

through the lens of ‘family resemblances’ raises some difficult questions. Having shown that it is replete with tensions, that it is a rather flexible label which might be used for different purposes, and that its canon should be extended to include other figures, one cannot but wonder what does unite all the authors here identified. In other words, ‘family resemblances’ lead to include many individuals with rather loose (or non-existent) connections with ordoliberalism in the narrower sense. The author seeks to address the issue of the actual relation between these authors and the ‘Freiburg school’ — for instance, by studying references, or correspondences. Still, in the end, one is left wondering whether this does not end up diluting the specificity of ordoliberal thought — in particular, their economic thought. This is perhaps most striking when, in conclusion, the author wonders whether, and how, these ideas could be salvaged to address the contemporary challenges of liberalism (climate change, new giant multinationals, European integration, etc.). Here, it is not clear what the author thinks could be, or should be salvaged: is it ordoliberalism *per se*, or, more generally, political and economic liberalism? Or have both become so entangled that they are now indistinguishable?

Despite leaving such questions unanswered, the book illustrates the fruitfulness of approaching contemporary political and economic ideologies by simultaneously tracing their intellectual genealogy, and analysing their social construction and uses. In this regard, the book strongly supports the case for an increased interdisciplinary dialogue between historians of political and economic thought and political scientists or sociologists. It is not the least of its merits that it could be fruitfully read by historians of (neo)liberalism, as well as specialists of EU, or of German politics.

Hugo Canihac

HELMUT SCHMIDT UNIVERSITY, HAMBURG

Riccardo Caporali, *Spinoza’s Political Philosophy: The Factory of Imperium*, trans. Fabio Gironi (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2022), 240 pp., £85.00 (hbk.), ISBN 9781474467599.

Scholarship on Spinoza in the English-speaking world is thriving and growing. Major publications and PhD theses appear on a near-yearly basis. Oxford University Press has published several monographs on Spinoza in recent years. Edinburgh University Press has established a new Spinoza Studies imprint, publishing new work and translations that challenge mainstream scholarship. The *Journal of Spinoza Studies* was launched in 2021, based at the University of Groningen. Edwin Curley’s excellent translations of Spinoza’s *Collected Works* are now available at an affordable price, and Pierre-François Moreau and his team have completed their critical editions of Spinoza’s Latin texts. Yet there remains a paucity of scholarship specifically on his politics, in

comparison to his better-known accounts of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics.

This reflects the greater attention usually given to Spinoza's *Ethics*, an ambitious and meticulously crafted work of philosophy demonstrated in geometrical order. The *Ethics* sets out many of Spinoza's core concepts, including substance monism, immanence, the three kinds of knowledge, conatus, the affects, power, and the conditions of beatitude. It is a fascinating, rewarding and difficult work. It is one that often suffices as a capacious service station on the road to 'modernity' (however construed) that makes up many early modern philosophy modules.

But what about the two political works that Spinoza also wrote, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*, 1670) and *Tractatus Politicus* (*TP*, unfinished)? The former is a bold, anonymously published intervention making the case for democracy, freedom of philosophizing and the restriction of ecclesiastical authority at a perilous moment in the Dutch Republic. The latter is a more theoretical text that considers the ideal forms of different political organizations in terms of their capacity to serve popular sovereignty. Do these two works merely complement the 'proper' work of the *Ethics* being merely contiguous with it, or do they offer a distinct social and political philosophy that clarifies, expands on and even excels its rather brief treatment in the *Ethics*?

These are some of the key stakes in the smaller sphere of work on Spinoza's political thought. A tradition with roots in France (e.g. Gilles Deleuze, Alexandre Matheron, Antonio Negri) identifies a radically modern politics in the metaphysics of the modes, egalitarian and 'expressive' or constituting power, or the account of affects and desire (e.g. Frédéric Lordon). In the English-speaking world, varying contributions by Jonathan Israel, Susan James, Justin Steinberg, Sandra Field and Mogens Laerke emphasize context, aims and influences. Some work, like that of Étienne Balibar, Filippo Del Lucchese and Dimitris Vardoulakis, bridges the gap. Yet there remains unfinished business in determining the relations between Spinoza's three major works.

Riccardo Caporali's *Spinoza's Political Philosophy* should be approached with these debates and difficulties in mind. Overall, it is an elegant and insightful analysis of Spinoza's account of conatus, the passions and power. It avoids a myopic focus on singular texts by illuminating the common movements between them, through the form of a careful if traditional commentary format. Key to Caporali's account is the idea that the State (or *imperium*) is constituted by the plural, intersecting forces (passions, desires) of individuals that make up the multitude. It is a difficult and subtle work, one that will require proficiency in Spinoza's ethical and political thought before using. In that respect it will be of more use to Spinoza specialists rather than beginners to Spinoza. But its panoramic quality, strengths in close reading, fluency in

the history of ideas and elegant style will interest scholars working across early modern political thought.

Caporali is Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Bologna. He is the author of several works on the history of philosophy, including *La tenerezza e la barbarie: Studi su Vico* (2006) and *La pazienza degli esclusi: Studi su Spinoza* (2012) with Mimesis (whose Spinoziana collection showcases the good health of recent Italian Spinoza studies). This is his first book translated into English. The work here was originally published in 2000 as *La fabbrica dell'imperium: Saggio su Spinoza*, a title more modest than the translation. While I cannot comment on the quality of the translation, Fabio Gironi has provided scholars with an excellent service in rendering the original text — littered with extensive quotations from the Latin original — into a serviceable and engaging edition that scholars with only English can make use of.

But what is Spinoza's political philosophy, according to Caporali?

Caporali takes leave of traditional Spinoza scholars who tend to view the two political works as appendices or distractions from the main *Ethics*. Caporali works in a continental tradition that owes most to the work of Alexandre Matheron, whose meticulously close readings in works like *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (1969) reconstruct Spinoza's reasoning within an etiological and systematic framework that works through the internal logic and consistency of the Spinozan texts. Caporali argues that Spinoza's metaphysics, ethics and politics should be approached as a holistic and coherent theory. He makes the argument using the whole breadth of Spinoza's major texts, from the account of *causa sui* [cause of itself], force, power, the conatus and relationality in the *Ethics* to a social philosophy of the multiplication of the plural powers of individuals in a State in the *TTP*, to the constitutive power of the multitude in the *TP*.

Caporali's argument is guided by four positions, introduced early on:

1. the real 'metaphysical foundation' of Spinoza's political thought is to be found in *Ethics* Book I;
2. the *TTP* is not a coherent evolution of the *Ethics* but a manifesto and ideological project of its time;
3. the *TP* is the highest point of his political reflection, because it is more congruent with his metaphysics;
4. Finally, in circular fashion, Spinoza's metaphysics 'holds, from the beginning, a precise political meaning and a very definite social intent' (p. 19).

These positions are reflected in the book's structure and argumentative approach. Arranged in four chapters, the first chapter analyses Spinoza's account of *causa sui* in *Ethics*, Book I, and its divergence from Descartes. Whereas for the latter *causa sui* is a theological concept that belongs only to a

hierarchically-conceived divine essence, in Spinoza causality is decentred to a horizontal plane where causality becomes a power of acting in which all modes of ‘God-nature-substance’ participate. Yet there remains a gap, a ‘movement’ (and Caporali’s sometimes wonderfully literary account is full of double- and triple- movements) between a mode’s capacity to act and the ways this capacity is negated by being acted on by others, that is, its passivity.

This rather complicated ontology of power enables the book to make some of its key arguments in Chapter 2, which continues with the *Ethics* but turns to the conatus. Human power is understood as something determined by these dynamic relations of power. These are inherently unstable and in constant movement, as human beings — as both subjects and objects of actions and passions — act or are acted on forcefully, *with* others. He writes:

For Spinoza it is *vis* — the *agere* as substance — that innervates the nature of various forms of *ex-sistence* by generating, via productive connections, the ‘self’ of every single human being, and by occupying its whole essence through the constant mobility of determination — and the continuous instability — caused by the relationship. (p. 53)

It is worth dwelling on this quotation, which does not easily yield its meaning. It gives a good sense both of Caporali’s distinctive approach and preoccupations (*vis* [force], connectivity, mobility, instability, relationality) as well as the complexity of his method and style of expression.

Whereas traditional accounts of identity e.g. those of Descartes or Locke dwell on a fixed, personal individual essence, Caporali emphasizes the inter-social, relational and interdependent aspects of human nature in Spinoza. While human beings share a generic essence (the *conatus* or striving to persist in being), our identities are defined by particular actions and passions as they intersect upon us and in us through our interactions with others. Taken together, this networked, collective force or ‘energy’ (p. 123) becomes the basis of political power, introducing questions of which kinds of social and political forms can make this collective power ‘better’, stronger and more productive.

This leads to the social and political philosophy of Chapter 3 (on the *TTP*) and Chapter 4 (on the *TP*), reflecting positions 2 and 3 above. In a rather inventive reading, the *TTP* is read as pursuing the metaphysics of networked power in a political direction, through conceiving the conditions of a free republic that ‘emanates from everyone, and its acts are guided by the majority, pushing interdependence to the highest level and, inversely, reducing fear to the lowest’ (p. 133). Democracy transforms ‘the irrepressible connective multiplicity of that “natural” force’ — by which he means the collection of individuals that make up a State — into a ‘positive energy, a political fuel’. Theology and superstition are challenged because they engender and thrive on fear, which in turn creates the conditions for passivity and the neglect

of the understanding which allows despotic regimes to emerge and which diminishes human power as a whole.

Yet the limitation of the *TTP* is its efforts to appeal both to a domestic audience of urban, middle-class supporters of De Witt's liberal government (who are appealed to in terms of their contempt for the common people) and to more rational, free-thinking Christians like the Collegiants Spinoza associated with. This appeal is manifested in the text's contractualism and account of the universal faith. The *TP* emerges as the more profound work, for Caporali, in that it puts aside polemical concerns to establish the earlier ontology of power (interrelational, interconnective, pluralistic) into a politics of the multitude, the amorphous association of individuals who are the source of sovereignty in any kind of political organization.

It is here that the rather peculiar title of Caporali's book, and its most original argument, emerges. The *imperium* (the State) is understood not as a fixed, singular essence, but instead conceived of as an organization or fabrication [*fabbrica*, factory] of the multiple powers and power-relations of the multitude. The *imperium* is both constituted by these relations and constitutes them into the form of a singular function or identity, which is that of the singular State. He writes:

As a particularly special kind of *fabrica* — as an *ars* of relationships between men — this is a relationship of force destined to unleash energies, to multiply powers [*potentiae*] while, at the same time, feeding itself. The *imperium* is a relationship of production of force. The essence, the *recta ratio*, of the State machine, lies entirely in its capacity to feed power (*potentia*), for otherwise its own persistence would be threatened. The continuity of the *conatus* turns the *ars* of power into a mechanism of mutual determination (by either a process of strengthening or of implosion): of both itself and of human beings. (p. 151)

One of the virtues of Caporali's approach is the way it combines a method of close reading, fluent in the text, with insightful contextualizations of Spinoza in the wider history of ideas and early modern thought. While at times this borders on a rather Talmudic approach, reminiscent of Matheron, in which any contradiction in one part of Spinoza's work can be rectified by comparison with another passage elsewhere in Spinoza, it reflects a mode or intensity of close reading that yields rewarding insights. Caporali makes familiar comparisons with Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes and Locke but breaks new ground, particularly in the ways he contrasts a view of a fixed human individuality and hierarchical organization of society, what he calls the 'hallucinations' of the monarchical regime and a tradition of viewing the self as a solitary subject, with Spinoza's interrelational, multiplicitous, pluralistic, dynamic and inherently unstable view of power as constituted by and among individuals, through their actions and unstoppable passions. In its useful

footnotes it also introduces Anglophone readers of Spinoza to a whole range of scholarship in Italian.

That said, this is a difficult text. As a work of commentary, it requires prior understanding of Spinoza's political thought; this is not an introductory guide. It is missing a conclusion to weave the arguments together. The complaint might be made that it does not engage much with Anglophone scholarship, though that same accusation could be levelled in the other direction in all but recent Anglophone work on Spinoza's political thought (particularly Italian). In this respect, translations like this are making accessible a world of continental studies in Spinoza that should greatly enrich forward-looking research. In its view of power as plural, intersecting, affective, desiring and striving towards a democracy-to-come, Caporali's work in some ways anticipates our own moment, in which a new generation of readers are examining Spinoza eager to find resources that challenge the stultifying hierarchies and sad passions of the present.

Dan Taylor
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY