

Book Review

Spinoza and Hegel ***- Substance and Negativity***

Gregor Moder

(Northwestern University Press: 2017)

Reviewed by Rodrigo Gonsalves

To claim that the field of Philosophy encompasses different lines of thought is nothing but an understatement. Sometimes philosophy can be seen as *the* ultimate clash of thought boxed into a field. We could name pairs and pairs of opposing sides, of opposing schools of thought, opposing rationales, opposing concepts and with time, see the in-depth level of complexity added to the homologies and analogies derived from the clashes embedded within this field. The investigation of a knowledge issue is a challenging proposal, especially when we are dealing with a field build upon diversity of thought. There are many risks and very few shortcuts. Well, it is safe to say that one of the fundamental issues of philosophy does revolve around the affirmative aspect of being or its negativity. In other words, all which is derived from the discussion if the being is or if it is not, is an open invitation to one of the greatest (if not the greatest) motif of philosophy. In Gregor Moder's latest book *Hegel and*

Spinoza - Negativity and Substance (2017), what we find, page after page, goes way beyond the dry presentation of this issue through the history of epistemology, offering an exhilarating investigation of its theoretical importance.

A more experienced researcher of the field could easily see that the proposal itself is justified, but the author moves even further on from the obvious attempt of researching a fundamental ontological problem, to here dive into an intrinsic theoretical dispute personified by the following proper names: Hegel and Spinoza. Chronologically, Spinoza dies in 1677 and 93 years later, Hegel was born (1770). Hegel's responses to Spinoza's philosophy is usually understood as a major line drawn in the sand or as a theoretical wall that avoids the troubles with the neighbors. What Moder's book wisely illustrates, is how there is not an easy way out from this major theoretical discussion and even more important than that: there is no way to stay immune. As a responsibly technical work, Moder presents the tension between both positions of this battlefield through engaging to all possible combinations of this clash of Titans: Hegel and Spinoza of the title, encompasses the troubles of presenting the tension of Spinoza *and* Hegel, Spinoza *or* Hegel, Hegel *vs.* Spinoza or perhaps, Spinoza *vs.* Hegel – therefore, leaving not much room for previous biases or exempt subsequent readings.

Each chapter of the book reveals additional layers of complexity to this inevitable and interesting tension; already at the Introduction we can sense the tone of this breathtaking theoretical discussion. Needless to say that this is an accomplishment only reached through the articulate and beautifully written construction of the book. Moder's line of investigation does not rush through the hard theoretical elements and always illustrates knowing its ways through both authors, Moder translates the clarity of his productive tension between Hegel and Spinoza, just like Charon cruising through the Styx and Acheron. The first chapter, *Hegel's Logic of Pure Being and Spinoza*, explores the relevance of *becoming* and being, reaching the necessity of negativity, to subsequently problematize Spinoza's substance. The following chapter, *History is Logic* presents the fundamental aspect of the *beginning* of

Philosophy for Hegel, which sets the battlefield between him and Spinoza. Giving a brief and detailed overview of the question of being and thought, through different philosophical schools it reaches Spinoza and his: "emanative system of the gradual degradation of being" (Moder, p.56) and one of Hegel's main objections to Spinoza's philosophy: it does not have room for negativity.

The history of questions surrounding the One finds in the third Chapter called *Telos, Teleology, Teliosis*, a powerful catalyst to this burning issue – the relationship of the subject with the *openness* and with *incompleteness*. This chapter is a reminder that something about Spinoza always returns to haunt Hegel, as the author puts it. And the consequence from this line of reasoning gives room to another level of question, summarized by the author: *should incompleteness be read as lack or as torsion?* (Moder, p.81) So, if the crucial relevance was not quite revealed yet, now it becomes clear as day. One of the main discussions within philosophy nowadays, lies in a major dispute between the theoretical perspective developed by other two proper names: Lacan and Deleuze. Such dispute finds its heritage right at the heart of the investigation of the *primacy of negativity*, therefore, between Spinoza and Hegel.

The fourth Chapter *Death and Finality*, far from settling the score gives a more provocative twist: Spinoza does not accept death as a concept, while Hegel finds a crucial element from death. This is the notion of incarnation which gives the philosophical take on the finite and the infinite – precisely why Hegel is interested in the notion of *kenosis* (Christ's humility), as explored by the author. After this chapter, the stakes are defined between both sides of this discussion about negativity and substance. At this point, Moder has already provided enough elements to defend the productive philosophical opposition between Hegel and Spinoza, as rearticulations of the Parmenidean and Heracleatian debate on the principles of being and becoming. The fifth chapter *Ideology and the Originality of the swerve* is a refreshing comprehension of Althusser's philosophical propositions, there we can understand a thinker that localized and struggled through this very own tension: could Spinozists

propositions coexist with negativity (a Hegelian aspect inherited through Marx)? And Moder's in-depth reading of Althusser, empowered the discussion towards the tension between lack and curvature as materialist concepts. In his conclusion, Moder manages to take to the ultimate the consequence from this provocative tension and gives to the reader more than a simple choice between sides, but rather the inexcusable necessity of going through this philosophical tension. This old and inevitable theoretical antagonism finds in Moder's work way much more than an exciting investigation – it gets exactly what it was looking for: a solid path towards the significance of this tension.