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Herausgegeben von Stephanie Garling, Enrico Thomas, Franziska Naether,
Christian Fröhlich, Felix Frey
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Emotions and politics: how trust (fides) can build a human community

Rosa Ricci

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Introduction

The theory of affections has seen a renewed conceptual interest both in the role played in the formulation of power structures in modernity, which remains important in understanding the present form of Nation State, and in the possibility to formulate a new interpretation of the social relationship useful to surpass the classical psychological lectures.

We aim here to reconsider an affect which in contemporary language is tinged with theological nuances: the affect of *fides*. We can translate the word using the modern terms of trust and belief, but also loyalty. The choice of this particular affect is due to the centrality that, in our view, it occupies in modern contract theories, and to its ability to reflect, with its multiple conceptual stratification, different perspectives and political proposals. In order to clarify the terms of this discussion, we will henceforth use the term *fides*, alongside with different meanings which overlap within it, to illustrate two different and divergent proposals that have emerged during the seventeenth century. We consider, in particular, the thought of Spinoza opposed to the social contract theories by Hobbes in order to understand the modern theoretical break with previous political concepts; in particular, we will briefly analyze the different conceptions of *Societas civilis* that emerge from this division.

The background of these considerations is the analysis of modern philosophy's use of the theory of affections.

The XVII century witnessed the rise of social contract theory. It draws on the concept of the individual, conceived as isolated from others, located in the original state of nature (pre-social), unable to develop its rational part. It is therefore a victim of its own passions, but even more so those of

others. The dominant sentiments emerging in Hobbes' *Leviathan* are therefore those of awe and fear. They derive from the constant uncertainty of one's power and strength; the uncertainty of being able to maintain everyone's domination over others and thus to suffer in turn the others' power. From the necessity to control these emotions in a rational way emerges the contractual proposal to transfer the power to an authority (singular or plural) whom all subjects must obey.

Philosophical movements such as neostoicism and philosophical works such as *Les passions de l'ame* by Descartes, testify in their „rationalist“ proposal the need to keep a constant control over the passions. They open the way for the famous dialectics of reason and passion, a central theme throughout the Enlightenment. This need to dominate the passions arouses from the complex Cartesian metaphysical theory and from its conception of the individual always split between body and soul, reason and instinct.

These two models are the ones which have prevailed; this conception of individual and society and this approach to the passions still dominate common sense when we talk about human affections.

The paper follows an itinerary across three authors of the modern age. At first we try to delineate the theory of affection by Descartes, and the birth of the dichotomy of body and soul through the focus of two of the most important works by Descartes: *Méditations métaphysiques* and *Traité sur les passions de l'âme*. Then, by analyzing the works of Hobbes (*Leviathan*), and Spinoza (*Ethic* and *Political treatise*) we will describe in which terms the subject carrying his affective baggage interacts in a political space.

Larvatus prodeo: the irrational and the Cartesian's moral

The way to define the passions¹ as something simply contrary to reason, as an upheaval, and definitely as a less noble part and dark side of man, is inherited from the medieval interpretation of ancient philosophy, forming the rationalist theory of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. First of all, we aim to ask for the origins of the opposition between reason and passions, mainly to investigate the conditioning that makes these two concepts notions that remain very difficult to understand because they cannot be taken for granted. Are the passions a perturbation of an (initial/incipient) original, neutral and rational state, or, are the passions innate in the human nature? A solution proposed by a renewed movement of Stoicism in modern Europe was to extirpate the affects, to distinguish a behavior that has rational sense which is intelligible and an irrational one stemming only from the emotional part.

Otherwise we can follow the example of Descartes, who brought to modernity the idea of rationalism and systematized the division of body and soul in ontological terms. The soul, seat of intelligence and of the logical and deductive process, has to fight against the passivity of the body, seat of irrational and external influence.

Descartes is one of those philosophers who support the necessity to renovate and restart philosophy. His *Méditations métaphysiques* and the *Discours de la méthode* are inner dialogs which aim to destroy a critical apparatus which falls down and can no longer work in a century in which everything is changing. It is for this reason that Descartes starts by rejecting and

negating everything known. The skeptical doubt envelops the external world making it unreal. How can anything be built in this void? What can man really know? How to define the subject? Descartes answers all of these questions elaborating a concept: the thought (*cogito*). The subject exists only in the moment in which he can exercise his rational faculties; it is not important whether his reasoning is correct or wrong. What is he therefore? He is a whole of thought and extension, but these two substances are not on the same level; for Descartes a hierarchy exists among God, Man and the World. That means that the subject is formed by two substances which can absolutely not be held together, but Descartes cannot deny that there is a relationship between them. Most of the aporias and problems of the Cartesian system arise from the possibility to enable communication between Extension (body) and Thought (soul).² This communication is only seen in negative terms by Descartes. Our body is a part of the extension and the mind – rational as it is – has to protect itself from the external impulse which tries to corrupt the soul by mistakes and irrationality.

If it is true that Descartes proposes this dualism in a new way,³ identity arises from a process of internalization which radically splits the ego from the world. This

2 The problem of the communication between body and soul is one of the most-discussed. In the objection to the *Meditations* the pineal gland as solution satisfies nobody. (This problem is discussed in the comments to the *Meditations*: Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898).

3 Negri A., *Descartes Politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2007. According to Negri, the Cartesian thought is born in a moment of crisis caused by the defeat of the humanism's ideals and the victory of the politics absolutism. It is with a „reasonable ideology“ that Descartes tries to face the crisis trying to develop the hope to be able to liberate the individual from its irrationality.

1 Bodei R., *Geometria della passione. Paura, speranza, felicità: filosofia e uso politico*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2007.

relationship becomes more vertical in the *Meditations*⁴ where the only guarantee of the individual's actual existence arises from an internal relationship between God and the Ego. God is the measure of man's existence and the only possibility to know the world. The reason is no more an adequate instrument to know the world. Knowledge of reality comes from a powerful and transcendent God.⁵

"[...] la scoperta dell'esistenza dell'io: questa nasce nel dubbio ma non dal dubbio, é precedente alla crisi e all'isolamento [...] Si direbbe che la separazione, apprezzata nel rapporto io-mondo si svolga ora e si fissi nel rapporto io-divinità [...] Dio é dunque in me, non nel mondo [...] il mondo non é una realtà di cui impadronirsi, ma una realtà da produrre."⁶

How does this separate and independent existence act in the world of passions?

"Je ne suis point d'opinion qu'on les doive (les passions) entierement mepriser, ny mesme qu'on doive s'exempter d'avoir des passions; il suffit qu'on les rende sujettes á la raison, et

lorsqu'on les a ainsy apprivoisées, elles sont quelquefois d'autant plus utiles qu'elles penchent plus vers l'excès."⁷

1649 was the year in which the *Traité sur les passions de l'âme* was printed. This book is the result of a long private correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia published thanks to the prodding of the Queen of Sweden, Christina. The treatise is divided into three parts which analyze the nature and the characteristics of the passions in order to determine the real power that the soul can exercise over the passions. The intent of Descartes is "curative":⁸ he tries to demonstrate to the Princess of Bohemia that her numerous health problems are the consequences of the soul's affections. Despite this approach, for Descartes the passions never represents pathology of the soul; they should not be fiercely eradicated but rationally made harmless and domesticated; here the moral intent of the treatise emerges explicitly.

"Sinon que la petite glande qui est au milieu du cerveau, pouvant estre poussée d'un costé par l'âme, & de l'autre par les esprits animaux, qui ne sont que des corps [...] il arrive souvent que ces deux implusions sont contraires [...] entre l'effort dont les esprits poussent la glande pour causer en l'âme le desir de quelque chose, & celui dont l'âme la repousse par la volonté qu'elle a de fuir la mesme chose. [...] Et c'est de là qu'on a pris occasion d'imaginer en elle deux

4 Negri A., *Descartes Politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2007, pp. 78- 82.

5 Descartes denies the capacity of the individual to understand the Absolute completely by means of reason. This denial is influenced by a fideistic and mystic tension; these are still the religious sentiments and experiences of faith that dominate the *cogito*.

6 Negri A., *Descartes Politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2007 p. 147-153. "[...] The discovery of the ego's existence: his birth in doubt and not from the doubt, it comes before the crisis and the isolation [...] we can say that the split appreciated in the relationship between ego-world develops now and consolidates itself in the relationship ego-divinity [...] God is so inside myself, not in the world [...] the world is not a reality to be possessed, but a reality to be produced" (own translation of the author).

7 Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. vol. IV p. 287. "I am not of the opinion that we should completely despise (the passions), nor that we should exempt to have passions, we just need to make them subject to reason, and when we do so, they are sometimes more useful as they remain excessive" (own translation of the author).

8 This work by Descartes is often considered as one of the first contributions to neurobiology.

puissances qui se combattent.”⁹

By taking cognizance of the contrast, the fight, between body and soul, Descartes suggests to face the passions with our rational part, using the will¹⁰ to be able to choose the better, the Good. The semantic universe is that of morals, it destined to “acquérir un empire tres-absolu sur toutes leurs passions, si on employait assez d’industrie à les dresser, & les conduire.”¹¹

This is the activity that the author judges as the most virtuous in order to acquire a rational and absolute order in the sentiment’s life.

It should be noted that Descartes use to describe the passions with terms (as absolute empire or leading) that recur in his political writings, which is particularly interesting since Descartes had a self-imposed rule to never intervene in the disputes of his time (especially the political ones). The moral problem in Descartes’ philosophy gives us back a language that could not be more

political.¹² *Larvatus prode*,¹³ Descartes told us. Moving from Paris to Amsterdam (where he lived as “dans le desert”¹⁴) he chose to live isolated from political and social space. The political absolutism, that characterized the State of the XVII century, imposed this style of life to a thinker who would like to remain a “free thinker”. The biography of Descartes is the accomplishment of his temporary morality.¹⁵ The renunciation to change the world order and the choice to obey (at least formally) the established rules testifies an idea of freedom that can be developed only in a heteronomous space. This is the ideal of a bourgeois freedom, born in conjuncture with the first development of commercial capitalism and with the creation of individuality both in religion and in politics.

9 Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. vol. XI. p.68-72 „Considering that the little gland which is in the middle of the brain, can be pushed on one side by the soul, and on the other by the animal spirits, which are only bodies [...] it often happens that these two impulse are in conflict [...] between the effort which spirits push the gland to cause in the soul to desire something, and those that the soul repel by the will to escape the same thing. [...] And is from this that we took the opportunity to imagine two powers which fight“ (own translation of the author).

10 In the words of Descartes: „on les peut considérer comme ses propres armes, & penser que les ames sont plus fortes ou plus foibles, à raison de ce qu’elles peuvent plus ou moins suivre ces jugements, & résister aux passions presentes qui leur sont contraires“ Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. p.73.

11 Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. p. 77 „acquire a very absolute empire over all passions, if we employed sufficient industry to train and to lead them“ (own translation of the author).

12 This is the main thesis in: Negri A., *Descartes Politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2007.

13 To go forward masked.

14 Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. vol. I p.14.

15 Descartes speech about his temporary morality in the *Discours de la methode*: „[...]afin que je ne demeurasse point irrésolu en mes actions pendant que la raison m’obligerait de l’être en mes jugements, et que je ne laissasse pas de vivre dès lors le plus heureusement que je pourrais, je me formai une morale par provision, qui ne consistait qu’en trois ou quatre maximes dont je veux bien vous faire part. La première était d’obéir aux lois et aux coutumes de mon pays, retenant constamment la religion en laquelle Dieu m’a fait la grâce d’être instruit dès mon enfance [...]Ma seconde maxime était d’être le plus ferme que je pourrais, et de ne suivre pas moins constamment les opinions les plus douteuse lorsque je m’y serais une fois déterminé que si elles eussent été très assurés [...] Ma troisième maxime était de tâcher toujours plutôt à me vaincre que la fortune et à changer mes desirs que l’ordre du monde[...] Enfin, pour conclusion de cette morale, je m’avisais de faire une revue sur les diverses occupations qu’ont les hommes en cette vie pour tâcher à faire choix de la meilleure“ Descartes, *Discours de la methode*, Ernest Flammarion Éditeur, Paris, 1908 p.16-18.

What remains of the *summum bonum* (highest good)¹⁶ and of the ambition to heal from passion? Descartes does not say any more about this argument, but invites us to have trust in our rational capacity and belief in the Absolute, whose will remains unknowable and transcendental.

Ultimately it is faith¹⁷ which saves the subject, the trust that the individual can have in rational thought and in God as a guarantee that no evil spirit can deceive it.

It is this considerably less rational reliance that guides a big part of Descartes' theory of action. Temporary morality remains the precarious context in which the individuals have to act.

Inter arma silent leges, Hobbes and the coercive delegation of the pact.

Hobbes is universally considered the father of modern political theory and it is not surprising that he speaks about the use of passion in the social and political context. In the *Leviathan* Hobbes dedicates much space to the rules that act in the building of a human community, transforming a chaotic *multitudo* in a well ordered people. Where does he place the connection between the representative structure of the State and the singularity of the individual? Modern polit-

ical theory and of course Hobbes describe the political relationship between the citizen and the State as vertical and transcendental. If the citizen spends his life within the State as a private citizen submitting to a pact that is impossible to renovate or abrogate, how can his happiness and freedom be developed, and where is the space for his sentiments in the public area? The aim of the social contract is to constitute the political conditions within which the citizen can feel himself protected from external violence. The pact is also an exigency of rationalizing the original passionate and uncontrolled affections of the State of Nature. The political significance attributed to the affections in modern thought suddenly changes its aim by facing the impossibility of dominating the sentiments, and by understanding that the stability of a State can result only in the rational utilization of the sentiments. In this way the irrationality that political theory tries to pull out of the social relationship returns in a renewed form which expresses its power through the sentiments using them as a form of administration.

If Mersenne, the promoter of the *République des lettres*, pursues the translation of all works by Hobbes with enthusiasm, Descartes' opinion is the opposite, defining Hobbes' philosophy as even dangerous.¹⁸ The reason is very simple, in his extremely mechanical approach, Hobbes, abandons every ideal man's autonomy and every moral dimension of human actions. The renunciation of finalism and even of the pretense of a human self determination is the deeper sense of this Mechanism.

The Mechanism, especially as developed in Spinoza's thought (here as it is analyzed

16 "Je croy que, comme il n'y a aucun bien au monde, excepté le bon sens, qu'on puisse absolument nommer bien, il n'y a aussi aucun mal, dont on ne puisse tirer quelque avantage, ayant le bon sens."
„I think, as there is no good in the world, except the good sense, that we can absolutely name good, there is also no bad, from which one cannot receive some benefit, having the good sense“ (own translation of the author).

17 „[...]les vérités révélées qui y conduisent sont au-dessus de notre intelligence, je n'eusse osé les soumettre à la faiblesse de mes raisonnements, et je pensais que, pour entreprendre de les examiner, et y réussir, il était besoin d'avoir quelque extraordinaire assistance du Ciel et d'être plus qu'homme“
Descartes, Discours de la méthode, Ernest Flammarion Éditeur, Paris, 1908, p.7.

18 Descartes, Oeuvres de Descartes, Ch. Adam, P. Tannery, Paris, 1898. vol. IV p. 67.

by Deleuze¹⁹), deletes every finalist deposit, every general and abstract definition of the concept of essence. Without the essence which drives human actions on the basis of prearranged values, the system of judgment becomes a pure act of singularity. This is the big difference between morality and ethics: ethics need to cast aside the transcendental universal to implement the possibility of an immanent action.

This change causes a real earthquake on the ontological field, but this is another kind of problem that we cannot analyze in this context; what matters now is only a small part of this change, in particular the effect on the theory of the sentiments, a change that naturally influences the approach of the social-political theory. Good and evil are no longer written with capital letters in modern philosophy, but they are the result of the direct movement and thrust of the sentiment, which organizes choices and rational life based on attraction and repulsions. The passions are vectors in this context which direct human choice, and even if they act in cooperation with rational processes they would still represent a problem in Hobbes' philosophy. This problem emerges in the context of social coexistence, because the thrust of the sentiments still lies in a free and unconditional development of everybody's power. Hobbes defines freedom as a negative and passive experience for the individual; freedom is only the absence of obstacles in the human actions. For Hobbes this is the reason for the *bellum omnium contra omnes*; without regulation, the action of each individual is unlimited. As a consequence fear is the

dominant sentiment, because everyone is obliged to defend himself or attack others. But the law of Nature is also an unexpressed theorem of reason for Hobbes:

"[...] *Jus Naturale*, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. By LIBERTY, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments[...] LAW OF NATURE, (*Lex Naturalis*) is a Precept, or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved. For though they that speak of this subject, use to confound Jus, and Lex, Right and Law; yet they ought to be distinguished; because RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear; Whereas LAW, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that Law, and Right, differ as much, as Obligation, and Liberty; which in one and the same matter are inconsistent."²⁰

This theorem of reason is still present in each individual but it doesn't have the necessary strength to develop this rationality which needs to be imposed from a coercive power.

Hobbes, as well as Descartes, cultivates the rationalist dream of releasing the individual from the passions. Freedom comes only

19 The difference between morality and ethics is one of the best known considerations by Deleuze in his courses at the University of Vincennes. Deleuze, cours à l'université de Vincennes, Les cours de Gilles Deleuze www.webdeleuze.com, p.48-49.

20 Hobbes T., *Leviathan*, Routledge Thoemmes Press, London, 1992. pp. 116-117.

from the comprehension of the mechanistic order, but this change cannot happen in the State of Nature; for Hobbes a process is necessary to universalize the only virtue necessary to the attainment of peace: obedience.

What happens after drawing up the contract? The Leviathan, the sacred monster of the Old Testament, establishes a model and hierarchy of values, determined by an abstract rationality. These values need to be imposed from the top down; with the use of the sword, the natural law changes and evolves into heteronomous obligations. The sovereign intervenes to universalize the moral law that in the particular passions cannot find a way to function. Consensus and the problem of command-obedience present themselves in Hobbes' political universe in a new way. Consensus does have not to be discussed; it is a certainty in normalizing society post-contract. The individuals (the citizens) have already granted trust in their sovereign by means of the pact, representing the unity of all citizens. The concept of "Person" makes this mechanism of representation by Hobbes explicit:

"A PERSON, is he whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction. When they are considered as his owne, then is he called a Naturall Person: And when they are considered as representing the words and actions of an other, then is he a Feigned or Artificiall person. [...] that a Person, is the same that an Actor is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to Personate, is to Act, or Represent himselfe, or an other; and he

that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name [...] the Person is the Actor; and he that owneth his words and actions, is the AUTHOR: In which case the Actor acteth by Authority. For that which in speaking of goods and possessions, is called an Owner, and in latine Dominus, in Greeke Kurios; speaking of Actions, is called Author. And as the Right of possession, is called Dominion; so the Right of doing any Action, is called AUTHORITY. So that by Authority, is alwayes understood a Right of doing any act: and Done By Authority, done by Commission, or Licence from him whose right it is."²¹

Therefore, people become a unity by the construction of the "artificial person", by the authority. This conception of representation is sharply criticized by Rousseau who, in the century of the Enlightenment, finds this kind of abstraction in the pact system deeply irrational. This idea of representation, impose the ideal construction of a totality that eliminated the plurality of the different parts and the contrasting interests in the State. But what exactly is "the people", if it is not an empiric reality, if it is just a production of the logical of political unity?

It is an abstraction and in this abstraction it is necessary to believe if one would live in peace.²² It is exactly this sentiment of trust that created the pact and justified the idea of sovereignty as representation.

We aim to analyze the sentiment of trust as the triggering factor of the pact. Is it possible to develop the rational potential in the

21 Hobbes T., *Leviathan*, Routledge Thoemmes Press, London, 1992. pp.147-148.

22 See Duso G., *La logica del potere. Storia concettuale come filosofia politica*, Polimettrica, Milano, 2007. pp. 157-177.

State of Nature without resort to an absolute monarchy and strict authority?

To find the answer to this question we need to move out of the limits of the pact-theory, and start questioning another author, who, in the XVII century, tried to give a more radical solution for this problem.

Spinoza's anomaly and the complex society.

Spinoza breaks in a very turbulent way with the theoretical tradition discussed above; placing himself in the uncomfortable position of already thinking against modernity. Our author categorically rejects the Cartesian proposal, he cannot accept the opposition and the division between mind and body, governed by an obscure cause and their union, governed by an even more obscure and indecipherable pineal gland, which should ensure their communication and unity.

“Non defuerunt tamen viri praestantissimi (quorum labori et industriae nos multum debere fatemur), qui de recta vivendi ratione praeclara multa scripserint et plena prudentiae consilia mortalibus dederint; verum affectuum naturam et vires et quid contra mens in iisdem moderandis possit, nemo, quod sciam, determinavit. Scio equidem celeberrimum Cartesium, licet etiam crediderit mentem in suas actiones absolutam habere potentiam, affectus tamen humanos per primas suas causas explicare simulque viam ostendere studuisse, qua mens in affectus absolutum habere possit imperium; sed, mea quidem sententia, nihil praeter magni sui ingenii acumen ostendit, ut suo loco demonstrabo.”²³

23 Spinoza B., Spinoza Opera, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung,

Here Spinoza refuses the concept of the individual as separate from the world; an independent substance that results from the activity of a solitary *cogito*.

The break with the contractarian thought is clearly opposed to Hobbes as it is shown in a letter to Jelles in 1674:

“Quantum ad Politicam spectat, discrimen inter me, & Hobbesium, de quo interrogas, in hoc consistit, quod ego naturale Jus semper sartum tectum conservo, quodque Supremo Magistratui qualibet Urbe non plus in subditos juris, quam juxta mensuram potestatis, qua subditum superat, competere statuo, quod in statu Naturali semper locum habet.”²⁴

How this metaphysical and political breaking does run into the theory of affection?

Heidelberg, 1972. E, III, Praefatio. „It is true that very eminent men have not been wanting, to whose labour and industry we confess ourselves much indebted, who have written many excellent things about the right conduct of life, and who have given to mortals counsels full of prudence, but no one so far as I know as determined the nature and strength of the affects, and what the mind is able to do toward controlling them. I remember, indeed, that the celebrate Descartes, although he believed that the mind is absolute master over its own actions tried nevertheless to explain by their firsts causes human affects, and at the same time to show the way by which the mind could obtain absolute power over them; but in my opinion he has show nothing but the acuteness of his great intellect , as I shall make evident in the proper place“ (Spinoza B., *Ethic: Demonstrated in Geometrical Order and Divided Into Five Parts*, Kessinger ,1996 pp. 104-105).

24 Spinoza B., Spinoza Opera, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1972. Ep. 56. “As for politics, the difference between Hobbes and myself, [...] is this: I leave always the natural law in its integrity and I argue that the sovereign power in a city has more right on subject only to the extent that has more power to it. And this always takes place in the state of nature” Ep. 56.

Spinoza maybe is the philosopher who, much more than others, speaks about sentiments; he dedicates three of his five books in the *Ethics* to this argument. What distinguishes Spinoza from the others?

Spinoza's anomaly is thus based on thinking the affections as an integral part of human nature. This approach is explicitly spelled out in the introduction to the third part of *Ethics*²⁵, where Spinoza complains that most of those who have written about emotions have treated them as „things that are outside of nature“ with the consequent attitude to mock, to despise or to pity the nature of affections. *Ethics* breaks with the traditional representation of the affectivity that pulls the emotions from a solipsistic horizon, and immediately places them in the middle of human relationships. Since for Spinoza the affectivity can be only relational, he, in contrast to Hobbes, says that a man is a God to man (*homo hominis dei*).²⁶ The *Ethics* is not an inner dialogue that reflect on a possible rational dominance over the passions.²⁷ The emotions, as relational, are inscribed forever in a communal con-

text; this is also the only possible horizon within which human beings can actually be free.²⁸

It seems interesting to dwell on this affectivity theory that Spinoza proves in a geometrical manner. That is, he tries to prove the functioning of the human affectivity by a geometrical method. Spinoza distinguishes, first, between the passion and affection (*Passio, Affectum*) on the basis of an ontological and epistemological conception which sees the individual permanently subjected to variations of its power.²⁹ In other words, he calls *affectum*³⁰ the affection or the modifications to which the mind and the body are subjected in terms of a change of power that can be negative or positive. The *affectum* is essentially a neutral force in which the person moves between the poles of activity and passivity. The term *passio*³¹ designates, by contrast, the impossibility for humans to act according to their nature (*utilitas*). When it is affected by a passion, the individual acts primarily on the basis of external causes of which it has no adequate knowledge, of which, that is, it does not clearly understand the causes. The indi-

25 Spinoza B., *Spinoza Opera*, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1972. „Plerique, qui de affectibus et hominum vivendi ratione scripserunt, videntur non de rebus naturalibus, quae communes naturae leges sequuntur, sed de rebus, quae extra naturam sunt, agere. Imo hominem in natura, veluti imperium in imperio, concipere videntur. Nam hominem naturae ordinem magis perturbare quam sequi, ipsumque in suas actiones absolutam habere potentiam nec aliunde quam a se ipso determinari credunt. Humanae deinde impotentiae et inconstantiae causam non communi naturae potentiae, sed nescio cui naturae humanae vitio tribuunt, quam propterea flent, rident, contemnunt vel, quod plerumque fit, detestantur; et, qui humanae mentis impotentiam eloquentius vel argutius carpere novit, veluti divinus habetur“ E, III, Praefatio.

26 In the *Ethics* loneliness is the worst thing for the human being: Eth IV, 37 schol. I.

27 This is the approach that characterizes the theory of passions by Descartes.

28 A precious analysis of the most important political concepts in Spinoza is by: Trucchio A., *Come guidati da un'unica mente. Questioni di antropologia politica in Baruch Spinoza*, Spinoziana 12, Edizioni Ghibli, Milano, 2009.

29 In this field Spinoza shares the same formulation of the mechanism with Hobbes.

30 Spinoza B., *Spinoza Opera*, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1972. „Per affectum intelligo corporis affectiones, quibus ipsius corporis agendi potentia augetur vel minuitur, juvatur vel coercetur, et simul harum affectionum ideas. Si itaque alicujus harum affectionum adaequata possimus esse causa, tum per affectum actionem intelligo, alias passionem“ E, III, def. III.

31 Spinoza B., *Spinoza Opera*, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1972. „Hinc sequitur mentem eo pluribus passionibus esse obnoxiam, quo plures ideas inadaequatas habet, et contra eo plura agere, quo plures habet adaequatas“ E, III, prop I, coroll.

vidual acts on this level, and the concept of *affectum*, as we have seen, implies the unavoidable presence of external causes. Natural sociability or an abstract tendency to associate cannot hold people together. The individual is already taken in an affective network in which he acts according to (*imitatio affectum*) imitation of the affects' rules.³² Affections and desires of the individual are, as we have tried to show, always included in complex dynamics and emotional relationships. This theory of affects shows, in our opinion, Spinoza's radicalism in his ability to explain the mechanisms which works within the human community and which are the foundation of the political and social choices.

These assumptions seem to be a reasonable basis for questioning the subject and value of trust (*fides*). This term seems to have a particular significance in the evolution of modern thought. As earlier mentioned, if Spinoza's „revolution“ is to depart from the problem of contract theory, it is necessary to specify this distance at this point because, rather than abolishing the contract, Spinoza makes it inactive by a new interpretation of the concept of *fides*. To explain completely this step, a further investigation of the meaning of the Latin word *fides* shall be undertaken, relying on an essay written by Eduard Fraenkel.

Fraenkel³³ tries to demonstrate that the use of this Latin word *fides* is far from the theological meaning which is covered with the

passage of time. Trust (*fides*) establishes a relationship between individuals, which accredits very strongly, first in rhetorics (*fidem facere*) and then in the vocabulary of jurists as a guarantee and credit among men.

“In conseguenza del fatto che abbiamo messo in lui la nostra fiducia, gli abbiamo consegnato qualcosa come un pegno con cui ci leghiamo a lui in un rapporto di fedeltà. Per questo la fede è tanto la fiducia che accordiamo a qualcuno, la fede che diamo- che la fiducia di cui godiamo presso qualcuno- la fede, il credito che abbiamo.”³⁴

The philological analysis of Fraenkel here is even more important since it highlights the issue of transfer and credit that is a central point for introducing the main problem of the contractarians. The logic of the pact is rooted in the concept of the transfer of power to which individuals renounce in favor of a monarch or an assembly of representatives. This transfer is based on an organizing principle which aims to establish a form of *imperium* (government which will evolve into Nation State). The problem of coexistence is thus solved in legal form and self-preservation of the individual guaranteed by common obedience to the laws. The problems that arise from such a conception of politics are manifold.

A first consequence is the unbridgeable split between the individual and the representative's will. Modern political science, as we already said, saw the birth of a private

32 In the words of Spinoza can be defined as follows: “Ex eo, quod rem nobis similem et quam nullo affectu persecuti sumus, aliquo affectu affici imaginamur, eo ipso simili affectu afficimur.” Spinoza B., *Spinoza Opera*, C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg / Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1972. “If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have previously had no affect, to have some affect, this gives us a similar affect” E, III, prop. 27.

33 Fraenkel E., *Zur Geschichte des Wortes „fides“*, Rheinisches Museum, LXXI. pp. 187-199.

34 Agamben G., *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla lettera ai Romani*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2000. p.107 “in consequence of the fact that we put our trust in him, we have given something like a pledge with which we bind ourselves to him in a relationship of fidelity. This is why faith is so much trust that we give to someone -the belief that we give- that the trust that we enjoy at someone - the faith, the credit that we have.”

citizen, an entity from which any form of political action is removed.³⁵ The Hobbesian sovereignty is resolved in normativity, in the neutralization of the conflict that can release the individual from the fight of everyone against everyone else but at the same time creates the conditions of its isolation. The trust that individuals are given at the moment of the contract is given once and for all, and is transformed in society (*Societas civilis*) into an unconditional fidelity to the sovereign. The plurality of the State of Nature is thus replaced by a new concept: that of people, a single will, which is not simply the sum of all individuals, but becomes the idea of totality and unity of the unique and juridical equal citizens of the post-contract.

It is not difficult, at this point, to note the great aporia which underlies this conception of society. Therefore, the studies about political concepts, as those of *Begriffsgeschichte* (*conceptual history*), have had the value of highlighting. The concept of the people, despite its claims to represent the concrete reality, is actually an abstract unity that through representation expresses a single will (at this point the will of each individual becomes private and does not face the public power anymore). The idealist character of the concept of people is evident here. In this perspective it is clear how the contractarian theories fail in their claim to establish an immanent power justified by the concepts of credits and transfer. That power arises from the bottom and is immanent only in the moment of its foundation. With the establishment of the pact we attend to the disappearance of the plurality of the individuals and of their constituent power. At the same time, the requirement

of obedience to the law emerges with the concept of people.

At this point, the secular claim of political forms that modernity offers us loses its meaning. On the contrary, we attend to the necessity to use a universal theoretical given again, such as that of people, in order to justify the validity of the pact. Modern political theory, even in its complex and seemingly immanent structure of representation, preserves the necessity of a transcendent movement.

Based on these premises, we cannot but question ourselves on the comprehensible connection which has developed between the Latin words *fides* and *credere*. The latter term assumed such importance among Christians to become all-encompassing and descriptive of a relationship solely theological. As Benveniste, one of the best known linguists of this century, noted, the concept of faith, narrows into a strong bond with the belief, „**kred* comme un mot distinct signifiant «force magique»; **kred-dhe-* signifierait donc : «poser en quelqu'un la **kred* (d'où résulte la confiance)»“.³⁶ The terms of trust and belief bring with them a baggage which is both juridical-political and in the following also religious. *Fides* in this theological use (that we can here translate with belief or faith) shows how the foundation of the political body in contractarian thinking is not based on a circulation of power. It does not happen, in the pact-system, what Benveniste emphasizes: to believe means to „give something with the certainty of recovering“.³⁷ It is through this trust given

35 „ognuno esprime un unico atto di volontà, che non è politico, ma fonda lo spazio politico, nel quale egli non agirà-politicamente- più” Duso, *La logica del potere*, p.155.

36 p.172. Cfr. E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Les éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1969. **kred* as a separate word meaning «magic power» **kred-dhe-* therefore mean: «ask someone in the **kred* (that result in the trust)».

37 „confier une chose avec la certitude de la récupérer” p. 177, Cfr. E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indoeuropéennes*, Les éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1969.

in an unconditional way that the meaning of belief rises in the word *fides*. The belief appears at the heart of the concepts of sovereignty and representation in a movement of absolute transcendence. The emergence of *fides* in its religious sense implies an absolute obedience to a transcendental power. The highest penalty to pay for the *Societas civilis* is falling back into the State of Nature where everyone has the right of imposing death on everyone. The logic here is that of sovereignty/obedience; disobedience is understood in terms of capital sin because it breaks the laws that had established the separation of good and evil.³⁸ If we look at this form of political organization, another very important factor emerges; the conquered stability and the impossibility for the citizens to harm each other results not only in the exclusion of the citizens from actual political decisions, but also in the persistence of those sad and uncertain passions that it wanted erase.

In this framework, the passions do not remain anything to be exorcised anymore, but become instruments which the regents use to maintain unity and peace in the political body. Far from achieving a rational life, the people of post-contract society live their lives oscillating between the irrationality of two sad passions: fear and hope. The right to kill does not disappear, but is simply transferred to the sovereign, a governor towards whom all subjects have *timor dei*.³⁹ The subjects are afraid of the sovereign as of a divinity and live their lives in the hope of future good. The constant uncertainty is the only instrument of government; it offers an inconstant stability incapable of turning into real security. If the multitude is a hodgepodge of sentiments and rationality impossible to man-

age in its magmatic power, the people do not have access to a superior rational form of life. The pact is just breakwater against the unseemly movements of the multitude. It reconciles the political space imposing a reign of terror. The people can exist just in a improbably representations and the fear and hope block every autonomous movement.

How does Spinoza break with this thought? As we have shown before, the theory of affects by Spinoza prevents to think about a possible rational domain of the emotions. The *Ethics* offers, however, a possible route of liberation from the passions, from those affects, that is, trapping the human in a state of perpetual passivity and inactivity.

Spinoza's political works not only oppose contractarian theories but try to invalidate its construction: pacts are in fact for Spinoza *non servanda* (not to be preserved), they do not imply, that is, an unconditional trust (belief), and when they do not prove to be productive, they have to be abrogated. The state should not aim to subjugate and force its subjects into fear, but to create a secure situation within which citizen can enhance their rationality and thus achieve true freedom. Human nature cannot tolerate the absolute constriction, and acting under the impulse of fear means accepting a lesser evil instead of enjoying a greater good.⁴⁰ Therefore, Spinoza's affective dynamics do not become an instrument to use in order to subjugate its subjects, but a complex system of social constitution. The desires, affections and passions arise within the social relations. Far from being an isolated atom in collision with others the individual is constantly crossed by these forces which impel it to act in different ways. The contract appears in these terms as a fictional

38 Spinoza B., *Ethic*, IV, p. XXXVII, sc. II.

39 Fear of God.

40 Spinoza B., *Ethic*, IV, p. LXV.

formal circulation of credit which can vary with the changing of its *utilitas*:

“Fides alicui data, qua aliquis solis verbis pollicitus est, se hoc aut illud facturum, quod pro suo jure omittere poterat, vel contra, tamdiu rata manet, quamdiu ejus, qui fidem dedit, non mutatur voluntas. Nam qui potestatem habet solvendi fidem, is revera suo jure non cessit, sed verba tantum dedit. Si igitur ipse, qui naturae jure sui judex est, judicaverit, seu recte seu prave (nam errare humanum est), ex fide data plus damni quam utilitatis sequi, ex suae mentis sententia fidem solvendam esse censet, et naturae jure (per art. 9 hujus cap.) eandem solvet.”⁴¹

This theory has an enormous impact on political practice. Not only are individuals not expropriated of their constituent power, but there is space for the governed (subjects) to act politically through a continuous monitoring of the representatives. The word *fides* changes in these conditions, removing any difference between natural/social and civil/state making the political space alive and dynamic. The community image that emerges from this framework is established as a continuous transformation driving force. *Fides* in this case can not recur to its theological significance, may not recur as sovereignty and absolute power able to

subject completely, but rather as a credit that obliges the recipient and that can be, as we have tried to show earlier, revoked in view of a higher good.⁴² This is once again to oppose the modern thought that questions itself in terms of law and of sovereignty, a power that „circulates“ through the bodies. This is not a question about the legal obligation to obey, about legitimate rights of sovereignty, but about the community in which we live, a horizon within which to search for happiness and freedom. If the relationships are the place of circulation of power, they cannot be grasped in the macrostructures of sovereignty but in their microstructure. There is a real difference in the political space within which people can live free, researching, in the natural requirement of the common life the best conditions to live in safety.

This proposal, as we were able to see, empties the problem of the community's genesis of significance and gives way to a much more interesting reflection; if reason and affections necessarily coexist, the search for a form of community life which can curb the deleterious effects for *imitatio affectum* is only based on an immanent rational strength that allows, even in its ambivalence, the development of the affects of joy that increase the power of each individual. The affective theory not only remains in the center of political space, but establishes an opportunity of liberation.

Among the ways that modernity has drawn, that of social contract theory has prevailed. The evolution of modern legal systems and the forms of representative democracy are direct developments of the organizing principle of sovereignty and contract theories. It is exactly this organizing ideology that forces us, even now, to think government as a unification of multiplicity and

41 „The pledging of faith to any man, where one has but verbally promised to do this or that, which one might rightfully leave undone, or on the contrary, remains so long valid as the will of him that gave his word remains unchanged. For he that has authority to break faith has, in fact, bated nothing of his own right, but only made a present of words. If, then, he, being by natural right judge in his own case, comes to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly (for „to err is human“), that more harm than profit will come of his promise, by the judgment of his own mind he decides that the promise should be broken, and by natural right (Sec. 9) he will break the same.” TP, II, § 12.

42 Spinoza B., *Ethic*, IV, p7.

power as an issue of sovereignty and obedience.⁴³ As we have tried to show in this article, different forms of theory of affections in the modern age imply different images of community. Modern philosophy sees sentiments as something to subjugate or to rationalizing, but at the same time it has to „rediscover“ the role played by human feelings in the political action. What follows is a theoretical displacement that leads to reinterpret the human passions as means of managing and organizing the political space. If validity and the internal coherence of the society (in the contractual theory) are due to trust in the legitimacy of the sovereign and his entire establishment, fear and awe remain the main sentiments of the *Leviathan*. Spinoza thinks, in contrast to Hobbes, that the State has to limit the passions (negative affects) and has to create a common space within which the individuals can develop their positive affections. The sentiment of *fides* plays a key role in the theory of affection. Its theoretical stratification is a sign of a different way

to conceive the community or to found it. The history of this word has helped us to reconstruct the manifold meaning of *fides* and to understand the different perspective of its use in the modern political theory. In particular we spoke about the need to found a community on trust (contract theory) in polemic relation to the observation that a community is constituted by circulating affects (Spinoza's politic theory). Spinoza teaches us that the use of trust in order to have a well ordered society and social cohesion is an ideological invention of the pact-system. To understand the importance of this statement it is necessary to keep in mind Spinoza's reject of Cartesian's individual theory. The opposition between mind and body creates a person split from the world; in this context the society turns in a simple sum of individuals. It is necessary to abandon this contrast to understand that the community is the precondition for the existence of the individual and a space within he acts.

Every narration of the creation of a community brings an effort of producing a unity of the multiplicity. Spinoza suggests to abandon any hypothesis of foundation and to understand the society as a space overstep by manifold human sentiments. Only with this assumption it is interesting to study the role that *fides* plays in a human society. This is an ambiguous role because it acts as a surrogate form of identification and affiliation in a community and as its funding myth. It is because of this ambiguous working of the sentiments that people have to weigh in order to understand the internal dynamic of his social context. At this point we have nothing more to do than to question the affects in order to discover the actual mechanisms that regulate contemporary societies. The contemporary philosophy follow Spinoza in this step and

43 This is Foucault's theory in *Il faut défendre la société*: „Il ne faut pas oublier que la réactivation du droit romain, vers le milieu du Moyen Age, qui a été le grand phénomène autour et à partir duquel s'est reconstitué l'édifice juridique dissocié après la chute de l'Empire romain, a été l'un des instruments techniques constitutif du pouvoir monarchique, autoritaire, administratif et, finalement, absolu. Formation, donc, de l'édifice juridique autour du personnage royal, à la demande même et au profit du pouvoir royal. Lorsque cet édifice juridique, dans les siècles suivants, aura échappé au contrôle royal, lorsqu'il sera retourné contre le pouvoir royal, ce qui sera en question, ce sera toujours les limites de ce pouvoir, la question concernant ses prérogatives. Autrement dit, je crois que le personnage central, dans tout l'édifice juridique occidental, c'est le roi. [...] Donc, le question, pour moi, c'est de court-circuiter ou d'éviter ce problème, central pour le droit, de la souveraineté et de l'obéissance des individus soumis à cette souveraineté, et de faire apparaître, à la place de la souveraineté et de l'obéissance, le problème de la domination et de l'assujettissement.“ M. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, éd Gallimard, Paris, 1997.

try to think about a political space where
rediscovery the real dimension of political
action and participation.