

Spinoza, Marx and Democracy

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Editor's Note

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Abstract

Democracy is today a system that is expanding around the world or at least, was expanding in the second half of the 20th Century and moreover, is still being demanded by people who are deprived of it, although not in the countries where it is established and seen by a growing number of people as an authentic achievement. What is the cause of this dual and conflicting perception of democracy? To a great extent it is due to the fact that the principle underlying it involves something more than a political system. Throughout the centuries, this was practically the only form in which democracy was conceived and discussed. At odds with the formalist tradition, this article approaches the issue of democracy from the works of Spinoza and Marx

Keywords

Democracy, Equality, Liberty, Spinoza, Marx

“Democracy is the destiny of humanity”: the saying is attributed to Benito Juárez, several times President of Mexico during the second half of the 19th Century and was quoted by J. F. Kennedy in a speech which he gave when he arrived in that country on an official visit on 29th June 1962.

At that time, the number of States that could be said to have a democratic government had not reached forty, a number that is certainly higher than the mere half dozen that existed at the beginning of the 20th Century. But even so, it had been greatly reduced and in some cases, there were countries about to collapse into dictatorship again, as was to occur in Greece (1967), Chile (1973) or India and Lebanon (1975). Hence there was nothing that could make one believe that the words of Kennedy and Juárez were anything more than simple rhetoric; in fact this had already been anticipated by de Tocqueville, who in 1848 announced that “the advent of democracy as a governing power in the world’s affairs, universal and irresistible, was at hand”¹. However, the phrase struck a cautionary note. From then until now, the number of democracies has not ceased to grow, despite a number of fluctuations and is now three times more than at the time of Kennedy’s speech. Admittedly, there has also been talk of its crisis or even decline. But no other political form has been put forward to replace it as a sound alternative, even on a theoretical plane. It was even argued not so many years ago, that democracy in its liberal and representative version, was the “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the end of history”².

So is it a mirage? The Hegelianism underlying this understanding of democracy has certainly not been exempt from criticism. Even following the destruction of the Berlin Wall, only a few months after Fukuyama’s controversial article, the “wave of democratization” which followed in its wake, seems to have borrowed some verisimilitude from him. Reality managed to bring to the surface other more complex factors such as the possible confrontation of the empowerment of human capital with the power of the States. There was also the question of whether democracy could be compatible with anti-liberal policies such as those of the People’s Republic of China and clearly this has, to some extent, imposed constraints on any unreserved acceptance of the notorious thesis. Nonetheless, whether or not it is the “end point” and “the end of history”, or the driving-force of prosperity, democracy has begun to feature in the ideal political world as if it is in fact bound to the destiny which all peoples are pursuing. The refutation that the system is often subject to, entails another idea of democracy: this is that it might have a different political system but still abide by its principles. Representative democracy is criticized but what is demanded is a democracy “yet to come”, with or without representation, as for example, a *leaderless democracy* of the movement.

Occupy Wall Street. “We need to invent different forms of representation”, insisted Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, “or perhaps new forms of democracy that go beyond representation”³. By becoming democratic, mankind is aspiring to turn itself into something that should always have existed and thus reconcile itself to its real nature. Even recently, when huge crowds occupied the streets of the main cities of North Africa

in protest against dictatorship – the so-called “Arab Spring” (called this by analogy with the “Springtime of the Peoples”, that broke out in some countries in Europe in the 19th Century) denoted a “democratic wave”, as if no other explanation was possible for the events, despite all the unknown and imponderable factors that hovered over the events from the beginning.

446

The spread of democratic systems and thus the way the idea of democracy has dominated political discussions in recent decades, does not mean that mankind and people have finally sworn allegiance to it or become persuaded of its benefits. Quite the contrary – the undeniable success of democracy, in geo-strategic terms, is accompanied by a general disbelief in its capabilities which is similar to the distrust with which the “power of the people” has always been regarded in the history of the West. In the past, it was criticized for allegedly degenerating into anarchy, and opening the doors to disorder and lack of restraint – perhaps inevitable for those who believe in a tradition that begins with Plato and culminates in Madison. However, now democracy is criticized for an opposite reason: this is that it makes no sense to reduce the equality and freedom which are bound up with it, to a list of vain expectations that lead to people being systematically beguiled by governments and other organs of power⁴. Perhaps it is not strictly a “hatred of democracy”, as it was called by Jacques Rancière⁵. It may only be a kind of “discomfort”⁶, originating from the inherent weakness and inadequacy of a system in which hope has not been completely abandoned with regard to its capabilities and for which no credible alternative is known. However, there is a growing dissatisfaction with democracy, in particular when the ineffectiveness of the powers and values that are embedded in the system seem to warrant at least a feeling of distrust, similar to that expressed by Marx with regard to the parliamentary system and the rights of man. Above all, what is becoming more apparent is the suspicion that institutions which are allegedly grounded on popular sovereignty can be reduced to a hollow formalism that prevents them from applying the rationale inherent in their idea of democracy to factual reality. In contrast, the economic and financial rational framework which tends to mould habits and customs and hence the lives of individuals in their private sphere, is increasingly being shown as capable of also moulding the public sphere and the States themselves. This leads to the conclusion that democracy – including liberal and representative democracy – is now exhausted and unable, even to the smallest degree, to withstand the banal practices that are imposed on it as necessary and inevitable, but which are in opposition to basic values. However, it is worth pointing out that there is no lack of people rushing to espouse it:

“Liberal democracy”, said Wendy Brown, with the aid of Foucault’s terminology, “cannot be submitted to neo-liberal, political ‘governmentality’ and survive. There is nothing in liberal democracy’s basic institutions – from free elections, representative democracy and individual liberties equally distributed to modest power-sharing or even more substantive political participation – that inherently meets the test of serving economic competitiveness or inherently withstands a cost-benefit analysis”⁷.

In summary, democracy is today a system that is expanding around the world or at least, was expanding in the second half of the 20th Century and moreover, is still being demanded by people who are deprived of it, although not in the countries where it is established and seen by a growing number of people as an authentic achievement. What is the cause of this dual and conflicting perception of democracy? To a great extent it is due to the fact that the principle underlying it involves something more than a political system. Throughout the centuries, this was practically the only form in which democracy was

conceived and discussed. Montesquieu, for example, does not mention it except as one of the forms of republican government, where sovereignty resides in the entire public. This is unlike aristocracy — the other type of republic where only a part of the public has sovereignty — or in one-person governments — monarchies and despotism. However in the view of Montesquieu being sovereign does not mean governing. In this respect the author of *The Spirit of the Laws* supports the oft-repeated traditional doctrine: “a people having sovereign power should do for itself all it can do well and what it cannot do well, it should do through its ministers”. What is it that the people are able to do well? Choose governments. And what is it that they cannot manage to do well? To govern. It is for this reason that democracy is a system where the people, to some extent, can be said to be sovereign, even though they remain in the condition of being subjects since they have to obey magistrates that have been chosen by the sovereign power⁸.

As can easily be inferred from his words, democracy for Montesquieu in short, refers to a set of institutions and procedures — suffrage, the separation of powers, the right to freedom of association and expression, the existence of an alternative to constituted powers — and that is able to lend some consistency, however remote this may be, to the idea of popular sovereignty. It is a similar interpretation to what prevails today throughout the modern world, and has only been questioned by de Tocqueville, whose thoughts on the idea of democracy in fact bear a resemblance to those of Marx, so long as one is prepared to make an obvious distinction and stretch the limits of how a simple form of power and the nature of politics have been traditionally understood. The change is sufficiently important to require the author to make it clear at the beginning of *Democracy in America*. Here, democracy is regarded as being linked both to a form of government and “equality of conditions”, and what is described as a “fact...the influence [of which] extends far beyond political mores and laws, exercising dominion over civil society as much as over the government; it creates opinions, gives birth to feelings, suggests customs and modifies whatever it does not create”⁹. In addition, de Tocqueville also states that “the gradual development of the principle of equality is a providential fact”, that operates in the underground of history as the “old mole”, mentioned in the revolution of Marx, and which ineluctably and simultaneously changes the laws or in other words, society and the State. In America, the colonies established institutions that de Tocqueville describes as being a denial of what these or their predecessors had known in the Old Continent, since they brought about equality. In Europe, for centuries history has been undermining the privileges and social stratification through which here too, the way is paved to equality. DeTocqueville believed that in the quite near future, equality would be universal and would reach the world of politics as well as all other areas of life in society.

However, the same cannot be said of freedom. In effect, the equality of conditions that de Tocqueville takes as being synonymous with democracy, can both materialize politically either by guaranteeing rights to every citizen or not guaranteeing them to anybody. In any case, it is always the sovereign people who, by definition, bestow or withhold political rights, either directly as occurred in the 5th Century B.C.¹⁰, or indirectly through representatives that the people elect by suffrage and watch closely. Political equality in the last analysis, completely rejects the hypothesis that the State is constituted as a power that transcends society. “There are countries”, said de Tocqueville, “where a power in a way external to the social body acts on it and forces it to march on a certain track. There are others where force is divided and placed both inside society and outside it. Nothing like this is seen in the United States; there society acts by itself and on itself.

Power exists only in its bosom”¹¹. In addition, equality arouses a taste for freedom in so far as it inculcates in individuals the habit of guiding themselves by their own free will and rejecting the authority of others over their private lives and being “naturally inclined to free institutions”. Nonetheless, the same equality that encourages the independence and freedom of each person, can run the risk of reaching a point of anarchy while at the same time it “conducts by a longer, more secret, but surer path toward servitude”¹². In effect, in the case of France, once left to themselves after the dissolution of the ties of dependence which structured society in the *Ancien Régime*, the citizens of the egalitarian society were, from a political standpoint, defenceless in the face of an “immense and tutelary power” that “reduces each nation to a flock of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd”¹³. It is certain that there was no personal sovereign since the regime naturally denied this privilege to any one of its citizens. But despite this, sovereignty can persist as a kind of impersonal Leviathan which originates from the free vote of each and all of its people and in this way, paradoxically tends to be transformed into a power that is equally or more tyrannical than the powers of a monarchical or oligarchical kind. Hence the problem of democracy is how to ensure the survival of free institutions that can protect people from discretionary powers in a regime where the social dynamics encourage the socially deprived to struggle for a complete reduction of poverty, even if it means sacrificing their own freedom¹⁴.

448

In the opinion of de Tocqueville, free institutions are in the first place constructed through suffrage and representation and this presupposes safeguarding individual rights and the existence of a real public space or rather, the right to criticize the authorities. At some point, the sovereignty of the people and the fact of democratic power will be immanent in society if it can be equated with the absence of a magistracy and has a State that shapes the whole of society. Democracy is not anarchy. If anything, equality on the political plane, will entail a greater volatility of functions and perhaps a reduction in the quality of the representatives but not the disappearance of the State apparatus and this leads to an asymmetry which, at least from the standpoint of decision-making, is established between the legislators and the general public¹⁵. Moreover, de Tocqueville, like a large number of liberal-conservatives, believes that although it is difficult, it is not altogether impossible for democracy to contradict the pernicious effects of social equality and not only preserve individual freedom as a certain type of “aristocratism”, through the choice of better methods for the exercise of law by different types of magistracy. However, this was evaded by the Industrial Revolution which established a new “aristocracy”, through a concentration of capital and a devaluing of the workforce. In the same way, it fails to account for the seizure of political power by the bourgeoisie and the sharpening of class struggles — issues on which his position is decidedly ambiguous. His argument reaches the point where he is convinced, as Claude Lefort points out¹⁶, that democracy tends to bring about equality in social conditions. While not ignoring entirely the revolutions of 1848, in France and some other countries in Europe, the picture of the present situation does not fall within the theoretical mould of this design with complete *finesse*. The rebellions in Paris which gave rise to dramatic events, a spirit of opportunism and uprisings, discredited the socialists who instigated them. But de Tocqueville also knows perfectly well that it is not only universal suffrage that is the cause; it is also the question of property rights, a subject that is admittedly serious, “the most serious that philosophers and men of the State can face”¹⁷. Certainly, de Tocqueville is inclined to think of this right as being embedded in human nature. However, he does not completely reject the hypothesis of these rights only being an institution like so many others that are rooted in

time — and who knows, the time may come when it is dispelled. Equality is to some extent, an embryonic principle, which operates in all sectors of society (and the word has made a lot of customs and norms obsolete which had previously been unalterable). In view of this, there is nothing to ensure that property rights are not one of these norms which only the dominant tradition allied to the power of the State has spared from the general trend in the direction of equality. De Tocqueville was well aware of this. And when in some countries in Europe, in 1848, the State was eclipsed for the moment, there arose in its place, a vast horde of disinherited people. The image of this brief moment in which private property so to speak, remained unguarded, would linger in their memory: “On this day [25th February], I didn’t see in Paris a single one of the old agents of public order, not a gendarme, not a policeman; the National Guard had disappeared. The people alone bore arms guarded the public buildings, watched, gave orders, punished; it was an extraordinary and terrible thing to see in the sole hands of those who possessed nothing, all this immense town so full of riches, or rather this great nation, for thanks to centralization, he who reigns in Paris governs France.”¹⁸

449

1. The Truth about Politics

The so-called February Revolution in France (1848) was something “extraordinary and terrible”, and took less than a week to be crushed. However, it resulted in the restoration of the Republic the reduction of working-hours from twelve to ten and above all, led to the introduction of universal male suffrage. Property rights were not even dented. In the opinion of most of the rebels, the election of legislators and governments, as well as their surveillance was enough to avoid an oligarchy. In other words, power politics, by definition embodied in the world of citizens, was seized by certain individuals both inside and outside of the Assembly. The sovereign power could at last be considered to be in the hands of the governed since the choice of rulers was made by each and every citizen and the decisions that they made were subject to public scrutiny. The proof of this, in empirical terms, was the famous printer Albert, a laborer and journalist who had been in the barricades and a part of the Provisional Government that emerged from the Revolution. Briefly, he had reached an agreement to restore the principles of 1789, in the conditions that they had been laid down by Sieyès: the sovereign nation, the principle of representation and the State as the expression of the united will of the citizens. The political form that was established over them constituted, organized (it was endowed by him with official bodies) and grouped together, a wide array of conflicting opinions, interests and wills that could be found in what Hegel designated “civil society”.

Similar to the concept of the Republic, which was largely inspired by Rousseau, the State was reestablished in the interface between immanence and transcendence where Hobbes, two centuries earlier had placed it. It was not completely outside society since it was the consent of the citizens that gave legitimacy and “authority” to the magistrates and rulers. It was not completely diluted in the *demos*, since it sought to rise above personal interests in a way that could allow eventual conflicts to be settled. Moreover, it featured as a universal agency that (by representing individuals on a one-to-one basis) was able to override the fiction of a common will, whereby it was possible to make decisions on behalf of everyone as if they were a single individual subject. Years later, there was an ambiguity implicit in a regime of this kind where “the principle of identity” between the rulers and the governed, (which is the key to democracy), is blended with its opposite “the principle of difference” — between the person who gives orders and the person who obeys, — this characterized monarchy and aristocracy and would be later underlined by Carl Schmitt¹⁹.

In reality, the asymmetry between the rulers and represented never ceased to act as a thorn in the flesh of a system that was of the people and for the people. As a rule, this system was never reformed except at exceptional times such as elections when it could express its dissatisfaction with the decisions made by those whom it had elected. But this is the way that liberal democracy operates. The subordination of public bodies to popular suffrage and the people's independence at the time when a decision is made, (however contradictory it may seem in itself), represent the two pillars which since the end of the Second World War, have underpinned the political model which has become widespread; moreover perhaps not by chance, it is also designated as a "State of Democratic Rights".

450

This era, however, is not restricted to this apparently triumphal cavalcade of French history moving in the direction of representative democracy. Before the uprising had broken out in February 1848, Marx and Engels had risen up in their *Communist Manifesto*, against an interpretation of popular sovereignty based on the hypothesis of national reconciliation that could be brought about simply through a universal extension of the right to vote. In this pamphlet, published a few weeks before the outbreak of the revolt, (and which had repercussions for the rest of the century), the authors cast doubts on the supposed neutrality of the State, whether it be a monarchy or democracy, and its claim to be above the conflicts that had split up civil society as Hegel had represented it in *Principles of the Philosophy of Law*. Far from being defined as the ultimate realization of the spirit, in which the essence of man, free and autonomous, (and being able to overcome the domestic sphere and civil society) will be able to acquire a full existence as a citizen, the State and Hegelian law arise (in the eyes of the authors of the *Manifesto*) as abstractions. As a result, the alienation of the human being is seen in the fact that he is transformed from a creator of political agencies to their very creature and subject. Setting out from the well-known thesis that the history of all societies is nothing but the history of class struggle, with alterations in the political plane being the outcome of alterations in the socio-economic plane, Marx and Engels concluded that: "since the establishment of modern industry and of the world market the [bourgeoisie] has gained exclusive political sway — the executive power of the modern State for managing the affairs of the ruling class"²⁰. In summary, sovereignty had found itself hostage to a particular section of the people, who in reality were not even recognized by the holders of political office but purely and simply by those who controlled the means of production, (although in abstract terms, this might be represented as if sovereignty was really possessed by a particular group of citizens). This implies that institutions and in particular, law, do not operate in a mere shadow play through which the reality of the class struggle is dissimulated. There is no political position there which allows space for the bourgeoisie and proletariat to confront each other; however, there are two powers which are constituted socially and politically, at the same time, in so far as the interests of each puts them in opposing camps. Certainly ideology restores diversity and makes it possible to confront the interests of the private sphere with the aim of safeguarding the abstraction of a political sphere which supposedly will embody the essential features of the people and where class differences can be subsumed and shifted towards the so-called common interest. In practice, however, as the authors of the *Manifesto*, insist, the State remains at the service of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, just as religious alienation was perpetuated in the Deism of the 18th Century philosophers who managed to keep the notion of divine transcendence safe from the criticism that religions were subject to, in the same way political alienation was perpetuated in the liberal State of the 19th Century. This was despite the fact that, in some countries, following the American War of Independence and French Revolution, there was a transition from (in the case of France) absolute monarchy to a society of citizens.

As a result, what Marxism announced as “destiny” involved the effective sovereignty of power, – the “real democracy”, as it was called by Marx, a unique configuration in which a community of free men could gain access to their real truth inasmuch as it was only there that they could be free from the domination of one individual or group over others. This kind of configuration obviously calls into question the idea of the State as formulated by Hobbes where it is grounded on a contract between individuals in which the sovereign, its representative, constituted the body politic. But above all, this configuration casts doubts on and directly refutes the State in its Hegelian formulation, which opposes the idea of representation of individuals in the abstract way put forward by Hobbes, to the corporate representation of concrete interests which can only have place in a hereditary constitutional monarchy. Hegel, in effect, rejects the liberal idea of founding the State on this abstraction which involves an indeterminate people reduced to the mere sum of individual votes and which does not reflect their will except as a particular feature such as “whim, opinion and judge of many (*der Vielen*)”²¹. Now, a “political State”, before anything else, is divided into three substantive divisions: a) “the power to determine and establish the universal – the Legislature”; b) “the power to subsume single cases and the spheres of particularity under the universal – the executive power”; and finally, c) “the power of subjectivity as the will with the power of ultimate decision – the Crown”.

451

When each of these political spheres is regarded separately, as has always been the traditional practice, we invariably come up against the question of which is the better system. This leads to making a choice between rule by the masses, by the few or by a single individual. Now in a constitutional monarchy, the traditional political forms – democracy, aristocracy and monarchy – are all subsumed and as a result, “referring to the status of moments (...): the monarch is a *single person*; the *few* come on the scene with the executive; and the many *en masse* with the legislative”²². All these “moments” now constitute spheres of the State as a whole which when united can be put into effect through the person of the monarch. As the author makes clear in an additional comment: “The power of the Crown contains in itself the three moments of the whole: a) the universality of the constitution and laws; b) council [of Ministers] which refers the *particular* to the universal and c) the moment of ultimate decision as the *self-determination* to which everything else reverts and from which everything else derives the beginning of its actuality.”²³

Whatever difference there may be between the Hobbesian definition and the Hegelian definition, they both stipulate that the sovereign is the single power that unifies the people. Hegel only rejects the formulation of Hobbes, because it undermines the necessary universality of law in the positivity of a right which does not express anything except the private will of the sovereign – a right which is fundamentally despotic. Far from removing domination, the consent of individuals reinforces it by establishing in good faith what La Boétie called “voluntary servitude”, under the pretext that there could not be a political form without this assurance of the order and decision of the king or his commands. Hence the opposition of Hegel to any concept where the sovereign, who embodies in himself the idea of the universal, should be shown as something that had arisen a posteriori, owed its origins to votes, opinions and the will of private individuals. “The king never dies”, as censured in the doctrine of the “two bodies of the king”. And whatever happens, the system of the monarchy must be hereditary. This is because according to Hegel, “to be something not derived, but purely self-originating is precisely the concept of monarchy”²⁴.

It is at this point that reference needs to be made to the criticism of the young Marx, when he argued as early as 1843, (in a text that remained unpublished until 1927) that it was

impossible for a sovereign who was empirically personified as an individual, to represent the expression of popular sovereignty: “If sovereignty exists in the monarch, then it is foolish to speak of an opposed sovereignty in the people, for it is a part of the concept of sovereignty that it can have no double and absolutely opposed existence”²⁵. On political affairs, the author states that “the *One*, very simply does not have any reality except to the extent that there are a large number of *Ones*”²⁶. Stated in other words, popular sovereignty cannot be understood except as a democracy. In all the other forms of government – whether monarchies or republican – the State is seen as a universal form which subsumes the real people, and through its institutions, organizes and regulates various spheres in which the particularities evolved: in short, marriage, business and life in society. Here, the Constitution and common law, as a formal judicial apparatus determine the limits and possible aspects of the will and the private activities of citizens. In contrast, in democracy, the political State is “itself only a self-determination of the people”, or in other words it is a sphere on a level with the remaining forms in which the concrete will of individuals is materialized. As Marx himself makes clear, “in democracy, the Constitution, the law, and State, is itself only a political self-determination of the people and a determinate content of the people”²⁷. And it is for this reason that “in monarchy we have the people of the constitution, in democracy the constitution of the people”²⁸.

452

As Miguel Abensour²⁹, explains in several stages, underlying the Marxist idea of democracy is a concept of politics that is different from the traditional model of unitary domination which is apparent in the Hegelian blueprint of the State. In this viewpoint, unless the people were given a political shape which could only emerge through a sovereign power embedded in a State, the people would only be an inorganic mass. Before people can gain access to political life, a principle is needed that can put their Constitution into effect. This means that the real political form, as we have seen, can only be a constitutional monarchy since it is only here that the mass of individuals and groups of interests can be united in the universal scope of the Constitution which is at the same time endowed with the appropriate powers to legislate and punish, or in other words the same as saying, to act in historical time. In short a constitutional monarchy is a system in which everybody else possesses their truth.

In opposition to a similar conclusion, Marx went on to observe this is the kind of politics in which monarchy is embedded, as well as being “a contradiction” and “extravagant” with regard to the question of sovereignty. This is because it once more reconstitutes the master-slave dialectic and the domination of man by man in so far as sovereignty appears as an external form that is above the lumpenproletariat.

“Hegel here defines the monarch”, said Marx, “as the personality of the State, its certainty of itself. The monarch is personified sovereignty, sovereignty become man, incarnate State or [political] consciousness, whereby all other persons are thus excluded from this sovereignty from personality and from State or [political] consciousness. Now Hegel at the same time fails to endow this ‘sovereign person’ with any content except s ‘I will’, the moment of arbitrary will. The ‘Reason of State’ and ‘consciousness of the State’ is a ‘single’ empirical person excluding all others but this personified person has no content except the abstraction ‘I will’ “.L’État c’est moi.”³⁰

When thinking about the real essence of politics as a means of obtaining an updated view of freedom and life in common, it is necessary to avoid such a metamorphosis of transcendence. This is because the only way it can be carried out is in the immanence of the *demos*. The only system in which politics is made effective through a union with freedom, is democracy.

The idea of democracy as lying at the heart of politics where the statute of forming ideologies is assigned to non-democratic constitutions (which, even when they demand popular sovereignty, in practice condone domination), inevitably leads to a paradox. On the one hand, as is underlined by Miguel Abensour, the “real democracy”, that Marx spoke of is “politics par excellence” and the “apotheosis of political principles”.³¹ On the other hand, it involves dismantling the mechanisms through which politics was traditionally undertaken and rejecting or disregarding any others that could provide equality and justice, in so far as they postulate that this necessarily paves the way to freedom. Although omitted from his text of 1843, this was to be explained more fully by Marx, years later in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: “What system “asked Marx,” will the State undergo in a communist society? In other words what functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present State functions?”³² If, in fact, the State was entirely subordinated to society, and politics was only one of the private spheres in which the collective life was manifested. The various institutions in which it is currently embodied – the law, government, army, police etc. – would cease to have a reason to exist. Once the domination of one class by another has been suppressed, in general terms, man would no longer have a place for the administrative and military organization that underpins this domination: “The French of that time understood this”, Marx concluded, alluding to the insurrection of 1830, “in the sense that in a true democracy the political State would disappear”.³³

Thus it is worth asking how politics will survive the collapse of the State? Or is it better to ask will politics be tenable on the fringes of the paradigm of domination? In short, will there be a way in which it subsists in the pure immanence of the collective? As is well-known, the anarchist will give a negative reply to this last question: the end of the State means redeeming mankind from its alienated condition in which politics like religion has until now remained submissive. As a result, once the State has disappeared, politics is merged with the social world. It is only when man submits to Gods or political leaders and recognizes that, whether through a religious power or the State machine, that they are above his will, that he will live as a being who is alienated from his own essential nature. Moses Hess, a companion of Marx in the *Rhenish Gazette* and lifelong friend (despite philosophic and political differences), states clearly that it is only when the different forms of alienation are removed that there will be a place for a real brotherhood of men to be fully realized: “And just as this curse”, said Hess, “came into being with religion and politics, so it will disappear after the domination of religion and politics has ended”³⁴. Lenin himself, whose relationship with anarchism was, to say the least, complex, wrote in 1917 that:

Democracy is a form of the State; it represents on the one hand, the organized, systematic use of force against persons. But on the other hand, it signifies the formal recognition of equality of citizens, the equal rights of all to determine the structure of and to administer the State.

It should be noted that Lenin is not indifferent to the recognition of equality by democracy. However, the nature of this recognition is purely formal and for this reason he concludes that “the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away”³⁵.

One fact about politics in Marx, is that it is not restricted to domination. Rather than putting forward the Hobbesian idea of the State, albeit in different forms (whether as a Jacobin republic, or a Hegelian constitutional monarchy), Marx thinks of politics as being above all a union which seeks to build a truly free and democratic community. A similar pattern which is evident in various writings by the author involves not just the destruction of the

bourgeois State but also, in contrast with those who support anarchism, a (presumably transitory) movement towards the Socialist State. This also includes what will succeed it and seeks to eliminate class divisions (by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat), and leads society to a situation where the structures of domination, however democratic they may be, will wither away through inertia and futility. It will clearly be the end of politics as a private sphere with a universal jurisdiction, that in the famous expression of Max Weber “monopolizes violence”. However, it will not be the end of politics as a democratic institution of collective action. In effect, the “real democracy”, that Marx refers to in 1843, should obviously not be confused with parliamentary democracy, where in the understanding of the author, equality is reduced to formal aspects of citizenship. It should also not be confused with a society that is definitively reconciled to its own condition. This means not having a State or political institutions that are completely devoid of interventions, such as the society that will in future protect the survivors of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Abensour makes the following comment on this point:

We are thus as far from anarchism as as from communism, as far from a self-regulating social spontaneity as from a species-community that would exist beyond politics.³⁶

Marx is really convinced, at least in 1843, that politics is the only means through which it is possible to realize the essence of man as a free being. This is because in the relationships which evolve in the heart of civil society, particularity cuts across the constraints of reason and by resorting to politics is able to prolong and consolidate the injustice that is enshrined in natural and social differences. Hence the problem is not politics in itself but rather the fact that it adopts a determined holistic form and in this way evades the condition of the simple private sphere by becoming attached to other spheres; in this way it can be made to prefigure a universal community and become emancipated in a way that impedes the emancipation of society. As well as (or in spite of) being abstract, this prefiguring in which everything is claimed to be realized, opens up a wide gulf between the political and social world. This is exactly what took place with Hegelian constitutional monarchy, where according to Marx: “the whole people is subsumed under one of its modes of existence, the political constitution”. Once politics has been established in place of everything else, the people have no choice but to be reduced to the pure indeterminacy of a shapeless mass. In contrast, “in democracy, the *constitution itself* only appears as a determination, that is the self-determination of the people”³⁷. Democracy when established as a return to the concrete plane of existence of the *demos*, is essentially plural and multifarious and is able to unite the political and social worlds, as well as a free man with another free man. It thus abandons the double abstraction of a State separated from society and a man endowed with a purely judicial form of citizenship. In this sense, according to Marx it is projected beyond the traditional question of political systems and is affirmed as a means of refounding the *demos* on a permanent basis. This is achieved either through spreading the principle of popular sovereignty to every sphere of society or resisting the tendency of power to be asserted as an absolute end in itself and adopted by the social totality. It is only in this way that the well-known conclusion of Marx can be understood:

In all forms of the State other than democracy, the State, the Law and the, Constitution is dominant but without really actual domination, that is without materially penetrating the content of other non-political spheres. In a democracy, the constitution, the law, the State, in so far as it is a political constitution, is only a self-determination of the people and a determinate content of the people. Furthermore, it is evident that all forms of the state have democracy for their truth and for that reason are false to the extent that they are not democracy.³⁸

This reversal of the Hegelian thesis clearly echoes that of another that emerged a century and a half earlier in the work by Spinoza, the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. In Chapter XVI of this treatise and again soon afterwards in Chapter XX, Spinoza stated that the liberal democratic State: “seems to be the most natural form of State and to come nearest to preserving natural freedom”³⁹. It should be remembered that in 1843, Spinoza was seen by many German intellectuals (in particular the so-called “Hegelians of the Left”), as a genuine “prophet”. Feuerbach called him the “the Moses of the modern freethinkers and materialists”⁴⁰. Hess, who has already been quoted, regarded him as, “the true founder of German philosophy (...), whose vision of the world is equally present in the founding of French social philosophy”⁴¹. As well as this, his enthusiasm reached the point where he noted in his *Sacred History of Humanity*: “The period that began with Spinoza was nothing less than that in which Christ had breathed and which he and his disciples, as the whole of Christianity had expected and prophesied.”⁴² “This period is evidently modernity — the time in which according to Hess, truth and the absolute are no longer only reflected in an object, as was the case in the Ancient World, not only as a subject, as was the case in the Middle Ages, but rather as a substance that is subject and object or matter and spirit, at the same time. Hess states that in Hegelian metaphysics the spirit outweighs and dominates matter and transforms it as a true subject of history through the principle of negation in a dialectical process through which, from negation to negation, it leads to a reconciliation with itself as an absolute spirit and finally combines in itself being and absolute being. In Spinoza, the opposite is the case and metaphysics is shown as *Ethics*, where being is wholly affirmed in the diversity of existing beings and as subjectivity that has already been objectified in history — in short, in *praxis*. The substance, as Spinoza said, is active by essence and is the reason why each of his modifications — the beings of which it is composed — are identified as *conatus*. This means it is the force in every animate creature toward the preservation of its existence which forms its being. It is also its ability to act, subject to the marks or affections which are printed on it by all the others with which it is in contact and which increase or reduce its own capacity to be and to act. All the beings are found in the plane where new singularities are formed from the aggregation or disaggregation of individuals that are constantly emerging and disappearing. Strictly speaking, apart from by abstraction, there are no individuals that can be taken in isolation as separated monads. The individual is always a collective and complex being, an agglomerate of parts whose natures are combined momentarily in a whole in which the forces of a positive signal (which tend to preserve its existence) are superior to the negative signal which tend to cause its disaggregation. It is this ontology that is developed in the first two parts of the *Ethics*, which is the foundation of the anthropology and politics of Spinoza.

As Moses Hess states, it is here that can be found the key to the abandonment of Hegelian metaphysics. By incorporating (in the manner of Spinoza), the singleness of the substance and the parallelism of matter and spirit and by identifying the essence of being with acting and striving to preserve our being, theory is combined with practice and the idea of freedom abandons the heights of metaphysics to emerge as concrete action in the world. Hess regards the French Revolution as moulding reality to the imperatives of reason. This was an unmistakable proof of the reconciliation between being and absolute being, which in various socialist movements (as they spread more rapidly through Europe) grew into an egalitarian component. Michel Espagne wrote the following: “by placing the philosophy of action in a process against Hegel, Hess (...) for the first time offered the young Hegelians a socialist horizon”⁴³. Certainly the fact that Marx never communicated this enthusiasm for Spinoza, which was clearly apparent to Moses Hess, made it one of the objects of

the well-known criticisms of the *Communist Manifesto* against the self-proclaimed “real socialists”⁴⁴. But the theoretical concept of democracy that he postulated in 1843 showed clear signs that the author whose work (which was rediscovered in the final quarter of the 18th Century) had excited German culture by stirring up the famous “quarrel over Pantheism” (Pantheismusstreit), which was linked to names such as Lessing, Jacobi, Mendelssohn, Goethe, Fichte and Hegel. It was difficult for the young Marx to remain immune from the echoes of such a conflict which lingered on in both the literary milieu and the University itself. Three of his student notebooks show that he had read Spinoza and this included a copy which he made in 1841, of dozens of extracts in his correspondence of the Theologico-Political Treatise. It is not strictly a copy but rather a real re-writing and appropriation of the text through a collage technique which turns the notebooks into a series of studies that one cannot hesitate to regard as a true work by Marx.⁴⁵

456

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Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique [Democracy in America]*, Advertência da 12.a ed., 1848, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 33. Another record of the idea of democracy as a destiny (very different but certainly not absent from Kennedy’s speech) is the myth of the United States as a nation with a vocation to undertake its own destiny, the concept of manifest destiny, as it was called by John o’Sullivan, who was, among other things, American Ambassador in Lisbon, from 1854 to 1858. Cf. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansion and the Empire of Right*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1995.
2. Francis Fukuyama, “The end of history”, *The National Interest*, version of 1989, reprinted in F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man [1992]*, (Translated into Portuguese as: *O Fim da História e o Último Homem*, Lisboa, Gradiva, 1992, p. 13). On the expansion of democratic government throughout the 20th Century, cf. Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 8; Michael Mandelbaum, *Democracy’s Good Name*, New York, Public Affairs, 2007, pp. 1-7; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993, p. 26.
3. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. (translated into Portuguese by Miguel Serras Pereira, Porto, Campo das Letras, 2004, p. 252).

4. Although often regarded and described in crude terms as a phenomenon of our time, there have always been contradictions in the history of democracy even if today this perception is clearer or perhaps more critical. This can be seen in the comments of A. Stephanson on the activities of Woodrow Wilson, the driving-force behind the League of Nations: “Neither the experience of the Second World War nor even the McCarthyist 1950s compares to the repression of domestic dissent during World War I. Wilson himself sensed no contradiction here in his odes to democracy and the popular voice, just as he saw no contradiction in arguing for public diplomacy while conducting it completely by himself, and just as he saw no contradiction in denouncing imperialism and intervention in the affairs of other nations while sending armies into Mexico and revolutionary Russia”, *Manifest Destiny*, cit.,p.119.

457

5. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *La haine à la démocratie [The Hatred of Democracy]*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2005, (trans. into Portuguese as *O Ódio à Democracia*, Lisboa, Navegantes Editores, 2006).

6. Cf. Carlo Galli, *Il disagio della democrazia*, [The Discomfort of Democracy] Turin, Einaudi, 2011.

7. Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the end of liberal democracy”, *Theory and Event*, Vol. 7, Issue 1, 2003, (French translation in Wendy Brown, *Les habits neufs de la politique mondiale. Neo-libéralisme et neo-conservatisme*, Paris, Les Prairies ordinaires, 2007, pp.61-62).

8. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois I*, Parte I, Livro II, Cap. 1 e 2, [The Spirit of the Laws Pt.1 Book II, Ch. 1 and 2] Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1979, pp. 131-136.

9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique [Democracy in America]* [1835], Introduction, Paris, Gallimard/Folio, 1986, p. 37.

10. The application of the idea of democracy to ancient Greece, although superficial in its current usage, is highly controversial among historians, political scientists and even Hellenists themselves. However, recently Florence Dupont stated that democracy in Athens was not democratic, “non pas parce qu’il y avait des esclaves, mais parce qu’elle ne connaissait aucune des valeurs qui fondent notre démocratie”, [not because it has slaves but because it did not know the values that underlie our democracy] *Le Monde*, 5th July 2013. In the same sense, Luciano Canfora states that “aucun texte écrit par un auteur athénien ne célèbre la démocratie. Ce n’est sûrement pas un hasard”, [There is no text written by a Greek author that celebrated democracy. This is surely not a matter of chance] *La démocratie. Histoire d’une idéologie*, [Democracy: the history of an ideology] (Translated into French) Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 27. In contrast, Jacqueline de Romilly is forthright: “Au début du v^e siècle, le pas était franchi, une fois pour toutes. La démocratie, ou souveraineté du peuple, était entrée dans les mœurs. Pendant toute l’époque classique, elle ne devait plus être contestée à Athènes qu’au cours de quelques crises rares et éphémères. Il s’agissait donc bien d’une démocratie au sens où nous l’entendons”, [At the end of the 5th Century B.C., the step was taken, once and for all. Democracy

or the sovereignty of the people became an accepted custom. During the whole of the classical era, it was no longer challenged in Athens except in the course of rare or fleeting crises. It was thus a question of democracy in our understanding of the term] *Problèmes de la démocratie grèque*, [Problems of Greek Democracy] Paris, Hermann, 1975, p. 20. The most respected study on this question remains that of Mogens Herman Hansen, published in an abridged form in English a decade after the Danish edition in six volumes: *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes, Structure, Principles and Ideology*, Oxford/ Massachussets, Basil Backwell, 1991.

458

11. *Ibidem*, I Part, Chap. IV, cit., p. 109.

12. *De la démocratie en Amérique [Democracy in America]* II [1840], Part IV, Chap.I, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, pp. 395-396.

13. *Ibidem*, II, Part IV, Chap. VI, cit. p. 434-435.

14. "This passion [for equality] tends to elevate the humble to the rank of the great. But one also finds in the human heart a depraved taste for democracy which impels the weak to attempt to bring the strong down to their level and reduces men to preferring equality in servitude to inequality in freedom", *ibidem*, I, Part I, Chap. III, cit., p. 104.

15. Half a century earlier, Kant explored this line of reasoning further: "Among the three types of States, democracy, in the strictest sense of the word is necessarily a *despotism*, because it establishes an executive power in which all decide for, and if need be against *one* (who thus does not agree); that is all who are not quite all decide, and this is a contradiction of the general will of itself and with freedom," *Zum ewigen Frieden*, B 25, [Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch] (Translated into Portuguese by Artur Morão, *A Paz Perpétua e Outros Opúsculos*, Lisboa, Edições 70, p. 130).

16 Claude Lefort, "Preface" to Alexis de Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, cit., p. XLII. The "ambiguity", in this case is literal since although there are exceptions, de Tocqueville, is far from ignoring these phenomena which he interprets in a consistent way, as being natural in an egalitarian society: "How is it that the poor, lower and thus powerful classes have not dreamt of escaping from their poverty and their inferiority in pursuit of their own interests? (...) And to speak more specially of property which is, as it were, the foundation of our social order, all the privileges which covered it and which, so to speak, concealed the privilege of property having been destroyed and the latter remaining the principal obstacle to equality among men and appearing to be the only sign of inequality – was it not necessary, I will not say that it should be abolished in its turn but at least that the thought of abolishing it should occur to the minds of those who did not enjoy it?", *Souvenirs*, cit. pp. 101-102.

17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, cit., p. 102.

18. *Ibidem*, p. 97.

19. *Verfassungslehre*, [Constitutional Theory] Paris, PUF, 1993, p. 352.

20. *Communist Manifesto* [1848], (translated into Portuguese by José Barata-Moura, in Marx/ Engels, *Obras Escolhidas*, Lisboa, Edições Avante, 2008, p. 128.) 459
21. *Grundlinien*, [Baselines] para. 281.
22. *Ibidem*, parág. 273.
23. *Ibidem*, parág. 275.
24. *Ibidem*, parág. 279.
25. Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* [1843-1844] [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right], (translated into French by Albert Baraquin, *Critique du droit politique hegelien*, Paris, Les Editions Sociales, 1975, p. 77.)
26. *Ibidem*, p. 74.
27. *Ibidem*, pp. 80-81.
28. *Ibidem*, p. 79.
29. Miguel Abensour, *La démocratie contre l'État. Marx et le moment machiavélien*, Paris, PUF, 1997.
30. *Zur Kritik*, [The Critique] cit., p. 74.
31. Cit., p. 55.
32. *Critique of the Gotha Programme* [1875], (translated into Portuguese by José Barata-Moura, in Marx/ Engels, *Obras Escolhidas*, Lisboa, Edições Avante, 2009).
33. *Zur Kritik*, [The Critique] cit., p. 81. The argument was expressed in a much more assertive way so that the proletariat was defined as the real subject of the historical process and the notion of communism replaced that of "real democracy". In the title for example, can be seen the formulation that appears in the *Communist Manifesto*: "When in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances to organize itself as a class, if by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class and as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions of production, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class", in Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, (translated into Portuguese by José Barata-Moura, Lisboa, Edições Avante, 1997.) A paradigmatic reformulation of the same thesis, although impaired by a degree of "empiricism" and by the pedagogical aims of the author. It is from Lenin's *The State and Revolution* [1917].
34. Moses Hess, *Philosophy of Action*, cit., in Miguel Abensour, cit. p. 59.

35. *The State and Revolution*, V. I. Lenine, *Selected Works*, Tomo II, Lisboa, Edições Avante, 1981, p. 291. 36 Cit., p. 79. 460
36. Cit., p. 79.
37. *Zur Kritik*, cit., p. 68.
38. Cit. p. 70.
39. TTP, G III, p. 195 e p. 245, (translated by Diogo Pires Aurélio, Lisboa, IN-CM, 3.a ed. integralmente revista, 2004, p. 332 e p. 389). On the question of Spinozism in Germany at the end of the 18th Century and beginning of the 19th Century cf. Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity. Mendelssohn, Lessing and Heine*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004; Steven B. Smith, "The Legacy of the Treatise", in Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism and the Question of Jewish Identity*, New Haven and London, 1997, pp. 166-196; *Jacobi und Mendelssohn. Eine Analyse des Spinozastreit*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1988; Winfried Schröder, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1987; Michel Espagne, "Le spinozisme de Moses Hess", in Pierre-François Moreau (coord.), *Spinoza entre lumière et romantisme*, [Spinoza between light and romanticism] Les Cahiers de Fontenay n.o 36-38, Fontenay, aux Roses, 1985, pp. 143-157.
40. Cit., in Maximilien Rubel, "Marx à la rencontre de Spinoza", [Marx and the encounter with Spinoza] *Cahiers Spinoza*, n.o 1, éditions République, 1977, p. 28.
41. Moses Hess, *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit von einem Jünger Spinoza's* [1837], trad. de Shlomo Avineri, *The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings*, ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 101.
42. *Ibidem*, p. 44.
43. Cit., p. 148.
44. Marx and Engels accused the "German literati" of having copied French ideas without taking into account that, "when these writings immigrated from France into Germany, French social conditions had not immigrated along with them". Thus "Since it [French socialist-communist literature] ceased in the hands of the German to express the struggle of one class with the other, he felt conscious of having overcome "French one-sidedness", and of representing not true requirements but the requirements of Truth, not the interests of the proletariat but the interests of human nature, of Man in general who belongs to no class, has no reality and who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy." *Communist Manifesto*, cit., pp. 150 -151.
45. Cf. Karl Heinrich Marx, Cuaderno Spinoza, tradução, estudo preliminar e notas de Nicolás González Varela, Barcelona, Montesinos, 2012. o texto, originalmente publicado na edição MEGA, I, Berlim, 1929, foi depois editado em francês, nos *Cahiers Spinoza*, n.o 1, 1977, acompanhado de estudos e comentários de Maximilien Rubel e François Matheron.