

Introduzione

Vittorio Morfino

Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane per la Formazione “Riccardo Massa”

vittorio.morfino@unimib.it

Francesco Toto

Università degli Studi ‘Roma Tre’

Dipartimento Filosofia, comunicazione e spettacolo

francescotot@gmail.com

In a 1976 text, attempting to summarize his philosophical path up until then, Althusser wrote some lines of great importance:

when you reject the radical origin of things, whatever the figure used, you need to create quite different categories from the classical ones in order to get a grasp on those notions -- essence, cause or liberty -- whose authority is drawn from this origin. When you reject the category of origin as a philosophical issuing bank, you have to refuse its currency too, and put other categories into circulation¹.

It is difficult not to read, in the reference to ‘the radical origin of things’, an allusion to the famous Leibnizian essay; and yet, beyond this single text, it is the entire modern metaphysics which is here criticized. And who dared criticize the radical origin of things more than the dark-skinned Jew (as Malcom X stresses in his autobiography)? Spinoza’s rejection of the radical origin of things entails a mode of thinking so different from the metaphysical one as to trigger reactions of estrangement such as the one marvellously described by Flaubert in his *Bouvard and Pécuchet*:

Thus our world is but one point in the whole of things, and the universe, impenetrable by our knowledge, is a portion of an infinite number of universes emitting close to ours infinite modifications. Extension envelops our universe, but is enveloped by God, who contains in His thought all possible universes, and His thought itself is enveloped in His substance.' It appeared to them that this substance was filled at night with an icy coldness, carried away in an endless course towards a bottomless abyss, leaving nothing around them but the

1 L. Althusser, *Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?*, in Id. *Essays in self-criticism*, translated by Grahame Lock, Atlantic Highs, N.J., Humanities Press, 1976, p. 179.

Unseizable, the Immovable, the Eternal. This was too much for them, and they renounced it².

Such an ‘icy coldness’ and ‘bottomless abyss’ are indeed so only for those who read Spinoza through the lenses of the classical metaphysics, for those who cannot renounce the services of the radical origin of things and its related conceptual tools. Another mode of thinking is nonetheless possible once we drop this principle, as the great number of studies on Spinoza produced over the last 40 years now start to attest and render visible. Of course, taken in itself, the Spinozist substance is an annihilating and shapeless abyss, as the idealists used to say, and individuals get lost in it as waves in the sea. Yet ‘substance’ is only the name that Spinoza gives to his deconstruction of the radical origin of things: it is meaningless if one does not go further, as the deconstruction of the origin is at the same time that which renders the knowledge of modes, bodies, minds, passions, of history and society, of right, rituals, religion and politics eventually possible.

Each of these fields and concepts, if compared to the philosophical horizon of his time, is deeply redefined by Spinoza. In order to interpret them, one must necessarily leave aside any facile erudite exercise that looks for the ‘eternal recurrence of the same’, and read in the network of links constituted by his concepts not a simple historiographical object, but the way in which Spinoza attempted to open up a new path to thinking of a world. This perspective constitutes the rationale for this issue, entirely devoted to the role of the collective imagination in his work, in the hope of contributing to the interpretation of a long-neglected (and yet in his mature work, ever-present) concept that seems to us to be one of the pivotal concepts of Spinoza’s theory.

Imagination is not, for Spinoza, the faculty of a *substantia cogitans* that is conjoint to a body, but the texture of ideas that constitutes a mind which is structurally embedded, like the body, in a network of relations. The mind does not communicate with other minds by way of a subjectivist interpretation of the states of their bodies (as symptoms of other states similar to his own states), but rather by taking part with them towards the construction of a more complex activity of thinking. To Spinoza, each individual thought is the juncture of a much more complex texture of thoughts. Each singular representation is over-determined by multiple factors: by the historicity of the collective imagination that it contributes to shaping, by the materiality of interests, by the practices and conflicts around which the subjectivities related to this imagination are constituted, and eventually by the fractures and gaps that pervade all the

2 G. Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet. A Tragi-comic Novel of Bourgeois Life*, Chicago, Simon P. Magee Publisher, 1904, p. 275.

relations of power that are empowered or called into question by imagination itself.

In this sense, each article of this issue contributes, in a different manner, to the composition of a unitary framework that aims to bring to the fore the complexity of this over-determination.

Sigle

CM = *Cogitata metaphysica*

Ep = *Epistolario*

Eth = *Ethica*

KV = *Korte Verhandeling*

PPC = *Principia philosophiae artesiana*

TIE = *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*

TP = *Tractatus politicus*

TTP = *Tractatus theologico-politicus*

G = edizione di Gebhardt delle opere di Spinoza

AT = edizione Adam Tannery delle opere di Descartes

app. = appendix

ax. = axioma

c. = caput

cor. = corollarium

def. = definitio

dem. = demonstratio

expl. = explicatio

n. = nota

post. = postulatum

pr. = propositio

praef. = praefatio

schol. = scholium

lem. = lemma