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Beyond Force and Consent: Althusser, Spinoza, Hobbes

About Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," both too much and too little have been said: too much because innumerable commentaries and summaries restate or claim to restate its "theory of ideology" and too little because the fact that Althusser not only did not elaborate a complete theory but provided only a "schematic outline" (Althusser 1971, 158) is seldom, if ever, acknowledged, let alone analyzed. While we cannot fault Althusser for failing to produce what he never promised (the essay is, after all, labeled "Notes towards an investigation"), neither can we ignore the fact that the investigation never followed.

The English translation of Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1971) began with the following note: "This text is made up of two extracts from an ongoing study. The subtitle 'Notes towards an investigation' is the author's own. The ideas expounded should not be regarded as more than an introduction to a discussion." When Althusser reprinted the essay in 1976 in the collection *Positions*, he introduced it by saying, "This article appeared in *La pensée*, number 151 (June 1970). It is composed of fragments of an originally much longer study." The discrepancy between these introductory notes is not insignificant. It signals not only a shift in Althusser's attitude toward one of his best-known works but, perhaps even more important, the difficulties internal to the theoretical project whose sole public expression was this essay. In the six-year interval, the "extracts" had dwindled into "fragments," and the study was no longer ongoing but apparently had been set aside, if not abandoned altogether. Most commentators have simply disregarded these prefatory statements as

I wish to thank Etienne Balibar for his illuminating commentary on certain aspects of this essay.

exercises in rhetoric and have tended to take the essay as the more or less coherent statement of a theory of ideology. In fact, the essay consists of extracts from a longer (apparently completed) manuscript entitled *De la superstructure*, only a part of which was devoted to developing the notion of ideology. The original manuscript was very much concerned with the events of May–June 1968 in France, a fact that partially explains Althusser's decision two years later not to publish the entire work in a political conjuncture very different from the one in which it was conceived. But there are other reasons beyond the political, having instead to do with the philosophical or theoretical impasses that Althusser encountered. It can be said with some certainty that the publication of this manuscript will pose more questions than it answers and reproduce on a somewhat larger scale the dilemmas of the published text. Such questions may seem of purely historical or even exegetical importance, a matter of texts or even words rather than arguments, but make no mistake: these dilemmas are decisive; they are our dilemmas and as such are inescapable for all those who dare to think with Althusser "at the extreme," as he liked to say.

For this reason, it is time to take Althusser at his word and to seek not the coherence, secret or manifest, potential or actual, of the essay's arguments but precisely the principle(s) of its incoherence and the conditions of its impossibility. Why not return to Althusser and perform a symptomatic reading of his text, that is, the text that he published, which in many respects is a different text from "De la superstructure" (both because of what Althusser left out and because of a few key passages that were added and appear only in the published essay)? What rendered "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" not only unfinished but unfinishable? While it is certainly possible to attempt to develop these fragments into a theory, it might be equally useful to begin by seeking in this essay that which prevents the construction of a theory of ideology, that is, its impasses and its symptoms. We may paradoxically discover that the importance of this essay lies more in the problems it formulates (but overlooks) and the questions that it poses without recognizing them as such than in its "answers."

Among the possible paths to take into this essay and its complexities, one seems particularly obvious. Much has been written about the influence of Lacan on Althusser's "notes towards an investigation" of a theory of ideology, especially on the section concerning the interpellation of individuals as subjects. Indeed, Althusser's distinction between the subject and the Subject, together with his assertion that the subject becomes a subject only by subjecting itself to the Subject, seems almost a paraphrase of Lacan's statement in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other" (1978, 188). Some commentators have suggested that it was the incompletely theorized relation between ideology and the unconscious that hindered the development of

Althusser's theory (Montag 1984). We now know, however, ^{Ublazih} that Althusser's early enthusiasm for Lacan's work was considerably tempered by the 1970s and that he quite deliberately refrained from embracing a system that he considered a "flight forward into theory," beyond the objective limits of the historical present (Althusser 1983, Montag 1991). While it is important to acknowledge this filiation, we must take care not to reduce its real complexity and assume that the terms and formulations of Lacan and Althusser are simply equivalent. And even more important, there is no longer any question of "correcting" or completing Althusser's essay with the aid of Lacanian theory, given that theory's own impasses and fragmentation.

Of the other, less obvious ways into this work (Althusser warns us in the very essay we are examining to question all "obviousnesses"), one seems not only timely but particularly compelling in the light of what we know about Althusser. Most of his career as a teacher was spent examining the texts of "classical" political philosophy, that is, the political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau (and, in addition, Machiavelli and Hegel). Because he read all philosophical texts as marked by the struggles in which they participated, Althusser believed that to do philosophy was not to write about these struggles from a distance, from a point outside them, but to intervene in them, drawing lines of demarcation that bring their constitutive conflicts to light. The struggles internal to seventeenth-century political philosophy, particularly the struggles that attended the transition from the "world of subjection" to "the world of right," as Etienne Balibar (1991) has recently described it—that is, from the world of subjects to the world of citizens, in which obedience to authority is said to be willed by those who obey, as well as the struggles over the specification of the legal subject as possessor of rights (alienable and inalienable) and property—were very much alive for Althusser, even if they have tended to disappear in much of his published work. In their ensemble, these struggles form one of the conditions of possibility of "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," imprinting their conflicts indelibly upon it, even if it displays them without acknowledgment.

One of the nodal points of theoretical conflict in the text is the section "Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects." Among the effects produced by this essay, one has been decisive: the notion that the individual subject, the individual as origin of thought, speech, and action is not a given but a product, neither the condition nor the foundation of ideology but its necessary effect. This allows Althusser, even as he insists on the transhistorical character of ideology and thus of the subject, to speak of a history of the forms of subjectivity. The productivity of this specific intervention is undeniable: among other things, it opened the way to Foucault's discussion of the different regimes of individualization in *Discipline and Punish* and later works, and further, to Foucault's assertion in the face of the resurgent liberalism of the

1980s that "the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state" (1982, 216).

But Althusser always warned against the theoretical fantasy of the omnipotence of ideas, the fantasy that the "anatomical obviousness of the truth" cannot fail to enlighten. On the contrary, philosophy is necessarily engaged in "an interminable struggle to insure new positions against the return of the old" (1989, 274). It is not too much to say that despite, or perhaps because of, the productivity of Althusser's central thesis concerning ideology, his position faced a massive theoretical attack, not, of course, primarily from outside Marxism but from within it. His critics often focused their attention on precisely this "sensitive" point (i.e., that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects), usually content to note the "bleakness" of Althusser's "vision" (Eagleton 1991). This charge itself revealed the persistence of the old positions: immanent in these criticisms was the often disavowed (or to use a psychoanalytic metaphor, "split off") idea that revolt must be the outcome of the rational choice of autonomous individual subjects, who would thus function as the radical origin of social practice. It is not possible here to trace the gradual process by which this fantasy emerged in the philosophical "conscious," beginning with questions about agency and ending up with Marxist theories of methodological individualism.

But far more important than these condemnations of the text on the basis of norms radically foreign to it is the question of Althusser's intervention itself. To what extent did Althusser fail to anticipate the reactions and counterattacks of the philosophy of the subject in the formulation of his critique of the subject as origin? At this point, we are compelled to examine the link between the theoretical effects of the exposition of the notion that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects and the (impasses) and (conflicts) internal to it. Today we read this essay from a certain distance: twenty years after its publication and perhaps ten years after most of the summaries and condemnations. From this distance, far from the din of its commentators, the essay appears in all its unadorned complexity. It is indeed composed of fragments: the fragments themselves often so profoundly elliptical that they seem to exhibit the scars of their suture. One of the most interesting and symptomatic passages occurs near the conclusion of the essay. In it Althusser asserts the circularity of ideological subjection. He argues that ideology "ensures simultaneously" the fundamental "ambiguity" of the subject, who is both free, "a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions," and simultaneously "a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission" (182), in order to conclude that a subject is interpellated as subject in order that it shall freely submit to its subjection.

There is more than a little that is equivocal about this passage, and its equivocation has produced effects that have shaped the reception of the essay; for, at this point, Althusser seems merely to have inverted the liberal explanation of politics and indeed is often assumed to have done so by commentators. The subject is "constructed" by the Ideological State Apparatuses in such a way that it will automatically "choose" (i.e., not really choose at all, given that it is not possible not to choose to do so) to subject itself to the established order. It is precisely this reading that has made Althusser a functionalist, having elaborated a scheme according to which individuals are constructed as functions of a system whose reproduction it is their purpose or end to ensure. Althusser, however, has made it quite clear that he has not substituted one linear scheme for another; it is not the case that subjects are "constructed" so that they will then (appear to) choose subjection any more than it can be said that originally free individuals choose (because they believe, mistakenly or correctly, that a given social order will serve their interests) to subject themselves to a ruling class. Instead, Althusser produces one of his paradoxes: he describes the two moments of subjection as "simultaneous," a (vicious) circle in which the subject has always already consented to the subjection that must necessarily precede the "act" of subjecting oneself, that is, the act of consent.

I have intentionally introduced a term (consent) that is strangely foreign to Althusser's essay, precisely in order to call attention to its absence. It would seem difficult not to read the distinction between the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses as a material expression of the opposition, so central to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, between force and consent. Is it not the function of the Ideological State Apparatuses to secure through deceit (or perhaps merely persuasion) the consent of the subject population so that the ruling class must only rarely resort to violence (by means of the Repressive State Apparatuses: the courts, the police, and the armed forces) to secure the involuntary (or reluctant or resigned) compliance of the exploited classes? All the more remarkable, then, that Althusser chooses to avoid the Gramscian formula at precisely the moment that he seems most closely to reproduce it. And this avoidance, which is never registered nor explained, produces some strange effects, transforming Althusser's argument at its most crucial point into a tautology. Accordingly, he explains the "essential" distinction between the Repressive State Apparatuses and the Ideological State Apparatuses thus: "the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence,' whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function 'by ideology.'" The Ideological State Apparatuses function by ideology—Althusser, who repeats this phrase consistently (the Ideological State Apparatuses are never said to function by anything other than "ideology"), neglects ever to address the glaring circularity of his argument, apparently content to reject the notion of consent without supplying a concept to take its place.

We would be gravely mistaken not to confer upon this omission the theoretical importance that it deserves, for Althusser's notion of the vicious circle of subjection, even as it alludes to Gramsci, only underscores not simply the contradictions immanent in his use of "consent" but even more the way in which Gramsci's text betrays itself in its choice of philosophical references. In his theorization of the opposition of force and consent, Gramsci cites Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1964), a work in which (at least as Althusser read it) consent all but disappears into relations of force. When Gramsci argues that "the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance" through force "but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (1971, 244; emphasis added), he builds upon the foundation of what he earlier called the "dual perspective," the idea that the rule of the ruling class exists on two levels, "corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur—half animal and half human" (1971, 170–71).

In fact, as Althusser has demonstrated, Machiavelli evokes the opposition between the animal and the human, which he explains in social terms as the opposition of law and force (Machiavelli 1964, 145), only to dismiss the discussion of law as of little importance (relative to force) in maintaining the rule of the Prince: "Since there cannot be good laws where good armies are lacking, and where there are good armies there must be good laws, I shall leave aside the discussion of laws and speak about armed forces" (ibid., 99). Not only does Machiavelli dismiss laws (he says not one word about either rights or obligations) as purely subordinate to the social relationship of forces, he, in opposition to Gramsci, argues that consent, with the exception of fleeting moments, must be the product of force: "armed prophets conquered and the unarmed came to ruin. . . . People in general are unstable, and it is easy to persuade them of something but difficult to hold them to that persuasion; and therefore things must be arranged so that when the people no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force" (ibid., 45). To use Althusser's language, Machiavelli seems to posit the permanent domination of the Repressive State Apparatus over the Ideological State Apparatuses and a permanent excess of force over consent, excluding in advance the very notion of ideological hegemony as a (successful) strategy for class rule. Given the extremism, even the crudeness, of Machiavelli's theses, how could Althusser have credited him, as he did, with the inauguration of political theory (1989, 257)?

Althusser saw Machiavelli as a "solitary" thinker, whose "uncanny" originality derived from his writing (after) and (outside) the grand idealism of medieval scholasticism—but before and thus equally outside the juridical ideology of the human subject characteristic of capitalist states. Machiavelli "did not speak the language of law or rights (*droit*) but the language of armed force" (Althusser 1988, 471). Even more, Machiavelli insisted that one can know the Prince (i.e., the reality of political power or domination) only from

the point of view of the people, "know him" not to denounce his injustice but to see how his power functions. Thus, domination is only knowable "from below"; it is not what great princes say about themselves or what is said about them (whether to glorify or denounce them) but what they actually do to secure their power that matters from the point of view of political theory. Thus, Machiavelli provides a position from which the emergence of the early modern state can be seen in the positivity of its practice, not in the edifying discourse of freedom, equality, and property with which it simultaneously denies and justifies its cruelty and violence. It goes without saying that Machiavelli's position is radically opposed to the philosophical position internal to this state, a philosophical position built on the foundation of the juridical ideology of free and equal subjects. Machiavelli, like Marx, invites us to view the emergence of the capitalist state from the point of view of the people, that is, its victims.

It is in this context, the emergence of capitalist states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the philosophical struggles that accompanied their emergence, that the discrepancies and lapses of Althusser's notion of the ideological interpellation of individuals as subjects become intelligible and analyzable. To speak of subjects as products, not as givens, and to refuse the notion of consent is not simply to allude to these struggles; it is to participate in them by taking one side against another. In this case (as in so many others), Althusser takes the side of Spinoza (who claimed that only Machiavelli had written intelligently of politics) against Hobbes (and *avant la lettre* Locke). By occupying this position, Althusser is able to name what Hobbes at his most liberal shows but does not say: that the state functions by interpellating individuals as subjects. Pierre-Francois Moreau, a former student of Althusser, writes of the shift in political thought that accompanied the rise of the early modern state in the seventeenth century: "Instead of saying that the state is a natural fact like the family, a necessity as a result of sin and human cruelty, a power given directly by God to the Prince, or an organic assembly of corporations, orders, and cities, it will be said that it emanates (by a delegation whose modalities can be quite varied) from the originary (will) of legal subjects (*sujets de droit*), the ultimate repositories of the source of sovereignty" (1982, 133).

"The originary will of legal subjects": the reference to Hobbes could not be clearer. There is no need here to rehearse Hobbes's well-known argument: Men in the state of nature exist necessarily as isolated and hence free individuals.¹ The rough equality of all men in matters physical and intellectual, together with the fact that they desire the same things in a world where

1. I use the term "man" instead of the generic "human" in order not to obscure Hobbes's ambivalent attitude toward women as political subjects.

human subject

such things are scarce, sets every one against every other one and makes any kind of society impossible. But because men inevitably act for their own self-preservation, they will see the necessity of agreeing to confer their rights and powers upon a sovereign. Society thus begins with an originary act of voluntary authorization: "every man should say to every man, I give up my right of governing myself, to this man or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorise all his actions in like manner" (Hobbes 1968, 227). Of course, as Hobbes readily admits, such a founding and constitutive act only in the rarest of cases actually precedes the origin of a society (ibid., 187). Rather, such authorization (which amounts to a transfer of a natural right by originally free and equal individuals, each acknowledging no sovereign authority but his own), which must be determined to be voluntary (ibid., 192) (if the condition of men is not to be mere slavery), is most often the retroactive effect of the silent and unknowing but somehow not involuntary act, the political meaning of which Hobbes must interpret. We are thus left with the brute fact that because, in the vast majority of cases, society has always existed, that is, that there was no presocial state of nature from which men escaped through a pact of subjection, individuals have thus always already consented to their subjection. Even those commonwealths acquired by conquest are founded upon a covenant freely and voluntarily made by the vanquished, who promises "either in express words, or by other sufficient signes of the will, that so long as his life and the liberty of his body is allowed him, the victor shall have use thereof, at his pleasure" (ibid., 255). A hermeneutics of consent is thus put into place with the enumeration of an endless possible series of "signes" to be interpreted. Beyond the obviousness of "express" consent, the words of which correspond to its meaning, there are "signes by inference": "sometimes the consequence of Silence, sometimes the consequence of actions; sometimes the consequence of forbearing an action" (ibid., 193).

Without exaggeration, we may say that Hobbes has provided us with the first sketch of the Ideological State Apparatus characteristic of the capitalist epoch: individuals are addressed as the authors of their own subjection, bound unto death by the covenant into which they have freely entered, even (or perhaps especially) when the state of subjection is authorized only retroactively, by an originary act that never took place. Hobbes thus produced, long before Althusser, the circle of subjection, and for a very good reason: men make such covenants only out of fear, whether in the rare but archetypal case of fear of violent death in the state of nature at the hands of "masterless men" or, more commonly, fear of death at the hands of the sovereign who has a monopoly of force. But how is it possible that an individual who makes a covenant out of fear, under duress, can be said voluntarily to have done so? Hobbes tells us as if in an aside or as an afterthought that the words "free" and

"liberty" have no meaning except as they are applied to bodies: if no force prevents the body from acting or the tongue from speaking then an individual can be said to be free (1968, 262). Hence, "fear and liberty are consistent" (ibid.). When a man acts out of fear he does so freely and voluntarily, for no "external impediments" (ibid., 189) prevent him from refraining from action and incurring the risk of punishment or death. Thus, with the exception of the rare cases of an actual transition from the state of nature to the civil state, a coercive power sufficient to compel individuals "freely" not simply to keep, but even to make covenants (silently, whether through action or the absence of action) is the necessary condition of the consent upon which the commonwealth is founded.

Hobbes, however, was well aware that even the permanent excess of force over consent (on this point Hobbes is in accord with Machiavelli) was not enough to guarantee the obedience of the subjects, that is, as he so well knew, to prevent under specific conditions the revolt of the multitude whose sheer numbers constitute a force that no state can resist. The multitude: thanks to the work of Negri (1991) and Balibar, among others, we know the importance of this concept of the multitude for seventeenth-century philosophical thought insofar as it is distinguished from political concepts such as "the people" or "civil society," which have functioned as the symbolic foundations of political order (Balibar 1989, 106). Very schematically, we can say that one of the central functions of the juridical ideologies of the individual subject is to mask and deny the very existence of "the masses and their tendency to subversion" and that Hobbes's notion of the state, in particular, "can be understood as a system of preventative defense against the mass movements that form the basis of civil wars (of classes and religions) and of revolutions" (Balibar 1989). Indeed, Hobbes's *Behemoth*, an account of the English revolution written after the Restoration, begins with the observation that King Charles I did not possess sufficient force to keep "the people from uniting into a body able to oppose him" (Hobbes 1990, 2).

"To keep the people from uniting" is precisely the objective that Hobbes pursues throughout his work. In relation to this objective, the juridical ideology of the natural rights of the individual does not simply mask or deny the reality but must have itself become real in order to modify strategically the reality of which it is a part. Thus, for Hobbes, the multitude, apart from the mediating function of the sovereign who brings peace (and society) through subjection, is simultaneously impossible and illegal. Revolt against the sovereign by the multitude is impossible because in the state of nature (which is the state to which individuals return the moment they no longer acknowledge their subjection to the sovereign) men are incapable of combining into even the smallest of associations; the war of every one against every other one leaves nowhere for a shelter (even the relation of parent and child in such a

state is, as long as it lasts, based on the child's fear of violent death at the hands of the more powerful parent). It is simultaneously illegal (the paradox stands unresolved in Hobbes) because only individuals as individuals possess rights, are the owners of their actions and speech, "wherefore a multitude cannot promise, contract, acquire right, convey right, act, have, possess and the like, unless it be every one apart and man by man; so there must be as many promises, compacts, rights, and actions, as men" (Hobbes 1972, 174). Thus, Hobbes's state interpellates individuals, and only individuals, as subjects—subjects, moreover, who have voluntarily authorized their own subjection. The state counters the multitude by reducing it preemptively to the individuals who are its constituent parts.

But if it is true that Hobbes put into practice a notion of the interpellation of individuals as subjects, it is equally true that this element has remained invisible except in the very peculiar sense of which I have spoken, to Althusser himself, who was able to grasp this notion only in "fragments." If Althusser has located (indirectly, belatedly) something very determinately unheard and overlooked in Hobbes, it is because, to use his own terminology, he occupied a very precise philosophical position. For him, philosophy, like society, is "a necessarily conflictual reality" in which "one cannot see everything from everywhere; the essence of this conflictual reality can only be discovered on the condition that one occupies certain positions and not others in the conflict itself" (1991, 21). The reference to Machiavelli's preface to *The Prince* is explicit here ("it is necessary to be of the people to know the Prince"), and we can reformulate it in relation to Althusser: it is necessary to be Spinoza (i.e., to occupy Spinoza's philosophical position) to read this element in Hobbes. In a very important sense, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" constitutes a Spinozist reading of Hobbes, initiating the Spinozist critique of Hobbes that Spinoza never articulated.

What is essential to Spinoza's position? First and perhaps most decisive is his massive and nearly total rejection of juridical ideology in all its forms. He began the political section of his supposedly liberal work, *The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, with a most illiberal and, in fact, Machiavellian thesis that right (*jus*) is coextensive with and has no existence apart from power (*potentia*). From this position, Hobbes's individualism appears absurd. The solitary individual as original owner (*dominus*) of rights and the author of the founding covenant is as sovereign de jure as he is powerless de facto. Spinoza refuses such paradoxes: if indeed right is coextensive with power, individuals alone have little power or right but "if two come together and unite their strength, they have jointly more power, and consequently more right . . . than both of them separately, and the more there are that have so joined in alliance the more right they all collectively will possess" (1951, 2:13). For this reason, the relation between the individual and the state is, in fact (as opposed to

theory), not at all the concern of the authorities. Their sovereign right extends only as far as their power, no matter how eloquent the philosophical (i.e., fictional) foundation with which it is provided. They possess right only insofar as their force is greater than the opposing force, not "of each individual but of the multitude, which is guided by one mind" (ibid., 1:2). If it is true that we can know the Prince only from the point of view of the people, it is equally true that we can know the people only from the point of view of the Prince. In this case, we will learn from what rulers fear, and their practice betrays what their words attempt to deny: they do not in the least fear individuals; they fear the multitude, the masses.

Spinoza thus allows us to interpret the function of that little bit of nonsense that Hobbes produced in his theorization of the rights of the supreme authorities: the multitude is impossible and anyway it is illegal; it cannot act, but if it does act, its actions have no legal status; it cannot speak, but if it does speak, it should not be listened to. Hobbes's state attempts (and I underscore attempts) to deny the existence of a reality (the multitude) that it is simultaneously constructed to act upon, to counter, to control. In fact, the strategic imperative of Hobbes's major philosophical interventions (and interventions they were) is based on the recognition (betrayed by the very words designed to deny it) that the reality is the inverse of his statement in *De Cive*: only the multitude possesses rights because only the multitude possesses power; only the multitude can act (in a politically meaningful way).

It is at this point that another component of this conflictual reality becomes visible from Spinoza's theoretical position. The distinction between the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses cannot, without great difficulty, be assimilated into the model of force and consent insofar as this model is grounded in a distinction between two orders or, to use precisely the notion that Spinoza rejected, two substances: body and mind, matter and spirit, necessity and freedom. Force is exercised on bodies, while persuasion is used to convince the minds of subjects in their irreducible freedom to choose subjection. Althusser, as we have seen, stops short of such notions—and for good reason: one of his most important objectives is to grasp the materiality of ideology, to dismantle every notion of ideology as error, illusion, or untruth, thus belonging to an immaterial realm of spirit or intellect.

From the point of view of the Spinozist position, the notion that a society is founded on the consent of the free individuals who comprise it (and who are thus, as we have shown, subjects in the dual sense of the term: they are the authors or subjects of their own subjection) is a fiction in that it does not correspond to the reality upon which the state rests (the relationship of forces between the antagonistic collectivities of the dominant and the dominated), but it is not the case that this fiction is either illusory or false. As Machiavelli said, rulers cannot rely on persuasion to maintain their rule, hoping that "noble

fictions" will dupe the people into voluntarily supporting their authority. Thus, when Althusser argued that "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," he did not simply invert Hobbes to say that the individual subject was an illusion that obscured the reality of the masses and their struggle; for when he modifies his statement by saying that "ideology has a material existence," Althusser prevents us from conceptualizing the opposition between the real and the imaginary as an opposition between the true and the false. In fact, these propositions taken together force us to abandon the notion that (false) ideas cause action (e.g., that consent causes obedience) and to speak instead of actions "inserted into practices" (1971, 168) governed by rituals, themselves inscribed in the "material existence of an ideological apparatus."

"Ideas" prior to and outside the actions that they were once thought to cause but in relation to which they must now be seen as "immanent," causes entirely coincident with their effects, are declared to have "disappeared" from the "presentation" of the notion of ideology (*ibid.*, 169). Ideas disappear into actions as Spinoza's God disappears into His creation: *Deus sive Natura*. Althusser even provocatively repeats Spinoza's casual gesture (the offhandedness of which fooled no one) of equating God and nature by letting drop the following phrase (which appears only once in the published text but several times, as if repeated for effect, in "De la superstructure"): "Consciousness, that is, the behavior [*comportement*: the word is misleadingly translated in the English version as "attitude"] of individuals-subjects" (1971, 182; 1976, 134)—consciousness, that is, behavior. Althusser's example is well known: "kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe." We would be gravely mistaken to see in this statement an assertion of a sequence according to which mind follows matter or the body like a shadow. This would be simply to invert the traditional hierarchical relation between the dual substances while preserving the dualism. Rather, Althusser's paraphrase of Pascal describes a most un-Pascalian (and very Spinozist) relationship of simultaneity. To say "perform the physical gestures of obedience and you will consent to the authority whom you obey" is to insist on the inseparability of the mind and the body and to refuse any dualism that would allow a freedom of consciousness to accompany the material determination of the body. For Althusser, the same causes that determine the body to obey determine the mind to consent.

But we seem thus to have been led precisely to the impasse proper to Althusser's essay, the very problem few commentators have failed to note: are we not in a world of functional automatons, a world of domination without hope of resistance, all the more hopeless in that Althusser's (Spinozist) materialism prevents us from positing even the ghost of resistance in the machine (or apparatus) of domination? In an important sense, Althusser seems to have so accurately described the circle of subjection proper to the history of

societies based on "right" only by remaining trapped within it or, to put it another way, since ideology has no outside, by suppressing the notion of its internal distance, the distance that separates it from itself and disrupts the circularity of its functioning.

It is no doubt tempting, especially from the Spinozist position, to suggest the following way out of Althusser's apparent impasse: we might "complete" Althusser's essay by arguing that the Ideological State Apparatuses that interpellate individuals as subjects can be understood only in relation to the "masses" or the multitude upon which they exercise their power. Althusser himself suggests just such a solution when he argues in the postscript to the essay that "the state and its Apparatuses only have meaning from the point of view of the class struggle, as an apparatus of class struggle ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction. But there is no class struggle without antagonistic classes. Whoever says class struggle of the ruling class says resistance, revolt and class struggle of the ruled class" (1971, 184).

If it is true that the Ideological State Apparatuses are not "conflict-free" (1971, 185) and the "masses" are not simply a pre-given "nature" on which ideology works (to divide and separate), then we must admit that ideological interpellation necessarily produces heterogeneous effects. We can say that the very apparatuses that have as their strategic objective the "freeing" of individuals from the multitude—to "keep the people from uniting," as Hobbes put it—are themselves caught in the aleatory destiny of the struggles in which they participate. In the course of these struggles, they produce effects other than those that correspond to their objective. The apparatuses that normally function to "recruit" individual subjects also produce effects of community and solidarity. There are times when the autonomy or solitude (according to one's definition) of the "imaginary" subject will disintegrate in the face of "real" unity, in the face of what Hobbes and Spinoza call the multitude. Just as individuals can be determined as bodies to obey and as minds to consent to their subjection, so they can be determined to act and think "otherwise," that is, contrary to the objectives inscribed in the apparatuses that interpellate them. One of the forms that this acting and thinking "otherwise" must take is the simultaneous constitution and consciousness of the multitude to which the individual always already belongs and whose power shapes "the political."

This "solution" to the problems posed by Althusser's theorization of the interpellated subject, however, would only have led us to another impasse. We would find ourselves confined by a too-familiar system whose polarities Althusser rejected: the individual and the community (or the mass), the private and the public, the state and civil society. And further, an opposition that should surprise us greatly: the natural and the artificial. For it might well be tempting to see the alternative between Hobbes and Spinoza as the

alternative between an artificially produced individuality and a natural or organic collectivity or sociality. Negri, who sometimes seems to conceptualize Hobbes/Spinoza opposition in such a fashion, argues that for Spinoza "society inheres in being, it is by being and in being" (1991, 194).² But Spinoza did not conceptualize the social as an organic totality (the multitude) whose "unicity" would be that of a being, an undifferentiated One whose existence would subsume that of the individual. In fact, these are the terms between which Hobbes's work oscillates (despite and in a sense by means of his repeated denials, especially his projecting onto nature the juridically constituted individual): the juridical subject artificially produced by the state and an undifferentiated natural mass "with a mind of its own."

If Spinoza displaces the axis of politics from the relation between the state and the individual to that between the state and the multitude, a move that refuses the juridical in favor of the strategic in the manner of Machiavelli (and in doing so, renders Hobbes's "nonsense" intelligible), he does not, for all that, permit a dissolution of the individual into the mass. At this point we must read Spinoza's political writings in the light of *The Ethics* (1982), especially part 1. For if it is the case that "society inheres in being," as Negri put it, then Spinoza's reflections on "being" or substance are as relevant to the analysis of society as to the understanding of any other modification of substance. Of particular interest are Spinoza's reflections on individual existences, given that whatever is, is in substance and can neither be nor be conceived apart from this substance (1982, 1:15). The supreme originality of Spinoza consists in his having rejected the notion that the individual is an expression of a more primary substance to which it must necessarily be reduced to be intelligible. For Spinoza, the old philosophical question of the relation of the whole to its parts and of unity of being in relation to its diversity cease to be problems: the unity of substance is its diversity, substance has no existence apart from the diversity without end of an infinity of attributes (Macherey 1979, 118–23).

What is the meaning of all this for political theory? Quite simply that just as the unity of substance is not prior to the infinite diversity of its attributes but is precisely realized in this diversity itself, so the unity of the multitude is not prior to the different individuals that comprise it but is rather identical to the distribution of the irreducible singularities (or singular essences, to use the Spinozist term) into which it "divides" in order to become itself, that is, to achieve the specific unity that makes it what it is and no other.

The hoped-for or feared disappearance of the individual into the mass (it is obvious that certain thinkers, not only Marxists, share with liberals a common

2. Whatever particular disagreements one may have with Negri's interpretation of Spinoza, it remains one of the most powerful and original studies of Spinoza to be produced in recent times. Negri's *theses* on Spinoza's political theory constitute a necessary, even if by themselves insufficient, starting point for any serious study.

political problematic) is, from this perspective, simply an impossibility. The irreducible (but never presocial) reality of the individual as a specific modification of substance (to use Spinoza's language) or as a singular disposition of effects (psychoanalysis has no meaning apart from this), however, not only does not invalidate the standpoint of the masses or the multitude, it precisely confers upon it all its importance. For once we reject the entire apparatus of juridical ideology with its constitutional guarantees and their necessary correlative, rights that have always already been transferred; once we reject any dissociation of right from power as a fiction that in its necessary materiality constitutes an intervention in favor of the powers that be, we are left with only one alternative: the recognition that the actualized power of the multitude alone allows the realization of the rights or power of the individual. The greater (the power of) the multitude to which the individual belongs, the more powerful that individual becomes as an individual and, consequently, in Spinozist terms, the more rights he or she possesses.

It now appears that it is the state—specifically the capitalist state—as it ceaselessly maneuvers to maintain a balance of social forces, that is caught in a circle: the very techniques of individualization proper to it, the means by which it interpellates individuals as subjects simultaneously constitute multitudes. Its subjects can become subjects in the sense of "citizens" (to use Balibar's expression) only to the extent that they escape the "form of individualization imposed by the state" to form an assemblage that is the sole and always temporary way to power and thus to right.

There is no need to return to Althusser's essay in order to conclude, for we have never left it. We have interpreted it as Althusser taught us to do: by occupying a position within it, by taking the side of certain of its theses against others, namely, by playing Machiavelli against Gramsci, Spinoza against Hobbes. And if we have not answered the old questions, we have at least succeeded in producing new ones. In any case, the work of "reading" Althusser has just begun.

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II

Totality, Causality, and Explanation