Prof. Balibar's X-Mutant Transindividuals:
Civic Disobedience in the Birmingham Philosophy Guild

ABSTRACT:
As I have explored elsewhere, the Birmingham Philosophy Guild, which my former students and I re-founded in 2012, is a team of community members who engage in theoretical discussion, support group self-cultivation, and community activism. To further promote the guild as a catalyst for progressive social change, the present article connects it to both the popular cultural phenomenon of the "X-Men"—to make the guild more appealing to students and laypeople—and to the cutting-edge contemporary French philosophy of Étienne Balibar—to make the guild more appealing to professors and culture workers. Moreover, the article connects these low- and high-brow phenomena to each other as well, thereby illustrating the political relevance of the lower, as well as a weakness in the higher, pursuant to social justice activism today.

Keywords: Étienne Balibar; transindividual; Spinoza; Hannah Arendt; mutants; X-Men

As I have explored elsewhere, the Birmingham Philosophy Guild, which my former students and I re-founded ten years ago in Birmingham, Alabama, are a team of community members, combining (a) open-ended discussion of various subjects (including philosophy, science, art, religion, politics, current affairs, and relationships); (b) support group-style informal therapeutic conversation in pursuit of self-actualization and self-cultivation; and (c) local community and political activism.[1] To elaborate on the latter point, the guild have repeatedly mobilized over the years to stage protests and take direct actions, create spin-off activist groups, and provide volunteers and staff for other progressive organizations in the city. The increasing importance of this activism dimension is largely due to our increasingly diverse and politically progressive membership, which is currently majority-minoritarian and international, over half of whom are transgender.

Among this current membership, which includes former students and other enthusiasts of the examined life, most (if not all) grew up on fantasy play incorporating virtual worlds

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[1] For more, see Joshua M. Hall, "Dionysus Lyseus Reborn: The Revolutionary Philosophy Chorus," in *Philosophy Today* 66(1): 2022, 57-74.

including that of the X-Mutants. Through weekly meetings, along with the individual

friendships, subgroups, and breakaway groups, what guild members do is channel their

individual abilities and resources into concrete, on-the-ground community and political activism

in pursuit of transformative social justice. In the interest of space, I will briefly describe just

three examples.

First, in 2015, police in the greater Birmingham metropolitan area allowed the death, in

their custody, of the teenage mother of a newborn son. She was spending her first night in jail,

after her first arrest, for nothing more than smoking marijuana and receiving a noise complaint at

a local motel. The victim, Sheneque Proctor, was the niece of one of my students, and in

response to her death, the guild organized a protest, secured international press coverage (in

Britain's *The Guardian*), and persuaded a renowned regional civil rights attorney to represent the

family pro bono.[2] Second, after a gay undergraduate student at our community college suffered a

violent hate crime on campus, the guild created the first and only LGBT+ organization in the

school's history, a student-led organization that we named the "Queer/Straight Alliance (QSA)."

And third, in 2019, several other guild members and myself recently participated in a successful

protest organized by Adelante Alabama Worker's Center, securing the release of one of their

board members, as well as the board member's son, both undocumented Guatemalan immigrants

who were wrongfully imprisoned by ICE, during a routine, voluntary, semi-annual check-in.[3]

As suggested by this example of the Birmingham Philosophy Guild, and these three of

our political actions, teams of philosophers are perhaps most easily created by academic

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[2] The article in question is as follows: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/09/black-alabama-teenager-died-police-cell-sheneque-proctor.

[3] For more on Marcos Baltazar's case, see https://www.al.com/news/2019/08/protesters-call-for-release-of-detained-alabama-immigrant-rights-group-board-member.html.

philosophers channeling the energy from after-class discussions. To further promote the guild as a catalyst for progressive social change, the present article connects it to both the popular cultural phenomenon of the "X-Men"—to make the guild more appealing to students and laypeople—and to the cutting-edge contemporary French philosophy of Étienne Balibar—to make the guild more appealing to professors and culture workers. Moreover, the article connects these low- and high-brow phenomena to each other as well, thereby illustrating the political relevance of the lower, as well as a weakness in the higher, pursuant to social justice activism today.

In accordance with this strategy, the structure of the investigation is as follows. The first section provides some context for the X-Men, explaining how this popular fiction was inspired by the same political phenomenon that inspired the Birmingham Philosophy Guild, namely the U.S. Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The second section introduces the reader to Balibar's own team of figuratively superpowered individuals, thus establishing a three-way connection between the guild, the X-Men, and Balibar. The third section offers a close reading of Balibar to elaborate his relevance and limitations vis-à-vis the X-Mutants' social justice, both of which stem from his concept of the "trans-individual." And the concluding section proposes the assembling of teams of what I call "Prof. Balibar's X-Mutants," as a powerful, queering response, and transgender-affirming corrective, to Balibar's challenge: to choose between becoming either "little Eichmanns," or "citizens against the powers that be."

But first, a word about how all this relates to the subject of culture and dialogue. At one level, the present article is a dialogue between two nation-states' cultures, namely France and the United States. But at another level, and more importantly, it is also a dialogue between "low" and "high" culture, between "popular culture" and "culture" simpliciter. For the many who posit a greater political polarization in the world today, this article affirms the enormous potential for

solidarity in combining the intellectual capital of the ivory tower and the community. Working

together, who can say what transindividual powers we may yet assemble?

I.   Civically Disobedient X-Mutants

To repeat, the role of this first section in my overall argument is to establish that the

Birmingham Philosophy Guild can be plausibly and meaningfully understood as directly inspired

by, and carrying forward the intended political objectives of, the fictional team called the X-

Men. The creative work of second-generation Jewish immigrant artists Stan Lee and Jack Kirby,

these mutants have since become the "best-selling comic book series in the history of the

medium."[4] Importantly for the present investigation, scholar Rebecca Housman notes that creator

Stan Lee originally "intended a less gender-specific title for the series, 'The Mutants," but he

was overruled by an editor, who gave them their official name: "The X-Men."[5] For my part, for

reasons including gendered justice and similarities to a central concept in Balibar's philosophy, I

will use the term "X-Mutants" for the remainder of the present investigation.[6]

For readers unfamiliar, the most influential characters and a rough description of their

powers, are as follows. Professor X, the founder of Xavier's School for Gifted Mutants and the

X-Men, is a powerful telepath who is also disabled and uses a wheelchair. Jean Grey, the most

powerful member of the team, is both telepathic and telekinetic. Cyclops can project beams of

force from his eyes. Angel uses life-sized angel-like, eagle wings to fly. Iceman is invulnerable

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[4] See Baron, Lawrence. "*X-Men* as J Men: The Jewish Subtext of a Comic Book Movie," in *SHOFAR, 22*(1): 2003, 44-52, 52.

[5] Rebecca Housel, "Myth, Morality, and the Women of the X-Men," in *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, ed. Tom Morris and Matt Morris (New York: Open Court, 2005), 75-88, 77.

[6] In references to the historical productions, including the graphic novels and films, however, I will use "X-Men."

to cold and uses ambient water vapor to project blasts and create constructs of ice. Nightcrawler, a U.S. immigrant from Germany, can instantly teleport between any two locations in his line of sight. Storm, an immigrant from Kenya, controls the weather and can create lightning. Colossus, an immigrant from the Soviet Union, is superhumanly strong with invincible steel skin. And Wolverine, an immigrant from Canada, has rapid healing abilities and supernaturally strong metal surgically bonded to his skeleton, which also form three long claws he can extend from his knuckles.

Overall, scholars of the X-Men are divided into two main camps, which queer theorist Jason Zingsheim summarizes as follows: on one side, "it is commonplace to remark on the allegorical power of the story to represent progressive struggles for race and sexuality-based civil rights," while scholars on the other side "dismiss the importance of these civil rights perspectives, claiming that instead of representing a discrete minority, the X-Men represent— and appeal to—everyone" (224).[7] To this, I would add that still others split the difference, emphasizing the wide range of political perspectives adopted by creators at different periods in *The X-Men*'s history, from its first appearance in 1963. For example, John Trushell contrasts the 1960s "Silver Age" incarnation of the X-Men, whose mutants were all white and U.S. American, with the 1970s "Bronze Age" version, which was multiracial and international (156).[8]

These historical variations notwithstanding, the dominant interpretation of the X-Men has been that they are directly inspired by (and at times explicitly modeled on) the Civil Rights

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[7] Jason Zingsheim, "Developing Mutational Identity Theory: Evolution, Multiplicity, Embodiment, and Agency," in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 11(1): 2011, 24–37; and Ramzi Fawaz, "'Where No X-Man Has Gone Before!': Mutant Superheroes and the Cultural Politics of Popular Fantasy in Postwar America," in *American Literature* 83(2): 2011, 355-388.

[8] John M. Trushell, "American Dreams of Mutants: The X-Men-"Pulp" Fiction, Science Fiction, and Superheroes," in *Journal of Popular Culture* 38(1): 2004, 149-168, 149.

movement. While Trushell concludes that "Such parallels are not far-fetched, others vehemently disagree (155). Martin Lund argues, for example, that interpreters simply project whatever they wish to see on the X-Men. Among his objections are that "essentialist perspectives are often applied to both characters and their creators, fallacious comparisons sometimes elide important historical and contextual differences," and "insufficient source criticism promotes the passage of parochial myth into academia."[9] While there is truth to Lund's criticism, it concerns only interpretations of professional productions of X-Men content (primarily graphic novels and films), and thus does not apply to analyses (including mine below) of the ways that the X-Mutants' virtual world is taken up in everyday life.

Two scholars who take up the latter issue are queer theorists Jason Zingsheim and Ramzi Fawaz, with their theories of "mutational identity" and "popular fantasy," respectively.[10] Zingsheim analyzes three poststructuralist theories of identity—intersectional, crystallized, and assemblage, as articulated by Crenshaw, Tracy & Trethewey, and Puar—which Zingsheim attempts to "integrate" into his view, based on an X-Men-inspired concept of mutation (24). More precisely, Zingsheim critiques intersectionality and crystallization theories for reifying categories such as race, gender, and sexuality as stable entities; and he faults assemblage theory for underemphasizing the political dimension of identity (which thus "sets the groundwork for denying systemic oppression based on inequitable flows of capital and social resources along lines of identity") (25-27). In sum, their best efforts notwithstanding, all three theorists (Crenshaw, Tracy & Trethewey, and Puar) tend to (1) "focus on discourse, continuing to ignore

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[9] Marin Lund, "The Mutant Problem: X-Men, Confirmation Bias, and the Methodology of Comics and Identity," in *European Journal of American Studies* 10(2): 2015, 1-18.

[10] Jason Zingsheim, "X-Men Evolution: Mutational Identity and Shifting Subjectivities," in *The Howard Journal of Communications* 22: 2011, 223-239.

the material bodies of subjects," (2) manifest "a lack of practicality and applicability," and (3) lack an adequate academic vocabulary for the evolving realities of contemporary identity (27).

It is to address these limitations that Zingsheim introduces the concept of "the mutants." Though the bulk of his analysis (elaborating the four aspects of mutational identity theory) simply rehearses familiar poststructuralist themes, there is one point regarding that warrants attention here, namely the (largely untapped) progressive potential of the X-Men. Unlike some scholars criticized by Trushell, Zingheim explicitly rejects a rose-colored oversimplification of the mutants. To wit, despite affirming that such cultural productions "rely on a narrative conceit where human subjectivities and identities are bound only by the imagination," Zingsheim immediately concedes that "the liberatory potential of such a plot exigency is far from realized in these texts" (28).[11] Nevertheless, in sympathy with the present investigation, Zingsheim concludes that "there remain discursive ruptures" in superhero narratives such as the X-Men, which are "capable of transgressing dominant formations of identity theories and discourses" (28). In other words, failures of (professional) realization do not negate the imaginative potential of the X-Mutants' virtual world for transformative social justice today.

The latter is also the focus of Ramzi Fawaz's queer theory analysis, which uses "popular fantasy" as a term of art, denoting the use of fantasy to imagine and create more socially just identities, relationships, and communities. In Fawaz's words, the term describes "the social uses of enchantment to examine the ways tropes of literary enchantment come to organize real-world social and political relations" (357-358). Due to my concern that this label might be misunderstood, however, and interpreted as mere solitary and escapist fantasizing, I would

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[11] Moreover, in a separate critique of the X-Men films in particular, Zingsheim arrives at the damning conclusion that "the X-Men, which has been praised over the decades as a 'progressive' text supporting equal rights, capitalizes on shifting identity discourses to reconstruct White masculinity as the superior subject position") (225).

suggest modifying the name to "participatory fantasy." Intended as short for "participatory democracy," this alternative emphasizes its grounding in and reconstruction of political community, a sense borne out by Fawaz's analyses.

Fawaz begins his story by noting a cultural-historical shift among comic book superheroes. By 1971, he observes, comic books "had come of age as America's 'native art'; taught on Ivy League campuses, studied by European scholars and filmmakers, and translated and sold around the world, they were now taken up as a new generation's critique of American society" (356). The "paradigm example" of participatory fantasy, Fawaz argues, is "the superhero," and especially the 1970s incarnation of the X-men, which made "explicit the mutually constitutive relationship between fantasy and political life" (357). More specifically, Fawaz explains, "the comic book's transnational cast and visual and narrative articulation of 'mutation' to social and cultural difference more broadly underscored the tie between expressions of popular fantasy and the ideals of radical politics in the postwar period" (357). In other words, Fawaz claims that the 1970s X-Men not only had mutated bodies; they also helped mutate racial, gendered, sexual, and other identities and relationships in everyday life. "Creators used the biologically unstable body of the superhero," Fawaz elaborates, "to explore, and potentially bring into being, the states of bodily and psychic liberation espoused by a variety of countercultural movements in this period" (357).

Acknowledging an alternative political interpretation of superheroes such as the X-Mutants, Fawaz notes that "Fredric Jameson has theorized fantasy's distinguishing tropes in Marxist terms, reading the ability to wield magic, for instance, as an attempt to reunite alienated labor with the body from which it was originally abstracted" (358). Supplementing and extending this critique, Fawaz suggests that the "entertainment value of popular fantasy—its

ability to induce pleasure in witnessing impossible phenomena or experiencing lifeworlds that have no everyday corollary—signals not only its embeddedness in commodity culture but also its capacity to constitute new political desires" (359). Thus, unlike the critical theorists, for whom late capitalism uniquely and viciously creates new desires, to further enchain the worker-consumer—for Fawaz, works such as *The X-Men* also create desires, in part virtuously, for individual and community reconstruction.

To Zingsheim and Fawaz's queer theory analyses of the X-Men, I would add, by way of conclusion for the present section, that its professional productions (such as graphic novels and films) are also mirrored in everyday people's lives, from whom those creations arguably originated. The most impactful example, perhaps, being children's make-believe play. What matters most, as suggested by (among others) Kendall Walton's analyses, is not fidelity to the fictional objects utilized in play, but rather how children reimagine and reactivate these virtual forms (which were, in turn, drawn from a common cultural store of figures, including those of various global mythologies). Put in Walton's terms, the X-Mutants constitute "props in games of make-believe." Moreover, though anyone can engage in such make-believe (and superhero fantasy seems increasingly popular in the world of adult cosplay), the process is much less restricted for children than adults, given the more permeable (or semipermeable) boundary, for children, between reality and imagination. Thus, the X-Mutants are empowered in that context to more intense and extensive inspiration and creativity (for children compared to adults), which in turn shapes the imaginative lives of adults and their communities.

It is in part for this reason that, though I value the results of other theorists' novel interpretations of professional texts and media related to the X-Men, I have deliberately avoided that method here. There are two other reasons for this choice, and in part to respond to concerns

from some early reviewers of this article, I will now address them. First, the use of professional texts and media is unnecessary, primarily because the narrative about comic book superheroes derive primarily from their powers and backstories, both of which are largely independent of any given professional interpreter. This is loosely analogous with the dynamic of professional wrestling, or anime like *Dragon Ball Z*, in both of which most of the story is implied directly by figures trying to maximize their powers and style against antagonists in elaborate staged fights. In short, if they know the characters' powers and basic bios, fans can easily generate narratives equally interesting as those of the professionals.

Second, in addition to being unnecessary, the use of professional sources is also insufficient, and even counterproductive, by amplifying and exacerbating the considerably regressive and otherwise counterproductive dimensions of professional X-Men media. For example, the hypersexualizing of female characters' bodies, marginalized and stereotyped role for characters of color, and suppression of queer identities, and cultural appropriation of Indigenous and other mythologies, inhibit more progressive and transformative imaginings. And these problems are much harder to overcome at the macropolitical level of professional media, which involve pervasive changes to entrenched adult behaviors and the structure of social institutions, compared to the micropolitical sphere of children and young people's play.

Imagine, if you will, the following scene. The setting could be a backyard, a local park, or a living room, anywhere children gather freely. Amidst unstructured playtime, one child suddenly shouts, "Let's play X-Men!" And wastes no time in declaring "I'm Wolverine!" followed, perhaps, by "I'm Cyclops" or "I'm Storm!" Some impromptu costuming may ensue, or at least some minimal creative grooming, but most of the effects occur through improvised dramatic movement and dialogue, drawing freely on various media representations of the X-

Mutants as needed or desired (an activity structurally similar to the adult activity of fantasy role-playing gaming for which it is a primary source, as I have explored elsewhere in connection to anarchistic politics).[12] The most important element of this scenario, for the present investigation, is the degree of freedom whereby the children may choose which of the various characters to embody, and how to perform those creative identities, constrained only by the tolerance and support of their playmates, the power of their imaginations, and the courage to be who and how they want to be. The latter involves negotiating, renegotiating, and even helping create new cultural norms regarding class, race, gender, nationality, etc., with both support and hindrance from the "props" derived from comics, films, and other media productions.

Put more concretely, when a group of children, no matter how demographically homogenous, plays that they are a team of international, multiracial mutants—focusing, since the point is to pretend to be superhero mutants, more on the powers than the other identity markers of the characters—they end up imaginatively identifying with characters whose gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc., differ from their own, whether intentionally or not, knowingly or not. It becomes less a matter of, for example, Nightcrawler being a Catholic German man, and more about being someone with blue skin and a tail who can instantly teleport from one location to another in their line of sight. But in the process of learning more about the character, they may discover that they have intuitively gravitated toward a Catholic, even if they were raised (as many Protestants in the U.S. are) to believe that Catholics are not Christians, and therefore bound for eternal damnation.

This scenario illustrates, in part, why young people, as has often been observed, are usually at the forefront of social change movements. An important recent example thereof is the

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[12] See Joshua M. Hall, "Guerrilla Warrior-Mages: Tiqqun and Magic: The Gathering," *Philosophy Today* 67(3): 2023, 405-25.

LGBT+ movement, especially regarding transgender rights, which has been remarkably swiftly advanced by a generation of Gen Z and Millennial youth, who continue to be as enchanted by the X-Mutants as are the Generation X and young Baby Boomers who raised them. In part for this reason, I will now explore how the X-Mutants can provide a helpful counterforce to the residual regressivity of Balibar's analysis of gender.

II.   Civically Disobedient X-Mutant *Philosophers*

To rehearse the role of this second section in my overall argument, having argued in the first section that the Birmingham Philosophy Guild shares with the X-Men a political inheritance from the Civil Rights movement, I now argue that Balibar's philosophy includes a structure sufficiently analogous to the X-Men to support a three-way linkage among them and the guild. In Chapter 6 of Balibar's masterpiece, *Equaliberty*, dedicated to Hannah Arendt's famous essay, "Civil Disobedience," Balibar reassembles Arendt's assemblage of a team of exceptional individuals. This team, in order of appearance, consists of (1) Arendt herself; (2) the legendary, fifth-century BCE Persian tyrant-overthrower Otanes (as depicted in Herodotus, and taken up therefrom by Rousseau); (3) the nineteenth-century French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville; (4) the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle; and (5) the sixteenth-century French jurist (and best friend of Michel de Montaigne), Étienne de La Boétie. Put in terms of my previous section, these are Balibar's philosopher X-Mutants.

The title of Balibar's chapter, "Hannah Arendt, the Right to Have Rights, and Civic Disobedience," already announces the first member of this team of theorists, namely Arendt herself, along with the philosophical analogue of her X-Mutant superpower, namely "the right to

have rights."[13] On Balibar's reading, Arendt understands what are usually called "human rights" as "qualities that individuals confer on one another as soon as they institute a 'common world' in which they can be considered responsible for their actions and opinions" (Balibar 2014, 171). That is, for Arendt, human rights are not in fact natural or automatic, as they are usually thought to be, but instead the product of deliberate human communities. The resulting political state, normally called democracy, Balibar prefers to call "isonomy," meaning "equal freedoms," and this isonomy represents "not a regime, but the principle or rule of the constitution of citizenship") (169). Finally on this point, the foundation of isonomy according to Arendt, Balibar claims, is "civic disobedience."[14]

To elaborate, according to Balibar, civic disobedience is, for Arendt, the "unpolitical" and "contrary element" within politics, which as such becomes the ultimate source of political rights (171). Simply put, civic disobedience is what allows us to push back against the powers that be, a political counterforce against tyranny. The radical implication that Balibar finds in this conceptualization of Arendt's is that "outside the institution of the community, there are no human beings." In short, "Humans do not exist as such, and thus they are not, strictly speaking" (172-173). Or, in Balibar's less jarring paraphrase of her point, "strictly speaking human beings *are* their rights, or exist through them" (173). Put imperatively, we must become civically disobedient citizens if we are to preserve the humanity of ourselves and our neighbors.

In this context, Balibar introduce the second member of Arendt's theorist X-Men, namely Otanes, whose philosophical superpower I find in his motto: "I wish neither to command nor

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[13] Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972).

[14] The choice of "civic" versus "civil" disobedience is deliberate on Balibar's part, as he acknowledges in an endnote (320n26). Unfortunately, that elaboration (in two others of his essay) has not been made available in English translation at the time of *Equaliberty*'s translation.

obey."[15] Balibar's rationale for introducing Otanes here is that Arendt (indirectly) references him

twice in her writings (for example in *On Revolution*, in her discussion of Herodotus' take on

isonomy) (Arendt 2006, 20-21).[16] More specifically, Balibar cites "the (undoubtedly fictional)

episode reported by Herodotus in book 3 of his *Histories*," involving "a debate among the

Persians as they chose an heir and at the same time decided the form of government after the

murder of the imposter who had taken power after the murder of Kambyses, following an

aristocratic plot" (Balibar 2014, 174).[17] To paraphrase, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus is

describing a fictionalized account of a crucial juncture in Persian history wherein, by debating a

potential successor, they ultimately chose a form of government as well. Summarizing this

debate, Balibar relates that "each of the three Persian princes who could be named to refound the

state"—being afforded this opportunity by Herodotus' staging of a Socratic-type dialogue—

"makes a plea for one of the typical regimes: *isonomia*, *oligarchia*, and *monarchia*" (174). For

Otanes' part, he chooses isonomy and, "in the form of a personal claim, delivers the formula that

expresses his political ideal," namely his motto of "I wish neither to command nor obey" (174).

Balibar characterizes Otanes' motto as "an anarchist principle," and "an imprescriptible moment

of an-archy that has to be constantly reactivated precisely if the institution is to be *political*"

(Balibar 2014, 175). For "without the possibility of disobedience, there is no legitimate

obedience" (175). Put differently, Otanes' position in the debate over rulership is that they

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[15] Herodotus, *The Histories*, ed. John M. Marincola, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin, 2003).

[16] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, trans. Jonathan Schnell (New York: Penguin, 2006).

[17] Herodotus introduces Otanes as follows: "The first to suspect that [the pretender] was not the son of Cyrus [the previous king], but an imposter, was a certain Otanes, the son of Pharnaspes, one of the wealthiest members of the Persian nobility, and his suspicions were aroused by the fact that Smerdis [the pretender] never ventured outside the central fortifications of the capital, and never summoned any Persians to a private audience" (201).

should have no ruler, and by making this claim, he embodies and performs the very civic

disobedience that Arendt is affirming, as also affirmed by Balibar.

Elaborating on this point, Balibar writes that civic disobedience for Arendt, as illustrated

by Otanes, "is a matter of collective movements that, in a highly determinate situation with

objective limits, abolish the vertical form of authority in favor of a horizontal association so as to

recreate the conditions of free consent to the authority of the law" (176). In short, civic

disobedience means a group who, at a pivotal moment, reserves the right to decide together,

anew. Arendt's civic disobedience, therefore, is not a matter of "weakening legality, but of

reinforcing it"—counterintuitively, and illegally—"defending the law against itself" (176). That

is, such a defiant coordinated stance can maintain the living tension between legislator and

citizens, without which the law becomes impregnable, its weight unbearable.

It is at this juncture that the third member of Arendt's X-Mutant philosopher team takes

the stage, namely Alexis de Tocqueville, whose philosophical superpower I identify as his

argument for "voluntary association" as a counterforce to the tyranny of the majority.[18] More

precisely, Balibar notes that Arendt cites Tocqueville on democracy's "dangerous freedom" and

its "perils of equality" (Balibar 2014, 176). In a long quote from Arendt's "Civil Disobedience,"

Balibar relates how she attributes these threats, more specifically, to "the right to free

association," the endemic danger of which, "Tocqueville, his admiration notwithstanding, was

not unaware" (Arendt 1972, 97). In essence, Tocqueville cautioned that the freedom of the

people to make majority decisions, with even the worst individuals convinced that nobody is

better than they are, could easily lead to a "tyranny of the majority" (as for example slaveholding

white people in the Deep South of the U.S.). For this reason, and here Arendt quotes

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[18] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Tocqueville, "the liberty of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority," and "it is by the enjoyment of dangerous freedom that the Americans learn the art of rendering the dangers of freedom less formidable" (Tocqueville, 183, 175). In other words, only by forming smaller collectives can we check the otherwise unlimited powers of the largest corporate individuals such as states and, increasingly, multinational corporations. In a society where mutants are the minority, those mutants should band together in like-minded teams.

Immediately after quoting Arendt's Tocqueville quote, Balibar cites a Greek predecessor for Arendt's view, namely Aristotle. The penultimate member of Arendt's X-Men theorist team, his philosophical superpower I identify as the idea that the citizen represents (what I will translate as) an "illimitable origin" of political power. As Balibar puts it, this derives from "the first definition of citizenship proposed by Aristotle in the *Politics*, which characterizes it as the bearer of an 'indeterminate' or 'unlimited' *archè*, according to the translation we choose of *archè aoristos*," adding the caveat that "no doubt, it is necessary precisely to retain both connotations" (Balibar 2014, 177). Put simply, for Aristotle the citizen is one whose political power is vaguely infinite, because the citizens define and delimit their power in relation to each other. Balibar then connects Aristotle's conception of citizenship back to Arendt's civic disobedience, whose thesis is "that *archè* has to again become unlimited or indeterminate (*aoristos*) in the negative form of civic disobedience, for this annuls the privilege of power, or returns judgment to the side of 'whatever' citizens" (178). In other words, Arendt is advocating that citizens periodically reenact the moment of political founding, manifesting their vaguely infinite group sovereignty.

This, finally, sets the stage for the last member of Balibar's X-Mutant philosopher team, namely Étienne de La Boétie, whose philosophical superpower I identity as his deconstruction of

what he calls "voluntary servitude."[19] Balibar introduces de La Boétie in a discussion of Arendt's

opposition to "any purely legal (or legalistic) understanding of right itself" (Balibar 2014, 178).

In other words, rights according to Arendt have a foundation that is more political than legal,

since the people can always reject or revise their laws. Arendt is opposed, Balibar elaborates, "to

the sovereign tautology: the law is the law (*Gesetz ist Gesetz*) (178). Regarding the latter

formula, Balibar writes,

> the crucial problem seems to reside in the transfer of absolutism to the law itself, which
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> was the work of jurists at the time of the institution of the nation-state, and thus of the
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> *internalization* of the sovereignty of the will to the form of law itself, which
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> impersonalizes it or renders it independent of the particular person of the sovereign and
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> the circumstances of his decision (181).

Simply put, each citizen's will must remain external to the law. Because from the position of

someone who has fully yielded to the legislator's will, "the law becomes *unilateral*, which means

that it presumes the subjects' obedience or makes it into a prior obedience" (Balibar 2014, 181).

This was the case, for example, of the infamous high-ranking Nazi functionary Adolf Eichmann,

about whose Nuremburg trial Arendt wrote her book, *Banality of Evil*. Tyranny is a self-fulfilling

prophecy of unfreedom. In this context, de La Boétie's "notion of voluntary servitude is

unavoidable," Balibar writes, "because it poses the problem in a radical way" (182). In

Eichmann's case, this voluntary servitude involved his own personal modification of Kant's

categorical imperative, which Arendt renders as follows: "Act as if the principle of your actions

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[19] Étienne de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2012).

were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land" (Arendt 2006, 136).[20] Put

differently, Eichman became monstrous by fully identifying his will with the Nazi law.

Seizing on this idea, Balibar links it to Arendt's discussion in *The Origins of*

Totalitarianism of how a totalitarian "Leader" identifies himself with every act of his inferiors.[21]

This point is close, Balibar writes,

> to the way that de La Boétie, in his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, questioned the
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> mechanism by which, in a perfect tyranny (what he calls the power of One), 'the despot
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> subdues his subjects, some of them by means of others, and thus he is protected by those
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> from whom, if they were decent men, he would have to guard himself' (Balibar 2014,
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> 185, quoting de La Boétie, 3§3).

It is as though there are successive ripples or waves of unfreedom, crashing outward from one

concentric circle to another. No matter how vicious or powerful, no tyrant can suppress the

freedom of his people without encircling rings of fellow tyrants. "This mechanism," Balibar

notes, "makes each individual with a certain power a 'little One'—or, as de La Boétie says, a

'little tyrant' (*tyrranneau*), an exact replica of the sovereign One" (Balibar 2014, 185, quoting de

La Boétie 3§§3-5). Such, for Balibar, is Eichmann, a little One to Hitler's big One. And the

antidote to both is Étienne de La Boétie.

Concluding Balibar's chapter on Arendt's civic disobedience, he notes that the

abovementioned legal tautology ("the law is the law") is, nevertheless and fortunately,

"essentially unstable" (Balibar 2014, 186). This is so because the law "requires a supplement of

conviction or a sense of duty on the part of individuals, who can"—like Eichmann—"be

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[20] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Mariner, 1973).

transformed into zealous collaborators with the execution of legal crime" (186). In short, unless people actively plug into the system, feeding its momentum with their individual willpower, it eventually runs out of steam. Without people like Eichmann, therefore, the "law is the law" tautology must "be corrected with all the risks this carries by incorporating a right to disobey in the constitution itself" (186). A virtuous nation would enshrine the right for its people to resist it, within its own founding laws. In the meantime, everywhere else, in Balibar's words, "each of us, as citizen, only has a choice between becoming a potential 'little Eichmann' and transforming himself by resisting authority (into a citizen against the powers that be)" (186). In short, it is time for every X-Mutant to join a group like the X-Men, such as the Birmingham Philosophy Guild.

III.   Civically Disobedient X-Mutant Philosopher *Transindividuals*

Reiterating the role of this third section in the overall argument of the present article, having argued in the first section that the guild shares with the X-Men a political inheritance from the Civil Rights movement, and in the second section that Balibar also shares with both groups of X-Mutants his own group of figuratively superpowered individuals (namely the philosophers of Arendt's essay on "Civic Disobedience"), I now argue that the roots of this civilly disobedient team lie at the heart of Balibar's philosophy, namely his concept of the "transindividual," which illustrates both its powers and its limitations for social justice today.

Transindividuality appears in the title of Balibar's second book on Spinoza, published in 2018 in French (and translated into English in 2020). Balibar borrows the term from fellow twentieth-century philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989), a major influence on one of the most important French thinkers of the late twentieth century, namely Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). For Balibar, to say that all individuals are transindividuals means that they are, in his

words, "*modified in order to modify*," and "*affected in order to affect*" (2020, 48, emphasis original).[22] Put differently, it is only because individuals are so malleable, changeable, and transformable that they can be individuals at all, and engage in meaningful interactions with others. This is clearly evident in the case of the X-Mutants, most of whose adventures involve using their mutant powers to change each other, empowering or hindering further self-actualizing transformations. Balibar's most condensed analysis of transindividuality is found in the following passage:

> each individual's preservation, that is to say its stability and identity, must be compatible with a "continuous regeneration" of its parts, what today would be called a regulated inward and outward flow. Materially, it is constituted by a continual exchange with other individuals. Mentally, it is constituted by the fact that all consciousness of the body mixes up or 'confuses' its own states with ideas of other things (52).

In plainer terms, we are constantly breaking down, so we must also always be rebuilding and reconstructing ourselves, including literally (as when we buy food from a grocer) and figuratively (when we misremember a friend's advice, which helps inspires us to resist despair, as our own idea). More precisely, what are exchanged by the individual-qua-transindividual are "the *parts* of the individual itself," wherein the individual "constantly abandons certain parts of itself, while constantly incorporating some parts from others" (53). For example, the X-Mutants team grew from, and continues to center, on a "School for Gifted Youngsters," whose teenage pupils (like real kids at specialized schools across the U.S.), are constantly learning from not only their teachers but also each other, including borrowing tools and techniques for mastering and applying their skills and powers. Moving beyond the transindividual organism, Balibar adds

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[22] Unless otherwise noted, all remaining italicizations in quotes from Balibar are original.

that "the *multiplicity* of other singular things is necessarily stronger, more powerful (and

potentially more destructive) than any particular singular thing ('me' or the 'self')" (55). In short,

collectivities are stronger than organisms, which is why, despite the popularity of individual

characters (such as Wolverine), it is the "X-Men" as a group who continue to garner the greatest

interest, and investment in formal media adaptations.

Despite this group-emphasis, each transindividual does possess a core, a singularity that

Balibar identifies as their *ingenium* (with the same linguistic root as the "gene" of genetics).

Balibar translates *ingenium*, variously, as "nature," "temperament," "character," "singularity,"

and "complexion" (each of which terms resonates strongly with central aspects of the X-Mutants,

including their being fictional characters, and an emphasis on their skin tones and phenotypes

generally, in part qua allegory of the Civil Rights movement) (2008, 29). Balibar also affirms

Spinoza's definition of *ingenium*, namely "a memory whose form has been determined by the

individual's experience of life and by his various encounters" (2008, 29, 37). In other words,

each of us moves through the world in a signature way which has been shaped and repeatedly

reshaped by our unique string of experiences. This memory, Balibar continues, "is inscribed both

in the mind (or soul) and in the dispositions of the body" (49). In contemporary terms, it includes

conscious, unconscious, and muscle memory, all of which feature prominently in the X-Mutants'

narratives, which center memories and traces of childhood trauma (based on enduring

discrimination based on their mutant deviations) and of course distinctive bodily powers.

In addition to the previously mentioned meanings of *ingenium* emphasized by Balibar, it

also boasts a wide array of others, including "innate quality," "nature," "disposition,"

"intelligence," "talent," "art," "genius," and "machine." In the present investigation, I propose to

keep all these meanings and this definitions in play, and to emphasize the specific variants

"ingenious" and "ingenuity," because the latter suggest prominent features of the X-Mutants'

world, which is a "virtual" one in Deleuze's sense.[23] More precisely, what is ingenious about the

X-Mutants includes not only the creation of their world by professional artists, but also its

creative reimagining and reactivation, for example in children playing make-believe.[24]

   In fact, returning to my abovementioned concept of "participatory fantasy," I argue that

the latter (nonprofessional) category not only involves much more ingenuity, but also risks being

obscured in that way by the former (professional) category. Put simply, as attested anecdotally

by my own childhood play memories, some of the most creative and fulfilling play involved

other kids who had no little to no knowledge or appreciation of the comic books or other media

such as children's cartoon television shows. In other words, it is within the assemblage of powers

in each (transindividual) figure, not the official narratives found in professional media, that the

most unbounded personal power and political potential lie. Moreover, this point has larger

implications for what we understand as "popular culture," suggesting (in sympathy with Balibar)

that a more democratic, free, egalitarian, and anarchistic approach is to resist the consumerist

model (according to which "consumers" modify professional cultural products), in favor of a

grassroots model according to which professional culture workers appropriate, often restrictively,

the spontaneously improvised cultural creations of the people.

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[23] In brief, "virtual" for Deleuze, in contrast to the possible, denotes a multiplicity (inspired by Bergson's thought) that is no less real than the actual, and is always available to be actualized. To elaborate, one can plug in these meanings into the X-Mutants' virtual world as follows: its *characters* are defined by their *innate* super-heroic *quality*, empowered by the *nature* of the X-gene, using their *talents* as honed by the *intelligence* of their *genius* teacher, and supported by various *machines*, into adopting a disciplined *disposition* and a *temperament* of sacrifice for social justice for the oppressed.

[24] For one account of the importance of make believe, in the arts, children's play, and the influence of the latter on the former, see Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

In support of my emphasis on ingenuity, "the term *ingenium*," as Balibar later elaborates, "contains the key to the problem of *the identity of individuals*, and so also to that of collective quasi-individuals" (2008, 128). That is, Balibar agrees with his fellow Spinoza scholar Pierre-François Moreau that the concept of ingenium is central to Spinoza's metaphysics and politics, and that Spinoza implies the existence of an ingenium (or quasi-ingenium) for each quasi-individual. Put analogically, the ingenium is to the organism as the quasi-ingenium is to the quasi-individual (or collective). More precisely, quasi-individuals manifest "a conciliation or combination of *ingenia* [plural of *ingenium*]," which results in "a collective *mens* [mind]" or "*animorum unio*" (122). The latter, I translate as a "union of heart-minds," as in that of a cohesive superhero team such as the X-Men (122).

Buttressing this translation (of *animorum unio* as "union of heart-minds"), Balibar renders *anima* sometimes as "heart" and sometimes as "mind," which he justifies on the grounds of "the Spinozist identification of affective processes with intellectual processes (or ideals) in the concept of the *mens*" (130). Put simply, thoughts and feelings for Spinoza interpenetrate, and cannot be meaningfully separated into metaphysically or physically distinct phenomena. In Balibar's elaboration of this point, for Spinoza the mind (*mens*) both thinks and feels, but this identification "leaves a 'remainder', which is precisely what the term *ingenium* designates" (130). Put differently, the difference between what transindividuals feel and what they think is what makes each of them unique. This is most vividly manifest in the X-Men by their contrast with their archenemies, the "Brotherhood of Mutants" (modeled on Malcolm X and the Black Power movement), whose central conflict centers on whether mutants can and should politically assimilate with (nonmutant) humans, based on their respective views of mutants as either merely different (according to the X-Men) or inherently superior (according to the Brotherhood). In

short, they all feel the same hurt from their mistreatment, yet think about it importantly differently.

Crucially for sociopolitical thought, this ingenium remainder means that no human being is completely assimilated to their groups or communities, and that no group or community (aka "collective quasi-individual") is completely assimilated to surrounding ones. On the contrary, differences abound. And with this interpretive move, Balibar attempts to avoid the criticism that many critics level against Spinoza—namely that he affirms a kind of "hive mind"—with its attendant risk for mass conformity, and thereby totalitarianism.[25] It is in this context that Balibar confesses that he is "tempted to retranslate" *ingenium* as "resistance to assimilation: a resistance belonging to the individual psyche, rooted in the psycho-physical complex [of the human being]" (130). Synthesizing the previous two points, the difference between what each of us thinks and feels is the core of our uniqueness, which empowers us to assert our singular independence against any group or organization that might threaten to swallow us whole and assimilate us. Each is an X-Man, but each X-Man is different. Finally from this first section, though Balibar's favored examples of quasi-individuals are cities and states, this idea of an ingenium (or quasi-ingenium) as resistance to assimilation (both within-group and between-groups) applies equally well to smaller entities, such as a corps de ballet, the marine corps. Or even a team of superheroes and/or philosophers such as the X-Mutants or the Birmingham Philosophy Guild.

IV.   Conclusion: Professor Balibar's X-Mutants

Put in Balibar's terms, one can combine his transindividual philosophers with those of the guild into a new team of quasi-individuals I will call "Prof. Balibar's X-Mutants." This new,

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[25] For a sympathetic analysis of what she terms "collective powers, like the commonwealth," in Balibar, see Hasana Sharp, "Spinoza's Commonwealth and the Anthropomorphic Illusion," *Philosophy Today* 61(4): 2017, 833-846.

combined team would possess its own Spinozist "collective heart-mind" or, more precisely, a "*quasi mens*," which Balibar describes as a "unity-of-conduct" (123). As Balibar elaborates, the latter's "direction is unified (and therefore 'defined') only tendentially (one could say 'asymptotically' to reason and communal utility), and therefore itself is unified only tendentially – in a *precarious* way" (123). In short, a team is unified by how members conduct themselves, their way of life, which in the case of this new X-Mutant team includes radical critical thinking in pursuit of civic disobedience.

More important for this new team than its quasi-ingenuity power, however, according to Balibar, is "the relation between the formation of transindividual ideas (the sociopolitical content of which we know to be the unification of common opinions and mass notions, the formation in action of a thought of the multitude) and the *ingenium* of each one" (129). In other words, what unifies this combined corps is not so much sharing the same ingenuity power, but rather each member's comportment being oriented toward the same ideas, which circulate among them and constitute their asymptotically-unified conduct into a way of life. In the case of Prof. Balibar's X-Mutants, these ideas are the central concepts discussed above, namely participatorily-fantasizing, mutational identity, civic disobedience, ingenuity-power, and transindividuality.

Balibar's openness to such assembling this new, more inclusive team is signaled by his claim, in his second book on Spinoza, that "Social reality must take on a hallucinatory character, or be woven from fantasy, in order to exist as such, in history and in practice" (2020, 154). In fact, multiple ideas from that book, as well as his first book on Spinoza, resonate equally strongly with the X-Mutants, and therefore further buttress the legitimacy and efficacy of this assemblage. I will consider five of these transindividual ideas here, beginning with three simpler ones, and concluding with two that are more complex.

First, Balibar insists, echoing contemporary Spinoza scholar Pierre Macherey, that we take seriously Spinoza's claim that there are infinitely many attributes of substance (which are not limited to extension and thought) (Balibar 2020, 23). This, in contrast to many scholars who write as if Spinoza claims that only material things and ideas exist. Similarly, the titular "X" of "The X-Men" is an open variable, signifying the X-gene that distinguishes mutants from homo sapiens and can manifest infinitely variously.

Second, Balibar notes that Spinoza's third kind of knowledge (usually rendered as "intuition"), as opposed to the first (sensory) and second (conceptual) kinds of knowledge, "posits singularities *as such* as necessary" (68). In brief, intuition for Spinoza involves understanding the highest abstract things through understanding the most concrete things.[26] Similarly, every X-Mutant is a vividly singular being, with their own conglomeration of powers and vulnerabilities, and yet one can grasp through any of them the basic idea of mutation, and thereby of difference and persecution (in part qua allegory for the Civil Rights Movement).

Third, in a second borrowing from Simondon, Balibar describes the condition of the constantly self-recreating transindividual as "metastable," which refers to a state between stability and instability, wherein an entity has great potential to shift between states. Clearly, this also applies particularly well to the X-Mutants, whose equilibrium is more vividly dynamic, and therefore more open to transformation, than that of homo sapiens (as normally understood) (57). Also relevant for this third point, Balibar insists that this metastability "is determined in its very essence by 'collective' processes, that is to say, 'constant ratios of movement and rest' or *convenientiae* which incorporate the individual into a greater individual, or into an individual of a 'higher' order" (57). In other words, metastability is the result of an entity being crisscrossed

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[26] For an alternate interpretation of Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, see Joshua M. Hall, "Poetic Intuition: Spinoza and Gerard Manley Hopkins," *Philosophy Today* 57(4): 2013, 401-407.

and constituted by forces and movements that move beyond it. Each X-Mutant, too, is part of the team identity, having incorporated their "closeted" mutant self into an "out of the closet" self, and basis of their transformability is a specific gene (the X-factor) that connects them all.[27]

Finally, the last two resonances that I will discuss involve Balibar's initial vision of Spinoza's oeuvre, and his subsequent revision thereof, respectively. Beginning with his first book on Spinoza, Balibar concludes it by claiming Spinoza's entire corpus can be interpreted as a philosophy of communication. Given that the X-Men began as a graphic novel, and have mutated into a film franchise, they too are centrally concerned with communication, including the communication of progressive political philosophy, as emphasized for example by Zingsheim and Fawaz's above interpretations. Returning to Balibar's elaboration of this point, an individual's "way of life," he explains, "is nothing other than a given *regime of communication* (affective, economic, or intellectual) with other individuals" (Balibar 2020, 124). These regimes, Balibar continues, "form a sequence through which a collective effort is being worked out – the effort to transform the mode of communication, to move from relationships of identification (that is, from modes of *communion*) to relationships based on *exchange* of goods and knowledge" (124). There are also isomorphic movements in the X-Mutants, at two distinct levels.

First, each member of the X-Men moves from a reconstructive self-identification as mutant (and therefore a potential candidate for enrollment in Professor X's school) to being an aspiring member of the team, where all depends on the complex relationships among the powers and vulnerabilities of the group. Second, the X-Men as a team has moved from its original, more homogenous constitution (of five suburban white teenagers) to its more diverse, international contemporary roster. Put in terms of the Balibar quote above, the X-Men go from (a) communing

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[27] For the many resonances between mutant and queer identity, see Zingham 2011.

with their individual mutant identity to exchanging their powers with the rest of the team, and (b) being a small group of white kids communing at a remote boarding school to becoming a large and ever-expanding group of people from all over the world, sharing and exchanging resources and empowering knowledge.

Extending this analysis from the micro- to the macro-political, Balibar adds that "The political state is essentially one such regime" of communication, though he clarifies that Spinoza uses the term "state" in a sense that is "much *broader* than the juridical and administrative form that is referred to by that name in the modern period" (Balibar 2020, 124). At the risk of oversimplifying, "state" for Spinoza is broad enough to include many other forms of political organization. This means, Balibar continues, that Spinoza's vision "can help us to envisage, at least in theory, historical forms of the State other than the present form"—as well as identifying "the decisive mechanism by which those new forms can be created: the democratisation of knowledge" (124). In short, a political state is metastable insofar as it is always open to the possibility of radical restructuring, limited only by the spread of knowledge among its people. Both aspects of this passage connect to the X-Mutants. First, the *content* of their central story arc concerns a possible evolution from the current geopolitical reality, wherein one form of human being (that of "normal," non-mutant homo sapiens) dominates by oppressing and marginalizing the others, to a possible future where mutants and non-mutants peacefully coexist and share power. Second, the *form* of the popular and inexpensive media in which the X-Mutants appear constitutes a democratization of this knowledge-content.

Now for the final resonance between Balibar and the X-Mutants. In the last section of his second book on Spinoza, at the cutting edge of his own thought, Balibar introduces a final metaphor "alongside that of the 'line of flight'," for the *trans*-transindividual, namely "the

extreme edge of transindividuality" (Balibar 2020, 178). Both metaphors seem custom-made for the X-Men, many of whom fly and/or possess sharp-edged appendages or external weapons. Moreover, Balibar's subsequent connection of this point to "*utopian communism*" is particularly evocative of the X-Men's world. In this utopian communism, Balibar writes, "the divisions of social labour and the corresponding 'forms of individuality' would become objects of planning and more generally of a *conscious* organization" (178). Just so, Prof. X's School for Gifted Mutants, the X-Men team, and their utopian vision of mutant justice all vividly express a conscious organization in the design of new forms of individuality.

This transformative political power of the X-Mutants derives, perhaps, from what Balibar describes as the transindividual's "essential *mutability*," which appears as "the increase or decrease in the power to act in Spinoza" (182). The X-Mutants are an ideal figure for Balibar's exhortation that, in what amounts to "a line of flight" from our current social relations, "we must proceed to *the edge of the transindividual*, where it 'decomposes' or tends to exceed itself, by destabilising the figures of individuality and community" that the transindividual "instituted, to identify the possibility for a transformation without importing an ideal alternative from outside" (183). And one such possibility of transformation from inside, with which the present investigation began, is the Birmingham Philosophy Guild.

In light of the foregoing analyses, I therefore propose that academic philosophers today, on the model of Professor X (modeled, in turn, on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), should assemble our own teams of participatorily-fantasizing (with Fawaz), mutational (with Zingsheim), transindividual (with Balibar) theorists, identifying and honing their ingenuity-powers. In this project, the X-Mutants' particular promise vis-à-vis queer identities could provide a vital

counterforce to the regressive gender essentialism that occasionally manifests in Balibar's

philosophy, as embodied in my opening example of the Birmingham Philosophy Guild.

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