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Grammars of *Conatus*: Or, On the Primacy of Resistance in Spinoza, Foucault and Deleuze

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Three centuries ago certain fools were astonished because Spinoza wanted the liberation of man, even though he did not believe in his freedom or even in his particular existence. Today new fools, or even the same ones reincarnated, are astonished because the Foucault who had spoken of the death of man took part in political struggle.

Gilles Deleuze

A false problem; or, the dialectic of power and resistance

In his unparalleled study of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze writes: "the final word on power is that *resistance comes first*."[1] Deleuze's daring political and ontological wager circumvents entirely the sterile impasse reached by many a debate on the nature of power relations in the wake of the publication of *La volonté de savoir* in 1976. Moreover, Deleuze's wager in effect denounces this impasse as a false problem.

The impasse may be encapsulated thus: if, as Foucault claims, "where there is power, there is resistance" and "resistance is never in a position of exteriority with respect to power,"[2] it follows then that resistance is caught always already in networks of power, and that it enables and supports such networks to the extent to which it constitutes one of their permanent and necessary components; resistance, thus, is futile and even counter-productive in so far as it provides us with the illusion of fighting power when in actuality power needs and is fuelled by it.

Foucault had foreseen such objections. In this passage, for example, he both invokes the objections and offers a detailed counter-rebuttal to them:

> Should it be said that one is necessarily "inside" power, that there is no "escaping" it, that there is no relation of absolute exteriority with respect to it? … This would be to misrecognize the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. … But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. … [N]either are they a lure or promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite.[3]

Such a nuanced counter-rebuttal nonetheless backfires in the end. In a way, Foucault reconfirms the legitimate concerns expressed in those objections: for all of his reassurance that resistance is not "only a reaction or rebound," is not "always passive" and "doomed to perpetual defeat," is not always necessarily "betrayed," in this passage "points of resistance" seem also to dig their claws deeper and deeper into the very logic of power, to the point that resistance becomes power's "odd term" and "irreducible opposite." Even though the adjective "irreducible" could be taken to mean "unassimilable" and hence refractory to the lure of the *Aufhebung*, Foucault is not able to dispel completely an interpretation of the relation between power and resistance as a dialectical, mutually determining, binary opposition. It is such a dialectical deadlock between power and resistance that Deleuze's wager aims to invalidate and to uncover as a false problem. To declare that "the final word on power is that *resistance comes first*," in fact, is tantamount to saying that the relation between power and resistance is not a dialectical one. And my own wager in this essay is that, whether or not Deleuze's wager constitutes a valid interpretation of Foucault, his wager is certainly most pertinent to Baruch Spinoza. It is of Spinoza's ontology that one can truly say: "*resistance comes first*." For Spinoza anticipated our present impasse, our false problem.[4]

A false problem is not a non-existent problem, is not nothing. It is instructive here to follow Spinoza's definition of falsity: "Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, i.e., mutilated and confused, ideas involve" (*E* II, P35).[5] In the Proof, Spinoza adds: "falsity cannot consist in absolute privation … nor again can it consist in absolute ignorance." Confined strictly to the realm of the relative, the false can never be absolute, which means that it cannot be

even nothing absolutely: the false is privation of knowledge and privation of knowledge cannot be absolute, which means that falsity is very limited, very confused, very inadequate knowledge, yet still knowledge. (Truth, on the other hand, belongs entirely to the realm of the absolute. It is in the wake of such a definition of falsity that Spinoza famously writes: "just as light manifests both itself and the darkness, so truth is the standard [*norma*] both of itself and of falsity," *E* II, P43S.) A false problem, thus, needs to be understood as an inadequate problem, namely, a problem that is inadequate to its solution as long as it is posed in a way that makes it insoluble. The question then becomes: if the problem of the dialectical deadlock between power and resistance is a poorly conceived, inadequately posed problem, how is one to pose the problem of the relation between power and resistance adequately?

We may find an answer to this question in the way in which Spinoza poses the problem of the relation between the true and the false. Were falsity to constitute the criterion of truth and truth to constitute the criterion of falsity, were the true and the false to be binary opposites, then we would be caught in an infinite dialectical relay without any possible resolution, we would be lost in a mirror-hall where the true and the false could no longer be distinguished from one another, in short, we would be trapped in the *mise-en-abyme* of the relative, which, as Spinoza warned, can only lead to skepticism (*E* I, Ap.). For Spinoza, however, the relation between the true and the false is not one of mutual inversion, opposition, reciprocity and determination because the true and the false are not on equal footing: the false is false relative to the true, yet the true is true only in relation to itself. In Spinoza, the relation between the true and the false involves at least two different types of relations: on the one hand, the self-positing and self-constituting relation of truth to itself, the self-relation of truth, and, on the other hand, the relation between the true and the false—and the former is logically prior to the latter. None of these relations can be dialectical: the relation between the true and the false may be imagined to be a dialectical relation of binary opposites only by foreclosing the prior self-relation of truth, which, when not foreclosed, displaces and forestalls the dialectic before it even emerges; and the self-relation of truth is not a dialectical relation because it is not a relation between binary opposites but a relation among multiple and heterogeneous parts—for the fact that truth is self-positing and absolute does not mean that it is not composite and complex. What is primary is the self-positing relation of truth, whereas the relation between the true and the false is secondary to and determined by the self-relation of truth. Or, *the final word on the false is that the true comes first*.

I am proposing, in other words, that Spinoza poses the problem of the relation between power and resistance in the same way in which he poses the problem of the relation between the true and the false: in Spinoza, *resistance is the standard of itself and of power*. And yet, how is one to demonstrate this proposition when only "truth" (i.e., *veritas*), "falsity" (i.e., *falsitas*) and "power" (i.e., *potestas* and *potentia*) are crucial words and concepts for Spinoza, whereas the word "resistance" does not occur anywhere in his works?[6] Clearly, the demonstration hinges on showing how the concept of "resistance" is present and crucial in Spinoza even in the absence of the word "resistance." For I believe it may be possible to find the primacy of the concept of resistance inscribed in the grammars of *conatus*.

A singular concept; or, *Conatus*

When it comes to *conatus*, word and concept do not coincide completely and much lies in that gap.[7] We encounter both concept and word first in a complex verbal construction in Proposition 6 of Part III of the *Ethics*: "*Unaquaeque res, quantùm in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*." "Each thing, in so far as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being." Leaving the concept aside for the moment, let us note (a) that the word appears here not as a noun (i.e., *conatus*, a striving) but in a verbal form, (b) that the verb in question (i.e., *conor*, to strive) is a deponent verb exhibiting aspects of both active and passive voices (i.e., signifying an active meaning through a passive verbal form), and (c) that the voice of this verb, hence, may well be indistinguishable from the intensive middle voice in which the grammatical subject is at once subject of an action and subject of a passion, in which the subject is always subject *of* and subjected *to* the direct action of the verb, in which the subject acts and is acted upon, affects and is affected, at one and the same time. In short, the word is first encountered as a verb that marks a zone of indistinction between subject and object as well as between action and passion.[8] And yet—even though the specificity of this verb is important since it implies a self-relation already by itself—it would be misguided to mistake the word for the concept here or elsewhere: to do so would lead to an interpretation of the concept of *conatus* as something akin to the Lacanian drive. (After all, what does the drive do if not repeatedly strive?) As we shall see, however, *conatus* is not drive but desire or love—these two are the same.[9]

The concept of *conatus* is first articulated by Spinoza in the *entire* verbal construction—"*in suo esse perseverare conatur*," "striving to persevere in its

being"—which is then repeated *verbatim* multiple times in rapid succession (e.g., after its first occurrence in Part III of the *Ethics* Proposition 6, we encounter it again in P6Pr., P7, P7Pr., P8, P9 and P9Pr.). It is only after the verbal construction has been repeated already twice that the noun with which we usually denote the concept—that is, *conatus*—makes its first appearances (in *E* III, P7Pr., P8 and so on). In each of the first three appearances, however, Spinoza qualifies the noun very precisely and always in the same way, namely, "[t]he striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being" (*E* III, P7, P7Pr., P8). And later, after having stated in *E* III, P9, that the "mind … strives to persevere in its being for an indefinite duration, and is conscious of this striving," the Scholium to this proposition, so as to make things perfectly clear, begins thus: "This striving, when it is related to the mind alone, is called 'will'"—as if to emphasize: *this* specific type of striving, and not others (*E* III, P9S). In short, Spinoza takes great care to explain that the meaning of the concept of *conatus* is not mere striving, is not just any striving, but is specifically *the striving to persevere in one's being*.

From here onwards—that is, from the moment in which the relation between word and concept has been established—Spinoza often will use the word *conatus* as a condensation of the entire verbal construction, omitting the construction itself altogether: eventually the word does denote and coincide with the concept, not because the word suddenly is able to signify the concept entirely by itself, but because, since at least Proposition 7 of Part III of the *Ethics*, the word *conatus* is no longer equal to itself and has been re-signified as to mean no longer mere striving but striving to persevere in one's being. For example, Spinoza writes: "We shall strive to do everything which we imagine men … to view with pleasure" (*E* III, P29). And in the Scholium he adds: "This striving to do something [*Hic conatus aliquid agendi*] … the sole cause of which is that we may please men, is called, 'ambition.'" Such a *conatus agendi* would be easily misconstrued without an understanding of *conatus* degree zero, that is, without previous knowledge of the fact that the concept of *conatus* means to strive to persevere in one's being. Why, after all, would we strive to do something that pleases others? We strive in this manner because we imagine such a striving to contribute to the striving to persevere in our being. This *conatus agendi* constitutes a redetermination of *conatus*: it indicates a power of acting that is put in motion and actualized by the striving to persevere in one's being. This is all to say (a) that, after Propositions 6–9 in Part III and their attendant Demonstrations and Scholia, the word *conatus* is most often found without the original verbal construction, and (b) that this fact may lead easily to misunderstandings unless one remembers that in such cases Spinoza uses *conatus* in effect as an abbreviation for *conatus quo*

unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur. The latter is precisely the way in which I will use *conatus* from now onwards.

As soon as *conatus* emerges in the text of the *Ethics*, however, it begets a concatenation of equivalences. As early as Proposition 7 of Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains that *conatus* is "the actual essence of the thing," and in Proof he specifies: "So, the power [*potentia*], i.e., the striving [*conatus*], of each thing by which, either alone or with others, it either acts or strives to act—that is … the power [*potentia*], i.e., the striving [*conatus*], by which it strives to persevere in its being—is nothing other than the given, i.e., the actual essence of the thing." *Conatus* = *essentia* in the sense that *conatus* = *potentia* = *essentia*. Modal essence consists of a certain degree of power that is the particular mode's striving to persevere in its being.[10] Shortly thereafter we learn that *conatus* is also "appetite" ["*appetitus*"] and "desire" ["*cupiditas*"]—the difference between the two being one of consciousness: "Desire is appetite together with a consciousness of the appetite" (*E* III, P9S). Moreover, we come full circle when we learn in *E* III, P56Pr., as well as in the first Definition of the Affects, that "[d]esire is the very essence of man," "*Cupiditas est ipsa hominis essentia*." Lastly, beyond Part III, *conatus* will undergo a significant metamorphosis in Part IV of the *Ethics*, where *conatus* = *virtus*—a metamorphosis to which I will return—and it will finally be linked to intuitive knowledge in Part V. Disentangling such a complex concatenation of concepts is a task that goes beyond the scope of this essay. Here, I will only highlight a feature of this concatenation that is most relevant to my arguments.

This concatenation of concepts is inflected in a particular way by Spinoza's singular understanding of essence. Thus: "I say that there belongs to the essence of a thing that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited, and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily negated; or that without which a thing can neither exist nor be conceived, and conversely that which can neither exist nor be conceived without the thing" (*E* II, D2). Had Spinoza not added this last and decisive caveat—that is, "and conversely that which can neither exist nor be conceived without the thing"—we would be dealing with an essentialist definition of essence that could exceed and transcend the mode in question and hence that could constitute the essence also of other modes or even of substance. That this is a particularly crucial matter for Spinoza is evident from how strongly he emphasizes this feature of essence in the last sentences of the following Scholium:

> For my intention here was simply to explain why I did not say that there belongs to the essence of a thing that without which the thing can neither exist nor be conceived … Instead of this I said that there necessarily constitutes the essence

> of a thing that which, being given, the thing is posited, and which, being taken away, the thing is negated; or that without which a thing can neither exist nor be conceived, and conversely that which can neither exist nor be conceived without the thing. (*E* II, P10S2)

The difference between what Spinoza did not say and what he stresses he did say instead is exactly the subordinate parallel clause which expresses the mutual immanence and mutual correspondence between a thing and its essence without any remainder: "and conversely that which can neither exist nor be conceived without the thing." For Spinoza, *essence is singularity*. (This is valid not only for modal essence but also for the essence of substance: only the latter, in fact, is existence; only when it comes to substance are essence and existence one and the same—see *E* I, D1 and *E* I, P20.) Further, Spinoza throws in a final clincher: "That which is common to all things … and which is equally in the part and in the whole constitutes the essence of no singular thing" (*E* II, P37). The essence of each and every thing is singular and cannot be shared in common. But the essence of a thing is its *conatus*, that is, its power [*potentia*]. Moreover, when it comes to the human thing, that essence which is its *conatus* is also its desire. In short, the rule of singularity must apply transitively to all four concepts—essence, *conatus*, power and desire. The *conatus* of each and every thing can only be singular. Essence inflects conatus in the singular: to each its own *conatus*.

An ethical solution; or, a common life

The essence of any thing is the striving by which that thing strives to persevere in its being. But what does it mean to persevere and, moreover, to persevere in one's being? And what exactly is this being in question here? The time has come to focus on the other part of the verbal construction expressing the concept of *conatus*, namely, "*in suo esse perseverare*." If the verb *conor* implies a self-relation already in its form and denotes a semantic field that is eminently dynamic, there seems to be something somewhat static about *persevero*. Indeed, there is a certain *gravitas* about this verb: *persevero*, in fact, derives from *per-severus*. The adjective *severus* means severe, stern; as a preposition, *per* may mean across, through—in spatial and/or temporal terms; and when it is used as a verbal prefix, as it is in this case, *per-* may retain one or more among the meanings of the preposition or may simply function as an intensive.

To persevere, thus, means either to be severe through time and space, or to be severe through and through, namely, to be particularly, completely, thoroughly severe. Either way, permanence, persistence and even defiance in the face of adverse circumstances are implied—all of which is soon made clear by Spinoza ("The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being involves, not a finite, but an indefinite time," *E* III, P8), as well as in the proof of the same proposition (in which it becomes evident that what is at stake in such a perseverance is nothing less than the deferral and avoidance of the thing being "destroyed by an external cause"). Isn't this the perilous condition in which each and every thing always finds itself, namely, to be constantly under threat of destruction by external causes? It is this threat that lends *gravitas* to such perseverance: to persevere here means to be severe in the face of danger. Far from being static (even in a homeostatic sense), *persevero* too is a highly dynamic verb that implies relations of force: stoic endurance rather than stoppage, suspension, paralysis, or immobility. In Spinoza, *persevero* is to insist in being against all odds.

What being is at stake in such a perseverance? Spinoza writes "*in suo esse perseverare*" rather than *in sua existentia perseverare* or simply *perseverare*. Had he written *in sua existentia perseverare*, it would have been legitimate to interpret the concept of *conatus* as some sort of survival instinct—an interpretation that is even more inadequate than the one that understands *conatus* as drive. For Spinoza, being—that is, *esse*—is not sheer existence. The being in question here is both existence *and* essence. Moreover, this being is the non-identity of essence and existence. And it is because there is a gap, a fissure, a relating non-relation between essence and existence that it is possible and indispensable to speak of ethics and of politics (rather than of mere survival). *Conatus* may be as good a name as any for such a relating non-relation that is constitutive of the ethical and of the political. Indeed, it is precisely because *conatus* is the striving to persevere *in the non-identity of essence and existence* that it invests and constitutes the realms of the ethical and of the political in and as its determinations of desire and of virtue. The essence of the thing is the striving by which each thing strives to persevere both in its essence and in its existence under adverse conditions: isn't this tantamount to saying that *conatus* qua essence is standard of itself and of existence? Doesn't this mean that the realms of the ethical and of the political that are opened up by the relating non-relation between essence and existence depend on the self-relation of essence for their articulations and resolutions? *Conatus* then ought to be understood as the incessant striving, struggle,

negotiation and adjustment between these two different types of relations (i.e., the self-relation of essence and the relating non-relation between essence and existence) for an indefinite period of time. Such an incessant striving gives logical and ontological precedence to essence over existence, but only in a very specific way. The fact that essence is standard of itself and of existence does not mean that existence has to raise itself to the level of essence and has to live up to essence; on the contrary, the only ethical-political imperative here is that one find and produce that singular way to strive to persevere in one's being that is worthy of one's existence and its inevitable contingencies, accidents and wounds—which are inevitable because one exists in adverse, unpredictable, inconstant conditions by definition. It is essence that must strive incessantly to relate to itself in such a way that existence becomes worthy of being such as it is, that is, worthy of being lived such as it is here and now rather than such as one imagines it should be or will be in an always already deferred utopian future. Essence, after all, is power qua *potentia*, namely, potentiality to become different from what one is—a potentiality that starts from what is rather than from what ought to be. *Conatus* is not love of life and especially not love of life at all costs. *Conatus* is love of life worth living, namely, that love of life which actively makes this life worthy of being lived.

If it seems far-fetched to draw such conclusions from the linguistic and conceptual grammars of *conatus*, one need only turn to Part IV where *conatus* finally turns into *virtus*. While articulating the dicta of reason according to which human beings ought to live, Spinoza writes:

> Since reason demands nothing that is contrary to Nature, it therefore demands that each person should love himself, should look for what is useful to him (which is truly useful), should seek everything that truly leads a man to greater perfection, and, in absolute terms, that everyone, in so far as he is in himself, should strive to preserve his being [*suum esse … conservare conetur*] … Then, since virtue … is simply acting from the laws of one's own nature, and since no one … strives to preserve his being except from the laws of his own nature, from this it follows, first, that the basis of virtue is the striving to preserve one's own being and that happiness consists in the fact that a man is able to preserve his being. (*E* IV, P18S)

The fact that in this passage—and throughout much of Part IV—striving is no longer *striving to persevere in one's being* but *striving to preserve one's being* may seem to pose difficulties here. The substitution of *conservare* for *perseverare*, after all, may well represent a conservative turn in Spinoza's arguments: *conservo*,

unlike *persevero*, does connote a certain stasis and does seem to tilt *conatus* toward notions such as instinct of self-preservation and the like.

And yet, first of all, we need to consider that *conatus* degree zero has been well established in Part III of the *Ethics* already and hence that in Part IV the meaning of this concept can be posited as a given and that "*suum esse … conservare conetur*" here constitutes in effect a second-degree *conatus*. For example, Spinoza writes:

> Virtue is human power [*potentia*] itself, which is defined by the essence of man alone (by Def. 8, Part 4); that is (by Prop. 7, Part3), which is defined solely by the striving by which a man strives to persevere [*perseverare*] in his being. The more, therefore, each person strives to preserve [*conservare*] his being, and is able to do so, the more he is endowed with virtue; consequently (by Props. 4 and 6, Part 3), in so far as he neglects to preserve [*conservare*] his being, to that extent he is lacking in power [*impotens*]. Q.E.D. (*E* IV, P20Pr.)

As it is customary in a proof, Spinoza reminds us of the previous propositions constituting the condition of possibility for the emergence and adequacy of the proposition at hand: in this sense, a proof always outlines an ontogenesis of that which it demonstrates. Here, crucially, *conatus* degree zero—that is, striving to persevere in one's being—precedes and enables *conatus* qua striving to preserve one's being, almost as if to say that anything we might understand as self-preservation constitutes a secondary consequence and feature of a prior striving to persevere in being.

Secondly, even in this redetermination of *conatus* what is at stake is not simply existence but being, which, as we established earlier, includes both existence *and* essence. Spinoza here writes "*suum esse … conservare conetur*" rather than *suam existentiam conservare conetur*. Spinoza is perfectly capable to specify when what is at stake is the perseverance and preservation of existence only, as he does, for example, in the last three sentences of the Preface to Part IV, in which the distinction between persevering in existence and persevering in essence is made very clear. The striving to preserve one's being, thus, is not only a conservative striving to preserve one's existence just as it is but also a projective striving to preserve one's essence, that is, one's potential for changing one's existence, one's capability for becoming different from what one is. Even in its second-order redetermination of striving to preserve one's being, *conatus* still constitutes the paradox of a striving to maintain a state of affairs such that an event may be able to take place in and transform that very state of affairs which is to be maintained.

Having shown how the shift from *persevero* to *conservo* in the grammar of *conatus* does *not* constitute a conservative turn in the articulation of this concept, let us further explore the *conatus* in Part IV:

> Since reason demands nothing that is contrary to Nature, it therefore demands that each person should love himself, should look for what is useful to him (which is truly useful), should seek everything that truly leads a man to greater perfection, and, in absolute terms, that everyone, in so far as he is in himself, should strive to preserve his being [*suum esse … conservare conetur*]. … Then, since virtue … is simply acting from the laws of one's own nature, and since no one … strives to preserve his being except from the laws of his own nature, from this it follows, first, that the basis of virtue is the striving to preserve one's own being and that happiness consists in the fact that a man is able to preserve his being. (*E* IV, P18S)

Conatus here reaches the level of the absolute that is proper of truth and of the ethical: it is "in absolute terms" "that everyone … should strive to preserve his being;" further, such a striving is "the basis of virtue" and its goal constitutes happiness itself. It is not the imagination, it is reason itself—that is, the realm of the true—that "demands that each person should love himself, should look for what is useful to him … should seek everything that truly leads a man to greater perfection," etc. *Conatus as self-love*. *Conatus* is indeed that love which produces one's life as worthy of being lived.

As the rest of this Scholium makes clear, such a form of self-love has nothing in common with utilitarianism, individualism, instrumental reason, or other variations on that theme which is the imagination and its specular, narcissistic and egocentric relations:

> It follows … that we can never bring it about that we need nothing outside ourselves [*extra nos*] to preserve our being and that we live in such a way that we have no dealings [*nullum commercium*] with things which are outside us [*extra nos*]. … Therefore, there exist many things outside us [*extra nos*] that are useful and which, consequently, are to be sought. Of these, none can be conceived as more excellent than those that agree [*conveniunt*] entirely with our nature. For if (for example) two individuals of the same nature are joined with each other, they constitute an individual that is twice as powerful [*potentius*] as either. Nothing … is more useful to man than man. I mean by this that men can ask for nothing that is more efficacious for the preservation of their being than all men should agree [*conveniant*] in everything in such a way that the minds and bodies of all should, as it were, constitute one mind and one body, and that all, as far as they can, should simultaneously strive to

> preserve their own being [*suum esse conservare conentur*], and that all should simultaneously look for the common benefit of all [*omnium commune utile*]. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason—that is, men who, under the guidance of reason, look for what is useful to them [*suum utile*]—seek for themselves nothing that they do not desire for the rest of human beings, and so they are just, faithful, and honorable. These are the dicta of reason, which I have decided to state here in a few words, before I begin to demonstrate them in an order that is more detailed. I did this so that I might, if possible, gain the attention of those who believe that the principle that each person is bound to look for what is useful to him [*suum utile*] is the basis of impiety, and not of virtue and piety. (*E* IV, P18S)

Here, *conatus* opens itself up to the outside and to the common. More precisely, *conatus* shows itself always to have included the outside and the common as its own condition of possibility: "we can never bring it about that we need nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being and that we live in such a way that we have no dealings with things which are outside us." And precisely because the outside and the common constitute the condition of possibility of *conatus* in the first place, then *conatus* finds its highest determination in and as that collective *conatus* in which "all … should simultaneously strive to preserve their own being … and look for the common benefit of all." *Conatus* constitutes the immanent mediation that brings us from the outside and the common back to the outside and to the common: it is the *dispositif* that at once finds its condition of possibility in the outside and in the common as well as potentiates the outside and the common by re-determining them with a higher degree of virtue, with a higher degree of ethical and political power.

There is no guarantee that *conatus* shall correctly identify what is "truly useful" for such a potentiation and redetermination of its own condition of possibility. The principle of utility articulated in this passage does not index an individualist utilitarianism essentially characterized by competition for the useful; it is a principle of utility, rather, that posits the "truly useful" as that which is at once the useful for one (*suum utile*) and the useful for all (*omnium commune utile*). But far from indicating some sort of utopian idealism, such a principle of utility bears witness instead to the difficulty of self-love, self-relation and self-constitution understood as collective process of co-operation: on the one hand, from the standpoint of reason, the self is always already open to the outside and to the common, and hence self-love can only be a collective process; on the other hand, from the standpoint of the imagination, the self is solipsistic interiority inimical and opposed to the outside and to

the common (i.e., the self has a dialectical relation to the outside and to the common understood as imaginary and specular other), and hence self-love can only be narcissism and egotism of the worst varieties. (Incidentally, while the latter standpoint is succinctly encapsulated by that dictum which has dominated the modern history of political philosophy at least since Thomas Hobbes' *De Cive*—namely, "*homo homini lupus*"—the former standpoint is succinctly encapsulated by Spinoza in his own rather different dictum in the above passage, namely, "*Homini … nihil homine utilius*," "Nothing … is more useful to man than man." This is Spinoza's direct answer and corrective to Hobbes' dictum). The difficulty of the type of self-love advocated by Spinoza is manifested lexically in these two passages in parenthetical yet crucial clauses such as "in so far as he is in himself," "as it were," "as far as they can," etc. But even had such provisos been absent from this passage, it is well known that Spinoza had no illusions about the fact that human beings are seldom guided also by reason and are mostly guided only by the imagination. From that fact, however, Spinoza never draws the conclusion that there is something essentially competitive and antagonistic about human relations and that human conflict is destiny unless the human is saved from itself by that *deus ex machina* which is sovereign power. Spinoza, rather, uses that fact so as to produce instead a powerful demonstration and affirmation of the collective nature of *conatus*—a nature that the imagination may well distort or foreclose altogether but that does not simply cease to be even when distorted or foreclosed. *Conatus* is not only self-love and not only love that produces one's life as worthy of being lived. *Conatus* is love that turns the only life there is into life worth living, namely, life outside and in common.

Leaving aside the question of the outside for the moment, my insistence on the inseparability of *conatus* and the common may seem unwarranted given that the only lexical evidence I have adduced so far is the expression "*omnium commune utile*" in the passage quoted above. Moreover, did I not go to great lengths in the second section of this essay to explain how for Spinoza the *conatus* of each and every thing is singular? How then can *conatus* be both singular *and* common? My question in this essay, however, has been: how can it *not* be both? The solution to this conundrum lies in the specific way in which Spinoza conceives of the relation between essence and existence. As I explained earlier, the essence of the thing is singular and cannot be shared in common, *conatus* is the essence of the thing, and hence *conatus* qua essence of the thing is singular and cannot be shared in common. *The point is that if essence is singular and cannot be shared in common, existence can only be common*. Though Spinoza has given us many

indications of the necessary commonality of existence already—e.g., "we can never bring it about that we need nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being and that we live in such a way that we have no dealings with things which are outside us …" and "Nothing … is more useful to man than man"—let us also return briefly to Proposition 37 of Part II of the *Ethics*, which I will now quote in full: "That which is common to all things [*omnibus commune*] (see Lemma 2 above) and which is equally in the part and in the whole constitutes the essence of no singular thing [*nullius rei singularis essentiam*]." In this passage, the common and the singular seem to be absolutely incompatible.

But what exactly is that "which is common to all things?" Within the parenthesis, Spinoza points laconically to "Lemma 2" for the answer to this question. This Lemma simply states: "All bodies agree in certain things [*Omnia corpora in quibusdam convenient*]" (*E* II, L2). Here, the verb *convenio* means also to come together, to join. (Incidentally, *convenio* is also the verb used by Lucretius when describing the collision and union of the atoms in *De Rerum Natura.*)[11] And it is once again to this lemma that Spinoza will turn in the corollary to the following proposition, in which those foundational building-blocks of reason, that is, the "common notions," are mentioned for the first time: "From this it follows that there are certain ideas, i.e., notions, which are common to all human beings [*notiones, omnibus hominibus communes*]. For (by Lem. 2) all bodies agree in some things, which (by the preceding Proposition) must be conceived adequately, i.e., clearly and distinctly by all" (*E* II, P38C). Besides irrefutably anchoring the *Ursprung* of reason in corporeality and tethering reason firmly to the imagination, this truly remarkable passage also goes a long way in providing a possible solution to the conundrum of the relation between the singular and the common. For if there is one thing in which all bodies certainly agree is in having an indeterminate yet finite existence: for Spinoza, "existence" cannot not be a notion "common to all human beings." In this sense, *conatus* needs to be understood as the thing's striving to persevere in the non-identity of its own singular essence and its own common existence—a relating non-relation of non-identity that makes essence and existence, the singular and the common, irreducible to yet inextricable, distinct yet indiscernible from one another.[12] *Conatus* is that singular process by which each one of us strives to be at once singular and common without either forfeiting one's singularity or abjuring the common. For Spinoza, there where essence and existence are not one and the same—namely, in modes—there being is singular common. *Conatus* is the exemplary manifestation of being singular common.[13]

A topologico-political conclusion; or, *Conatus extra nos*

We have traveled far from Foucault and Deleuze, from the false problem of the dialectic of power and resistance, from stating that in Spinoza resistance is the standard of itself and of power, and from attempting to show that such a conception of resistance is inscribed in the linguistic and conceptual grammars of *conatus*. And yet, we have been traveling through a topological space, in which what is far may also be near—we have been traveling always in the proximity of the set of all sets. … "Topology" is the title of the second section of Deleuze's *Foucault*. It is undoubtedly the topological character of Spinoza's ontology that inspires and guides Deleuze in his own distinctly Spinozist readings of Foucault. Here, I would like to locate *conatus* also in this other grammar—a topologico-political grammar—by enlisting the help of Deleuze's Spinozist Foucault. From this standpoint, *conatus* is a point on the boundary of the set of all sets, a knot on what Deleuze, inspired by Herman Melville, calls "the twisting line of the outside."[14]

Earlier, I referred to *conatus* as always already open to the outside and including the outside—thereby also implying that *conatus* may be conceived of as an inside-outside complex, as an inside of the outside, as an enfolding of the outside in which the outside is contained inside. Unlike in Foucault and Deleuze, neither the word nor the concept of outside plays an explicit and important role in Spinoza—and yet the concept is there implicit throughout. It could be argued that Spinoza's ontology does not admit of any outside: being is the immanence of substance and modes without remainder (i.e., no mode is not in substance, and substance does not include anything that is not a mode). By the same token, however, the entire plane of immanence constituted by substance and modes can be considered infinite and absolute outside—an undoubtedly heterogeneous outside, yet the outside of no inside. Certainly, the latter is similar to what Foucault calls "outside" in his essay on Maurice Blanchot, "*La pensée du dehors*"—though Spinoza's absolute outside is a potentially more radical concept to the extent to which, unlike Foucault's outside, it does not privilege the attribute of thought and involves just as importantly the attribute of extension. Spinoza's absolute outside is more akin to Deleuze's re-elaboration of Foucault's outside as force field, as the field of force relations.

Absolute outside, however, is not the only kind of outside in Spinoza: there is also another outside, a relative or modal outside—and it is there that *conatus* is first located in Spinoza's text. In Part IV, we read:

> we can never bring it about that we need nothing outside ourselves [*extra nos*] to preserve our being and that we live in such a way that we have no dealings

> [*nullum commercium*] with things which are outside us [*extra nos*] … Therefore, there exist many things outside us [*extra nos*] that are useful and which, consequently, are to be sought … Nothing … is more useful to man than man. (*E* IV, P18S)

The outside indexed by the construction "*extra nos*" is first of all relative rather than absolute: it applies to modes of thought and modes of extension, in short, to what Spinoza in this passage refers to as "things." We are things among things in a world of things in which each and every thing is outside relative to each and every other thing—and, willy-nilly, *conatus* brings the thing outside of itself and makes it interact with other things. *Conatus*—namely, the very essence of the thing—is *extra nos*, is outside ourselves, is between the thing and other things, and hence produces and constitutes the thing as open set relative to and interactive with other open sets.[15]

Deleuze captures well the difference between relative outside and absolute outside when distinguishing between "exteriority" and "the outside." Deleuze writes:

> We must distinguish between exteriority and the outside. Exteriority is still a form, as in *The Archeology of Knowledge*—even two forms which are exterior to one another, since knowledge is made of the two environments of light and language, seeing and speaking. But the outside concerns force: if force is always in relation with other forces, forces necessarily refer to an irreducible outside which no longer even has any form and is made up of distances that cannot be broken down through which one force acts upon another or is acted upon by another. It is always from the outside that a force confers on others or receives from others the variable position [*affectation*] to be found only at a particular distance or in a particular relation. There is therefore a becoming of forces which remains distinct from the history of forms, since it operates in a different dimension. It is *an outside which is farther away* than any external world and even any form of exteriority, which henceforth becomes infinitely closer … [F]orces operate in a different space to that of forms, the space of the Outside, where the relation is precisely a "non-relation", the place a "non-place", and history a becoming.[16]

In earlier passages, Deleuze had already explained that forms, of course, are traversed by forces and their relations and indeed constitute their actualization and integration: even though forces always relate to other forces—that is, even though forces always affect and are affected by other forces—forms and forces, as well as power and knowledge, are nonetheless immanent and in a relation of

"mutual presupposition and capture."[17] In this context, hence, the distinction between "exteriority" and "the outside" is a distinction *within* the heterogeneous plane of immanence: it describes the difference in nature between these two dimensions of the one and only plane. Exteriority is relative outside: it is the measurable and divisible distance at once separating and relating historical forms of knowledge, namely, modes. The "Outside," on the other hand, is Spinoza's absolute outside consisting of the entire plane of immanence of substance and modes, which is formless, immeasurable and indivisible, and *which appertains to forces*—namely, as Deleuze puts it, "which no longer even has any form and is made up of distances that cannot be broken down through which one force acts upon another or is acted upon by another." Repeatedly throughout the *Ethics*, Spinoza puts much emphasis on the apparent paradox of the measurability and divisibility of modes and the immeasurability and indivisibility of substance (such as, most famously, in *E* I, P15S). In his articulation of the "Outside," however, Deleuze explicitly recasts Spinoza's absolute outside or plane of immanence not only as immeasurable and indivisible but also as the field that is crisscrossed and interwoven by force relations.

As I stated earlier, the outside posited by "*extra nos*" is undoubtedly relative: *conatus* is *extra nos* in the sense that it opens and relates modes to each other, in the sense that it connects historical forms of knowledge that are exterior to one another. In this context, moreover, *conatus* is itself a form of exteriority, a form of relation, namely, it is the historical form that materializes and incorporates the relation between forms or modes that are exterior to one another. The historicity of *conatus* as form of relation is expressed lexically in and as the word *commercium*: "we can never bring it about that we need nothing outside ourselves [*extra nos*] to preserve our being and that we live in such a way that we have no dealings [*nullum commercium*] with things which are outside us [*extra nos*]" (*E* IV, P18S). This historicity is unmistakable: it is the historicity of mercantile capital. Spinoza's word choice for the "dealings" that are necessary for life—namely, *commercium*—is used to designate not only any type of dealing in general but also commerce and mercantile transactions in particular: *conatus* here is conceptualized as form of relation that implies and presupposes certain relations of force, namely, relations of exchange and, more specifically, capitalist exchange relations.

And yet the outside posited by "*extra nos*" is also absolute outside or plane of immanence: *conatus* is *extra nos* also in the sense that it is force that affects and that is affected by other forces—thereby always indexing the plane of immanence which is produced and reproduced as open force field by all such

relations and affections, that very plane upon which all forces ceaselessly fold and unfold. For what is that striving to persevere in one's being if not force par excellence? And what did we discover earlier about the verbs of *conatus*—namely, *conor*, *persevero* and even *conservo*—if not that they all, in various ways, refer to relations of force? And what else is being envisioned in the culminating statement that nothing "is more useful to man than man" if not joining forces, if not the collective integration of all *conatus* as force relations? *Conatus* has two faces or two openings, one turned toward the relative outside that opens modes up to other modes, and the other turned toward the absolute outside or plane of immanence understood as open field of force relations, as open set of all sets. At once form of relation and relation of force, *conatus* is outside—both relatively and absolutely.

And it is precisely when it is outside absolutely, when it is a knot on the line of the absolute outside, that *conatus* is not only force but also resistance. Deleuze writes:

> It is still from the outside that a force affects, or is affected by, others. The power to affect or be affected is carried out in a variable way, depending on the forces involved in the relation. The diagram, understood as determination of a set of relations between forces, never exhausts force, which can enter into other relations and compositions. The diagram stems from the outside but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to "draw" new ones. In this way the outside is always an opening on to a future [*avenir*]: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything metamorphoses. In this sense force displays potentiality with respect to the diagram in which it is captured, or possesses a third power which presents itself as capacity for "resistance." In fact, alongside (or rather as counterpart of) singularities of power which correspond to its relations, a diagram of forces presents singularities of resistance, such as "points, knots or focuses" which act in turn on the strata [i.e., historical formations], but in such a way as to make change possible. Moreover, the final word on power is that *resistance comes first* [*la résistance est première*] to the extent that power relations operate completely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge. This means that a social field resists more than it strategizes, and that the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance.[18]

The word for "power" in this passage is *pouvoir* (approximately corresponding to the Latin word *potestas*) rather than *puissance* (approximately corresponding to the Latin word *potentia*, which is the word Spinoza uses in the description of *conatus* as the power of the thing). Throughout his *Foucault*, Deleuze uses

pouvoir whenever re-elaborating Foucault's theory of power in *La volonté de savoir* and elsewhere (undoubtedly due to the fact that Foucault himself uses the word *pouvoir* in that book). Though the word *puissance* is nowhere to be found in Deleuze's *Foucault*, the concept of *puissance* is repeatedly expressed in the various articulations of the word and concept of force. In the above passage, for example, Deleuze writes that "force displays potentiality with respect to the diagram in which it is captured, or possesses a third power which presents itself as capacity for 'resistance.'" And earlier, Deleuze writes: "The statement integrates into language the intensity of the affects, the differential relation between forces, the singularities of power (potentialities)."[19] Here, (a) the materials of linguistic integration are not three different building blocks but three different ways of describing the same set of phenomena, three different points of view on the same *combinatoire*, and (b) the singularities of power constitute potentialities because they have not yet been integrated and actualized in and as language (or, put differently, because they have not yet been integrated and actualized in and as "diagram understood as determination of a set of relations between forces," such as, for example, Foucault's diagram par excellence, namely, "*le dispositif panoptique*").[20] Undoubtedly—as Deleuze explains—for Foucault "power is a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a 'power relation,'" and, at the same time, "force essentially exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power."[21] The point, however, is that *conatus is first of all force not power*, that *conatus* qua *potentia* is logically and ontologically prior to whatever type of *potestas* may nonetheless instantiate it, capture it and be constituted by it.

Such a logical and ontological primacy, as well as such "mutual presupposition and capture," is evident in Definition 8 of Part IV of the *Ethics*: "By virtue and power [*potentiam*] I understand the same; that is … virtue, in so far as it is related to man, is the very essence, i.e., the nature, of man, in so far as he has the power [*potestatem*] of doing certain things which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone." According to the logic articulated in this passage, it is the case both (a) that *potentia* comes before *potestas* and that, indeed, the final word on *potestas* is that *potentia* comes first, and (b) that *conatus* qua *potentia* is the essence of the human thing to the extent to which it repeatedly actualizes and re-actualizes itself as *potestas* in human existence, namely, to the extent to which it realizes our indeterminate yet finite existence in and as acts of self-determination (i.e., acts of liberation or freedom). *Conatus* is at once (a) *potentia* logically and ontologically prior to *potestas*, as well as (b) *potentia* only to the extent to which it realizes itself as *potestas* qua self-determination.

Whence resistance? As we saw earlier, *conatus* is double: it is both historical form of relation as well as relation of force. *Conatus* as relation of force, however, is itself also double: with respect to existence, *conatus* qua force is force of power (*pouvoir*, *potestas*); with respect to essence, *conatus* qua force is force of resistance (*puissance*, *potentia*). Thence what we might call the triad of *conatus*: (1) form of relation, (2) relation of force expressed as power and (3) relation of force expressed as resistance. (This is perhaps why in the passage quoted above Deleuze refers to force as possessing "a *third* power which presents itself as capacity for 'resistance.'") *Conatus* operates on three different levels at once: as form of relation at the level of strata (namely, at the level of the historical formations or "social field," which in this case bear the name of mercantile capital); as relation of force expressed as power at the level of the diagram (namely, at the level of the historical arrangement, integration and determination of all force relations, which in this case bear the name of capitalist exchange relations, by definition unequal and asymmetrical); and as relation of force expressed as resistance at the level of the outside (namely, at the level of the absolute outside or plane of immanence, which is always becoming, and which Spinoza in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* significantly calls *concatenatio rerum*, "the concatenation of all things.")[22] As Deleuze puts it in the passage above: "The diagram stems from the outside but the outside does not merge with any diagram." It is when led by the imagination that we mistake the outside for the diagram—in effect merging the two in the same image of the world—thereby believing that the only way to concatenate all things is through capitalist exchange relations. Deleuze also writes: "the final word on power is that *resistance comes first* [*la résistance est première*] to the extent that power relations operate completely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge." It is when we are unwilling and unable to distinguish between the diagram and the outside that we also mistake resistance for power—merging the two in the same image of force—thereby actualizing resistance at best futilely as the dialectical binary opposite of power rather than as that force of the outside which may change power and its diagram (for the better or for the worse or both).

But if the imagination shoves us into the arms of the dialectic of power and resistance, is then reason, which always gives us adequate knowledge of the world, sufficient for *conatus* to disengage power from resistance and *potestas* from *potentia*? Is reason sufficient for *conatus* to articulate the always chiasmic relations between power and resistance and between *potestas* and *potentia* in such a way that the latter may have not only logical and ontological but also

political primacy—namely, capacity for historical change—over the former? Despite the fact that the dicta of reason posit that "nothing is more useful to man than man" and lead all *conatus* to transform the human community in such a way that to strive to persevere in one's being, to look for what is useful for oneself, and to look "for the common benefit of all" are one and the same, and despite the fact that Spinoza adds that "to act absolutely in accordance with virtue is simply to act, live, and preserve one's being (these three mean the same) in accordance with the guidance of reason" (*E* IV, P24)—despite all that, Spinoza's answer to this burning question ultimately is no. Reason does pave the way—thereby enabling us to conceptualize and even to desire such a human community—but it does not take us there. Had reason sufficed, after all, there would have been no need for Spinoza to conceive of a third kind of knowledge inclusive of yet beyond both the first (i.e., imagination) and the second (i.e., reason), namely, intuition.

So far, we have traveled through and confined ourselves to Parts III and IV—due to the fact that the word and the concept of *conatus* are first and most centrally articulated there—and we have not ventured into Part V and its primary concern, namely, the third kind of knowledge or intuition and the eternal intellectual love of God that arises from it.[23] Though there is neither time nor space for a prolonged adventure into EV, we do need to note at least that it is neither in imagination nor in reason but in intuition that *conatus* finds its fullest and most virtuous realization.

Let us start with Proposition 25: "The highest striving of the mind [*Summum Mentis conatus*], and its highest virtue, is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge" (*E* V, P25). A bit later he adds: "The striving or desire [*Conatus seu Cupiditas*] of knowing things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge but can arise from the second" (*E* V, P28). (In case we be misled by the facts that here such a striving is referred to as a striving of the mind and that the love of God that arises from the third kind of knowledge is defined as "intellectual," we need to note that in Proposition 13 of Part II Spinoza defines the mind as the idea of the body and, further, that throughout Part V Spinoza repeatedly explains how the third kind of knowledge involves necessarily also the body, such as, for example, in *E* V, P29 and *E* V, P29Pr.) When *conatus* is no longer completely under the spell of the imagination and is primarily under the guidance of reason, it can at best metamorphose into the desire for extending and reaching beyond reason and for achieving the third kind of knowledge: in its final and highest redetermination, the striving to persevere in one's being is not only the rational striving to preserve one's being

and to look for that which is truly useful—namely, useful at once for oneself and for all—but also the striving to know the world and to understand things according to intuition. The best possible way to strive to persevere in one's being is to intuit. But what exactly is to intuit?

Already in Part II Spinoza tells us that the third kind of knowledge "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of some of the attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (*E* II, P40S2)—and this definition of the third kind of knowledge is repeated several times in Part V. To intuit is to achieve "adequate knowledge of the essence of things," and such a knowledge "proceeds," derives, is deduced from the essence of substance. To be known adequately, modal essence needs to be deduced from the essence of substance. Intuitive knowledge entails not only understanding that *aliquid* which makes each and every thing singularly what it is but also understanding such an *aliquid* by starting from that which necessarily exists in the thing, which is not its own essence but the essence of substance. Through a deductive procedure, such knowledge produces a link between the essence of substance and the essence of modes: it reaches and comprehends the singular essence of each and every thing by linking it to the essence of substance that is immanent yet irreducible to it. In short, it is at one stroke that intuitive knowledge understands modal essence and links it to the essence of substance. This is to say that intuitive knowledge conceives of modal essence in and as the link to the essence of substance: modal essence is the link between itself and that which causes all modes to exist as linked to one another. It turns out that that which is most singular about each and every thing derives from, and consists in its being a link to the link of all links, namely, a link to absolute outside or plane of immanence or concatenation of all things. That which is most singular in us all—namely, *conatus* qua essence—is the way in which we relate to our being embedded in and constituted by the concatenation of all things, is our singular manner of being-in-common, is our singular position in being-in-the-world and the potentiality of that position.

The fullest fulfillment of *conatus*, thus, is to know the essence of things, to know their *conatus*. *Conatus* fulfills itself in knowledge of *conatus* qua essence—a knowledge that can be achieved only at the point of tangency with the outside, namely, there where *conatus* becomes force of resistance. In its highest realization and redetermination, *conatus* is resistance. To intuit is to resist: intuition takes place on the line of the outside where the striving to persevere in one's being turns into the striving to resist. Moreover, intuition is radically transformative knowledge—which is why *conatus* qua *essentia* and qua *potentia* has not only logical and ontological but also political primacy. Spinoza writes:

> [T]he knowledge of singular things, which I have called intuitive, or, of the third kind … is more powerful than the universal knowledge that I have said to be of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part One that all things … depend on God in respect of essence and existence, yet that demonstration—although legitimate and beyond doubt—does not so affect our mind as when it is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we declare to depend on God. (*E* V, P36S)

Knowing within the limits of reason alone does not change a thing. Such is the trouble with reason: it is too general, too "universal"—and hence it does not affect us enough. Reason lacks enough power to move us, to change us significantly. In particular, that which Spinoza demonstrates according to reason in Part I—namely, "that all things … depend on God in respect of essence and existence," that all things are embedded in that which at once causes them and inheres in them, that all things are concatenated—is never so "powerful" as when *conatus* realizes itself in knowledge of *conatus* as that "very essence" which depends on absolute outside or plane of immanence or concatenation of all things, is never so "powerful" as when *conatus* realizes itself in knowledge of *conatus* as that "very essence" which is resistance. There where *conatus* is resistance—namely, on the line of the outside—there *conatus* is most powerful and stands to transform radically all *conatus*. Deleuze can say that the "diagram of forces presents singularities of resistance … which act in turn on the strata … in such a way as to make change possible" because "power relations operate completely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge"—thereby being capable of changing both historical strata and diagrams of power. Indeed, it is only because intuition re-determines *conatus* as resistance by relating and linking it to the absolute outside that radical politics is at all possible.

But if, as Spinoza cautions, the third kind of knowledge is not only not guaranteed but also difficult to achieve and rarely achieved, and if it is such a radically transformative knowledge that re-determines *conatus* as resistance, how can we say that the final word on power is that *resistance comes first*? It would make more sense to say that, if and when resistance does come, it certainly comes last! The point, however, is that *resistance always comes first and last*. As always in topological-political space-time, *conatus* as resistance comes first and last because it belongs to another space, to another time, to another dimension, namely, eternity. It might help here to remember that the third kind of knowledge is knowledge *sub quadam aeternitatis specie*, namely, under a certain species of eternity. Intuition is knowledge from the standpoint of eternity. This means

that knowledge of modal essence as link to the essence of substance is not only knowledge of that which is eternal but also eternal knowledge: it itself takes place, operates and unfolds in eternity. Diagrams of power are constituted and integrated by reason and in history, while acts of resistance come into being by intuition and in eternity. Power lives in history, while the moment of resistance—much like the moment of love—is eternal. Spinoza writes: "The intellectual love of God that arises from the third kind of knowledge is eternal" (*E* V, P33). In the Scholium, he adds: "Although this love of God does not have a beginning … yet it has all the perfections of love, just as if it had come into being. … Nor there is any difference here, except that the mind will have had eternally these same perfections that we have just supposed to be added to it." Once in love or in resistance, it is *just as if* such love and such resistance had come into being—for when truly loving, when truly resisting, there was no beginning and there shall be no end, there is no before and no after, there is endurance without duration, and the first and the last are each the future anterior of the other. When in love and in resistance, above all, there is no fear of death—which condition Spinoza indicates as supreme freedom (see *E* V, P38; *E* V, P38S; *E* V, P39; and *E* V, P39S). Is there anything more politically explosive that striving to persevere in one's being without fear of death?

When discussing Definition 8 of Part IV, we saw that under the guidance of reason, on the one hand, *conatus* qua *potentia* is logically and ontologically prior to *potestas*, and, on the other hand, *conatus* qua *potentia* constitutes the essence of the human only to the extent to which it repeatedly actualizes itself as *potestas* in human existence, namely, only to the extent to which it realizes our indeterminate yet finite existence in and as acts of self-determination, in and as sovereign acts of freedom. But if reason leads *conatus* down the path of sovereignty, it does so only in order to pave the way for the third kind of knowledge and its superior self-determination and supreme freedom. Intuition turns *conatus* into resistance thereby delivering us from self-determination and freedom intended as sovereign *potestas* and delivering us instead up to the terrifying joy of the absence of the fear of death. *Potestas* is a necessary path, a necessary strategy and a necessary achievement—as long as one does not stop there. *Potestas* must be achieved only so as to be relinquished in an ultimate surrender to and affirmation of being-in-common. Such surrender and affirmation never completely erase the possibility of the re-constitution of *potestas*, which lies in abeyance even when relinquished and deactivated.[24] And yet such surrender and affirmation also beget another freedom, namely, not the freedom of sovereignty but the freedom and liberation from sovereignty:

only the latter is that freedom to which the title of Part V refers—"*De Potentia Intellectus, seu De Libertate Humana*"—a freedom that is all but synonymous with *potentia*.[25] *Potestas* derives from *potentia* and leads to *potentia*—which always comes first and last. This other freedom or liberation is achieved only when *conatus* is the striving to persevere in one's being not as sovereign but as being singular common *extra nos*.

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Notes

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 89. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986), 95.

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 97. Translation modified. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1. La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 125–26.

3 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95–96. Translation modified. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1*, 126–27.

4 For a different attempt to articulate the primacy of resistance—one that turns to Marx rather than to Spinoza—see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 64–69.

5 Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)—on occasion, translations are modified. Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. by C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925).

6 Neither *resistentia* nor *resisto* are listed in Emilia Giancotti Boscherini's *Lexicon Spinozanum* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

7 It could be argued that the concept is implicit in the intricate constellation consisting of the first eight definitions which opens the *Ethics* and in which the word is absent. In particular, the concept is already present in the way in which this whole effects one of its parts, that is, in the way in which this entire constellation of eight definitions determines the significance of *E* I, D7. It is the explicit emergence of *conatus* in the *Ethics*, however, that concerns me here.

8 On the importance of this zone of indistinction for Spinoza, see Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 234–45.

9 On the relation between *conatus*, desire and love, see the mesmerizing last pages of Lacan's *Seminar XI*. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 275–76. But see also Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," 236, as well as Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, trans. by Gabriel Ash (London: Verso, 2014), 72. Slavoj Zizek's purportedly Lacanian understanding of *conatus* seems to agree with my emphasis on the difference between *conatus* and drive. Zizek writes:

> What is unthinkable for [Spinoza] is what Freud called "death drive": the idea that *conatus* is based on a fundamental act of self-sabotaging. Spinoza, with his assertion of *conatus*, of every entity's striving to persist and strengthen its being and, in this way, striving for happiness, remains within the Aristotelian frame of what a good life is—what is outside his scope is what Kant calls 'categorical imperative,' an unconditional thrust that parasitizes upon a human subject without any regard for its well-being, 'beyond the pleasure-principle,' and that, for Lacan, is the name of desire at its purest.

Aside from the fact that to understand the death drive as "a fundamental act of self-sabotaging" is simplistic and misguided (e.g., by the same token, one could understand the death drive as a fundamental act of self-constitution), and aside from the fact that the conflation of "death drive" and "desire at its purest" in Lacan is a reductive and misleading rendition of Lacan's thought on these concepts, I will argue, contrary to Zizek, that *conatus* includes the possibility of self-destruction. Slavoj Zizek, "Spinoza, Kant, Hegel … and Badiou!" http://www.lacan.com/zizphilosophy1.htm. For a pointed and compelling rebuttal of Zizek's position that is far more faithful both to Lacan and to Spinoza, see A. Kiarina Kordela, "A Thought beyond Dualisms, Creationist and Evolutionist Alike," in ed. by Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Spinoza Now* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 331–33.

10 On *conatus* as degree of power (*puissance*), see Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 230–31,

but also 240. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968), 209–10 and 219. But see also Gilles Deleuze, "Index of the Main Concepts of the *Ethics*," in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988), 98–99 and 102. Importantly, in his "Index" Deleuze does not have a separate entry for *conatus*; rather, he discusses *conatus* within the entry for "Power." On the relation between *conatus* and *potentia*, see also Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 146–47.

11 Titus Lucretius Carus, *De Rerum Natura*, Book V, Line 429. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 416.

12 The essence of each and every thing is to strive to maintain its singularity and its commonality non-identical yet in symbiosis with one another: modes are essentially split in the sense that what fuels and sustains their being is precisely that which provides them with two irreducible, heterogeneous and asymmetrical aspects, one singular and one common. Far from constituting a lament mourning paradises lost of wholeness and bemoaning the irreparably fragmented and alienated nature of modal being and of the human condition, such a conception of the relation between singular essence and common existence posits their non-identity as the precondition for any project of liberation: for Spinoza, it is not in the fusion between the two that love and freedom lie; rather, it is in the constantly re-negotiated and re-determined mutual *adequacy* of the two that the potential for love, freedom and liberation lies.

13 I argue for the relating non-relation between singular and common in Spinoza also Cesare Casarino, "Marx before Spinoza: Notes toward an Investigation," in ed. by Vardoulakis, *Spinoza Now*, 213–14. On the relation between the singular and the common, see also Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*, 125, 198, 308, 348–49.

14 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 44. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 51.

15 Or, as Negri puts it, "*Conatus* extends itself toward the interindividual and intrahuman dynamic." Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 150. Translation modified. Antonio Negri, *Spinoza* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 1998), 199.

16 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 86–87. Translation modified. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 92.

17 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 71–72, 74–75, 81–82. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 78–79, 81, 88–89.

18 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 90–91. Translation modified. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 95–96.

19 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 79. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 86.

20 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 36, but see also 31–39. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 44, 39–48.

21 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 70. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 77.

22 For a reading of the significance of *concatenatio rerum* in the *Ethics*, see Casarino, "Marx before Spinoza," 179–234; but see also Yves Citton, "ConcateNations: Globalization in a Spinozist Context," in ed. by Diane Morgan and Gary Bantham, *Cosmopolitics and the Emergence of a Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 91–117.

23 See *E* V, P32C. Spinoza writes that from "the third kind of knowledge there necessarily arises the intellectual love of God."

24 For an excellent argument regarding how Spinoza derails "the logic of sovereignty"—an argument which is based on the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rather than on the *Ethics*, and which ultimately may be less hopeful than mine with respect to the possibility of relinquishing sovereignty—see Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Sovereignty and Its Other. Toward the Dejustification of Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 123, but see also 122–40.

25 On this matter, see also Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital*, 23.

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