

Towards a New Spinozistic Democracy: Power and/ or Virtue

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Abstract : The present study aims to accomplish two tasks: First, it critically reinterprets the actual relationship between democracy and the modern state in order to show that it is responsible for most of our current political problems and dilemmas. Second, it is argued that this relationship can be reimagined for better, and Spinozistic notions such as 'conatus', 'power' and 'virtue' are crucial in this pursuit. The significance of the present study lies in several interrelated observations: The world has never been a more heterogeneous place than today. People from different religious, cultural and historical backgrounds do equally have 'good reasons' to hold that their world views are the best ones. We have almost no authority to be respected equally by all these different world views. We no longer have gods at once we had in our ancient times. We have three big monotheistic religions, yet the God of which is significantly different from each other. The worse is that the believers of these religions do not seem eager to perform a duet, but rather tend to fight a duel with each other. Thanks to post-modernism, neither reason nor science is any longer seen as universally value-neutral guide to be employed in our search for a common ground. In sum, the question 'how should I live?' has never generated this much diversity before in terms of answers and the answers have never been this much away from a fairly objective evaluation. Our so-called liberal democracies are supposed to perform against this heterogenous, antagonistic and self-sustained web of discursive background. It is argued that our conception of 'State' with a weak emphasis on democracy is not a solution, if not itself the source of this topsy-turvy. Weak emphasis on democracy should be understood here as a kind of liberal democracy which operates in a partisan State, one which takes sides among rivals either for this or against that world view. This conception of State rests on a misleading understanding of the concept of power, and it is argued that it can only be corrected by means of a Spinoza-informed ontology of politics. The role of State in such an ontology is no longer a partisanship of any kind, nor is it representative of all-encompassing authority to favor any world view. State in this Spinozistic ontology equally encourages world views and their discursive practices to let them increase the power of acting and have more power to affect rules and regulations. World views can enhance every medium -in the sense of nonviolence ethology- to increase their power of acting. The more active a world view is, the more powerful and the more virtuous it is in terms of its effective power on the State. Though Spinoza has provided us with a limited guideline to understand what kind of democracy, he actually had in his mind, his ontology developed in Ethics is rich enough to imagine and inspire a better democratic practice to help us sustain the modern State in our extremely pluralistic contemporary societies.

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