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It is an honor to reply to Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, especially given that her astute and creative interpretations of Spinoza have been an inspiration for my own work. Along with others, her work has shown me how to think not only about but *with* Spinoza. Such a practice of philosophy entails perhaps a greater measure of risk, since it aims not only to analyze Spinoza's arguments but to show what they can do, how they can transform our own ways of thinking and living. Rorty finds that my own appropriation of Spinoza toward a reconception of ideology critique falls short, however, by (a) failing to "take Spinoza's mind-body identity seriously" and by (b) advocating a "battle of ideas" rather than an enlargement of perspective. She presents an illuminating analysis of how, according to Spinoza, dichotomies serve as blunt provisional tools that become counterproductive once understanding is reached. She suggests that I preserve certain distinctions to the detriment of my own liberation project, such as the distinction between the truth of an idea and its persuasive force. As part of criticism (a), she admonishes me for neglecting the importance of material conditions, and with criticism (b) she suggests that the imagery of battle misconstrues the project of becoming rational and the power of truth. Below I will try to show that we do not disagree about either the importance of material conditions for a project of political transformation or the identity of mind and body in substance. We do disagree, however, about the character of ideology critique. I will offer an example, in an attempt to demonstrate why it is neither a distortion of Spinoza nor strategically counterproductive to understand the project of thinking as an effort of what I call "resistant reconstruction" within the attribute of thought.

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Rorty contends that I locate the liberation project “primarily on the level of the war of ideas, rather than in the transformation of material conditions.” I thereby overlook the historical and institutional conditions required for the formation of rational community. I acknowledge that the abstract character of my analysis and the heuristic isolation of the attribute of thought might seem to portray critique and social transformation as taking place in *either* the ideal *or* the bodily domain. This was not the aim of my argument. In fact, I meant precisely to supplement and complement the analyses of interpreters, like Montag, who demonstrate so ably the corporeal character of servitude in Spinoza’s philosophy. I took the risk of isolating the attribute of thought for *analytic* purposes to make the perhaps peculiar claim that ideas *are* material conditions in the sense that they are effective forces that comprise our existence and activity. I defend this strategy in the article (pp. 737-738, 743, 748) on the grounds that Spinoza denies that an account of bodies can explain the life of ideas, and vice versa, because there is no causal relationship between them (*E* Idef2, IIp7, IIIp2). There is a place, therefore, for considering how to operate effectively within the community of ideas, precisely because, in reality, ideas and bodies reflect one and the same “order and connection of causes” (*E* IIp7), and social transformation occurs in both concomitantly. Given that so much attention has been paid to institutional and corporeal transformation in the Marxist tradition of Spinoza interpretation, I found it important to develop language and imagery for a strategy of ideal, or “ideological” change. My effort comprises a kind of thought experiment, but in no way entails that political action should accord a priority to spiritual transformation, or to suggest that ideas could change independently of the bodies that describe the same reality in different terms. I pursue one register of explanation and bracket the other only to emphasize that ideas, too, operate within a field of power relations. It would be unfortunate if my argumentative strategy obscured the fact that I agree wholeheartedly with Rorty and others on the necessity of “liberating material conditions that enhance the formation of rational communities.”

Rorty’s response indicates a genuine point of disagreement, however, regarding the place for conflict and *oppositional* thinking in Spinoza’s philosophy and politics. Rorty claims that my combative language misconstrues the process of transformation from inadequate to adequate ideas. She notes that “starvation can never be a cure for already inadequate, partial, perspectival ideas.” She suggests that rather than mobilizing a counterforce of ideas, the project of thinking well requires feeding, enlarging, and enriching partial ideas. She counsels that inadequate ideas cease to be a problem in that they “become clearer as they are enlarged by their systematic

connections.” “Enlightenment,” “rationality,” and freedom follow from encompassing and absorbing provisionally false ideas into a larger frame of reference that grasps the conditions and causes that sustain their being. “A false judgment,” on her account, should be fed rather than starved because, “when fully amplified, fully explicated, it expresses what is the case.”

Rorty gives what I consider to be a correct account of the transition from imagination to reason, the movement from inadequate to adequate ideas. Arriving at truth, or reason, however, is not precisely my problem. My problem is dismantling an oppressive, or disabling constellation of ideas, regardless of its truth or falsity (p. 752). Adequate, true ideas, on my account, can, as I will try to show below, be noxious for finite beings, and thus I advocate *oppositional* thinking in certain circumstances, but not dichotomous thinking in general. Certainly, I do not regard truth, adequate ideas, and rational community as peripheral to Spinoza’s philosophy. Such an interpretation of a rationalist philosopher would be eccentric, or just plain wrong. What I claim is that ideology critique, or the “reappropriation of images that are given to us in perception” (p. 749)—something which cannot occur without “the remedial intervention” of reason and intuition (p. 734)—is not *primarily* a project of truth-bound inquiry. In noting several times that ideas ought to be regarded in terms of their force and vitality “rather than *primarily* in terms of their truth and falsity” (emphasis added), I do not mean to say that truth is irrelevant, or unnecessary. Indeed, ideology critique could not occur without arriving at adequate ideas, but what matters is not “only” truth (p. 751) because true knowledge of a disabling idea, in many circumstances, is not enough to render it beneficial. While true ideas involve an affect of joy and are thus enabling in themselves, they cannot overwhelm a massive conglomeration of ideas hostile to their existence. In order for countertruths and their corresponding counterjoys to prevail against harmful and deeply rooted ideologies, like patriarchy, for example, they must be mobilized *en masse*. In such cases, indeed, starvation, struggle, and resistance to dominant ideas, true and false, are necessary.

Let me offer an example. I have often heard women remark that they desire plastic surgery because it makes them feel better about themselves. They deny that they are pursuing alteration of their bodies to please their male partners or to attract a mate. They claim that they are doing it entirely for themselves. Indeed, in Spinoza’s terms, liposuction or breast augmentation might be sources of joy, indicating an increase in the power to persevere in being. Empirical studies show that women who correspond to patriarchal standards of beauty are better remunerated, more likely to be encouraged in school, and to receive regular expressions of affirmation and assistance from

intimates as well as strangers. Thus, the idea that a woman might affirm herself and enhance her power to persevere in existence by altering her body in conformity with community standards of beauty gets at a certain truth. A feminist, like myself, would suggest that an adequate idea of this phenomenon entails understanding that such community standards of beauty are misogynist and do not ultimately benefit women as a social group. Plastic surgery might genuinely serve as an individual strategy of well-being, however, because, in a sexist context, it may very well be true that one will fare better having altered her body. Even the feminist with a full grasp of the causal context that sustains patriarchal beauty standards will still be affected by the desire to be seen as attractive, because such affirmation brings her pleasure and some form of power in a sexist milieu. The transformation of the causal nexus that renders such measures of beauty powerful and effective is one of the tasks of feminist action. That surgical alteration of one's body is experienced by some as a necessary means of self-affirmation must *cease to be true*. Feminists and antiracists have collectively challenged beauty standards hostile to their thriving by proliferating counterimages of beauty, producing alternative community standards by which nonconformists can be affirmed, appreciated, and assisted. The appropriate response to the idea that conforming to community standards of beauty feels good is not *only* to understand the various forces that hold such standards in place. An enlargement of perspective by which one can come to regard such standards as sexist and disabling for a large proportion of women is necessary but, in this case, has not been sufficient to disable such a powerful and effective ideology in most societies. One can very well "see the better and do the worse," as Spinoza notes many times.

My suggestion is that understanding ideas in terms of their force and vitality rather than primarily in terms of truth is necessary for the project of ideology critique. Rorty's response indicates that I should have been clearer about how critical consciousness still entails truth-bound inquiry and that the primacy of what might be called "power-bound inquiry" is not necessarily a temporal one. One *may* need adequate ideas to engage in certain oppositional activities effectively, but determining any such temporal priority is likely a futile exercise in the abstract. In refiguring ideology critique, my concern lies above all with social movements endeavoring to reorganize and transform the ideas that determine their actions and passions. Certain ideas can be both true and pernicious, not from the absolute point of view of Nature but from the perspective of finite individuals and collectivities. Although I am a bit mystified by the accusation that I reify the power and *conatus* of individual minds, finite beings (which include social groups and political bodies) often

must act in light of particular needs and in response to genuine threats to their existence (*E* IIIp6d, IVax1). It is not always conducive to survival to affirm that “individual minds are only modal expressions of Substance,” even if it is essential to affirm that one cannot transcend Nature’s determinations.

Rorty points to the responsibilities of a “wise Sovereign” to use a persuasive rhetoric of connection and to institute the material conditions that encourage peace and reason. She refers to the unity of Spinoza’s accounts of “the philosopher” and “the liberating Sovereign.” In the *Political Treatise*, however, Spinoza mocks the notion of philosopher kings (chap. 1, par. 1) and counsels that a commonwealth must be so constructed that even those leaders with entirely irrational motives will be led to act in accordance with peace and security (chap. 1, par. 6). The notion of a “wise Sovereign” (even if that Sovereign is a democratic popular will) imagines that the conditions for wisdom can be instituted from above, when my account aims to show that sage individuals emerge only from enabling contexts. A coordination of many thinking powers, both deliberate and accidental, conscious and unconscious, comprises the power that minds exercise. A Spinozist, on this model, affirms, with Foucault, that there is no truth without power (nor is there power without truth effects, for good and for ill), and such power is that of a multitude of natural forces rather than a Sovereign. Far from requiring a sage and liberatory ruler, or ruling class, then, Spinoza’s politics require the arduous and precarious process of engendering liberating conditions that will enable and constrain the passions of the entire body politic. Such conditions are ideal and material, at once, and the horizontal ideology critique of social movements plays an essential role in producing and organizing powerful minds and bodies.

The establishment of such conditions, I suggest, involves collective action on the part of ideal-corporeal assemblages. I exhort my readers to nourish and nurture counterideas so that they may become true and powerful within a particular milieu. For black to be beautiful, for fat to be fabulous, and for meat to be murder, for example, oppositional groups have reconstructed the relationships and causal connections that organize their own mental-corporeal lives. These ideas became true, became adequate in certain causal contexts, by virtue of the actions and passions of resistant thinking powers. It remains necessary to displace, minimize, and starve certain hegemonic ideas rather than to absorb and encompass them. An adequate grasp of the causes and conditions that make oppression the case often emerges in the process of fighting it. The task of liberation entails rendering oppression no longer the case and destroying the truth-value of certain judgments through disabling and reorganizing the vital forces that have sustained them until now.

In conclusion, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify aspects of my argument and to offer an account of my motivation for refiguring ideology critique. In isolating the attribute of thought to portray the vital struggles of finite beings—be they social groups, human individuals, commonwealths, or other strange assemblages—I do not mean to deny either mind-body identity in substance or the importance of material conditions for thinking and living well. My aim was to explore the problem of freedom and resistance within the attribute of thought to show precisely how Spinoza's philosophy does not allow for spiritual transcendence or the freedom of conscience within overwhelmingly hostile circumstances. Considering ideas in terms of their force, vitality, and power, I suggest, entails a kind of activist posture with respect to one's mental environment. The ideas that are permitted to grow, expand, and take hold matter; they comprise part of our ability to strive and thrive. Rorty's intervention helps me to articulate that aggregates of dominant ideas can generate domineering truths. Ideology critique, then, is never merely a problem of false consciousness, or an inadequate grasp of the structures and causes that make something the case. Ideology critique, to be effective, involves the production of new and better truths—that is, more enabling causal communities—through the resistant reconstruction of our ideal environments. We might describe these environments in the language of bodies, but my hope is that my portrait of the ecosystem of ideas shows just how much of a materialist, albeit a highly unconventional one, Spinoza really is.