

**Post-Secular Spinoza:  
Deleuze, Negri and Radical Political Theology<sup>1</sup>**

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The postmodern world is the site of the breakdown of any stable opposition between the religious and the secular. In his book, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad provides an anthropological genealogy of secularism, suggesting that the modern European world constructs the opposition between religion and the secular for political purposes. Today, he claims, “the secularization thesis no longer carries the same conviction that it once did . . . because the categories of „politics“ and „religion“ turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought, a discovery that has accompanied our growing understanding of the powers of the modern nation-state. The concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion.”<sup>2</sup> Asad’s analysis highlights the breakdown of the infamous “secularization hypothesis.” According to many European intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and many Americans after World War II, the secularization thesis asserts the inevitable progression of secularism and the concomitant decline of religious practice and belief. Events during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s have falsified the secularization hypothesis, at least in the short term, due to the phenomenal resurgence of religion in culture, politics and thought, a transformation that has occurred throughout much of the world. For most people, except perhaps the most naïve secularists and academics, the secularization hypothesis is dead.

For many observers, whether or not the resurgence of religion is good, bad or mixed, an important corollary of the secularization hypothesis is the death of God. That is, if the secularization thesis is true then God is dead, or God dies when people stop believing in Him. Therefore, the argument sometimes implies, especially in contemporary theological appropriations of postmodernism, that the falsification of the secularization hypothesis also means the repudiation of the

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<sup>1</sup> A revised version of this article is included in Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 200.

claim that God is dead. As a philosophical argument, this does not necessarily follow, as it confuses an argument a priori—God is dead—with an argument based on a posteriori grounds, that religiosity is in fact waxing rather than waning in our contemporary world.

However apparently absurd or incoherent the death of God theology that emerged in some quarters of the US academy in the 1960s, it gave rise to a radical theological vision, one attached to the academy to be sure, but detached from ecclesiastical or pastoral commitments and concerns. Radical theology, in the work of Charles E. Winquist, Mark C. Taylor, Carl A. Raschke and others, welded the death of God to French poststructuralist philosophies for the sake of a radical postmodern theology. What was missing from this early American postmodern theology (which was more preoccupied with aesthetic, epistemological and cultural concerns) was an explicitly political focus, as Jeffrey W. Robbins has observed. In an essay on “Terror and the Postmodern Condition,” Robbins examines American radical and postmodern theology, and charges that while its interests “were characteristically broad and far-ranging, moving seamlessly from philosophy and theology to literature, psychoanalytic theory, art and architecture, the political was marked by its absence.”<sup>3</sup> Robbins calls for “a truly radical political theology,” one that “puts both the political and the theological order in question.”<sup>4</sup>

This political element was partially restored to postmodern theology by the emergence of Radical Orthodoxy in the 1990s, which combines a radical social theory with important political implications and interventions, and a more conservative, or orthodox, theology. By crossing a radical political critique with a theoretically-informed, postmodern version of Christian orthodoxy, Radical Orthodoxy, associated primarily with the work of John Milbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock and others, became popular and influential in intellectual, academic and seminary environments in the early 2000s. Radical Orthodoxy is not radical enough, however, and it lacks the creative force of earlier American radical theology. At the same time, its attention to social and political issues provides an opening and a challenge to develop a radical political theology that would neither be theologically orthodox nor politically conservative. Such a project may be too risky to be carried out within the Church, and may not be granted a hearing in the Academy, but it takes seriously the breakdown of the secular-religious opposition without simply reducing the secular to the religious.

*Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, edited by John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek and Creston Davis, provides important resources for thinking a radical political theology. Most of the explicitly theological essays, however, are inspired by some version of Radical Orthodoxy, and many of the more secular, non-orthodox essays also eschew the term “theology.”<sup>5</sup> This situation institutes a

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Terror and the Postmodern Condition: Toward a Radical Political Theology,” in Clayton Crockett, ed., *Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>5</sup> See *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj

cleavage or a break that reinforces the irreconcilable split between theology and philosophy, secular and sacred. Many of the most influential philosophers of our time have taken up writing about religion in important ways, including Žižek, Agamben, Badiou, Negri, Nancy, Vattimo, and of course the late Derrida. The problem with the orthodox theological framework is that it can only appropriate these philosophical insights and critiques for the purposes of a pre-established Christian agenda, rather than read them as already profoundly theological in a way that challenges the strict separation between philosophy and theology without subsuming one into the other. The encounter that theology and the political stages between a radical political philosophy and an orthodox theology that embraces radical social theory opens up a space for a radical political theology, but it does not explicitly name, announce or pursue this possibility as such.

In choosing Spinoza as an example and an inspiration, then, I am consciously challenging the limits of the opposition of the secular and the religious, including a more conventional theological discourse that simply declares victory and believes that it can thereby dispense with any considerations of the secular. Spinoza must be read through a postmodern lens, and I will use Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri's interpretations of Spinoza in order to help construct a contemporary postmodern interpretation of Spinoza that directly feeds into a radical political theology for which Spinoza could serve as a saint, if not the "Christ."<sup>6</sup>

In some ways, Spinoza emerges as the first modern philosopher due to his consistent identification of God and nature. Descartes is generally granted this title for his emphasis upon the human ego, or thinking self, but Descartes retains a medieval and Aristotelian hierarchical dualism between thought and body that Spinoza attempts to overcome with his notion of substance. In his book, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Yirmiyahu Yovel illustrates the complex historical and cultural background of Spinoza's family and its crossing of religious lines. Spinoza was born in Holland as a Jew, but his parents were Portuguese Marranos who fled the Portuguese version of the Spanish Inquisition when Spain and Portugal were united under the same king. Spinoza was educated in Jewish Amsterdam but he was famously excommunicated in 1656 because he could not conform to the strictures of the Amsterdam Jewish community. Yovel explains that Spinoza's thought is the product of a complex and secret religious background which has "a Jewish framework but [is] saturated with Catholic

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Žižek (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2005). For example, Antonio Negri critiques Giorgio Agamben in his essay on "The Political Subject and Absolute Immanence" (231-239). While Negri criticizes Agamben's understanding of the political subject as too negative and too marginal, he absolves Agamben of the charge of theology, associating theology with "verticalization" and transcendence (236). The question I am raising here is whether it is possible to imagine a fully immanent theology, or whether theology necessarily refers to transcendence.

<sup>6</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari's claim that Spinoza was "the Christ of philosophers . . . Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher: he showed, drew up, and thought the „best“ plane of immanence." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 60.

elements and interpretations.”<sup>7</sup> Spinoza was influenced by his Catholic tutor, Van den Ende, yet he resisted efforts by friends and colleagues to convert him to Christianity. The main point here is that it is a religious faith held and practiced in secret—the Judaizing Marrano—that becomes deformed in relation to both forms of Christian and Jewish orthodoxy and later evolves into what we think of as secularity. The secular in Spinoza is the product of a complex religious space, an intersection and interaction between Jewish and Christian elements that is constructed initially in secret but later becomes unhidden, manifested as non-religious in any formal sense. According to Yovel, the religious duality at the heart of the Judaizing Marranos ultimately created “a form of faith that is neither Christian nor Jewish,” and eventually “the confusion of Judaism and Christianity led in many cases to a loss of both.”<sup>8</sup>

I am following Yovel in suggesting that Spinoza represents a singular philosophy, due in large part to his religious identity as well as his thoughts about religion. In some ways, Spinoza’s thought, as well as the Marranos’s experience, provides the consistency that supplies the dash in Judeo-Christian, if there is one. Spinoza anonymously writes the controversial *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which launched a massive critique of biblical truth, as well as a posthumously published masterpiece, the *Ethics*, a dizzying geometrical treatise, both of which helped to make him the “supreme philosophical bogeyman of Early Enlightenment Europe,” as Jonathan Israel points out in his impressive study of the radical Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> Spinoza’s thought is challenging and radical, both for contemporaries as well as later thinkers such as Deleuze and Negri.

I will briefly explain Spinoza’s proof of the existence of God at the beginning of the *Ethics*, with particular attention to the concepts of substance, attributes and modes. I suggest that Spinoza does not so much prove God as he defines God into existence. At the same time, there is a tension in Spinoza’s definition between a unitary substance and a plurality or infinity of attributes. After explicating Spinoza’s understanding of God, I will turn to Deleuze and Negri’s respective interpretations of Spinoza, in order to indicate their relevance for a contemporary understanding of radical theology.

Part 1 of the *Ethics* is entitled “Concerning God.” In six definitions, seven axioms, thirty-six propositions and assorted corollaries, scholia and proofs, Spinoza defines and proves the existence and nature of God. The key terms are laid out in definitions 3, 4 and 5, where Spinoza defines substance, attribute and mode. These terms culminate in definition 6, where he states “By God I mean an absolutely infinite being; that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each

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<sup>7</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 20. See also my discussion of Spinoza in relation to Kant, Derrida and Caputo in Clayton Crockett, “Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion Without Religion,”

*CrossCurrents* 52, n. 4 (2003): 500-503.

<sup>8</sup> Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 22, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159.

of which expresses eternal and infinite existence.”<sup>10</sup> According to Spinoza, there can exist only one infinite substance, and substance is primary being because it alone “is in itself and can be conceived through itself.” Substance is infinite and indivisible, and according to Proposition 5, “in the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.”<sup>11</sup> Attributes are defined as “that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.” By definition 6, then, substance, which is ultimately God, consists of infinite attributes. The essence of substance may be perceived and known in potentially infinite ways, even though substance is essentially one in itself, that is, the unity of all of these attributes insofar as they pertain to a substance. Spinoza distinguishes between the higher unity or oneness of substance, and the plurality or infinity of attributes, in order to affirm that substance or God is one.

The infinity of the attributes of substance, that aspect by which we can know the essence of substance, mirrors the infinite number of modes, as explained in Proposition 22: “Whatever follows by some attribute of God in so far as the attribute is modified by a modification that exists necessarily and as infinite through that same attribute, must also exist necessarily and as infinite.”<sup>12</sup> Modes are modifications or affectations of substance, and follow the attributes of God in their expression. Modes are finite determinations of substance, but there are an infinite number of modes because there are an infinite number of attributes of substance. “Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God; that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.”<sup>13</sup> The two known attributes of substance are mind and body, or the Cartesian duality of thinking things and extended things, a duality Spinoza ultimately wants to overcome.<sup>14</sup> The attributes are crucial in that they mediate between the modes and substance itself, and they are also what allow intellectual knowledge of substance and comprehension of modes. Substance is defined in such a way that it must be infinite and indivisible, and hence one. God is defined as substance, and God as substance is known by means of the infinity of modes possessed by God. Although “each attribute of one substance must be conceived through itself,” its conception necessarily involves its relation to the one substance, which is God. Infinite attributes link the infinite modes or modifications of substance, to the unity of substance in itself. Since substance necessarily exists, if in fact anything exists whatsoever, God necessarily exists insofar as God is defined as substance. Although Spinoza seems to present proofs of God’s existence, he actually defines God into existence, paradigmatically in Proposition 11: “God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which

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<sup>10</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> See Spinoza, *The Principles of Descartes’ Philosophy*, trans. Halbert Hains Britan (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974).

expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.”<sup>15</sup>

I have not so much presented the progression of Spinoza’s thought in Part I of the *Ethics*, as tried to lay out how God is defined as substance in relation to attributes and modes. This discussion is highly complex, not the least because of the geometrical style Spinoza adopts in this book. The key, however, is the understanding of the nature of the attributes, because they allow us to pass from infinite substance to finite modes and vice versa. The status of the attributes constitutes the theological link between God and nature, and it is through a profound re-working of the attributes that Deleuze and Negri interpret and apply Spinoza to contemporary thought. For Deleuze substance becomes a plane of immanence, while the attributes are conceived as expressions, in order to assemble a philosophy of expression. Expressions actualize or elaborate the modes, which are affects, or becomings that take place along a plane of immanence which provides a bare minimum of unity of consistency. Later in his career, Deleuze abandons the category of expression as too intellectualistic, preferring to follow the movements of machines and bodies in his work with Guattari, although it may be seen as a prefiguring of his notion of the fold, as expressed in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Antonio Negri, by contrast, follows the development of the *Ethics* by eliminating the attributes and envisioning a direct confrontation between substance and modes. By seeing the attributes drop out, Negri eliminates their mediating function, although the attributes return in a very subtle way in Negri’s reading of *potentia*, or potential, constituting power, in its contrast with *potestas*, or actual power. Ultimately, dislocating the attributes from any understanding of mediation precludes transcendence, raises the possibility of a radical theological thinking that is Spinozistic in that it is fully immanent, and also harbors important political implications that will be partially addressed at the conclusion of this essay.

Deleuze wrote two books dealing with Spinoza. The first, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, lays out a constructive understanding of philosophy as expression rather than a description of reality by working through complex ideas of Spinoza as well as Leibniz. The second book, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, is a brief but intense engagement mostly with the *Ethics*. In this latter book Deleuze makes a claim that was implicit in the earlier one, and which is decisive for Deleuze’s own philosophy. Deleuze argues that the true significance of Spinoza is “no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a common plane of immanence on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated.”<sup>16</sup> Deleuze claims that the modes of expression of substance are primary, and “a mode is a complex relation of speed and slowness, in the body but also in thought,” such that the fundamental idea here is the composition of a mode that occurs along a plane of immanence. A plane of immanence is then contrasted with a theological plan in which “organization

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<sup>15</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 199.

comes from above and refers to a transcendence.”<sup>17</sup> Here transcendence is precluded as something imposed from outside, a dimension of height. Meaning, significance and life are internal or immanent to the mode of composition.

We can trace Deleuze’s thought forward from this key insight to the elaboration of a plane of immanence in *What is Philosophy?* co-authored with Félix Guattari, and in his final essay, “Immanence: A Life.” I also wish to relate Deleuze’s understanding of a plane of immanence, developed in relation to Spinoza’s philosophy, to Deleuze’s earlier book on Spinoza, *Expressionism in Philosophy*. In this book, Deleuze uses Spinoza’s thought to criticize the notion of analogy in its theological use, and I want to reflect briefly on this critique before shifting to Negri’s reading of Spinoza in *The Savage Anomaly*. In Part I of the *Ethics*, as we have seen, Spinoza elaborates his three key terms: substance, modes and attributes. He proposes that there is only one “absolutely infinite substance,” which is defined as God (Propositions 13 and 14). Substance manifests itself in modes, or modifications of substance. There are technically an infinite number of possible modes, but the two main ones, following Descartes, are extension and thought. I have suggested above that the main conceptual difficulty of Part 1 concerns the nature of the attributes, which function to mediate between substance and modes.

Now, the challenge is to understand the attributes of substance in distinction from the traditional properties of God. Deleuze argues that theology “oscillates between an eminent conception of negation” in which negative theology goes “beyond both affirmations and negations in a shadowy eminence” and “an analogical conception of affirmation.”<sup>18</sup> These two work together in a confusing way, because they are based upon a confusion of God with God’s “*propria*.” *Propria*, or attributes considered as properties of God based upon relationships of analogy and dis-analogy, render the idea of God necessarily indeterminate. Deleuze’s solution is to understand attributes as expressions of substance, in continuity with modes, rather than as mediating an analogy between substance and our experience of a mode. Here is where the notion of immanence comes in, because it resists the obscurity of revelation: “revelation concerns, in truth, only certain *propria*. It in no way sets out to make known to us the divine nature and its attributes.”<sup>19</sup> Attributes directly express the nature of substance in modes, along a plane of immanence, which avoids the confusions of analogy and negative theology. Any time one posits two planes, a plane of transcendence and a plane of immanence, the problem becomes the mediation, in both ontological and epistemological terms, between the two planes. If God is simply located on a transcendent plane, then knowledge of God is impossible, and religion is reduced to the problem of political obedience, as Spinoza concludes in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>20</sup> See Spinoza’s distinction between obedience to God, which is required by revelation, and

The separation of the two planes does not only concern knowledge, but also political power, precisely due to the need for mediation. If one plane is insufficient, and is mediated by a higher plane or a higher power, then power is dissipated, or drawn away from its direct, immediate application, to another level or realm from which it can then operate in order to impose order, harmony and obedience. This is what Deleuze means when, following Nietzsche, he criticizes the separation of force from what it can do, which is the essence of reactive force.<sup>21</sup> The active force is replaced by the reactive force, which is the essence of the State as representative and mediating power, as well as God as transcendent sovereign power. The question is whether or not God and the State are equivalent in their role of mediating direct, antagonistic conflict among forces, people and ideas, as Deleuze and Negri's readings of Spinoza direct us to think.

The attribute is the most problematic notion in Spinoza's *Ethics*, due to its mediating role between substance and mode. Deleuze tries to solve this problem with the notion of expression in order to read Spinoza's attributes as direct expressions rather than as mysterious properties of substance. In his book on Spinoza, Antonio Negri goes further than Deleuze by dispensing with the attributes altogether. Negri reads the *Ethics* more contextually, in terms of its development towards Spinoza's unfinished political treatise, which is why Negri claims that Spinoza's metaphysics is his political thought. Negri explains that as the *Ethics* proceeds, the attributes drop out, the result of an antagonistic clash between substance and modes. So long as attributes occupy a middle realm between substance and modes, a medium of mediation is preserved, a back and forth shuttle between two alienated realms.

Negri takes a lesson from his reading of Marx's *Grundrisse*, which he develops in *Marx Beyond Marx*, and that lesson is one of antagonism. Negri emphasizes Marx's understanding of tendency as a method, which is functionally similar to that of attribute, and stresses that this tendency is an antagonistic tendency. That is, in the *Grundrisse* the relations of production tend to exacerbate rather than ameliorate conflicts. At the same time, Hegelian dialectics and other forms of mediation tend to subsume or reduce conflict by locating it elsewhere. "The general concept of production," Negri writes, "breaks the limits of its materialist and dialectical definition in order to exalt the subjectivity of its elements and their antagonistic relation."<sup>22</sup> The political problem is that the State mediates the conflicts among subjects in order to strip them of their power to address the increasing inequality created by capitalist conditions.

In Negri's analysis of Spinoza, after the early stage of the *Ethics*, the focus on the attributes drops away, leaving substance and mode to "crash against

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intellectual knowledge of God, which is known by reason, in Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 158.

<sup>21</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia, 1983), 57. Reactive forces "decompose: they separate active force from what it can do; they take away all or almost all of its power."

<sup>22</sup> See Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano (New York: Pluto Press, 1991), 45-46.

each other and shatter.”<sup>23</sup> Deleuze’s effort was to undo the hierarchy implied by the attributes by reading them as expressions, foldings of substances that occur in and as modes. But Negri examines the tendency of the attributes to fade away and leave substance and mode as stark antagonists.

The question is: why not retain mediation? Why must substance fall into conflict with each other? Negri argues that it is for political reasons, and that the essence of Spinoza’s metaphysics is his politics. As opposed to the traditional modern bourgeois theory of the state, which is fundamentally based on mediation, Spinoza’s philosophy remains an anomaly, because it is based solely on power: “Clearly, Spinozian philosophy is an anomaly in its century and is savage to the eyes of the dominant culture.”<sup>24</sup> In order to explain the significance of power in Spinoza’s thought, Negri distinguishes between two understandings of power expressed in the Latin terms *potentia* and *potestas*. *Potentia* is potential power, whereas *potestas* is actualized power. Unlike traditional Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy and theology, however, Negri reverses the value-relationship between these two terms, and suggests that *potentia* is more profound and more significant than *potestas*. These two forms of power are never separated, but are importantly distinguished. That is, Spinoza grounds *potestas* in *potentia*, while bourgeois thought from Hobbes through Rousseau to Hegel separates and mystifies *potestas* as power and obscures *potentia*, which produces “the bourgeois ideology of civil society.”<sup>25</sup> Mediation is the space of separation that allows modern political thought to separate and mystify *potestas*, actual power, while hiding its rootedness in *potentia*.

In Negri’s reading of Spinoza, the attributes go under in order to contribute to the power of *potentia* in its contrast with *potestas*. The antagonism between substance and modes created by the virtual disappearance of the attributes brings about “a dimension of the world that is not hierarchical but, rather, flat, equal: versatile and equivalent.”<sup>26</sup> This is Deleuze’s plane of immanence, and it is also the “fundamental point” where “the idea of power . . .

leaps to center stage with enormous force.”<sup>27</sup> The attributes no longer function to mediate between substance and mode, in order to preserve hierarchical being, but “have themselves been reabsorbed on a horizontal field of surfaces. They no longer represent agents of organization but are subordinated (and very nearly eliminated) in a linear horizon, in a space where only singularities emerge.”<sup>28</sup> The absorption of the attributes contributes to the power of *potentia*, which is then manifested as *potestas* in the constitution of reality by the productive material imagination. This process is a political process because the *potentia* of constituting reality is the *potentia* of the *multitudo*, or the multitude. According to

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<sup>23</sup> Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 62.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Negri, Spinoza's philosophy, as fulfilled in the political treatise, includes three important elements:

(1) a conception of the State that radically denies its transparency—that is, a demystification of politics; (2) a determination of power (*potestas*) as a function subordinated to the social power (*potentia*) of the multitude and, therefore, constitutionally organized; (3) a conception of constitution, in other words, of constitutional organization, which necessarily starts from the antagonism of subjects.<sup>29</sup>

The notion of *multitudo* that Negri finds in Spinoza is directly related to the understanding of multitude that Negri develops in “Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo,” included as the second half of *Time for Revolution*, and which Negri and Michael Hardt express in *Multitude: War and Democracy in The Age of Empire*. At the same time, however, multitude is not explicitly related to power as *potentia* in either of these later works.

*Potentia* is an immediately political term for Negri, and read along with Deleuze's work on Spinoza, helps us to think a postsecular Spinoza beyond the puerile opposition between religious and secular. The constitution of reality is at once political, secular, religious, imaginary, theological and real. A plane of immanence is not necessarily a denial of transcendence, but a way to express force and meaning directly without recourse to an abstract mediation that projects the source of power elsewhere in relation to its effects. Mediation is duplicitous; it appears to resolve antagonism, but in fact it displaces and diffuses it, appropriating and conserving power (*potestas*) and distributing violence (invisible effects of antagonisms) throughout the social order. Our media serves the *potestas* of the state and the corporation in this regard. The current role of the corporate media is to absorb, bleed off and redirect any serious challenge to the social order and saturate citizens with a disorienting and numbing cascade of spectacles. Any position is immediately reduced to “liberal” or “conservative” and then plugged into a pre-established network of other associations and identified with a party (you can choose the one on the left or the one on the right), both of which are funded by the same corporate money. Frustrated with their impotence, people give up, tune out and become zombies of consumption.

The power of the constitutive bodily imagination in Spinoza, on the other hand, is its direct production of a new thought, which is theological as well as political in nature, and it is radical rather than reactive in relation to current and former modes of theological, political and philosophical thinking. The notion of a plane of immanence keeps power from running away and transmuting itself into the power of *potestas* behind our backs as it were, whether this is done by rulers, CEOs, philosophers or God.

The political solution of Radical Orthodoxy ultimately substitutes God for the role of the state in its role as absolute mediator, claiming that God actually

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 202.

does harmonize and mediate conflict before it can break out, whereas the modern state, and its concomitant philosophies and social theories, instead exacerbates conflict and creates violence. This is John Milbank's argument in *Theology and Social Theory*: modern political economy is "neo-pagan" because it is fundamentally conflictual and agonistic.<sup>30</sup> Milbank dissociates the essence of Christianity from original violence in order to claim that modern secular society is originally and essentially violent, and this is a betrayal of Christianity. Of course, the state both creates and resolves conflictual violence, as does the capitalistic economy, where the market (as Adam Smith called it, "the Hand of God") serves to mediate and reconcile competing ends. The state is established to reconcile or mediate conflict among citizens, although it also serves to instigate conflicts with other states. Milbank strips away the mediating aspects of the modern state and capitalist economy, leaving its naked violence exposed. At the same time, its mediation is what allows both the state and the economy to function. The problem with the state, then, is that on the religious reading it either usurps God's (or the Church's) role of mediation of conflicts among entities, or, in Milbank's more radical critique, it dispenses with this function altogether in its antagonism against Christianity. In his book, *Christ and Culture*, Graham Ward adopts a similar solution to Milbank, while focusing more on biblical and early Christianity rather than the modern secular world. Ward defines politics in terms of power relations that are necessarily asymmetrical and unequal. Ward argues that the revolutionary significance of Christ is not as "the leveler of hierarchies, the liberator of the subjugated." Christ is not apolitical, however, because he is concerned with "power and its authorization. The oneness concerns the submission of all social positions . . . to Christ, and the new orders of power (and its polity) that are engendered by this submission."<sup>31</sup> While Ward elaborates suggestive ways to re-imagine the significance of Christ for believers, his political stance is that the authority of Christ substitutes for the power and authority of the state while sublating any independent human culture.

On the secular level, the drawback of the state is that there is no higher, international authority to regulate or mediate the conflict among sovereign states as they pursue their own heterogeneous political and economic ends. This concern leads to rationalistic and/or pragmatic reflection about the United Nations and international law, but the logic is similar to the theological situation. If only there were some higher power with the authority to adjudicate, to mediate and reconcile competing claims and conflicts, it would accord with what Derrida calls "the reason of the strongest" in a positive sense, the coincidence of „might“ and „right.“<sup>32</sup> But if God as the coincidence of power and benevolence does not exist, if the state is in fact a rogue state, and if there exists no international power or authority to play God in the realm of international affairs, what can we do about the problems of political and economic inequality, the savagery of naked

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<sup>30</sup> See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 37.

<sup>31</sup> Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 89.

<sup>32</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michel Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

capitalism vs. the desire for social justice, not to mention the irruptions of ethnic, religious, and terrorist violence?

I do not have the answer to this question, but this interpretation of Spinoza assists us in thinking about political power in our contemporary world. Spinoza offers us a radically political act to retain *potentia* and refuse the subterfuge of transcendental mediation. If this is possible, then the question becomes: can we think theology without transcendence, whether with or without God? If a purely immanent theological thinking is impossible, if theology is necessarily tied to transcendence, then there can be no truly radical political theology. In this case, we are left with the cleavage between a neo-orthodox theology and its relationship to transcendence, however figured, and a radical politics that must reject theology. But what if theology itself follows the trajectory of the attributes, and folds into or under the modes of thought that constitute the productive imagination? What if the lesson of the postsecular is not that we must embrace religion but that modernity is not yet secular enough? As Nietzsche explains in *Twilight of the Idols*, when we posit a separate realm of value and then question its existence we do not merely lose the transcendent world, we also lose this world because we have emptied it of value. “The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one, perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.”<sup>33</sup> What if theology were to set for itself the task of restoring belief in this world, rather than another? This would be the theological desire for a “thinking which does not disappoint,” as expressed by Charles Winquist.<sup>34</sup>

In his book *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze argues that the problem of the modern and contemporary world is a problem of belief. It was “a great turning-point of modern philosophy, from Pascal to Nietzsche, to replace the model of knowledge with belief.”<sup>35</sup> But the fact is that “we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us.”<sup>36</sup> The project for modern cinema, according to Deleuze, as well as modern and postmodern philosophy, and I would suggest also for theology, a radical theology, is to restore our belief in the world, this world. Of course, cinematic technologies and effects also contribute to our sense of unreality, the experience of being in a bad movie, or maybe even a good one, but ultimately just a movie. Belief cannot be addressed to another world, a different world; this is a denial of faith and a betrayal of belief. According to Deleuze, “whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief.”<sup>37</sup>

Following Deleuze and Negri and their respective readings of Spinoza, I

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<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968), 486.

<sup>34</sup> Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), ix.

<sup>35</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 172.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 172.

suggest that we need a new political-theological critique as prolegomenon for a new ethics, an anti-capitalist ethics that could stitch together humanity and world, body and belief, faith and experience, democracy and power, beyond the opposition of religion and secularity. God is dead, has disappeared like the attributes and given way to the irreducible antagonisms between man and man, man and woman, and humanity and nature. Like the attributes, however, „God“ also names the virtual *potentia* that makes it possible to restore belief. Restoring belief means transforming belief; it is the creation of a new world, but it is not a utopia, because it is somewhere—right here, and right now.