

Hegel or Spinoza (or Hegel); Spinoza and Marx

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As my title indicates, I hope in the pages that follow to offer a few productive alternatives to the stark opposition, "Marx or Spinoza." This is not to say that there is not some legitimacy to the latter opposition, as it is often one implicitly at work in some versions of contemporary cultural and political theory. On one level, the opposition — or is it already a full-blown contradiction? — would seem to correspond to that which Michael Moore presents in his recent *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) between "capitalism or democracy." That is, the story goes, that while Marx offers us a careful scientific or totalizing mapping of the economic mode of production we still inhabit, the supplement of Spinoza becomes necessary to think of a truly global alternative to the various fatally flawed political systems that accompany capitalism. This seems to me to be very much the mode of operation at work in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's deeply influential and vitally important trilogy of *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009): the Marx of the *Grundrisse* manuscripts, supplemented with late Foucault, offers us the tools to analyze the biopolitical regime of contemporary global capitalism, while Spinoza offers the most effective figuration of an emergent concrete Utopian other to the mode of global sovereignty they name "Empire."

A problem arises, however, when this is thought of as a choice in the way Moore presents it, as the project of figuring Spinozan democracy threatens to eclipse the pole of Marx altogether. It is to this tendency that Fredric Jameson indirectly refers in his essay, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" In this essay, Jameson offers a brief three-part periodizing history of theory: the first moment, that of structuralism, occurs when the materiality of concepts "becomes inescapable; in which in other words, it slowly begins to dawn on us that concepts are not ideas but rather words and constellations of words at that."¹ In the second stage, that of poststructuralism, "this discovery mutates as it were into a philosophical problem, namely, that of representation, and its dilemmas, its dialectic, its failures, and its impossibility."² Finally, in the present, all this gives way to a (re)turn to the political:

“Under the tutelary deities of Machiavelli and Hobbes, and then of Spinoza and Carl Schmitt a whole new kind of discourse, a genuinely political theory, emerges, recast in the agonistic structure of Schmitt’s ‘friend or foe’ and finding its ultimate figure in war.”³ This last is the situation in which the option “Spinoza or Marx” becomes operative. However, Jameson concludes by observing that he remains “personally somewhat distant from this new moment, as I have always understood Marxism to mean the supersession of politics by economics”; and this leads him to “forecast yet a fourth moment for theory,” one that “has to do with the theorizing of collective subjectivities.”⁴ In the final part of my comments here, I will return to one approach Jameson has more recently offered to this problematic of collectivities and its usefulness for thinking our way outside of the binary of Marx or Spinoza.

Of course, in another way, the opposition itself, of economics or politics as the central determinate of theory, is a category mistake, placing two incommensurable fields of research and theorization in opposition to each other. The real opposition then lies elsewhere, something most immediately apparent in the title of Pierre Macherey’s 1979 book, *Hegel ou Spinoza*. In this work, Macherey contributes to a much more wide-ranging project unfolding at that time in French intellectual life more generally with the aim both to purge modern French philosophy of a Hegelianism that had been ascendant since the late 1920s and 1930s in the work of those following in the footsteps of Jean Wahl, Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite, and others; and, more particularly, to displace Hegel with Spinoza as the philosophical core of a revamped Marxism. Some of the figures most associated with the latter trend remain familiar ones today: Macherey, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser, to name only a few (albeit, the particular approach to this problem in each case being markedly distinct). Moreover, a similar development occurs in Italian Marxism, led by the rich and original contributions of the Autonomia movement and most prominently of all, the wide-ranging work of Negri.

A full comparative history of the French and Italian Spinoza revivals remains to be written. In both contexts, the project of developing “alternatives to Hegel and Hegelian Marxism,” to quote Eugene Holland’s phrase in his fine overview of these developments, grew out of debates within and splits from the official established Communist Parties.⁵ However, in the French context this is further complicated by the fact that, especially by the time Macherey publishes his book, this turn to Spinoza has also become linked to the project of expunging the last traces of another Hegelian Marxist tradition that had emerged in France in the 1960s, that of Maoism, of which Alain Badiou’s recently translated 1982 book, *Théorie du sujet*, stands as a last isolated outpost. And, as Bruno Bosteels points out in his excellent translator’s introduction, in 1980s France, “to point a finger at someone and whisper that he or she was in the process of reading *Théorie du sujet* was tantamount to declaring this person either insane or fanatical, if not both at once.”⁶

Interestingly, and I believe less widely recognized today, this latest return to

Spinoza is in fact the third such fin-de-siècle development in European intellectual and political life. The first occurs in the latter part of the eighteenth century following the lead of Goethe and German Romanticism more generally. Goethe famously claims,

After looking around me in vain for a means of disciplining my peculiar nature, I at last chanced upon the *Ethica* of this man. To say exactly how much I gained from that work was due to Spinoza or to my own reading of him would be impossible; enough that I found in him a sedative for my passions and that he appeared to me to open up a large and free outlook on the material and moral world. But what specially attached me to him was the boundless disinterestedness which shone forth from every sentence.... To be disinterested in everything, and most of all in love and friendship, was my highest desire, my maxim, my constant practice.⁷

A second wave of Spinozism occurs in the late nineteenth century, with the elaboration of the philosophical monisms of figures such as Ernst Heinrich Haeckel and Ernst Mach, and influencing in a direct and immediate way such thinkers and activists as the Russian revolutionary, science fiction author, and comrade of Lenin, Alexander Bogdanov.⁸ Haeckel makes the Spinozan wellspring for his position explicit when he writes in his global bestseller, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1900):

The first thinker to introduce the purely monistic conception of substance into science and appreciate its profound importance was the great philosopher Baruch Spinoza; his chief work appeared shortly before his death in 1677, just one hundred years before Lavoisier gave empirical proof of the constancy of matter by means of the chemist's principle instrument, the balance. In his stately pantheistic system the notion of the *world* (the universe, or the cosmos) is identical with the all-pervading notion of *God*; it is at one and the same time the purest and most rational *monism* and the clearest and most abstract *monotheism*. This universal substance, this "divine nature of the world," shows us two different aspects of its being, or two fundamental attributes — matter (indefinitely *extended* substance) and spirit (the all-embracing energy of *thought*). All the changes which have since come over the idea of substance are reduced, on a logical analysis, to this supreme thought of Spinoza's; with Goethe I take it to be the loftiest, profoundest, and truest thought of all ages.⁹

What makes the first or Romantic wave of Spinozism markedly different from the later two, however, is that while the late-nineteenth- and late-twentieth-century Spinozisms both emerge in a significant part in response to a reigning Hegelianism,

in the first case, it is Hegel himself whose work responds to Spinoza, and even more precisely to Goethe's Romantic version of Spinoza. This all becomes especially significant in that Goethe was deeply critical of the French Revolution and especially Jacobean radicalism: as one Goethe biographer puts it, "The French Revolution, in which all Europe was engrossed, was in Goethe's eyes only another proof that the passing of the old régime meant the abrogation of all law and order, and he gave voice to his antagonism to the new democratic principles in the dramas *Der Großkophta* (1792), *Der Bürgergeneral* (1793), and in the unfinished fragments *Die Aufgeregten* and *Das Mädchen von Oberkirch*."¹⁰ Hegel, on the other hand, and especially the younger Hegel of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), was deeply influenced by not only the French Revolution, but also, as Susan Buck-Morss and others have recently taught us, that taking place in Haiti.¹¹ Indeed, what Macherey sees as the ideologically necessary "misreading" of Spinoza by Hegel (but then might we ask is not Macherey's misreading of Hegel's reading itself equally necessary in his own context?) might now be recast as a critical rejoinder to the influential "philosophy of history" that arises from Goethe's Spinozism.

And with this insight, the later two waves of fin-de-siècle Spinozism appear in a new light as well: not as the second term of a binary opposition, Hegel or Spinoza, but rather the mediating term, or negation, in a three-part dialectic. The negation of the negation of Bogdanov's Spinozan monism — which Althusser's one-time student Dominique Lecourt shows is at the root of both later Stalinist Proletcult ideology and the catastrophic agricultural techniques developed by Trofim Lysenko — occurs in the work of Lenin, first in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), and then, even more significantly, in the dialectical fusion of theory and practice presented in *The State and Revolution* (1917) — the latter work made possible, as is well known, by Lenin's meticulous re-reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* undertaken in the fall of 1914 while the revolutionary leader was in exile.¹²

A similar movement also occurs, I would suggest, in the various significant reconsiderations of Hegel that emerge in the unstable post-Cold War and pre-War on Terror context of the 1990s (the latter being the topic of my most recent book, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*). This is most explicitly the case in the work of the author of the 2002 essay entitled, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," Slavoj Žižek. In his major work of the late 1990s, *The Ticklish Subject*, published shortly before the intellectual supernova of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, Žižek obliquely begins to formulate a rejoinder to the anti-Hegelianism of contemporary French theory.¹³ Then, in *The Parallax View* (2006), Žižek offers a full staging of the dialectic I outlined above. In Žižek's presentation, Hardt and Negri represent the negation characteristic of contemporary anti-Hegelianism. As a result of this turn, Žižek suggests, they become too much materialists:

they are *too* Marxist taking over the underlying Marxist schema of

historical progress.... In short, they rehabilitate the old Marxist notion of the tension between productive forces and the relations of production: capitalism already generates the “germs of the future new forms of life,” it incessantly produces the new “common,” so that, in a revolutionary explosion, this New should just be liberated from the old social form.¹⁴

However, the dialectic Žižek sets into play here becomes even more complex: for if Hardt and Negri move too far to the objective side, then Badiou, a figure whom Žižek already identifies in *The Ticklish Subject* as falling prey to Kantianism, takes a converse swerve into the subjective:

This brings us to the deadlock of Badiou’s politics, after he proclaimed the end of the Jacobean revolutionary paradigm: while he is aware that the anti-Stalinist revolutionary Party politics which aimed at taking over and demolishing the State apparatus is exhausted, he refuses to explore the revolutionary potential of the “economic” sphere (since for him, this sphere belongs to the order of Being, and does not contain potential “evental sites”): for this reason, the only way left is that of a “pure” political organization which operates outside the confines of the State and, basically, limits itself to mobilizational declarations.

Žižek then concludes, “The only way out of this deadlock is to restore to the ‘economic’ domain the dignity of Truth, the potential for Events.”¹⁵

It is crucial to understand precisely the nature of the leap Žižek makes here. In no way does he offer a simple reversal of the economic-political binary, the one I named at the outset of this paper, Marx or Spinoza; and even less so can he be accused of performing the stereotypical sublation or “synthesis” of the two poles characteristic of a rigid schematized dialectic that Hegel was the first to denounce in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*. Indeed, it might also be worth stressing here again that the dialectic Žižek performs is not a three- but a four-part one, beginning with the implicit term of older Hegelian Marxisms and passing through the double negations of Hardt and Negri and Badiou before unfolding into the negation of the negation represented by his own position. But then again, the fact that the dialectic always already involved four rather than three terms is exactly the argument Hegel advances in the final pages of the *Science of Logic*:

In this turning point of the method, the course of cognition at the same time returns into itself. As self-sublating contradiction this negativity is the *restoration* of the *first immediacy*, of simple universality; for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the *positive*, the *identical*, the *universal*. If one insists on *counting*, this *second* immediate

is, in the course of the method as a whole, the *third* term to the first immediate and the mediated. It is also, however, the third term to the first or formal negative and to absolute negativity or the second negative; now as the first negative is already the second term, the term reckoned as *third* can also be reckoned as *fourth*, and instead of a *triplicity*, the abstract form may be taken as a *quadruplicity*; in this way, the negative or the difference is counted as a *duality*. The third or fourth is in general the unity of the first and second moments, of the immediate and the mediated.¹⁶

Žižek thus means to illustrate the limitations of the two paradigms indicated by the names Hardt and Negri and Badiou (and I hope it is clear that the accuracy of his characterizations of the two camps is not of importance for our purposes here) in order to clear the space for the project that Žižek calls in his 2002 essay cited above a “repeating” of Lenin in our new global situation. Žižek’s sense of what is involved in such a project is itself worth repeating in full:

Consequently, to *repeat* Lenin does not mean a *return* to Lenin. To repeat Lenin is to accept that Lenin is dead, that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrosly, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving. To repeat Lenin means that one has to distinguish between what Lenin actually did and the field of possibilities that he opened up, the tension in Lenin between what he effectively did and another dimension one might call what was “in Lenin more than Lenin himself.”¹⁷

But to present it in this way is still I think to end on too negative a note, and in conclusion I want to turn to another repeating of Lenin suggested recently by Jameson as a way of perhaps thinking more productively about the conjuncture I called in my title, *Marx and Spinoza* — and what I have in mind when I use these two names are two parallel traditions, those in our immediate context of Hegel-Marx-Lenin-Žižek on one hand, and Spinoza-Goethe-Haeckel-Bogdanov-Hardt and Negri on the other. In an essay presented in the fall of 2009 at the Society of Utopian Studies annual meeting, Jameson offered a further reflection on the project of his *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), in particular focusing on the “fortunes of Utopia in late capitalism.” In light of his comments from the 2004 *Critical Inquiry* essay cited earlier, it becomes clear that in the work collected together, *Archaeologies* represents, in part at least, Jameson’s contribution to the project of the “theorizing of collective subjectivities.” In the Utopian Studies conference essay, Jameson proceeds by outlining a set of oppositions — beginning with the classical structuralist one of synchrony and diachrony, or a systemic and a temporal paradigm, before moving on to what he refers to in *Archaeologies* as those of the Utopian impulse and the Utopian program, or reform/repair and revolution, or hermeneutics and politics. At this point,

he engages in a fascinating thought experiment, rewriting each of these clusters of terms according to the two historical stages Lenin outlines in *State and Revolution*: those of the notorious “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” — what he notes, “the ‘socialist countries’ will later on explicitly call socialism” — and a more speculative, “relatively undefined, or undefinable,” realized communism.¹⁸ Jameson outlines these oppositions in order to set them productively into play, thereby casting familiar problems, and perhaps even our preconceptions about the directions his own argument will take, in a strange new light. Indeed, by reimagining these two poles as distinct historical stages in the realization of a radically other society, he momentarily turns on its head the assumption that it will be the second term — communism or the systemic global or total Utopian transformation — that is the more significant one in the couple. If the Utopia that is communism “can only be theorized on the economic level,” it will be the expressions of a Utopian impulse — filtering “through the structure or mode of production like impulses from another place” — that mark our concrete political interventions in this world.¹⁹ In short, Jameson suggests that we need in this context an active Utopian praxis as much as a vibrant Utopian imaginary.

In this essay, Jameson demonstrates once more the power of his own form of dialectical thinking, refusing as he does here false oppositions and discovering solutions in apparent conceptual dead-ends. I want to conclude then by speculating on the effectiveness of this model as a way of bringing into focus the possibilities, and even necessity, of thinking Marx and Spinoza together. Following Jameson’s lead, we can understand the unity of theory and practice named Marx as occupying the first stage, and that of Spinoza, the second. This, then, immediately reverses the apparent opposition with which I began. Not unlike in Žižek’s presentation of Hardt and Negri’s project, it is Spinoza’s multitude that now appears to be theorized on the economic level. Conversely, the stress lies fully on the political aspects of Marx’s project of *political* economy, the mappings of the capitalist mode of production being recognized as inseparable in their inception from the pressing immediate project of developing a revolutionary political tradition (this is what Negri also demonstrates in his brilliant re-reading of the *Grundrisse* found in *Marx Beyond Marx*). Moreover, we see that each pole in effect remains a sterile one without the other: Spinoza without Marx produces a thoroughly idealist daydreaming — what in *Archaeologies* Jameson names the Utopian Impulse as opposed to the Utopian Program, and which he associates more specifically with the genre of fantasy rather than science fiction — while a Marx without Spinoza leaves us with a critical programmatic politics stripped of truly emancipatory and radically other horizons.²⁰ Authentic Utopian thought, then, remains the union of these two, program and impulse, “the reality principle of SF and the pleasure principle of fantasy.”²¹ This lesson remains an invaluable one, I think, for our work as teachers of literature and critics of culture as much as political actors.

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 405. See also Jameson's discussion of the role of structuralism in the reinvention of dialectical thought in *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 2009).
2. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 405.
3. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 406.
4. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 406.
5. Eugene Holland, "Spinoza and Marx," *Cultural Logic* 2.1 (Fall 1998) <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-1/holland.html>.
6. Bruno Bosteels, "Translator's Introduction," in Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009) viii.
7. Cited in P. Hume Brown, *The Youth of Goethe* (London: John Murray, 1913) 209-10.
8. I discuss the influence of Mach and Haeckel on Bogdanov and Jack London in *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: U California P, 2002) Chap. 4.
9. Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900) 215-16.
10. John George Robertson, "Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von (1749-1832)," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, Vol. XII (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1910) 184.
11. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 2009).
12. See Dominique Lecourt, "Bogdanov, Mirror of the Soviet Intelligentsia," in *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977) 137-62. For a groundbreaking re-reading of Lenin's engagement with Hegel's *Logic*, see Stathis Kouvelakis, "Lenin as Reader of Hegel: Hypotheses for a Reading of Lenin's Notebooks on Hegel's *The Science of Logic*," in *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke UP, 2007) 164-204.
13. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999).
14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2006) 266. Also now see Hardt and Negri's reply to Žižek in *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).
15. Žižek, *The Parallax View* 328.
16. G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999) 836. I discuss this passage in my forthcoming essay, "Lacan avec Greimas: Formalization and the 'Other Side' of Cultural Studies," *Minnesota Review*.
17. Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 566.
18. Fredric Jameson, "Utopia and Marxism Today," unpublished manuscript, 7 and 6. Badiou similarly offers stimulating thoughts on this often-critiqued two-stage model in *Theory of the Subject* 82.
19. Jameson, "Utopia and Marxism Today" 9 and 8.
20. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005) 3-5 and 55-71. For a more detailed discussion of these and other issues at work in this important book, see Phillip E. Wegner, "Jameson's Modernisms; or, the Desire Called Utopia," *Diacritics* 37.4 (Winter 2007): 3-20.
21. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 74.