

of a transformation. The long historical tradition of colour theory continually emphasises the ephemerality and fragility of this view of paradise, just as the sparkling brilliance of the bourgeois revolutions soon fell into an inevitable greyness. For Goethe, 'the infant discovers a colourful toy in a soap bubble', in the evaporation of water on glass, in projections upon the clouds in the evening light, in rainbows, in the shadows of colour during a full-moon. All these fall though, collapse on themselves.

Such a repetitive movement of transformation, revelation and return form the dialectic at the heart of Leslie's work: between freezing and melting, between continuity and interruption. This recalls the child referred to in Benjamin's 'Central Park' (1939) who turns the kaleidoscope, and 'with every turn of the hand', Benjamin writes, 'dissolves the established or-

der into a new array. The concept of the ruling class has always been the mirrors that enabled an image of order to prevail – The kaleidoscope must be smashed.' This image in many ways reflects one of Marx's: that 'men and things seem set in sparkling brilliants' returns as a repetition of order, or the order of things. To smash the kaleidoscope is to release its unruly coloured fragments. The radical potential of the liquid-crystal form – contained in screens, soap and other commodities – remains under the control of the ruling classes. The kaleidoscope must be smashed. In *Liquid Crystals*, Leslie provides a script, its prose and its subject, which anticipates a festive enactment of the history of liquid crystals that might wrench its technological potential away from the dominant class.

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The wrong couple

Gregor Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017). 200pp., £110.00 hb., £37.50 pb., 978 0 81013 542 0 hb., 978 0 81013 541 3 pb.

Gregor Moder's work contributes to a recent trend in continental philosophy: the reconciliation of Spinoza and Hegel. For generations, the continental field has been divided between those who valorise one of these two figures, usually to the detriment of the other. The partisans of Hegel have included Kojève, Hyppolite and Žižek; those of Spinoza have included Deleuze, Negri and Althusser. Early efforts at reconciliation can already be seen in Pierre Macherey's seminal *Hegel or Spinoza* (1979). While Macherey considers himself a partisan of Spinoza, he ends his book with the hint that the title's 'or' can be understood as the Latin 'sive', that is, as an inclusive disjunction. Or, to put it in Maoist terms, the contradictions between Hegel and Spinoza are not necessarily antagonistic ones. Moder's own *Hegel and Spinoza* adopts this line of thought from its beginning. It is crucial to note, however, that this entire conversation begins itself with a very particular assumption: that is, the rejection of rationalist metaphysics, or what Heidegger called 'ontotheology'. The rejection of ontotheology means refusing to conceive of Being as a stable thing

or noun, with its own immutable essence. This understanding of potentiality as more real, or primary, than actuality is common to all these figures; it is expressed by some partisans on both sides of the Spinoza-Hegel divide as the concept of 'the virtual'. The great virtue of Moder's work is to clearly identify this common, fundamental assumption shared by all these figures.

The primacy of potentiality over actual identity seems to imply a constitutive role for what Moder calls 'the negative'. An irreducibly dynamic being or substance is always becoming what it is not. However, Moder repeatedly resists falling into what he calls a 'simple negation'. Ontotheology (the primacy of actual identity) is not to be merely inverted, or discarded in favour of an absolute abyss or lack. This would, for Moder, fall into the trap of reifying the whole (even a negative whole) over the concrete or determinate. Instead, Moder prefers the image of the curve, border or 'torsion' – in other words, the dividing line itself. For Moder, such boundaries express the dynamism of potentiality, but remain always par-

ticular and determinate. Being is nothing other than this determinate edge or 'torsion'.

Of course, this reading marks a glaring departure from Hegel's own well-known consideration of boundaries. In his critique of Kant, Hegel asserts that any limit implies something beyond that boundary, and so cannot be absolute. But Moder follows Žižek in insisting that the point is not to sublimate the limit at all. We need not transcend boundaries in favour of a higher reconciliation of contradictions for the sake of a stable identity, but rather recognise that any identity will be fractured and torn. Substance doesn't become transparent to itself as subject (as Hegel intended); rather, in Moder, the relationship between substance and subject is treated as antinomical, or perpetually frustrated. Moder discounts any chance of ultimate reconciliation as illusory, or as part of a bad metaphysics of presence (what Moder calls the idea of *Parousia*).

Because absolute identity is fractured and torn, it can have no independence above the transient world of finite things. Moder, now channelling Deleuze, rejects any notion of ontological hierarchy. Being does not condition or produce determinate existence out of its own absolute and unchanging nature. Substance *univocally* expresses itself within finite things. This is to say, it creates finite things in the same manner as it is the cause of itself (*causa sui*). Finite things are therefore in a constant movement indistinguishable from that of substance itself. Spinoza's proposition that substance is prior to its modifications is left aside in this reading. In this way, Moder follows Deleuze in converting Spinoza's modern rationalist metaphysics into a medieval nominalism.

In trying to reconcile Spinoza and Hegel, one of the primary obstacles is the question of teleology. The idea of 'final causes' seems to be an anathema to Spinoza's rationalist worldview, governed as it is by efficient cause-and-effect. Hegel, on the other hand, famously employs teleology throughout his system. Moder correctly points out, however, that the sort of teleology that Spinoza rejects is invariably of the 'external' sort. Specifically, this is teleology understood as providence or divine command, i.e., the external direction of earthly events according to the whim of God. Yet the sort of teleology employed by Hegel is

nothing of the sort. His is a decidedly 'internal' teleology, wherein the final cause of a thing is less a divine command, and more the inherent conceptual structure of a thing itself. But the idea that things have an internal impetus is actually quite similar to Spinoza's own concept of self-preservation, or *conatus*. This much is not new to Moder's work, but has been highlighted in earlier studies of Spinoza and Hegel; for example, that of Errol Harris (*The Substance of Spinoza*, 1991). Moder approaches this perfectly genuine similarity, however, through the idiosyncratic filter of Deleuze and Žižek. Hence, it is the concept of the virtual, or 'actual potentiality', which connects both Hegel's *telos* and Spinoza's *conatus*. For Moder, internal teleology amounts to a constant striving to become what one is not. The end-point never arrives and there can be no final resolution. Things are always happening 'in the middle', and so being is something performative for Moder because it is perpetually incomplete and changing.

By definition, a substance that is constantly becoming cannot do so in a way that is guided by its complete nature or essence. Neither, Moder insists, is this an entirely random process. Substance's self-creation, on this account, must amount to a voluntary action. It must be a free will decision on the part of God to become something new. Indeed, Moder uses the term 'decision' innumerable times throughout his work when discussing ontology. At times, Moder does recognise the 'sharp critique' that Spinoza levies against the notion of free will. However, he seems to interpret free will narrowly to denote the mind's control over the body. Moder believes that his own conception of an immanent decision, native to bodies themselves, avoids Spinoza's harsh critique. It is at this critical juncture that Moder's commitment to potentiality undermines the intelligibility of his metaphysical picture. He claims to eschew all external teleology. Yet this is precisely where his metaphysics leads us.

If substance freely creates itself and the world, in the manner of a decision, then it is hard to meaningfully differentiate this from a traditional theism. External teleology, or providence, involves the idea of a free-will decision on the part of God about the fate of God's creation, i.e. the world. The same is true

for Moder's reading, with the exception that God is at the same time immanent to the world. But this in no way converts an external teleology to an internal one. For the will, or decision, is nonetheless unbounded from any determinate essence. As if to emphasise this point, Moder even describes substance's creativity in deeply personalistic and Christian ways: God's incarnation, or *kenosis*, is 'open to real surprises and daring risks'.

By way of contrast to Moder, the *conatus* in Spinoza involves the striving of a thing to preserve its own nature, an 'existential inertia'. The key here is that an individual's essence precedes its act or decision. Acts are never 'free' in the sense of being sovereign and untethered. Indeed, the act or decision is merely an outgrowth of an individual's stable nature. The *conatus* in Spinoza always involves a thing striving to be more secure in what it already is. This is not true for Moder's re-reading, where a thing is always striving (creatively) to become what it is not. This difference is particularly evident in Spinoza's discussion of physical bodies in the *Ethics*. An individual thing is defined by a certain form, i.e. a ratio of constituent parts organised in a unified structure (*Ethics* Part 2, Physical Digression). The *conatus* of a thing involves merely doing what is necessary to maintain this structure or form. For Moder, because being is performative, it strives not so much to preserve itself through its changes, but rather suffers its own effects, and changes in turn.

To be sure, Spinoza's pantheism and Hegel's absolute idealism involve a God which is immanent to its effects, in a sense at least. As opposed to traditional theism, Spinoza's God is materially extended, and each created thing is a modification of its body. There is no gap between heaven and earth. On the other hand, this immanence should not be overly exaggerated. In order to maintain an intelligible ontology, *pace* Yitzhak Melamed, Spinoza's God is in fact bifurcated. *Natura naturata* is God considered as the sum total of finite things. *Natura naturans*, on the other hand, is God considered 'in itself and ... through itself', i.e., as an immutable, conditioning force (*Ethics* Part 1, Prop. 29, Schol). This is why Spinoza can speak of Nature as 'one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change in the individual as a whole' (*Ethics* Part 2, Physical Di-

gression). The body of Nature is infinitely modifiable, whereas the laws of Nature are eternal.

For all the (mis)characterisation of Hegel as a historicist, he seems to embrace the eternity of Spinoza's *Natura naturans*. There is in Hegel's 'Concept' the notion of an unchanging absolute that contains within itself all determinations. The seeming (but only seeming) tangle of dialectical movement ultimately results in the unity of the subject-object. In the end, the 'other' is reconciled with the absolute idea. As Hegel puts it in the *Science of Logic*, 'the movement of the Concept must be considered, so to speak, only as a play; the other which is posited by its movement is, in fact, not an other'. This reconciliation of contradictions is the crowning achievement of Hegel's dialectic. What Moder's ontological commitments cannot grasp is precisely what he calls this 'emanationist' character of ontology, i.e., the immutable 'One' over the transient many. Moder shares with Deleuze an abiding suspicion of all that smacks of neo-Platonic hierarchy. But this emanationist logic is inherent to Spinoza and Hegel. For Spinoza, infinite things flow from Substance, and for Hegel, the absolute Idea releases itself into finite nature. This is the 'emanationist' movement of something absolute releasing itself into the finite that Moder rejects.

Moder's rejection of emanation is linked to his rejection of ontotheology. But his emphasis on reading Hegel and Spinoza through such a Heideggerian lens distorts the logic of their systems. Neither is Moder's attempt at reconciliation between Hegel and Spinoza particularly novel, as Mladen Dolar's foreword claims. Errol Harris, Leslie Armour, and others have dwelt on the question of reconciliation of Spinoza and Hegel before Moder, focusing on key aspects of their systems that Moder leaves behind. Like the 'incompleteness of Being' that Moder assumes, his book is likewise incomplete. Moder has missed an opportunity to affect a real reconciliation between the two rationalist metaphysicians. Instead – and this is Moder's main achievement – he has effectively reconciled only a postmodern Spinoza and a postmodern Hegel, and not the figures themselves. While Moder named his book *Hegel and Spinoza*, a better title would be *Žižek and Deleuze*.

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