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Spinoza's Commonwealth and the Anthropomorphic Illusion

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Abstract: Balibar presents Spinoza as a profound critic of "the anthropomorphic illusion." Spinoza famously derides the tendency of humans to project their own imagined traits and tendencies onto the rest of nature. The anthropomorphic illusion yields a gross overestimation our own agency. I argue in this essay that the flip side of this illusion is our refusal to extend certain properties we reserve exclusively to ourselves. The result is that we disregard the power of social and political institutions because they do not resemble us. The anthropomorphic illusion therefore causes us both to overestimate our power as singular individuals and to underestimate the power of social and political institutions. If we understand ourselves and institutions as "transindividuals" rather than on the illusory model of substantial individuality, it is unproblematic to attribute individuality to collective powers, like the commonwealth, and makes better sense of how we are determined by external forces.

Key words: Spinoza, Balibar, *Political Treatise*, transindividuality

> *Just as in the state of nature the man who is guided by reason is the most powerful and the most his own master, so a Commonwealth will be most powerful and most its own master if it is guided by reason. For the Right of a Commonwealth is determined by the power of a multitude which is led as if by one mind.*
> —*Spinoza,* Political Treatise

In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze celebrates Spinoza's radical devaluation of consciousness through its exposure as the effect of a triple illusion. In the wake of René Descartes and the phenomenological tradition, human existence is typically understood to be defined most essentially by consciousness. We are those beings who are uniquely aware of ourselves, and

whose self-awareness forms the basis of all knowledge and experience. Deleuze presents Spinoza's philosophy as a profound challenge to the (metaphysical and methodological) priority of consciousness. Spinoza reveals the fundamentally illusory structure of first-person experience.[1] Rather than serving as an anchor of truth, the grasp of ourselves as, most fundamentally, creatures of consciousness expresses three modes of ignorance: "the illusion of final causes," "the illusion of free decrees," and "the theological illusion."[2] Étienne Balibar interprets Spinoza as a thinker who exposes and examines yet another systematic illusion governing human experience: "the anthropomorphic illusion." Related to the illusions identified by Deleuze, the anthropomorphic illusion prompts us to imagine other beings—including God, nonhuman animals, and the State—on the model of a confused idea of "Man." This projection involves imagining individuality as such in terms of an inadequate idea of human individuality. The illusion is thus (at least) double: (i) by virtue of the triple illusion of consciousness, we imagine that humans exist and act in a particular way, and (ii) we project this confused and largely false image onto other beings. Metaphysics itself issues from a confused anthropology.

I would like to suggest that the anthropomorphic illusion is structured also by a negative moment. Positively, it involves a projection or a filter that represents all of reality in the image of man. We might also detect a negative tendency, according to which the anthropomorphic illusion withholds the extension of certain properties that it reserves exclusively for humans. That is, the anthropomorphic illusion involves more than an animistic projection of "personality" onto trees, beasts, mountains, or deities. At the same time, it encourages a misrecognition of how institutions and social forces can be sufficiently unified in their existence and action so as to constitute individuals (albeit Spinozist rather than substantial individuals). Because we do not typically perceive a commonwealth, multitude, or an army in the same terms as an anthropomorphic individual, we dismiss their coherence and power. More so today than in Spinoza's time, the anthropomorphic illusion operates to obscure the individuality of extrahuman phenomena. That is, it overlooks the material coherence and durability of, for example, institutional forces or an indignant multitude. Because we do not attribute to them conscious intentions, we mistakenly deny individuality to collective agencies. The anthropomorphic illusion with which Spinoza himself was most concerned was our tendency to project individuality, personality, and volition onto beings we imagine to be analogous to ourselves, such as God or beasts. He was likewise concerned to deny the presence of divine intention behind natural events, especially those painful events of fortune that result in grave losses or the rise of certain individuals to cultural or political power. He encouraged us to interpret consequential events as outcomes of natural patterns of determination rather than as reflections of divine judgment.[3] Today, following a long history of methodological and

ideological individualism, we find in the liberal individualist interpretations of Spinoza's political theory an expression of a wider tendency, made legible by Spinoza's philosophy, to disavow the power and coherence that collective bodies and minds have as a result of their non-resemblance to ourselves. Insofar as we perceive social and political bodies as nothing more than many discrete powers temporarily cooperating, hardly different in nature from "a pile of stones,"[4] we underestimate social and political power. The result is a radical underestimation of the power of collective forces "to construct," socially and otherwise, our modes of being and action.

Balibar declares that "for Spinoza, the great philosophical project *is to think the human outside of any anthropomorphism*, freed as theoretician . . . of all the *models* that human beings . . . incessantly assign to themselves."[5] Every student of Spinoza recognizes the critical analysis of what Deleuze named "the theological illusion": the idea that human consciousness "invokes a God endowed with understanding and volition, operating by means of final causes and free decrees in order to prepare for man a world commensurate with His glory and His punishments."[6] Spinoza denies that God governs on a tribunal model by showing that neither God nor humanity ought to be understood to exercise free or spontaneous judgment that defies the natural order of cause and effect. Rather, all beings act from the necessity of their natures, such that our freedom expresses rather than contradicts our natural determination.

Elsewhere, inspired by Balibar among others, I sought to develop the consequences for political theory of Spinoza's anti-anthropomorphic conception of humanity.[7] Humans ought to be understood in the same way as any other natural thing—enabled and constrained by ambient forces, natural laws, and their material and affective constitutions. What we must also recognize is that nonhuman beings may be *more* like human beings than we typically recognize. While we may see the resemblance between humans and primates, for example, we may neglect the mental properties of social groups and institutions. We ought, therefore, to extend Balibar's analysis further to identify a "negative moment" of the anthropomorphic illusion. Spinoza not only exposes how the imagination presents a world in the human image, a world in which nonhuman powers and beings act like we (falsely) imagine ourselves to do, by virtue of transparent intentions and motives. He also does more than force us to redefine human existence in terms of natural forces and laws. As Balibar has shown perhaps better than any other commentator, Spinoza provides a framework through which to reconceptualise individuality as such. Balibar's analysis of "transindividuality" has been influential among interpretations of Spinoza, but attention has been paid primarily to how the concept of transindividuality allows us to re-imagine the existence of human individuals in terms that are neither atomistic nor holistic.[8] Less attention has been paid to how Spinoza provides a "transindividual" framework for the analysis

of collectives, masses, and institutions.[9] Thinking beyond the anthropomorphic illusion demands that we reimagine not only ourselves but the collective bodies of which we form a part. Elaborating upon Balibar's analysis, I suggest that we can diagnose the widespread resistance to naming the State an individual, as a constraint imposed by the anthropomorphic illusion. Freed of the anthropomorphic illusion, perhaps we can learn more than we have thus far from Spinoza's "originality" as a thinker for whom "the 'mass' is itself the principal object of investigation, reflection, and historical analysis."[10]

Anthropomorphic Human Individuals

Balibar warns that "it is deeply wrong-headed to represent *all* the processes of individuation on the model of *human* individuation." This tendency is especially strong in the representation of political phenomena, such as the State.[11] According to the classic anthropomorphic representation, the sovereign appears as the "head" of the State while the subjects compose its body. This corresponds to a dualistic ontology according to which the mind directs the body to execute its commands. Of course, Spinoza rejects this portrait of humanity and thus cannot be understood to support such a model of the commonwealth. As one can see from this example, the anthropomorphic illusion is not only problematic insofar as it falsely imposes a human model upon what is not human. The problem is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, that *Anthropos* is imagined on a false model of substantial individuality, such that humans in nature constitute "a dominion within a dominion" that "disturbs rather than follows" nature's order.[12] The anthropomorphic illusion includes the idea that our minds transcend the causal world and move us, insofar as we have achieved moral perfection through self-mastery, according to imperatives of reason *as opposed to* natural (or mechanical) causes. While this aspect of Spinoza's philosophy is well known, I will briefly review how Balibar replaces this inadequate conception of human existence and individuality with the concept of "transindividuality," indebted to the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon.[13] When one considers individuality in terms of transindividuality rather than in terms of anthropomorphism, the attribution of individuality to nonhuman beings and collective agents is far less problematic.

A traditional substance metaphysics, such as Aristotle's, describes individual things or objects, including human beings, as "substances." Substances, like subjects of a sentence, are those things of which properties, locations, or actions might be predicated. Although there are complex stories to explain how substances interact and depend (or not) on one another, the language of substance typically refers to our intuitive grasp of distinct objects.[14] We perceive and speak of "things" as discrete. For Descartes, humans are individuals, composed of two fundamentally distinct substances, mind and body. Substance, for Descartes, refers

most fundamentally to a relationship of conceptual independence. A substance is something that does not require the concept of another thing in order to be conceived.[15] Since we cannot apprehend "intelligent" without also conceiving of something that is mental, we require the notion of mind in order for the property of intelligence to be conceived. Spinoza rejects these ways of reasoning about the human being as well as other things we encounter in the world. Finite things are not, on his account, individuals with the kind of ontological or conceptual independence that an Aristotelian or a Cartesian might grant them.

Spinoza asserts, against Aristotelianism and Cartesianism, that "substance does not pertain to the essence of man."[16] Substance, according the *Ethics*, requires both ontological and conceptual independence, which, he maintains, cannot be said of human beings. In Spinoza's language substance is "in itself" and "conceived by itself."[17] There is only one infinite substance[18]—Nature or God—and everything else exists "in another": each and every other thing is a mode of the unique, infinite substance.[19] Humans are not substantial individuals, but are modes that, like every other thing in nature, exist and act by virtue of the infinitely diverse powers of other finite beings,[20] all of which belong conceptually and ontologically to the one substance, or Nature.

For Spinoza, humans and other things exist in, and by virtue of others. We are relational beings, dependent and exposed. At the same time, we necessarily affect others with our mental and corporeal activity.[21] This is, of course, the basic premise of all Spinozism. Typically—because embodied experience is such that we are ignorant of what causes us to think, feel and act—we imagine that we are, at least in some important respects, independent of natural laws of determination.[22] Whereas *other* things may exist *in* nature, subject to the necessary laws of cause and effect, the anthropomorphic illusion represents each of us as an exception to the rule: *imperium in imperio*, a dominion within a dominion. It is still commonplace for philosophers to maintain that having a mind, soul, or will entails that we contradict or transcend the laws of nature, or that we are able to act according to a (non-mechanical) "higher law" revealed by reason. For Descartes, the fact that we are composed of mental substance implies some aspect of our thinking power is unlimited, "in a way infinite," like God.[23] This is precisely the illusion of consciousness that Deleuze describes so well. The illusion of consciousness prompts us to imagine that we are the unconstrained, spontaneous sources of our volitions. In reality, we are everywhere moved to desire by myriad ambient forces that function as the "hidden abode" of the production of consciousness.[24]

Nevertheless, Spinoza uses the language of individuality to refer to humans as well as to most other beings in nature. Even if we are always necessarily involved with others and our thoughts and actions are constantly enabled and constrained by others, the grasp of ourselves as individuals is not illusory. Spinoza refers to the human body as an individual "composed of many individuals of different natures,

each of which is highly composite."[25] Each of us is a multiplicity, a composition of many individuals, which is regularly modified and exchanged in a process of constant "regeneration."[26] Even if there is no substantial part—mental or corporeal—that persists to explain the identity of a human individual over time, we can understand individuality as a threshold of consistency reflected in the persistence of a "certain and determinate" proportion of motion and rest among the fluctuating parts of one's body.[27] The most enduring individuals will be malleable and resilient, able to sustain and produce many changes in relationship to the complex and variable causal network in which they exist and act.

Thus, while there are no atomic or substantial individuals as the anthropomorphic illusion prompts us to imagine, Spinoza conceives of individuality on a different model that Balibar calls "transindividual." From this perspective, the problem is to grasp individuality as it really is for finite beings like us: variable, compatible with multiplicity, and emergent over time in interaction with others. Fundamental to the concept of "transindividuality" is the Spinozistic notion of (emphatically) non-isolated individuality.[28] Balibar argues that Spinoza has a robust conception of individuality that is thinkable only with an equally robust notion of interaction and interdependence. He presents Spinoza as a profound thinker of individuality who is in no way a methodological individualist.[29] He insists that singularities for Spinoza are not indiscernible, as they are for Leibniz, but rather belong to a causal network through which (*not* in spite of which) they are "individualized."[30] Because no composite individual has the precise natural history of affections and desires that I do, I am unique. Moreover, the richer my experience and the more diverse my interactions with the rest of nature, the less reproducible my affective history becomes. As a result, the more elaborate my relationships are, the more individualized I become. My individualization would be diminished by sealing myself off from the rest of nature, since it depends upon multiplying my capacities to affect and be affected.[31] Against the presuppositions of individualism, Spinozistic *individualization*, as Balibar insightfully interprets it, grows in proportion to my involvement and interaction with other beings.

Since individualization occurs little by little, and can be diminished or amplified according to one's circumstances, individuality must be understood to be something that is reversible and that admits of degrees. Just as I become more distinct ("individualized," in Balibar's Simondonian vocabulary) by virtue of having a more elaborate experience of other bodies and minds, I also become more "individuated" by virtue of the powers that I develop affectively. "By *individuation*," Balibar notes, "I mean that individuals become separated from their environment."[32] Each individual may be understood to be more or less unique and powerful, more or less singularized and effective as a part of nature. It might seem paradoxical to understand Spinoza's account to imply, concomitantly, that we are more individualized through having increasingly many relations with others

and that our greater powers of affection result in increasing "separation" from our environment. We ought not to imagine separation in spatial terms, however. We are separate insofar as our actions and thoughts can be increasingly grasped as our "own" powers, which is to say in Spinoza's terms, insofar as our actions can be explained by the laws of our own nature. As Balibar emphasizes, "our own powers," or the powers that follow necessarily from the "laws of our nature alone," include the forces of others insofar as they enhance and concur with our own.[33]

To explain further, consider Spinoza's observation that "children, because their bodies are continually, as it were, in a constant state of equilibrium, laugh or cry simply because they see others laugh or cry."[34] Children's bodies are highly responsive to their affective environment. They are so intensely moved by ambient affects that they may appear to reflect their social milieus rather immediately.[35] But as a human body develops powers of perception that make it possible to be increasingly "conscious of itself, God, and things,"[36] the individual will act more and more from its own resources rather than in response to external causes. As Spinoza puts it, "The more perfection each thing has, the more it acts and the less it is acted on."[37] Increasing power results in increasing activity, but, on Balibar's interpretation, Spinoza's is not a story of linear progress from dependency to independence. Rather, the one who is enabled through her history of relations and affection to become increasingly active is, at the same time, increasingly connected to others. Thus, the height of emancipatory knowledge is the enjoyment, shared with as many others as possible, of "the union the mind has with the whole of Nature."[38] Spinoza also describes the "free man" as one who desires friendship and community most of all.[39] The achievement of rationality follows from the enjoyment and production of commonality. One is therefore individuated in both an epistemological and an ethical sense ("separated") insofar as she can be *understood* to actively produce her thoughts and actions "from her own nature." Although I appreciate that Spinoza's terminology raises many questions that are beyond the scope of this essay, Balibar insists, correctly in my view, that acting "from oneself" does not in any way imply acting in solitude. Quite the contrary. In Balibar's words, "Spinoza *never actually says* that anyone whose actions can be explained by his own or sole nature . . . is acting solely, or separately from others."[40] Indeed, her individuation is only possible by virtue of being able to understand and act from shared resources and the laws common to all of nature. Thus Spinoza conceives a "transindividualist" alternative, according to which neither the individual nor the whole is prior. Our relations make it possible for us to be individuated, just as our individuation makes our network of relations more coherent and fecund.

Yet, by virtue of the anthropomorphic illusion, we imagine our freedom to be on the model of substance. We imagine the free man to strive towards a minimization of affections. The illusion is that individuation is delivered by severance

from others, inoculation against their noxious influence, and thus on the model of *imperium in imperio*. As Spinoza suggests in the famous preface to the third part of the *Ethics*, we likewise imagine the fool to be unconstrained, albeit lamentably so. We hold him entirely responsible for his folly, failing to understand his utterances and behaviors as products and producers of a network of causes. The positive moment of the illusion involves the fantasy that we are substantial individuals, worlds unto ourselves, fountains of spontaneous power. The Spinozan alternative that Balibar develops with the concept of transindividuality, however, (re) describes more than human existence. It pertains to the being of any finite thing whatsoever. Grasping the State in transindividual terms, as Balibar advocates, poses its own challenges to which we will now turn.

The *imperium* is not an *imperium in imperio*

Spinoza asserts in the *Political Treatise* that "the Right of a state, *or* of the supreme powers, is nothing more than the Right of nature, determined by the power of a multitude, led as if by one mind."[41] Spinoza predicates "*una veluti mente*" of the commonwealth no fewer than seven times in the *Political Treatise*, which has prompted a vigorous debate about the status of this single mind.[42] Perhaps more than any other fine point in Spinoza interpretation, the question of the single-minded State has aroused palpably ideological sparring. Whether Spinoza's State is "an individual" is understood by some to settle the question of whether Spinoza is ultimately a liberal or an illiberal political thinker. For some, his liberal credentials must be secured by affirming the priority of the human individual, which entails denying the metaphysical possibility of higher order, social or institutional individuals. For these interpreters, individuality is only conceived holistically, such that granting the State metaphysical individuality implies that its subjects are metaphysically (and thus ethically) subordinate to it. As Barbone puts it, "If it is true that for Spinoza the individual is first and foremost, it only follows that political institutions take second place in importance to the individuals joined in them."[43]

In contrast, Balibar argues that, just as the human individual ought not to be understood as an atomic or substantial individual, the State ought not to be understood as an organic individual. The State, for Spinoza, is not an organism whose parts serve the requirements of the whole. At the same time, the multitude is not a mere aggregate of discrete individuals artificially united by their political membership. Balibar suggests that the State is better regarded as a "transindividual." The different powers that contribute to the existence and action of a commonwealth can be sufficiently coherent and unified to account for its endurance over time, its ability to preserve itself in the face of hostile forces (internal and external), its ability to organize constituents to act according to certain norms and laws, etc.

Interpreting the State as a transindividual does not demand that we understand the multitude, its institutions, or its various resources to be seamlessly unified and perfectly coordinated. If the State, like the human, is transindiviudated, its coherence, uniqueness, and power to act from its own resources admits of a wide range of degrees. It can be more or less at odds with itself, more or less able to follow the dictates of reason (i.e., to act in a way that conduces to its strength and endurance), and more or less reactive to external forces, such as threats from foreign States, natural disasters, or the vagaries of markets. The commonwealth, Spinoza maintains, is a "natural thing," an individual that can produce effects, can be destroyed, and that is amplified, sustained, or weakened by forces that are specific to the natural history of its being. In Spinoza's words,

> For if a Commonwealth were not bound by any laws, *or* rules, without which the Commonwealth would not be a Commonwealth, then we'd have to think of it, not as a natural thing, but as a fantasy.
>
> The commonwealth sins, then, when it does, or allows to happen, what can be the cause of its ruin. . . . The commonwealth sins when it does something contrary to the dictates of reason. For the Commonwealth is most its own master when it acts according to the dictates of reason.[44]

Here, Spinoza represents the Commonwealth and its virtue in precisely the same terms as human virtue, properly understood. This does not mean that the good for the commonwealth is the same as the good for human beings. It is arguably not best served by maximizing its knowledge of God, or nature. Rather, it is best served by creating those conditions that enable the multitude to be guided, as it were, by one mind. The "as it were," Balibar suggests, does not signify Spinoza's hesitation regarding attribution of mentality to a collective agent, such as the *civitas*. Rather, the "as it were" points to the lack of self-sufficiency proper to any finite mode.[45] To assert that the commonwealth is a natural thing rather than a "fantasy" is merely to say that it is never an absolute substance, an *imperium in imperio* that acts according to a power that lies exclusively within itself.[46]

Balibar thereby carves a middle path for understanding the State in neither holistic nor atomistic terms. If predicating individuality of the State, like that of a human or any other finite mode, does not entail granting it absolute self-sufficiency, impermeability, and perfect coherence, the degree of unity and coherence required to count as an individual is lower than many critics imagine.[47] If a human can be an individual and yet "subject to passions,"[48] "changeable and inconstant,"[49] often subject to the right of another,[50] and always fundamentally in need of others, calling a State an individual does not entail representing it as a "Mortall God"[51] whose subjects are little more than functions of its metabolism. Balibar claims that "all 'degrees' of union, from the passional opinion of an insurrectionary mob . . . to the rational deliberation in the setting of stable institutions,

are included potentially in the idea of *animorum unio*."[52] To assert that a commonwealth might act "as if" it were directed by a single mind is directly opposed to an idea of the State as "the march of God in the world."[53] Indeed, Spinoza refers to the operation of a single-minded multitude in the case of a virtuous, rational social order[54] but also in the case of a passionate assembly, driven together by fear or a shared longing for vengeance.[55] To assert that a commonwealth is guided as if by a single mind entails only that a number of individuals (human and extra-human) have reached a minimal threshold of incorporation to produce effects that depend on the synergy produced by their concatenation. Or perhaps better, when we can only interpret a set of effects with reference to a power of aggregated individuals, that aggregate is—however temporarily and precariously, or however enduringly—a (trans)individual.

Warren Montag, in an illuminating analysis of these debates also indebted to Balibar, highlights how both the holists and the anti-holists represent individuality in anthropomorphic terms.[56] A holistic model of the State (such as Hegel's) or a holistic figure of the multitude (such as Matheron's[57]) imagines a subject, more or less rational, acting with a view to its ends. It is thus, like the God of Spinoza's famous appendix, an organism "endowed with human freedom" willing ends in accord with its perceived advantage.[58] In contrast, the individualists deny subjectivity of the State but do not free themselves of a conception of human individuals as substances cum subjects, as the ultimate source of their own desires and actions as well as of the State's legitimacy. When interpreters come across Spinoza's multiple iterations to the effect that "the right of a commonwealth is determined by the power of a multitude, which is led as if by one mind,"[59] the holists imagine a State strictly analogous to a human subject while the individualists imagine an aggregate of individuals whose consent authorizes the State to act as their representative. What remains unthought is transindividuality as a natural-social phenomenon with, Montag insists, no juridical grounding.[60] In other words, if the "commonwealth, is a name for a multitude led as if by one mind," the "as if," for Montag, expresses the fact that composite individuality cannot but exceed the limits of legal (anthropomorphic) personhood. The power to act that belongs to a multitude sufficiently incorporated to be called a commonwealth is not reducible to its constitution or the sum of subjective agreements to abide by the law. Rather, what transindividuality points to, on this interpretation, is the unpredictability and uncontainability of collective agency, the "permanent excess of force over law."[61]

In addition, I would emphasize that, as a particular composition of nature's power, the power of a multitude animating a State is not reducible to its human members. It includes the extra-human components of, for example, the fecundity (or lack thereof) of its territory, the quality of its air and water, the vitality of its flora and fauna, its technoscientific apparatuses, its artillery, roads, bridges, and other infrastructure, and so on. The various individuals that enable a State to

produce effects, to secure borders, levy taxes, or influence the actions of other States and peoples are not only its human subjects. They include its cultural productions, military might, ability to grow food, its accessibility by transport, and more. These individual powers co-operate differently than the individuals that cooperate to form my body—the State is not an organism—but it does not mean that it is absurd to call their collective power "individuated," or "singular."[62] It may seem trivial and unnecessary to assert that the coherence of, for example, Canada is greater than that of a "pile of stones," but the individualist camp of Spinoza interpretation seems to fear that granting even this much greases the slippery slope toward organicism and noxious collectivism. Calling a political body an individual—even an individual with a *quasi mens*—does not mean that it desires and acts on account of an end, like we imagine ourselves to do, in an anthropomorphic fashion. A State has a *quasi mens*, according to Balibar, insofar as there is a minimum of communal thought operative as a condition of the endurance of a social or political power.[63] Spinoza thereby enables us to imagine thought, individuality, and activity (as well as passivity) beyond the anthropomorphic illusion.

Grasping the State in transindividual terms goes a great length toward mitigating the ideological character of the interpretive debate. The problem for Spinoza interpretation is not to establish the relative "importance" of human subjects versus State power, but to reconceive, quite radically, the relationship between the two. In freeing ourselves from the constraints of the anthropomorphic illusion, we cease to imagine the State either as an organic whole of which its members are parts or as an artificial aggregate of metaphysically discrete substances. If we can imagine individuality beyond our false image of human individuality, we might hope to grasp how collective agency is, in Spinoza's words, "a natural thing" rather than a chimera. Recognizing composite powers such as the Commonwealth or the multitude as real (trans)individuals rather than as fictitious unities will help us to appreciate how and why what we call "social" phenomena—such as customs, habits, and oppressive institutions—endure despite being subject to vigorous critique and contestation. The anthropomorphic illusion according to which we attribute coherence, purposiveness, and even intelligence only to individual human beings rather than to collective powers, such as States or systems of domination, encourages us to underestimate their power and durability. For Barbone, the State is a collection that is not different in kind from a pile of stones; it does not have a conative power, and it thus functions in the service of its members. This looks to me like prescription in the guise of description. Spinoza allows us better to appreciate the materialization of social relations, such that their resistance to reorganization is not characteristically weaker by virtue of having come into being at a particular time as a result of the historically constituted needs of some human beings. Jason Read aptly describes Balibar's contribution to thinking the politics

of transindividuality as a refusal to divide nature and institution. "Nature, the fundamental aspects of desire, imagination, and language, cannot exist without some kind of organization, some kind of institution, and no institution, state, or economy can exist without becoming part of the most fundamental aspects of human existence."[64] The anthropomorphic illusion is inextricable from the fantasy that humans alone escape the determination of nature. It likewise involves the mystification of those other natural powers—composite individuals of human and extrahuman forces—that effectively, even skillfully, reproduce themselves, produce effects in the world, and resist their undoing.

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Notes

1. See also Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1970), 17–21.
3. See Benedict de Spinoza, appendix to part I of *Ethics* (hereafter *E*) and the preface to *Theological-Political Treatise* (hereafter *TTP*). Citations from Spinoza's *Ethics* will follow the standard convention: part will be represented by Roman numerals I–V; proposition by "p," followed by Arabic numerals; "d" for demonstration; "s" for scholium; etc. Citations of *TTP* and *TP* will indicate the chapter and paragraph numbers (for example, 5/3). Citations of Spinoza will be from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vols. 1–2, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985 and 2016).
4. Steven Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and J. I. Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 106.
5. Etienne Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluti mente ducitur*," in *Current Continental Theory and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 95.
6. Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 20.
7. Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
8. Examples of interpreters who take up Balibar's thesis of transindividuality in relationship primarily to human existence are Aurelia Armstrong, "Autonomy and the Relational Individual," in *Feminist Interpretations of Spinoza*, ed. Moira Gatens (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009); Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*.
9. At least two interpreters take up Balibar's interpretation of Spinoza as a transindividual thinker of the multitude, civil society, and the State, though they are in the minority.

They are Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* (London: Verso, 1999), and Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

10. Balibar, "Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell," *Rethinking Marxism* 2(3) (1989): 106.
11. Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis*," 95.
12. Spinoza, *E* III preface.
13. See especially Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007).
14. This is an over-simplified reference to Aristotle's account in the *Categories*. In Spinoza's context, he writes against Scholastic Aristotelianism more than Aristotle himself. For a useful gloss of Spinoza's basic metaphysical categories, see Yitzhak Melamed, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes and Modes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
15. René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, part I, art. 51, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
16. Spinoza, *E* IIp10.
17. Spinoza, *E* Idef3.
18. Spinoza, *E* Ip14.
19. Spinoza, *E* Idef5.
20. Spinoza, *E* Ip28.
21. Some of which is irreducibly our own, since no being exists without affecting others (Spinoza, *E* Ip36).
22. Spinoza, *E* Iapp.
23. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, art. 152, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
24. Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*, chapter 3.
25. Spinoza, *E* IIp13post1.
26. Spinoza, *E* IIp13post4.
27. Spinoza, *E* IIp13lem5.
28. For a study of the wide range of appropriations of the concept of transindividuality for political thought, see Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*.
29. Balibar thereby disputes the arguments of Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, and Douglas Den Uyl. Their interpretations are highly influential in English given that Barbone and Rice (with an introduction by Den Uyl) provided the only critical edition of the *Political Treatise* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001) until the recent publication of volume 2 of *The Collected Works of Spinoza*.
30. Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (Eburon: Delft, 1991), 9. Hereafter *Transindividuality*.
31. See Spinoza's definition of "useful" (from the Latin *utile*, which is also translated as "advantage," "good," or "interest"), *E* IVp38.
32. Balibar, *Transindividuality*, 9n8. Although I explain what is meant by "separated" below, I do find the word a bit misleading. "Distinguished" would be better, since it avoids the spatial imagery of coming away from one's relations.
33. Balibar, *Transindividuality*, 24. See also, Spinoza, *E* IVp31–p35.
34. Spinoza, *E* IIIp32s.

35. I do not know how much experience Spinoza had around children, but I suspect that if he watched many grow up he might have more to say about how diversely different infants respond to laughter and tears in their midst.
36. Spinoza, *E* Vp39s.
37. Spinoza, *E* Vp40.
38. Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, paragraphs 13–14, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1.
39. For example, Spinoza, *E* IVp18s, IIIp59s.
40. Balibar, *Transindividuality*, 24.
41. Spinoza, *TP*, 3/2.
42. Overviews of the debate, in addition to Balibar's, include Warren Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude?," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104(4) (Fall 2005): 655–73, and André Santos Campos, "The Individuality of the State in Spinoza's Political Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92(1) (2010): 1–48.
43. Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?," 107.
44. TP, 4/4.
45. Campos rejects Balibar's interpretation of the State as a transindividual on the grounds that the State is by definition self-sufficient. Campos may be referring to a Rawlsian definition of a society as self-sufficient, but it is not Spinoza's. If the State is natural—as everything must be in Spinoza's system—I do not understand how this objection can have any weight. See "The Individuality of the State in Spinoza's Political Philosophy," 22.
46. Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis*," 74.
47. Ibid., 91.
48. Spinoza, *E* IVp4c.
49. Spinoza, *E* IVp33.
50. Spinoza, *TP*, 2/10.
51. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 17, par. 13, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).
52. Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis*," 90.
53. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Pt. III, sec. 258, addition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
54. Spinoza, *TP*, 3/7.
55. Spinoza, *TP*, 6/1.
56. Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude?," 661–62.
57. Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1969) is the starting point for the representation of the commonwealth as an individual, more or less guided by reason.
58. Spinoza, *E* Iapp.
59. Spinoza, *TP*, 3/7.
60. Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude?," 663.
61. Ibid.
62. There is a debate about whether "singular things" (*E* IIdef7) ought to be called "individuals" (by *E* IIp13s). The refusal to call "singular things" "individuals" results, in my view, from a fetishistic understanding of "individual" that is not shared by Spinoza.
63. Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis*," 91.
64. Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*, 83.