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## IUS SIVE POTENTIA: PAUL AND SPINOZA

### ABSTRACT

This article is a part of a research project entitled *Law as Potency*, that, broadly put, investigates the relation between law and ontology. I argue, starting from St. Paul, that an ontological perspective can be understood as the possibility of justice, in a sense of a liberation of the human being. Thus, this paper offers an analysis of the concepts of potency and universality. Even though the term 'universalism' is not explicitly mentioned, it is present in St. Paul's thinking and brought onto its practical consequences. In addition, Spinoza's reading of St. Paul opens up a possibility to challenge this concept to a concept of modern teleology. Therefore, I discuss the consequences of this confrontation in regard to law, politics and economics. This leads to an articulation of another modernity, where, perhaps, the universal appears as the affirmation of difference.

### KEYWORDS

St. Paul, Spinoza,  
potency, ontology,  
universalism

### 1. Introduction

This article is a part of an ongoing research project *Law as Potency* that investigates the relationship between law and ontology, present in works of St. Paul, Spinoza, Deleuze, Agamben, Negri and Derrida. As a starting point, I offer a brief discussion on Paul and Spinoza.

When we take into consideration Paul's work, it seems that, the possibility of justice could be understood in the sense of a general liberation of the human being. The concepts of potentiality and the universal appear throughout in a meaningful and explicit way. But the question is what kind of rupture does Christian thought provide in order to enable us to think on presence of metaphysics in Paul? And, moreover, why, as we talk about a possible metaphysical rupture, we want to save ontology in Paul? Even though, the term itself is not mentioned, universalism is present within Paul's thinking, and he brings it to its ultimate and practical consequences. Through the comparison and juxtaposition of Paul's *Epistles* and the works of contemporary philosophers devoted to the readings of his *Epistles*, I propose an ontological reinterpretation of the relation between law and justice, and of Right as potency.

On the other hand, we can ask ourselves why do we need to go back to Spinoza in order to discuss teleology, if modern teleology is much more explicit in Hegel. The answer to this question seems obvious: In order to understand

Spinoza's thinking we need to start from teleology. Or, rather, everything that Spinoza champions seems to be a possibility of a confrontation of this concept and the entire world that is grounded in it. So, the question of substance appears immediately, from the very beginnings of his philosophy, as well as the possibility to think the potentiality of substance as *causa sui*, as something that is not determined by any transcendental structure. Therefore, this paper explores the possibility of another modernity brought to the fore by Spinoza: I give a certain advantage to an ontological interpretation of his thought *vis-à-vis* the Western tradition, elaborating its consequences and political limitations, as well.

## 2. The Paul's Ontology

It seems that metaphysics always went along with the history of philosophy: within the ancient Greek context, it unfolds itself as a question of the grounding (*die Erdung*) of the world; in the modern context, it becomes the question of the subjective grounding of theory and practices. Even in the context of the discussions about the critique and possibilities of overcoming of metaphysics, it appears a rupture within the question on the new grounding that is directly connected to the question of our authenticity. Here, according to Heidegger, this rupture will be called ontology and not metaphysics. What we want instead, therefore, is to grasp one possible ontology in St. Paul.

But, what any of this has to do with the readings of Paul's Christianity? The term ontology is missing. Moreover, having in mind his unfortunate encounter with Greek philosophers, we can argue that regardless of our readings of St. Paul, none of them is going to be philosophical. Nobody understood no one during these encounters. But what seems to appear, though, is the question concerning a possibility of Christian metaphysics. What kind of rupture do we have in Christian thought if we reconsider Paul's metaphysics? And, moreover, why, discussing this possible metaphysical rupture, we want to save ontology at all costs?

Is there any possibility of bringing his position closer to the modern metaphysical era? I argue that there is a notion of subjectivity in his thought, even though the question of subjectivity itself belongs to the late modernity. Not even Descartes discussed the matter. Taking this into account, isn't it rather obvious that we can interpret Paul not only as our contemporary, but as a modern thinker, too?

Once again, is there a possibility to speak about ontology in his thinking? He, himself never uses this term, as mentioned previously. Nevertheless, I would like to trace back this absence and explore further the possibility of Paul's ontology, following Heidegger, who indicates that ontology represents a critique of metaphysics, creating the rupture for the possibility of our authenticity. Thus, would Paul be contemporaneous? Ultimately, he talks about the universalism, and, perhaps, this is the point where he goes beyond his time; perhaps he is our guide, telling us something about ourselves now.

In addition, what I would like to examine and scrutinize is whether the Paul's thought has its practical consequences. At least, the *Epistles* indicate this much. Yet, how can we trust Paul's politics if, for instance, even when condemning slavery, he does not invite us to overthrow it, but to stay passive? "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." (1 *Cor.* 7:20)<sup>1</sup> Would be there, nevertheless, a political articulation that goes in this direction? Is Paul's *Amor Mundi* a possibility? How can we offer a legal reading of this position? Paul dedicates many passages to discussion of justice and laws. Paul and metaphysics, Paul and *Amor Mundi*. Paul and the question of justice.

Let's try to start from the beginning, yet again. Everything begins on his way to Damascus, when suddenly a heavenly light strikes him and Paul falls from his horse. Then he hears a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And Paul asks back: "Who are thou, oh Lord?" And the answer was: "I'm Jesus, who you persecute". This is, in sum, the very first conversion in Christianity. Saul will even change his name, and instead of the name of a great king of Jews (Saul), he will start presenting himself as Paul, as someone insignificant and worthless. This is the beginning of the one of the most important narratives of humankind; it departs from the Aramaic version, where he "starts speaking Greek, penetrating definitively the Greco-Roman cultural world" (Holzner 2008: 100) and arrives to us. As a project or a task, perhaps.

## 2.1. Greeks and Christians

But why should we follow Jesus? We already have Greek guidance. What is the point of questioning the Greek heritage? Ancient Greek metaphysics follows the world, not men, not even one man. The Greeks are humble; they want to understand the world and their very own place in it. But Paul is humble too; someone who thinks of himself as insignificant, as the change of names indicates. Moreover, he puts all his hope in the perspective of following Jesus.

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 *Cor.* 1:23) Or, speaking from the Christian standpoint: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God [...]" (1 *Cor.* 3:19). The wisdom of the philosophers does not reveal the potentiality that is proper to man. Tied to wisdom until today, we remain bonded to what is given, and not to what the possible human world could be. For that reason, there shall be faith and not the shred of evidence related to wisdom. Therefore, to follow Jesus.

Of course, there is a difference between Greek and Christian receptions of metaphysics. For Greeks the search for the ground is the question of reason. Even *Eros* appears as an attempt of actualization, of fulfilment of oneself, perhaps only cognitively. But reason appears as spiritless, as it is not the place of the encounter, of others. Paul, thus, found Athens cold, a place where no one understands him. That is why the Christian way differs: it is not about *Eros*, but about *Agape*; it is the path of love for the divine; it is an emotional relationship.

1 All translations in English are mine, if not indicated differently.

It is not the Reason, but the Spirit, *Pneuma*. Therefore, we can ask ourselves what could be the meaning of the *Pneuma*? This difference between Reason and Spirit will remain present for a very long time, inspiring Hegel's philosophy. But here, however, this difference is at the very beginning of the attempt of re-constructing Christianity.

Why, again, follow Jesus? Adam, as we know, is the first man (ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος) and Jesus the second one (ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος). But Adam is the first man on earth (ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς) and Jesus the first of heaven (ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ οὐρανοῦ). Here, perhaps, there is the difference. Does the Spirit, *Pneuma*, has its distinctive mark only for being heavenly? This is, rather, common or too literal reading of the spiritual that appears to be something different from the natural, something merely given. Thus, being of heavenly origin does not suffice to open the possibility of the spiritual. The Bible confirms this. The Spiritual happens with the resurrection. Only through it we can talk about *Pneuma*. Spirit is what makes life (πνεῦμα ζωοποιον). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22)

In other words, not only to survive, but to accomplish something proper to the human, beyond the mere fact of being alive. "[... ] where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17) Thus, the Spirit is the possibility of Freedom. This is, perhaps, the meaning of human life. But how this can be accomplished? Everything is foretold and depends on praying? We only liberate ourselves in the monasteries or only by following the religion? If Paul is at the beginning of Christianity, we need to know what has happened. Perhaps Christianity has not fulfilled itself yet.

Perhaps not even through resurrection the Spirit fulfills itself. We need something more. An intrusion, perhaps. An intrusion from the very human being. For, only through intrusion the Spiritual may appear. It means that the Spiritual depends on the human being. Hegel follows this line of interpretation. Because, ultimately, resurrection is a gift of the divine and the Spiritual is not only found in this gift, but in something that still needs to be done. Done by the human being, maybe? Maybe the Spiritual is the (only) possibility of the human? Is it Freedom, bounded to the Spiritual, still a possibility waiting to happen? There are three essential parts of Christianity: the redemptive death, the resurrection and the return of the Holy Spirit. (Holzner 2008: 322.) When will Jesus come back? This is the question of *Parousia*, and maybe as such, it is the question of possibility or potentiality of the very human being.

But, how to understand this potency? At this point I propose a different path: to follow the difference between law and justice; Right and the question of potency. In my opinion, this is a great message: Paul sees that the laws are unjust; they killed Jesus. So, the laws do not bind us to the possibility of our own potency. They connect us with objects. Or, rather, they connect our desires to objects and express the conditions for their satisfaction. This is the meaning of the laws. They treat us almost like animals, as Hegel laments in the *Phenomenology of the Mind*.

Therefore, how to think the possibility of our assertion beyond this reification? We are at the threshold or the beginnings of a possible Paul's ontology. This ontology is marked by crucifixion. Or better, its beginning is in the cross. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." (*Rom. 10:4*) Justice appears only beyond the laws; Justice outside the law, *outlaw justice*, as suggested by the brilliant interpretation of Theodore Jennings (2013.).

## 2.2 Law and Justice

We need to closely examine this possibility. If, in the end of the laws stands the possibility of death, which, in fact, ensures them, we can expect a reinvention of life. If, the laws appear in relation to objects, from the ontological standpoint, the Others appear, too. This is, at least to the certain extent, the assertion (affirmation, contention) of (the) Others. Paul's word for this assertion is love: Love is the possibility of this ontological rupture, of this life in Jesus. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (*Rom 13:10*)

Hence, the possibility of justice does not stem from the laws. Paul does not identify justice with the laws, as it was the case until Cicero. Justice comes from the divine generosity, from this opening to Others, perhaps as slaves. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (*Gal. 3:28*) A promise of the universal that had never appeared as such before. "Justice is the affirmative experience of the arrival of the Other as Other", contends Derrida (2002: 104). The assertion of the contingency of the Other. Therefore, it is called love and it is not some kind of rational procedure.

Welcome Others! This is the message. Will it fulfill itself? What would be the messianic dimension of this opening and this politics? And why here, of all places, the potentiality of the very human being would appear? "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea." (*2 Cor. 1:19*) The performative Derridean 'yes' is clustered in this ontological opening; here the human being appears.

"For we are laborers together with God [...]" (*1 Cor. 3:9*) The project is ours. Yet, why God did not appear, for example, in Auschwitz? The answer is simple: because he is not responsible for evil. He cannot help us, but we need to help him. We are his co-workers (σύνεργοι). Weak, perhaps, without knowledge, without support from the legal order. But in this weakness, Paul claims, in this determining absence of power, lays potency. "[...] Strength is made perfect in weakness." (*2 Cor. 12:9*) And also: "[...] for when I am weak, then am I strong." (*2 Cor. 12:10*)

Agamben will return to this revolutionary reading of the concept of potency in Aristotle (Caputo, Alcoff: 2009). The messianic is not the place of strength or power, but of weakness, that perhaps creates the world. In later readings, the concept of potency was almost lost. For instance, Thomas Aquinas, in his identification of essence and existence, sees potency in acts. According to him,

there is no potency that does not fulfil itself. We will need to wait for Spinoza to reinvent the concept of potency, connected to a metaphysical reading as well. In Paul, God waits for us to say “yes”, to hear the call and act (ibid: 156). There are no transcendental places that secure the way to the divine. Here, perhaps, we may talk about the immanence of the ontological way.

And what is arriving? What the *Parousia* would be? The return of Jesus? “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (*Gal.* 5:14) But also: “[...] for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” (*Rom.* 13:8) This is a direction that leads us to the core fundamentals of the laws. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” (*Rom.* 4:31) There is an acknowledgment of the law that can be justified. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (*Gal.* 2:16) The law that acknowledges itself is the law that justifies itself. The law can be legal, but unjust, even according to our ‘informal’ understanding. The law that is acknowledged here is the law that is bounded to justice.

We may remind ourselves that, from modernity onwards, we acquired a positivistic perspective which dismisses the need for this legitimacy from justice. What matters is legality, to stay within a system. And this Paul’s justice, understood here as an opening to the Other, is a sign, perhaps, of the possible democracy. In the end, to study law is to understand its very own democratic postulates.

This ontological opening, this assertion of the Other, is the question of justice, the postulate of the laws. Therefore, “we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” (*Eph.* 2:19) Co-citizens (*συμπολίται*) or citizens of the new world community bounded by mutual greets.

### 3. Another Modernity

St. Paul provides us with the opportunity to understand the possibility of justice as the possibility of general liberation of human being. Potentiality and the universal explicitly appear. But the question is how this subject is addressed within the modern context? Or, differently: What is the potency of modernity and what can be universalized through it? Having these questions in mind, we can now turn to Spinoza.

There is a Hegel’s remark that the Modernity accomplishes us and that it represents the fulfilment of freedom for all. The question is now why go back to Spinoza, if the modern responses became explicit only in/with Hegel? After all, Hegel presents himself as a specific modern self-consciousness, as an elaboration of the truth of the modern world. Why, again, return to the question that concerns the modern truth and, even more so, to the question of modernity itself *via* Spinoza?

Hegel gives credit to the works of Spinoza, first and foremost, for thinking the absolute (Hegel 1986: 157–197). However, for Hegel, Spinoza only thinks it as Substance, and not yet as a Subject, an error that, from Hegel's standpoint, leaves room for many questions. What does this mean? Hegel's critique unfolds and becomes apparent when he discusses the consequences of the Spinoza's position in relation to particular, concrete things. Hegel thinks that Spinoza misunderstood the concrete, that is, he understood only one dimension of it, showing its differences only in relation to other concrete entities. In other words, Spinoza understood only the negation related to the concrete, but not the double negation which involves the concrete in its own process of actualization. Therefore, Spinoza did not understand, according to Hegel, the possibility of overcoming the concrete, the negative, and of accomplishment of its own potentialities. Thus, the concrete, the particular, does not even appear. Everything would be encapsulated and lost in the metaphysical identity of the Substance. Life itself disappears in the name of this identity that, perhaps, Spinoza only repeats.

For Hegel, Spinoza only arrives at an elaboration of the world in relation to our understanding (*Verstand*), but not to our Reason (*Vernunft*) that would show the dialectical overcoming and the final accomplishment of the world. Understanding knows only the first negation, whereas Reason knows the process through which the negative is surpassed, meaning, it knows the process of the double negation. This negation of a negation, in Hegel, remains related to the discussion of the possibility of the Subject. The Subject ultimately accomplishes something that nature cannot. When all is said and done, Spinoza had only the idea of Nature and not the idea of Subjectivity. And this Subjectivity, following Hegel, creates the conditions for mediation and change in the world. What appears here is, first, the possibility of the specific human world and second the endpoint of universal freedom for all. Therefore, Subjectivity and universal Freedom articulate the potentiality and the truth of the modern world. We have, thus, all reasons to remain linked to this modern project.

Why, again, go back to Spinoza when modern teleology is clearly more explicit in Hegel? Here appears the term from which we can begin to understand Spinoza's thinking: Teleology. Or, better, everything that Spinoza advances regarding the possibility of a conflict of this word and the world that is grounded in it. The question of substance appears here, from the very beginning of his philosophy. Or, differently: to think the potentiality of substance as *causa sui*, as something that is not determined by any transcendental structure. The transcendental disappears in Spinoza, that is, there is a disappearance of all the traditional assumptions of philosophy, which includes, for example, the later assumptions of German idealism as well. The world is the affirmation of its own immanence and not the accomplishment of transcendental and/or teleological structures. Hegel's critique becomes very concrete, or better, includes the dialectical fulfilment, if seen as the affirmation of the Substance's potency only. The concrete, thus, does not accomplish something beyond itself. In

other words, the concrete is the affirmation of this ontology of potency and not the deontology of the accomplishment of the transcendental.

I will discuss further how this ontology seems to appear in Spinoza regarding the questions of law, politics, and economy. Within this context, what becomes apparent is a possibility for another modernity, or, for a world beyond modernity. From this perspective, we cannot forget the initial terms previously mentioned as essential to a discussion with Spinoza: potency and the universal. In this sense, a perspective to confront Hegel is now clearer – the question is: Is it possible to talk about the idea of the Subject along with Spinoza? Consequently, this is the point where Deleuze would pursue a Nietzschean reading, to contest a particular Hegelian heritage in psychoanalysis and to reinvent possibility of potentiality in the contemporary context (Deleuze 1962).

### 3.1. Spinoza and Law

Let's follow here the practical implications of Spinoza's rupture with the metaphysics of the transcendental. In the beginning there is a question on *jus naturalism* articulated in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. The postulate of *jus naturalism* is the idea of nature related to natural rights, the social contract and the conditions of articulating the State. What Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau have in common is the notion of natural freedom that appears also as the difference between authoritarian, liberal and democratic State. Therefore, the question about *jus naturalism* articulates the possibility to reconstruct the historical road of modernity.

Whereas the German Idealism defies *jus naturalism*, something that already could be found in Kant's difference between nature and freedom, Spinoza's contesting entails a different relation between nature and freedom. Spinoza will go along the lines of the affirmation of the potentiality of being, which, as a consequence, is related to the human being and its practices. In other words, freedom will remain linked to nature and to a specific inclination towards the preservation of one's own being. This is what Spinoza calls as *conatus*. This interpretation of the preservation of one's own being resembles Hobbes. However, this reading is different. While in Hobbes the contract will require the abandonment of natural rights in favor of security in the authoritarian State, Spinoza opposes to this idea of contract. Following this line of inquiry, we will understand better the very place of the human being within the context or framework of immanence in nature.

"No one transfers his natural right to another" (2016: 287), says Spinoza, elaborating the conditions of coexistence within a society, "all remain equal, as they were before in the state of nature." (ibid: 287) This is a point of departure from Hobbes. In fact, Hobbes speaks about the conditions of security that animate all contracts, creating the conditions for our survival. However, for Spinoza what is important isn't survival. The point is "to liberate the individual from fear, so that he can live as much as possible in security, that



is, preserving as much as possible, and without damages to other, his natural right to exist and act.” (ibid: 347) In this sense, Spinoza brings together right and natural laws: Right is related to the ontology of being, and it represents an affirmation of being; it does not imply mere following of the given norms. Right, in this sense, is the concretization of this ontology of being.

### 3.2. Spinoza and Politics

What we can see is that it would not be any metaphysical stratum between nature and freedom, as in the Aristotelian or Hegelian interpretations. Hegel would agree with this critique of the social contract, for it requires a thinking of the dignity of the State as something independent of human decisions, as something that ends this historical teleology. But, for Spinoza, there is nothing final here: The State accomplishes only its own nature. Therefore, the finality of the State can only be freedom (ibid: 347).

Modernity did not abandon the metaphysics of identity manifested in our knowledge. We can draw a line from Hobbes to Hegel. This identity has a teleological sense, in accordance with the lines of interpretation of nature in Hobbes, or the Spirit in Hegel. It seems that within the Spinoza’s dispute with this modern teleology or this modern identity, we can look for a possibility of another modernity, where human being could be understood not as deficiency, but as potentiality.

Here we arrive at the issue concerning a possible Subjectivity in Spinoza and the question of democracy. As we have seen, Spinoza’s metaphysics indicates the affirmation of immanence in being. Yet, if everything would be the process of immanence, there wouldn’t be any necessity for us to do anything whatsoever. That is, anything beyond contemplating of the world. On the contrary, we are witnesses of the powers which do not affirm any potency. Would capitalism be the example of the immanence of being? In this sense, we need to know what are the principles (*arche*) of our world, so that we can follow the way of immanence. Hence, Spinoza’s *Ethics* is a continuation of the readings on *Physics*. *The Ethics* follows the process of affirmation announced at the beginning of his metaphysics (Deleuze 1968: 251). Knowledge brings us closer to the understanding of the structure of being, to the possibility of agreeing with nature. How can we understand this? One possible answer is – through the question of democracy.

“As men are subjected to passions, one cannot say that they agree in nature”. (Spinoza 2018: 32) What we see here, in fact, is the matter of reason in Spinoza. Reason is no more representative (element) as in Aristotle, nor constitutive, as in Hegel. Reason simply speaks to us, asking us to comply with nature. “Only as men live through the conduct of reason, men agree, always and necessarily, in nature.” (ibid: 35) In *Corollary 1*, Spinoza points out that the thing most useful to man, among singular things, can only be a man that lives on the condition of reason (ibid: 35). That is, ‘there isn’t anything more useful to man, between the singular things, than a man.’ (ibid: 35)

This intersubjectivity, that appears when Spinoza speaks of multitude, is a possible dimension of subjectivity in his philosophy. It starts with the idea of *conatus*. Thus, subjectivity is not transcendental or constitutive; it expresses and articulates itself in a relation, therefore, Subjectivity in Spinoza is relational. Or, as Balibar argues, the condition of the subject in Spinoza has as its ground in the conditions of coexistence with others, of citizenship which develops itself in the democratic State (Balibar 2005: 45). Democracy is, therefore, a project which agrees with nature. In other words, it is the immanence of nature. This is why we can say that Spinoza is not so much a thinker of difference; he is the thinker of the possibility of the understanding of immanence. Through the agreement with nature, we arrive at the universal dimension of democracy; to the common, not the public world. So, Spinoza is the thinker of the common world, not the public one. This difference between the common and public becomes clearer through the reconstruction of the problems of the economy in Spinoza.

### 3.3. Spinoza and Economy

In order to shed some light on the problems of economy we will start with Marx, who will search the truth of the modern world *in* the economy. According to him there is nothing more profound for understanding of modernity than the economy. Or differently, we cannot go beyond the conflictual relation between capital and labor to understand our world. The modern truth is economical; in the background of modernity stands economy.

Now, Spinoza dedicates only a couple of lines to the discussion of economy. On the final pages of the *Ethics*, the book IV, he writes: “But money has furnished us with a token for everything: hence it is with the notion of money, that the mind of the multitude is chiefly engrossed: nay, it can hardly conceive any kind of pleasure, which is not accompanied with the idea of money as cause.” (Spinoza 2018) Can we say, then, that Spinoza understood modernity as undervaluing the economy? Is it possible to do such a thing? If this is true, how can we bring Spinoza and Marx closer? In order to address this issue, we need to return to the text that perhaps inspired Spinoza, namely Aristotle’s *Politics*, chapter III.

For Aristotle economy stays within the private sphere (it concerns domestic, household affairs), and, as such, it has nothing to with the public one. Also, for the Greeks economy was not an ontological question. Maybe, we are about to face a problem in their thinking: the problem of ontology and economy. Maybe the relation between ontology and economy could be seen only as modern one, as utterly Marx’s realm, for he was the first one to grasp it?

Going back to Aristotle, we can ask ourselves why he dedicates one of the first chapters of his *Politics* to the economy, if economy remains irrelevant for his thought? There is a type of art of acquisition “which by nature is a part of the management of a household” (or domestic economy, [*Politics*, 1256b: 1997]). For us, this is not a problem at all. Ultimately, not even for Marx, even though

he criticizes the economy as such (the Greek economy, for instance). The point of his critique is the question of economy in modernity. Maybe Aristotle already got close to this kind of reading. There is, as we have seen, an art of acquisition which is ‘natural’, “given by nature” (to use Aristotle’s expression), and that plays its part in “the satisfaction of the proper necessities of man” (1257a). But there is another way of wealth acquisition, contrary to nature, related only to money, an art, if we may say so, of wealth-getting. (1257b) Here, richness is the goal and not the natural teleology. The economy that departs from this natural teleology creates certain risks. Aristotle claims: “Hence usury is very justifiably detested, since it gets wealth from money itself rather than from the very thing money was devised to facilitate.” (1258b), that is, the natural necessities. And he concludes: “Hence of all the kinds of wealth acquisition this one is the most unnatural.” (1258b) That is why he even uses another word, *Chrematistics*, to emphasize the difference between the economy given by nature from its not-natural counterpart.

What Spinoza criticizes, in the passage commented earlier, is the economy that became *Chrematistics* in the modern epoch. For him, the economy is not that much of the importance, because he does not let social reproduction to be bounded to an identity, in this case to the economic one. At this point, maybe we can argue, along with Spinoza, for the common and not the public, because the public arises from the modern affirmation of economy. Common world should be the affirmation of potentiality, of plurality, and not something related to the teleological reproduction of identities.

It becomes clearer why Spinoza does not belong to the liberalism and the economical roads of modernity, nor republicanism: He confronts the modern idea of the teleology of the State, which finds its ultimate consequences in Hegel.

Following this line of argumentation, Marx will claim that we cannot accomplish universality in modernity. Modernity is the conflict between capital and labor, and not the possibility to overcome an accomplishing of the affirmation of universal. The truth of the modern world is not universal, but a mere abstraction. Since the beginnings of modernity, labor is transformed from a standpoint of capital to a standpoint of abstract value of exchange, not even the concrete value of (some) use. For Marx this transformation of labor to capital is a sign that we cannot conquer the universal in modernity.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

*Parousia*, therefore, is the invitation for a change, for a mutual recognition with/of Others. The divine gift is a possibility, an invitation of/for this change. *Parousia* concretizes itself in a universal and messianic community. Politics is not grounded in the identities of a social and legal community. (Arendt comes to mind along with Paul following the idea of *Amor Mundi*).

What is at the bottom of politics? Differences? Differences quite often result in creating new identities. The debates on sex and gender show us at least that much: Each party defends its own truth. But, if truth exists, it must be

universal. This is the point of Badiou's reading of Paul (2009). Therefore, the alternative to identity politics is not difference, but the universal; the possibility of being to be treated as a human being.

But what about the question of the universal in Paul, when it seems that he disputes Jews, Greeks, and Romans alike? He is against Jewish legalism, Greek reason, and the Roman imperial power. Thus, what could be universal in this context? Perhaps the universal is in this militancy, in this confrontation with the identities and this possibility of opening for the others. An explicit militancy, it seems, because the world of Paul was a world of slaves.

Martin Scorsese's movie *The Silence* offers us a useful illustration: Why the Christian missionaries go to Japan? Nobody wants them there. The Japanese, from their side, do not send missionaries to conquer the souls of Europeans. Thus, all sympathies are on their side. If we support this line of thinking, how can we defend the universal, of Christianity presented in Pauline readings? It could mean: To save Japan from suffering, and social exclusion, to affirm the Other, to affirm Change, and to be free (Beings). "Stand fast therefore in the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free." (*Gal.* 5:1) Or: "[...] where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (*2 Cor.* 4:17)

Therefore, *Amor Mundi* manifests itself as love for freedom. The resurrection of Christ, a singular event, appears as universal, as the possibility of (for) humankind. The Pauline universal, thus, represents a specific connection between the singular and the universal. This is the message we receive and it is much stronger in the face of the neoliberal culture of new identities, which excludes life and the others in the name of the market. Is there anyone who feels alive in Capitalism? We, the zombies of globalization. Maybe this resembles a draft of Pasolini's movie, which he never made, that places Paul not in Galilee, Attica, and Lazio, but somewhere between Europe and the United States.

In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul contends: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision means anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." (*Gal.* 6:15) This is a quasi-Nietzschean message. Nietzsche is the one who did not understand Paul because of the recurring question of universalism. For Nietzsche, Christianity, even the Pauline one, is a form of a cultural nihilism. Contrary to Nietzsche, the new being, claims Paul, is the rupture in the very being, so Christianity may yet happen.

We see, from the beginning, that Paul confronts the Jewish, Roman, and Greek orders. This represents an opening to/for our potentiality: the creation of another world. On the one hand, I understand Paul as a forerunner of the process of the destruction of metaphysics. This destruction remains a contemporary project. It also seems to be a possibility of understanding the relationship between right and its principles, between laws and justice.

On the other hand, Spinoza still seems to believe in universal, thinking about democracy and not revolution. But, arguing with Spinoza, we need to act here and now, in the empirical-transcendental sense, as Deleuze would say, instead of waiting for the teleological possibility of a subjectivity that, perhaps, may never accomplish itself. Indeed, this is the reality of the working class today.

Perhaps there are no more subjects, as Deleuze claims, following Spinoza, but only anonymous forces linked to individuals (Deleuze 1981: 172).

“To become what one is” is the Nietzschean message that Deleuze follows. Return to oneself, beyond all teleologies. And affirm our own desire, which does not have its object. The project, therefore, begins with the affirmation of the concrete, then follows the framework of ontological immanence. Here, perhaps, we can read Marx and Spinoza alongside one another, on the issue of the confrontation of the reification of desire in the modern world (Lordon 2015). Even practical struggles, according to Deleuze, should not articulate a dialectical negation, in Hegelian or Marxian sense, but entail a return to “difference and its potency of affirmation.” (Deleuze 1988: 935) This affirmation of the concrete, the Deleuzian project of the empirical-transcendental affirmation, might be the possibility of another modernity that starts with Spinoza.

This affirmation of difference could create a context for thinking of the very idea of the universal to which Spinoza was committed. At the end of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza asks: “whether it is by nature or by convention that women are subject to men. For if this is due solely to convention, I have excluded women from the government without any reasonable cause. However, if we consult actual experience, we shall see that it is due to their weakness.” (Spinoza 1983) And he concludes that: “we shall easily see that it is impossible for men and women to govern on equal terms without great damage to the peace.” (ibid) From this standpoint, along with Spinoza and against him, Deleuze will begin his project of becoming-woman. The universal appears, therefore, as the affirmation of difference. What is affirmed, thus, can become our common ground of immanence, or our equality.

translated by Ricardo Martins Spindola Diniz

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### *Ius sive Potentia*: Pavle i Spinoza

#### Apstrakt

Ovaj članak je deo istraživačkog projekta pod nazivom *Zakon kao potencija*, koji, u širem smislu, istražuje odnos prava i ontologije. Tvrdim, polazeći od Sv. Pavla, da se ontološka perspektiva može shvatiti kao mogućnost pravde, u smislu oslobađanja ljudskog bića. Stoga ovaj rad nudi analizu koncepata potencije i univerzalnosti. Iako termin „univerzalizam“ nije izričito pomenut, on je prisutan u mišljenju Sv. Pavla i doveden do svojih praktičnih posledica. Pored toga, Spinozino čitanje Sv. Pavla otvara mogućnost da se ovaj koncept iskuša konceptom moderne teleologije. Stoga raspravljam o posledicama ovog sučeljavanja u pogledu zakona, politike i ekonomije. To dovodi do artikulacije druge modernosti, gde se, možda, univerzalno pojavljuje kao afirmacija razlike.

Ključne reči: Sv. Pavle, Spinoza, potencija, ontologija, univerzalizam