot about strategy in philosophy, and he is perfectly right, since every philosophy is a *dispositif* of theoretical combat that disposes of theses as so many strongholds or prominent places so as to be able, in its aim and strategic attacks, to take over the theoretical places fortified and occupied by the adversary. Yet Spinoza began with God! He began with God, and deep down inside (I believe it, after the entire tradition of his worst enemies) he was (as were da Costa and so many other Portuguese Jews of his time) an atheist. A supreme strategy: he

began by taking over the chief stronghold of his adversary, or rather he established himself there as if he were his own adversary, therefore not suspected of being the sworn adversary, and redispersed the theoretical fortress in such a way as to turn it completely around, as one turns around cannons against the fortress's own occupant. This redistribution consisted in the theory of infinite substance identical to God "*causa sui*" (therefore, without exterior) and in the infinite omnipotence of God effecting his existence in the infinite attributes (infinite in number, but we have access only to two of them, thought and extension) and are parallel (that which identifies the *ordo rerum* and the *ordo idearum*—the order of things and the order of ideas—with one and the same *commexio*), being effected themselves into infinite modes and these finite modes into an infinity of finite modes. An infinite substance (God) that cannot even be called *unique*, for it has nothing else to compare with it in order to distinguish from it and to call it unique (Stanislaus Breton), therefore, without exterior, being effected in itself without ever leaving itself, therefore, without this other classical exteriority (in the illusion of creation) that is the world or universe. Generally this is not the way that philosophers proceed: they always oppose from a certain *exterior* the forces of their theses, which are destined to take over the domain protected and defended by previous theses, which already occupy the terrain. Militarily speaking, this revolutionary philosophical strategy recalls more than anything else the theory of the urban guerrilla and the encirclement of cities by the countryside dear to Mao or certain forms of politico-military strategy of Machiavelli (his theory of fortresses in particular). I was fascinated by this unparalleled audacity, which came to me as the idea of the *extreme* essence of every philosophical strategy, its acknowledged *limit*-essence, the one that could never be surpassed. Thus it reminded me of the thought of a Machiavelli, who always thinks "in extremes," "at the limits." And no doubt this strategy comforted me in my personal philosophical and political strategy: to take over the Party from inside its own positions . . . but what pretensions!

Yet I was not through with Spinoza. Not only had he rejected every theory of original foundation of every meaning and every truth (the *cogito*) always functioning as a guarantee of every established order, be it scientific, moral, or in the last resort *social* (mediated through other elements guaranteed by Truth), but he was a *nominalist*! I had read in Marx that nominalism is the "royal road" to materialism. To tell the truth, I really believe that nominalism is not the royal road to materialism but *the only conceivable materialism in the world*. How did Spinoza proceed? Without ever sketching a transcendental genesis of meaning, truth, or the conditions of possibilities of every truth, of whatever meaning and truth there might be, he established himself within the factuality of a simple claim: "We have a true

idea,” “We hold a norm of truth,” not by virtue of a foundation lost in the beginnings, but because it is a fact that Euclid, thank God—God knows why—has existed as a factual universal singularity, and [that there is not] *even* a question, as Husserl will want to “reactivate the original meaning,” [that] it suffices to think within the factual result of Spinoza’s thought, within its crude result, in order to dispose of the power of thinking. This *factual nominalism* was rediscovered—and with what genius!—in the famous distinction, internal to every concept, between the *ideatum* and the *idea*, between the thing and its concept, between the dog that barks and the concept of the dog, which does not bark, between the circle that is round and the idea of the circle, which is not round, and so on. Thereby was opened and justified (always in fact) the distinction between inadequate knowledge of the first kind, that is, the passage, in the interplay and the space, of this crucial distinction, and a more and more adequate knowledge, up to “knowledge of the third kind,” that is, the passage from the imagination-world to the world of the concept of this imaginary inadequation, up to the intuition of the universal singularities that exist from the beginning in every finite mode, but are then caught up and misrecognized in the imagination.

Should I add an extraordinary theory? Yes, that of the body, based on the famous parallelism of attributes. This body (our material organic body) of which we don’t know “all the powers,” but of which we know that it is animated by the essential power of the *conatus*, which is rediscovered in the *conatus* of the state of what corresponds to the *mens* (an untranslatable word: *mens* is neither the soul nor the mind but instead the power, the *fortitudo*, the *virtus* of thinking). Now this body—Spinoza thinks of it as *potentia* or *virtus*, that is, not only as *fortitudo*, but also as [*generositas*], that is, *élan*, opening to the world, free gift. I was to rediscover it later as the astonishing anticipation of the Freudian libido (less, to tell the truth, as the crucial sexual connotation), just as I found in Spinoza an astonishing theory of ambivalence, since—to give a single example—*fear is the same thing as hope, its direct opposite*, and they are both “sad passions,” passions of slavery under the imagination, therefore, a kind of “death instinct,” apt to destroy the joyous *élan* in all life and expansion of the *conatus* that unites the vital effort, that seals the effective unity of the *mens* and the body brought together as are “lips and teeth.”

One can imagine how wonderful this theory of the body seemed to me. In it I rediscovered, in fact, my own vital experience, in the beginning a slave of a fear and a hope that were excessive, but that were liberated in the recomposition and appropriation of their forces during my grandfather’s exercise of social labors and later in a prisoner-of-war camp.¹ That one can thus liberate and recompose one’s

own body, formerly fragmented and dead in the servitude of an imaginary and, therefore, slavely subjectivity, and take from this the means to think liberation freely and strongly, therefore, to think properly with one’s own 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 quite 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. It is so true, as Hegel said, that one really only knows what one recognizes either to be *false* (knowledge of the illusion of the imaginary) or to be *true* (intuitive knowledge of one’s *virtus*, knowledge of the third kind).

In this fantastic philosophy of the necessity of the factual stripped of every transcendent guarantee (God) or transcendental guarantee (the “I think”), I rediscovered one of my old formulas. I thought, then, using a metaphor—for what it was worth—that an idealist philosopher is like a man who knows in advance *both* where the train he is climbing onto is coming from *and* where it is going: what is its station of departure and its station of destination (or again, as for a letter, its final destination). The materialist, on the contrary, is a man who takes the train *in motion* (the course of the world, the course of history, the course of life) but without knowing where the train is coming from or where it is going. He climbs onto a train of chance, of encounter, and discovers in it the *factual* installations of the coach and of whatever companions he is *factually* surrounded with, of whatever the conversations and ideas of these companions and of whatever language marked by their social milieu (as the prophets of the Bible) they speak. All that was for me, or rather became little by little, as if inscribed in filigree in Spinoza’s thought. It is then that I loved to quote Dietzgen, speaking of philosophy as the “Holzweg der Holzwege,” anticipating Heidegger, who no doubt knew this formula (which I owe to Lenin for having discovered, then to the beautiful translation by Jean-Pierre Osier), “the path of the paths that lead nowhere.” I have known since that Hegel had previously forged the prodigious image of a “*path that proceeds all alone*,” opening its own way to the extent of its own advancement in the woods and fields. What “encounters”!

It is assuredly through the encounter with Machiavelli that I was to experience the fascination of fascinations. But this occurred much later. One will not be astonished that once again I anticipate in my associations, for I am not interested at all in the chronological sequence of anecdotes of a life, which interest no one—not even me—but in the repeated insistence of certain affects, whether they be psychic or theoretical or political, which are truly grasped and experienced only after the fact and whose order of appearance matters little, since most of the time it

is a *subsequent affect* that not only gives meaning to a previous affect, but even reveals it to consciousness and to memory. I would never have finished meditating on this word of Freud's: "*an affect is always in the past.*" One may wish, therefore, indeed to follow me in this new retrospective anticipation.

IV

I discovered Machiavelli for the first time in August 1964, at Bertinoro, in an extraordinary old and large house on a hill dominating the whole plain of Emilia. Franca lived there, and I had known her for hardly a week. A woman of dazzling Sicilian beauty, black-haired (in Sicily it is called "mora"), who had been introduced to me by her sister-in-law Giovanna, the companion of Crémolini, the great painter, who was one of my old friends. Franca had a splendid body, a face of extreme mobility, and above all she displayed a freedom as a woman I had never known — and in Italy! She introduced me to her country, and our intense loves were sometimes dramatic (but of my doing rather than hers). In short, I was dazzled by her, by her love, by the country, the marvel of its hills and towns. I became an Italian, easily as always, and we often went down to Cesena, a large town on the plain at the foot of the hills. One day she taught me that Cesena was the little town from which César Borgia had left for his great adventure. I began to read a little Gramsci (on the intellectuals) quickly interrupted my reading in order to engage myself in reading Machiavelli.

Ever since I have tried to read Machiavelli, to understand him, I have ceaselessly returned to him. I had several courses on him at the Ecole Normale. He is, without doubt, much more than Marx, the author who has most fascinated me. I do not intend here to give a talk on Machiavelli, about whom perhaps I should speak thoroughly one day, but I would like to indicate why he seems to have fascinated me. In addition I am told that there are even today, after Lefort's great book,² a good dozen theses being completed on him! What a success.

I came to Machiavelli by means of a word, ceaselessly repeated, of Marx's, saying that capitalism was born from the "*encounter between the man with money and free laborers,*" free, that is, stripped of everything, of their means of labor, of their abodes and their families, in the great expropriation of the English countryside (this was his preferred example). *Encounter.* Again a "*casus,*" a "case," a factual accident without origin, cause, or end. I would rediscover the same formula in Machiavelli when he speaks of the "encounter" between the good occasion (*fortuna*, or good conjuncture) and the man of *virtù*, that is, a man having enough intelligence (intuition) to comprehend that the good occasion presents itself, and above all hav-

ing enough energy (*virtù*) or excess vigorously to exploit it for the benefit of his vital project. What is most astonishing in Machiavelli, in the theory that he made of this new prince before founding a new principality, is that this new man is a man of *nothing, without past, without titles or burdens*, an anonymous man, alone and naked (that is, in fact free, without determination — again the solitude, first of Machiavelli, next of his prince — that bears down on him and could impede the free exercise of his *virtù*). Not only is he like a naked man, but he finds himself intervening in one place as anonymous and as stripped of every outstanding social and political determination, which could impede his action. Whence the privileged example of César Borgia. Of course he was the son of a pope, but one who did not love him and, in order to extricate himself from him, bequeathed to him a plot of land in Romagne, really in Cesena — a part of the papal estates. Yet, one knows, Machiavelli sufficiently insisted on it: the church estates were absolutely not governed, without any political structure, governed only and still, he says, by religion, in any case not by the pope, nor by any serious politician: it was the total political void, another nakedness, in short an empty space without genuine structure able to obstruct the exercise of *virtù* of the future new prince (Hobbes will say: freedom is an empty space without obstacle). It is from this encounter of a man of nothing and naked (that is, free in his internal and external movements) and of an empty space (that is, without obstacle to oppose César's *virtù*) that his fortune and success arise. César knew how to recognize in this encounter the occasion of a fortune he knew how to seize, as one seizes "a woman by the hair" (Machiavelli). In this void he knew how to build structures, and he constructed for himself a kingdom that grew and, for Machiavelli, would have created Italian national unity if César had not fallen ill with fever in the pestilential marshes of Ravenna, and he found himself absent from Rome, where another decisive "occasion" would occur, at the time of the pope's death. This bad fortune (the fever) prevented him from seizing the distant good fortune (Rome where the pope died), and his destiny was sealed. César will vanish from the history that he was going to forge, and this exceptional man, but from now on deprived of "fortune," was left to die in an obscure Spanish place with the anonymity of a simple soldier one last time deserted by fortune (because of a bullet or an arrow). Anonymity again: at the beginning and the end.

But how to guide one's *virtù* in order to produce a real continuation of fortune, that is, to maintain *in a lasting way* (Machiavelli's problem: "a principality which *lasts*") a favorable conjuncture well beyond the moment when the "feminine" fantasy of fortune is offered to her conqueror? This is the whole problem

but

of the prince as head of a state. I do not want to enter here into detail, where a number of specialists are more competent than I. I only want to note what follows.

We know that Machiavelli, taking up again the classical image of the half-beast, half-man centaur, says that the prince must be such a being: half-beast through the violent force of which he must be capable (the lion) and half-man through the human morality with which he must be stamped. But it is too often overlooked that *the beast is divided in Machiavelli*, who by this fact completely abandons the metaphor of the centaur to forge an entirely different one. In fact, the beast is divided into a lion and a fox.

What is the fox? The ruse, one might think. But this is too simple. In fact, it appears that the fox is indeed in reality something like a third instance that governs the other two. In other words, it is the fox's instinct (a kind of half-conscious, half-unconscious intuition) that indicates to the prince what attitude he must adopt in such and such a conjuncture in order to rally to himself the people's assent. Sometimes to be moral, that is, clothed with virtues (in the moral sense, which has nothing to do with *virtù*, this *virtus* whose concept Spinoza obviously borrows from Machiavelli and which is *potentia*), and sometimes to be violent, that is, to make use of force. Or rather, and this point is decisive, *to know how sometimes to be moral and sometimes to be violent*. Or rather, for this point is even more decisive, to know how *to appear* to be moral or to know how *to appear* to be violent, in all the cases that he is one or the other or the one and the other, to know how *to appear* to be it at the decisive moment in order to win for oneself the continuation of fortune, to render fortune *lasting*.

It is here that this quiet instinct of the fox intervenes. It is that, in the last resort, which inspires in the prince the appearance of such and such conduct, that of the virtuous man or that of the violent man. This instinct is in fact the *instinctive* intuition of the conjuncture and of possible fortune to be seized: a new "encounter," but this time controlled and prepared as in advance.

Thereby the prince constitutes for himself a kind of *lasting image*. Machiavelli says that the prince must be neither loved nor hated but only feared, that is, always at the correct *distance*, which at the same time maintains him above the people and great men and their perpetual antagonism, above and beyond the immediate reaction that such and such of his regular initiatives can arouse (those which, contrary to his image, *do not last*), and definitely *at a distance from himself, from his own desires, drives, and impulses, and therefore*, in the language of the time, from his passions. His image forces him to some extent to remain always faithful to

this image of himself, therefore, to restrain his own "passions" for him to conform to them *in a lasting way*, for without it he could not render fortune and therefore the friendship of his peoples *lasting*. For Machiavelli indeed wants, too, to call the people's fear a kind of friendship — but never love — for the prince.

If he provokes hate or love, the prince appears to be submitted to the passions he can no longer control either in himself or in the people, passions without internal limitation. Thus, Savonarola's demagoguery of love has unleashed in the people a true passion of love, which has entailed horrible struggles in the people and finally — the so-called prince not being able to control them — his own execution. Thus, such people's *bate* for its tyrant and his continual violences always ends by throwing the people either into the nothingness of stunned silence (see later Montesquieu: the silence of despotism) or into the insurrectional revolt of riots, which lead inevitably to the death of the tyrant and to the loss of his regime.

Thus, there exists an extremely profound connection between the "passions" of the prince and the "passions" of the people. If the prince doesn't control his passions, he cannot control the passions of the people — worse, he unleashes them and winds up being their first victim, and his state perishes with him. Everything happens, then, as if the absolute condition of the reign that *lasts*, of fortune governed by the prince in order that it *last* in his favor, proceeded by means of this fundamental *distance* through which, even if its being inside of him makes everything different, the prince must *know how to appear to be*, conforming to his lasting image: a head of state who maintains his subjects at a distance from himself, maintains them at the same time at a distance from their mortal passions, whether it be love or hate (what a beautiful ambivalence!).

Certainly, Machiavelli is completely silent on the internal nature of the fox, unless one of his texts has escaped me on this point. He thinks of the fox not in terms of its internal nature as "*cause*" but only in its *effects* of semblance. To think that certain people harp on the "theater" of politics as if its reality and its discovery were new things!

Having presupposed that this man exists, the prince must assume in his own behalf "*the emptiness of a distance taken*" (which is how I provisionally defined philosophy in *Lenin and Philosophy*). The question is whether or not the prince is capable of doing so, but Machiavelli is equally silent on this point, that is, on the appropriate means to produce this distance, which is the mastery in the prince of his own passions, and the distance with respect to every passion — we would say today of every *transference* and especially *countertransference* (for the countertransference

not to be harmful, it must, while neutralizing it, anticipate the transference, in this case, of the people's passionate reactions). But perhaps here I could turn back to Spinoza, for he is not at all silent on this question.

One knows, in fact, that for Spinoza, in the Cartesian tradition of the *Treatise on the Passions of the Soul* (but in an entirely different sense), it is a question of giving to man the mastery of his passions, of passing from the domination (of the imagination) of "sad passions" over "joyous passions" to the contrary domination of "joyous passions" over "sad passions" and through this *displacement* of guiding man to freedom. The current interpretation, resting on certain of Spinoza's formulas isolated from their meaning, believes that this mastery of the passions is the effect of an "emendation of the intellect," that is, of a simple intellectual knowledge. This is the position of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which saw in knowledge and its public diffusion the solution to all personal and social contradictions, including the dissipation of all ideological illusions. But Spinoza does not at all share this opinion. And the root of the mistake in this interpretation can be found very precisely in the total neglect of the *mens* in Spinoza. We have seen that the soul (the *mens*, the activity of the mind) is in no way separate from the activity of the organic body; that, quite the contrary, the soul only thinks to the extent that it is affected by the impressions and movements of the body, that therefore it thinks only with the body but *in it*, consubstantially united with it before any separation, since this union, which is never a problem, contrary to what happens in Descartes, is based in the infinity of attributes of substance and their strict parallelism. The mastery of the passions in Spinoza, far from being able to be interpreted as an "intellectual" liberation of the negative efficacy of the passions, on the contrary consists in their subsumption united with the internal *displacement* of the "sad passions" into "joyous passions." Just as later in Freud no fantasy ever disappears but—and this is the effect of the cure—is *displaced from a dominant position into a subordinate position*, so too in Spinoza no passion ever disappears but is displaced from a position of "sadness" into a position of "joy." The *amor intellectus Dei* is in no way an "intellectual" love; it is the love of the entire individual, which is a finite mode of infinite substance—a love of the body substantially united (from the moment of constitutive substance, that is, God) with the love of the *mens*, and bringing about in the movements of the *mens* the very movements of the body, those of the fundamental *conatus*: "The more power the body has, the more freedom the mind has" (Spinoza). It is here that one could bring together Spinoza with Freud: for this *conatus*, torn between sadness and joy, what is it therefore by anticipation if not the libido torn

between the instincts of death and life, between the sadness of Thanatos and the joy of Eros?

So it is that I laboriously advanced, across my own fantasies, across Spinoza and Machiavelli, toward Freud and Marx, whom I had never dissociated from my preoccupations. And so each follows his own path, and it would be interesting to compare our respective paths. But will it ever be possible? In any case, for my account, my cards are on the table. Make of them what you will. But I owe it to my friends and others to help them understand what has befallen me—both success, perhaps, and drama, surely.

Translated by Ted Stolze

Notes

1. Althusser
2. Lefort