

Transcript

Yifan Song - "The Radicalization of action and social transformation: A Spinoza-Hess-Marx Triangle"

Yifan Song:

Today I'm going to talk about the reception of Spinoza in about the early [18]40s among the young Hegelians. And my topic is about "The radicalization of action and social transformation: A Spinoza-Hess-Marx triangle".

So, Spinoza through the pantheism controversy generated by Jacobi and Lessing on the one hand is an important source on German idealism, on Hegel as we discussed before, and on the other hand Spinoza serves as an intellectual hero of young Hegelians throughout the first half of the 19th century to overcome the contemplative side of Hegel's philosophy. The reception of Spinoza in the philosophy of Moses Hess and Karl Marx is particularly remarkable here when Karl Marx prepared for his dissertation in Berlin early 1841, he left several notebooks including the excerpt of the Theologico-Political Treatise, which is often regarded as a political intervention, which aims at liberating the multitude from superstition. And at the same time, Marx started Book 3 of Aristotle's [De Anima?] which reflects Marx's primary and persistent interest of different human faculties in the natural history such as five senses imagination, common sense, thinking and so on, which are related to a theory of action. And in addition, Epicureanism attracts him which not only denies revelation and providence but also maybe more importantly is an endorsement of practical wisdom's priority to theoretical wisdom.

In April 1841 Marx travelled to Bonn in search of a teaching position and it was there that he met Moses Hess for the first time. Subsequently Hess wrote to his friend Auerbach who is a German novelist on Spinoza, I have a picture of his book here, and later Hess published the philosophy of action and on the nature of money which transformed the theory and practice relationship into a radical philosophy of action inspired by Spinoza's ethics and also Cieszkowski (I got here). And Hess considers the Spinozan concept of freedom as the immanent doctrine for communism, a being can live and act according to his nature and express his essence unhindered. We could assume that it is through Hess and thus Spinoza truly enters Marx's horizon especially during the period of [inaudible] yet rather than a linear succession of intellectual history, Spinoza-Hess-Marx as my topic and my title shows forms a theoretical triangle. Marx both inherits thus radicalized discourse of action and through his reconstruction of Spinoza goes beyond Hess with a new concept of praxis.

Okay then next I will show some Hess reception of Spinoza in his context. Hess's philosophy starts with a rather organic Hegelian philosophy of history. In his first book, "The Holy History of Mankind", he divided history into three stages: past, present and future. Namely from the primary communism represented by Moses to the Christian equalism and finally the last stage represented by Spinoza, in which the dualism between mind and body, religion and the politics, are overcome. He uses the term what TTP calls the 'true religion' we could say here, and in this last stage our love of god is perfectly aligned with our positive understanding of communal living, which to some extent means a resurrection of the Hebrew Commonwealth, with the reunification of the multitude's minor body a stage of action is coming. As he said the word of the master into a deed ... [presentation interrupted due to issues with the slides] ...

And the philosophy of action and on the nature of money are further attempts to clarify the ontological basis for socialism unlike Hegel's dogmatic critique of Spinoza's ontology, where we can find no place for subjectivity. Hess boldly to his time grabs the code of Spinoza's Ethics as the empowerment of individuals.

It's very interesting here that some of some of Hess' thinking contains some post metaphysical characters even in a very naive way. For example, he believes that becoming rather than being, realizing rather than realization, for him individual is herself a kind of self-creating activity. On the other hand, in on the nature of money, highly influenced by Feuerbach, Hess combined philosophy with political economy and introduces the social dimension in which action always happens in relation to others and in specific social contexts. In Spinoza's context the more we can act from our nature striving to be the adequate causes of a series of effects that the more we are close to freedom, a free community based on love and interaction which could always be recognized and pursued by a reason are more likely to increase our power of act. So Hess nearly used the same expression here: love where wherever it also appears is more powerful than egotism egoism. Then when when these plural power relations are brought into sphere of political economy has called them intercourse or well-known Marxist term "productive power".

In terms of the mind and body parallelism, it's worth noting here that ... Spinoza emphasized ruling and the knowing are actually one and the same power of mind. The mind constantly tends to affirm body's desire, the unification of viewing and knowing is a primary expression of philosophy of action. Hess often conceives himself as an apostle ... of Spinoza. In correspondence with the Russian socialist Alexander Herzen as I stated here, Hess explained 'I don't just know what I want but also want what I know. I'm more often an apostle rather than a philosopher'. An apostle is different from a philosopher who actively transforms theoretical knowledge into practice and makes theory serve his own critical purpose. We could recognize that Hess in the name of Spinoza plays an important role in the birth of a Marxist practical turn, as Marx cited ... his book in the Paris Manuscript here.

So, it's interesting here that Hess's active political beings could not be expressed by pantheism-reading of Spinoza because for Hess pantheism is a mere negation of difference and equal divinity in the abstract, in the attributes of matter, and therefore only a frozen and homogeneous relationship of equality without the positive understanding of freedom. Hess requires a revolution in the form of anarchism, the dynamic social life which never consolidates into potestas and cannot be absorbed by mere abstract reflection. Which sounds rather familiar to today's radical philosophy. The dual origin and also paragons of the modern revolutionary action are hence dated back to Fichte in Germany and the [inaudible] in France so it's here that Hess permits or even pleases the violence and the terrorism of revolution. It's rather problematic here.

And so next I will give some reflections and the critique on this return to Spinoza. It could be highly controversial and even risky Hess violates his teaching in the following three aspects which will give us inspirations for understanding... why Marx could share the same problematic with Spinoza. I want to know where does Marx start and where Marx and Hess diverge. Hess and also Feuerbach fall into an anthropological illusion in their use of species being, namely that humans are at the centre of nature and that God is merely the mirror of humans. This is an imagination that Spinoza severely rejects. Therefore, we could say that Hess and Feuerbach it's only on the level of a kind of inter individuality but not transindividuality which unites Spinoza and Marx again by Balibar when we reread Marx's theses on Feuerbach. And secondly, it's the problem of immanence, by resorting to a

radical break in history Hess violates the Spinozan teaching of immanence and step into a certain philosophical future. This is also a problem about critique. And as I cited here Hess said as soon as men united, and this is a kind of direct intercourse, then it will take place the inhuman and external means of intercourse.

And then you by replacing the ... the universal abstractions with real and concrete life then a utopian future can be realized in the present via Marx never attempts to replace the abstraction but turns into the civil society represented by Judaism and later he turns to a scientific study of the genesis of society. So accordingly, in the ethical and normative area Hess emphasized the transcendence over natural history and therefore denies the transformation between passions and actions, love then becomes the highest and a fixed result of normativity. He therefore transforms Spinoza's ethics into a pure form of moralism, namely that moral elevation, the cultivation as the way out of capitalism.

And the last point is as the result of absolute action and the radical break of totality, Hess contracts his political philosophy on anarchism, which means he simply ignores Spinoza's prudence on the tension between ethics about freedom and the realistic perspective of the Political Treatise. Nevertheless, Spinoza never turns to the radical position of social autonomy against the State but rather insist on the virtue of the State as peace and security. This project of radical democracy becomes the very start point of early Marx and that brings the relationship between state and the state and society into a far more complex context, which also foreshadows the later separation of Marxism from anarchism. And finally, I got the citation from the mature Marx, well what is very interesting here that he says what is the true inner structure of Spinoza, it still remains unclear today, but still, it proves that Marx never forgets his study of Spinoza in his early life and what does his legacy of radical democracy means to him will be a further project in the future. So, thank you for the attention.