

The Individual and the Multitude in Spinoza

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In the variety of methods and topics, the essays gathered here revolve around the problem of the relationship between unity and multiplicity, between individuality and collectivity in Spinoza's thinking. This is a central and crucial issue, both in its specific political dimension as well as in its inevitable intersections to which it opens with its more exquisitely moral and theoretical side in the philosophy of Spinoza. This issue is addressed, in the first place, in relation to the notion of «time», in the perspective of a radically and infinitely mobile and modifiable immanence, continuously disassembled and reassembled in the multiplicity of single «durations», according to a conception that is ideally connected to Lucrezio's atomistic materialism and the Macchiavellian concept of «occasion», contrasting itself frontally with other visions, monistic and serial, theological and teleological, both ancient and modern (from Plato and the Stoics to Descartes, from Hobbes to Hegel). Still in close contact with Machiavelli and his reflection on political action in the contingency of actual reality, the unity-multiplicity relationship is revisited in light of the idea of the «multitude», which in Spinoza's *Political Treatise* does not appear to simply oppose (as does occur, in contrast, in many fifteenth and sixteenth century European republican-Machiavellian readings) forced and violent political unification carried out by a «tyrant», but instead seems to come into play to replace it, to connectively and relatively measure every process of aggregation and emancipation: even tyranny, in this way, becomes an expression not of the individual and his power but of the collective – albeit in a specific case, an expression of one of his weaknesses more than his strength. This is a perspective according to which Machiavelli's extremely «acute» understanding becomes the «science of the multitude», comprehension of the action and interaction of the whole of individuals comprising a State: the understanding, in other words, beforehand becomes political paradigm of the third Spinozian type of knowledge, the highest and most adequate, which intuitively proceeds from the universal towards the specific. In partial continuity with this approach, the third essay rules out the possibility that one of the traditional and most consolidated enunciations of «tolerance» may be attributed to Spinoza's political philosophy, since in this the classical roles of the tolerant (the one, the sovereign, able to coerce and command) and the tolerated (the many, the governed, in whom greater or lesser «patience» is placed, in the last instance, the formal codification, the consistency and essence of *imperium*) are reversed. Intended, not by chance, to conclude the discussion, the fourth paper/essay actually completely

reopens it: a master of Spinozian studies - to whom all, even the three authors who preceded him, owe much - through an unrelenting analysis, calls into question the effective significance of the idea of «multitude», whose valorization he does not consider) as the legitimate and credible result of authentic Spinozian instances, but as the persistence of nineteenth century suggestions: the continuation of the fascination of Nietzschean mysticism of immanence and the lingering tendency, typical of many Marxist traditions (but far from the real, true Marx), to mortify individuality.

Structured in this way, the sylloge can seem unusual. Nevertheless – and just because of this unusualness – it seems to be endowed with a certain positive emblematicism. First and foremost on the level of Spinoza's extraordinary intellectual accomplishment, which even in these limited and minute circumstances emerges in its rich and unitary complexity, always steadfast in cataloguing, of which there has so often been the temptation to abbreviate and simplify, plunging it alternatively into antiquity or modernity, into idealism or materialism, into determinism or freedom, into rationalism or mysticism, into individualism or holism. But then – if one could say – also on a subjective and personal level of “experience”, on the level of friendships and esteem which sustains the impact of confrontation as well as that of dissension, in the common consciousness – this is indubitably and authentically Spinozian – that the illusory self-referencing of «solitude» is for humans among the greatest causes of fragility and danger.