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The Force of Ideas in Spinoza

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This paper offers an interpretation of Spinoza's theory of ideas as a theory of power. The consideration of ideas in terms of force and vitality figures ideology critique as a struggle within the power of thought to give life support to some ideas, while starving others. Because ideas, considered absolutely on Spinoza's terms, are indifferent to human flourishing, they survive, thrive, or atrophy on the basis of their relationship to ambient ideas. Thus, the effort to think and live well requires attention to the collective dimensions of thinking life, where "collective" refers to a transpersonal accumulation of ideal power that includes human as well as nonhuman beings. Because it is a matter of force and power rather than truth and falsity, the project of thinking otherwise entails an effort to displace and to reorganize ideas that is best undertaken by coordinating and galvanizing many thinking powers.

Keywords: *Spinoza; ideology; Althusser; materialism*

Recently, Spinoza has been celebrated as a champion of individual freedom in the liberal tradition,¹ a proto-Rousseauian radical democrat,² and a thinker of communist ontology.³ Without trying to claim that Spinoza belongs essentially to one tradition rather than another, I aim to highlight his transformative contribution to a project of ideology critique. The Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, several of whose students became important Spinoza interpreters,⁴ claims that he found in the appendix to the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics* "the matrix of every possible theory of ideology."⁵ Taking his suggestion to read Spinoza in these terms, I propose an analysis of Spinozan proto-ideology critique somewhat oblique to Althusser's analysis. Althusser highlights Spinoza's analysis of imagination and how the world "spontaneously" appears to human subjects, but an understanding of

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imagination depends upon the conception of thought and of mental life in general. If one examines Spinoza's framework as a whole, one discovers "Ideology"⁶ to be a feature of natural rather than exclusively social (intra-human) existence, and the project of critique becomes an engagement with the "life force" of ideas. Ideology critique in Spinoza's more naturalistic terms still belongs to a project of human freedom, including mental freedom, but such freedom must be reconceived. The freedom at which critical practice aims cannot be understood as a transcendence or escape from determination, but must be produced through an immanent displacement and reorganization of one's constituent relations with others, including other ideas. Mitigation of the servile aspects of human imagination entails, rather than an extirpation of any and all partiality or distortion (Ideology), "a new form ... of appropriation" of one's imaginary life.⁷ Such an appropriation entails a grasp of the peculiar force of ideas, the way that we live and have our being in "the attribute" of thought.

This essay hinges upon my interpretation of Spinoza's difficult concept of the attributes, in particular the attribute of thought, and the portrait that emerges of what it is to be a finite thinking power in the infinite totality of nature's thought. I argue that Spinoza asks us to consider ideas in terms of their force, vitality, and power rather than primarily in terms of their truth and falsity. Such an emphasis leads me to conclude that the effort to think and live well requires attention to the collective dimensions of thinking life, where "collective" refers to a transpersonal accumulation of ideal power that includes human as well as nonhuman beings. Ideology critique thereby becomes a project of ascertaining particular disabling assemblages of thought, which must be countered through the mobilization of alternative constellations of thinking force. I come to this conclusion by way of an interpretation primarily of Spinoza's metaphysics rather than the more obvious route of his political writings, even as my claims render his frequent counsel for large deliberative assemblies in the latter far from surprising.

From attention to the nature of thought and thinking life emerges a kind of materialism of ideas, which underscores the exigency of joining forces to counter harmful ideas and the ways of life that correspond to them. Much attention has been given to Spinoza's materialism of bodies, but one can articulate an analogous field of determination among ideas. The enhancement of freedom and agency requires attention to the distinctive characteristics of either mental or corporeal life, even as transformation must occur in each realm of life concomitantly. This essay considers how to treat, critique, and live as powerfully and joyfully as possible, given that we are beings that belong to a power of thought that far exceeds our minds.

The Matrix

Since I take my inspiration of Spinoza as an ideology critic from Althusser, even as I depart from his explicit remarks on the subject in several ways, I will briefly rehearse his argument for Spinoza as inventor of “the matrix of every possible theory of ideology.” Althusser derives “the matrix” primarily from the appendix to Part I of Spinoza’s *Ethics*.⁸ In these few pages, Spinoza traces the superstitious belief in a capricious and anthropomorphic God back to a spontaneous misrecognition of the individual’s freedom and place in nature. Spinoza condemns the view that holds humans to be the center of a universe in which God rewards and punishes human deeds in accordance with his pleasure or will. Nevertheless, the image of God as an all-powerful parent is entirely natural, a product of the embodied apprehension of one’s desire. In Spinoza’s words, “men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams, of what moves them to wanting and willing.” That is, humans take their desire to be in front of them, something to which they are freely attracted, rather than behind them, as it were. Such a view of oneself “turns Nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely.” Spinoza calls this form of spontaneous perception “imagination,” which discloses a great deal about the dispositions, desires, and passions of individuals, without revealing much about the character of nature, or external things. One requires the remedial intervention of other forms of knowing in order to modify the imaginative constitution of the world as something God, inspired by love for his subjects, laid out for human use.

Althusser’s matrix of ideology emerges, above all, from the conviction that the human individual is “the center and origin of every perception, of every action, of every object, and of every meaning.”⁹ Such a misrecognition of one’s place in nature occurs by virtue of a “spontaneous” reversal of the order of cause and effect, mentioned above, in which the desire that appears to the subject as the cause of her initiatives, ideas, and actions is actually an effect of having been moved by ambient bodies and affects. This phenomenon may be familiar to Anglophone readers from Warren Montag’s account in his work on Spinoza and Althusser.¹⁰ Thus, I will review it only briefly.

Althusser holds that Spinoza’s treatment of the “imagination,” or the “first kind of knowledge,” identifies the basic structure of ideology. Imagination, according to Althusser, is not the first step on a ladder that comprises a “theory of knowledge,” that is, a theory of the guarantee of

truth.¹¹ Imagination, rather, describes an “apparatus” that induces subjects to suffer a nearly endemic “slavelike subjectivity” precisely insofar as they regard themselves to be free, or undetermined. Without attention to what moves them to think and act, to their constraint and lack of freedom, subjects cannot modify their situation, or hope to become freer. The apparatus of imagination performs two basic functions, which I have already mentioned: first, it locates the human subject as the center, or origin of its thoughts, actions, desires, and meanings; second, it reverses the order of nature such that effects appear to be causes, and reality seems to be organized teleologically in the service of human ends.¹² Readers of Althusser will recognize this as the apparatus of subjection described in the well-known “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs) essay. The description in the ISAs essay is endowed with political significance and resonates with assertions Marx frequently makes, especially in the first volume of *Capital*. The reality of subjection is already visible in the ambiguity of the term: one is a free subjectivity, an agent of thought and action, who is nevertheless subject to think and act under systematic and inescapable constraints. As the story goes in *Capital*, the subject-worker is “interpellated” as free and responsible, as a peer in a legal exchange, but only in order to contract away her freedom.¹³ That is, one is just free enough to submit to one’s slavery, which amounts to a far more economical system of servitude than one that requires a regular crack of the whip. The legal, theological, and metaphysical discourse of inalienable, God-given freedom—which is said to belong to conscious beings as such who remain free always to think otherwise—conceals the elaborate network of forces that determine the horizon of consciousness, desire, and action.

The “illusion of subjectivity” to which Althusser refers is not, as many have feared, the illusion of agency. It is certainly the case that we act both because and in spite of ideology. Certainly, capitalism would not function without the activity of a multitude of workers, even as such activity is overtly and covertly forced. The illusion of subjectivity is the fantasy that one is the center and unique origin of one’s mode of imagining, that ideas and desires are one’s solitary product, things that emanate outward from individual minds and wills. Montag points out that, with Althusser, ideology ceases to be a question of beliefs and false consciousness.¹⁴ I will go as far as to claim that, on a broader reading of Spinoza, ideology ceases to be a question of minds at all. Althusser shows persuasively that ideology must be explained by relations of force, the practical discipline and arrangement of bodies, and the unconscious, affective structure that mediates the appearance, or imagination, of our lived world.¹⁵ Thus, Montag emphasizes that

ideology, for Althusser, is not a matter of subjective illusion, but a matter of practice, ritual, and gesture.

Nevertheless, the fact that Althusser locates Spinoza's "matrix" in the appendix to part I of the *Ethics* suggests a faithfulness to Marx's (and Feuerbach's) emphasis upon the theological fantasy as the necessary structure of any and all ideology, indeed "every possible theory of ideology." I want to suggest that a more promising route for considering how we are subject to the force of ideas lies in Spinoza's larger ontological picture. Thus, rather than take aim exclusively at the religious form of our illusory autonomy (even as that was also Spinoza's explicit target), I want to explore the question of freedom through an account of what it means to be a tiny particle within an infinite power of thought.¹⁶ In so doing, I offer an interpretation of ideology even further beyond the problematic of false consciousness, since it exceeds a problematic of "minds." Spinoza's unique contribution to ideology critique lies not merely in his exposure of consciousness itself as spontaneously theological, as an originary and irrepressible belief in a transcendent and goal-directed human nature and its divine correlate. Rather, Spinoza's singular contribution is an examination of the life force of ideas, how ideas *qua* ideas behave and interact, and how humans live among and as ideal powers. Before discussing the fine details of Spinoza's portrait of the life of ideas, I will distinguish the notion of ideology critique that I am sketching here from other major conceptions of it.

Ideology Critique Today?

Ideology critique has been all but abandoned in political theory,¹⁷ even as it is practiced under other names. Although some eloquent and persuasive defenders remain,¹⁸ it has been declared a victim of its own "imperialistic success,"¹⁹ since a clever critic can determine anything whatsoever to be ideological. Thus, if there is no statement or image, for example, that cannot be said to be ideological, the category loses any analytic power. Likewise, in its so-called "vulgar" Marxist formulation, ideology critique is denounced for expressing a naïve hope for a transparent social order, devoid of either distortion or domination. Paradoxically, while ideology critique takes its specific form as *critique* in Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology*, Marxism itself is often seen to be the supreme representative of ideological theorizing. In its fantasy of a social order that delivers total transparency and a community of free producers at home in the world, Marxism seems to many to exemplify the aspiration of purity intrinsic to

any oppressive self-representation.²⁰ Prompted by Foucault, many have shifted the rubric of their analyses to regimes of discourse. Foucault and many others found it necessary to distance themselves from the traditional Marxist practice of ideology critique, which depends upon an untenable opposition between truth and falsity, reality and ideology, whose source might be found in the relationship of subjects to their objective position in an economic structure.²¹

Suffice it to say, theorists have identified genuine difficulties within the Marxist traditions of ideology critique. Nevertheless, I argue below for a consideration of Spinoza in terms of the refiguration of ideology critique for two main reasons, which I will substantiate and develop throughout the paper. First, the notion of ideology, in contrast to discourse, preserves the centrality of an examination of ideas *qua* ideas. Spinoza's metaphysics insists upon an analytic separation of ideas and bodies, each of which must be considered in their peculiarity and irreducibility to the other. There has been a tendency in the studies of Spinoza to which I am most indebted to emphasize determination at the level of bodies. Yet Spinoza insists that, since there is no *causal* relationship between the order of thought and the order of extension,²² the life of ideas cannot be explained *through* the life of bodies, and vice versa. There is a risk, therefore, in the emphasis upon corporeal determination, of suggesting that the order of bodies is more real, more amenable to explanation, and thus bodies, matter, and things represent the domain of science, truth, or reality. Although the theorists explicitly turn to Spinoza to avoid a simplistic model of the superstructure as epiphenomenal with respect to the base,²³ the privileging of corporeal determination without an analysis of ideal power might imply that a consideration of ideas can only be ideological in the pejorative sense. Yet in no sense are ideas either secondary or derivative in Spinoza. Rather, thought names a way of being that is enacted by every existent thing. The omission of an analysis of (power) relationships among ideas risks leaving the philosophy of mind to the philosophers, as the interpreters of Spinoza's political thought consign themselves to the plays of force in the putatively real world of bodies and affects.²⁴

Moreover, in contrast to the Lacanian tradition of ideology critique, for Spinoza, there is no unbridgeable distance between representation and "the Real," symbolization and that which it symbolizes. The order of extension, or matter, is not the ghostly specter of being that can only take the form of thought at the cost of its fictionalization. The fact that Spinoza's metaphysics forbids any kind of exit from thought to matter, insisting upon the analytical irreducibility of one to the other (except, perhaps in "the last instance" in

substance), suggests a kind of affinity to the Lacanian tradition, which finds expression in Althusser's creative fusion of Lacan and Spinoza in the famous "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," as well as his contributions to *Reading Capital*. Yet, I will insist that it is important not to implicitly give body or matter the status of "the Real," even if it remains similarly elusive, since ideas are equally real, equally determinant, equally definitive of existence. Thought, which is not equivalent to the symbolic, is its own peculiar reality rather than a reflection of something other than itself. The task, then, is to understand the reality of ideas, which can never be understood by way of a science of bodies. This essay is precisely an effort to consider the way of being expressed by ideas. Thus, I will claim that a materialist ideology critique, at least from a Spinozist perspective, does not consist in simply privileging and proscribing analysis to the realm of bodies or matter. On the contrary, Spinoza's strange materialism is one that reveals the force of ideas, their proper power, agency, and dependency in natural life. With this in mind, I claim that Spinoza offers a way to think about how to negotiate life within a force field of ideas, of which we are a part.

The second reason I preserve the term "ideology" will likely strike many as counter-intuitive. Ideology, refigured in the Spinozan terms I advocate, is less anthropocentric than discourse analysis. Admittedly, Foucault's examination of discursive regimes is far from being subject-centered, phenomenological, or psychological (as in the Lacanian and Frankfurt school traditions). Foucault examines how discourses traffic through various institutions with conflicting aims and techniques, yielding effects that may have little to do with the self-evident intentions of anything like a dominant class, the state, or a particular association of scientists, but that nevertheless contribute to a constellation of normalizing and constraining (even as they are also enabling) power relations. Discursive analysis, as much as Marxist ideology critique, however, can be said to pertain to social relations, relationships among human beings. Neither Foucault nor Marx constrain themselves to an examination of the aims or self-representation of subjects, and each attributes determinate power to impersonal, unconscious institutions and structures. Yet, the purview of their analysis remains the practices, activities, and relationships among human beings, or social subjects.

Ideas and minds, for Spinoza, however, belong to any and all existent beings, be they rocks, cars, birds, or chewing gum. The critique of ideology, then, entails more than an examination of the human imagination, modes of representation, or regimes of signification. Certainly, Spinoza privileges human relations and the *Ethics* comprises a manifesto for human freedom.²⁵ Yet, from his perspective, one cannot even begin to grasp human imagina-

tion before affirming that one is but a tiny part of nature (*E* IVp4), which is, as a whole, indifferent to human aspirations (*E* Iapp). By insisting upon the fact that the world of ideas is not only human, one must also affirm that being a tiny part persevering within the whole of nature pertains not only to the efforts of our bodies but also to the strivings of our ideas. Our ideas encounter resistance and assistance to their thriving from nonhuman as well as human sources. Although such a perspective on ideology critique risks becoming even further stretched to meaninglessness than the discarded version of ideology critique that encompasses all human statements, I contend that it is worth entertaining this peculiar picture, even if it is only to “bend the stick” away from an anthropocentric psychology and view of agency. Since I have been steeped in Spinoza, I no longer find strange the notion that ideas generated by nonhuman and inorganic life affect and are affected by my power of thinking, even as I acknowledge that such a metaphysical assertion will appear ridiculous to many.²⁶ Nevertheless, I entreat my readers to consider this strange view of existence precisely because it is strange, and may thereby shed a different light on more familiar assumptions. I will argue that this picture of reality underscores the exigency of caring for our ideas, nurturing them, and joining them to others for the sake of their survival. I want to suggest that such a vision of reality yields promising effects even if one may not readily accept that shoes have minds. Thus, into Spinoza’s strange world we go.

The Fly in the Coach

Inspired by Spinoza, in his essay on “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” Althusser cryptically remarks that “consciousness is only the Fly in the Coach.”²⁷ He alludes to the fable by Jean de La Fontaine in which a stagecoach struggles to mount a steep hill drawn by several strong horses. A fly believes that by stinging everyone in the coach and buzzing around she will impel the coach toward its destination and expects to be rewarded for her efforts when the horses finally succeed. Because the fly desires the forward motion of the coach, she reasons that her endeavors must be its motor. In all likelihood, if the coach had fallen irretrievably into a ditch, the fly would have searched for an external cause to hold responsible for thwarting her aim. The realization of her goal, on the other hand, is interpreted as her accomplishment alone.

Consciousness, like the fly, finds itself in a situation already in motion. It becomes aware of itself among a multiplicity of other beings and desires,

but is most immediately aware only of its own desires and ideas. A relatively small animate power of thinking, which describes any human in the “immense forests” of nature and history, cannot possibly be aware of the innumerable powerful forces generating and determining its motion and existence. Gramsci, alluding to the same fable, likens the proletariat to the horses and accuses the bourgeoisie of resembling the fly.²⁸ The bourgeoisie congratulates itself for moving history, as it ignores the work horses heaving it forward in a well-appointed coach. Althusser’s remark, in contrast, is directed at Marx himself, thereby implicating all consciousnesses, even those of the most powerful founders of sciences, in both the fly’s ignorance and the exaggeration of her self-generated power. The insistence that we are all flies in coaches, and it is not only the privileged or the foolish who are ignorant of what determines them to act, indicates Althusser’s Spinozan conviction that to be a human mind is to be a tiny and often confused agency amidst immeasurably many other forces.

In a famous letter, Spinoza likens the notion of human freedom to the consciousness a stone might have as it flies through the air. A stone hurled through the air is determined by an external cause, along with the laws of motion and rest that pertain to its body and the medium through which it soars, to continue in motion in a “fixed and determinate way.” Spinoza urges his interlocutor:

Furthermore, conceive if you please, that while continuing in motion the stone thinks, and knows that it is endeavoring, as far as in it lies, to continue in its motion. Now this stone, since it is conscious only of its endeavor [*conatus*] and is not at all indifferent, will surely think that it is completely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than it so wishes. This, then, is that human freedom which all men boast of possessing, and which consists solely in this, that men are conscious of their desire and unaware of the causes by which they are determined.²⁹

This analogy is not as hyperbolic as it seems at first glance. For Spinoza, all beings, including stones, are to some degree “animate.” That is, all beings include a power of thinking that corresponds exactly to the power of their bodies to be disposed in different ways, to act and be acted upon (IIp13s). Likewise every being, to the extent that it preserves its integrity amidst infinitely many other beings, as a stone surely does, is endowed with a *conatus*, or a desire to persevere in being, to remain what it is, to preserve and enhance its life to the extent that its nature allows (IIIp7). A human *mens*—usually translated as “mind,” but which Althusser claims can only be

understood as a “power of thinking”³⁰—is different only in degree, not in kind, from the power of thinking that belongs to a stone. The body of the stone is far less capable of acting and being acted upon than a human body, and thus it is likely entirely unaware of its striving to be what it is and the effort it exerts against disintegrating into earth, or dissolving into air.

This analogy might seem to suggest that humans are absolutely devoid of freedom and as dumb as rocks when it comes to the appreciation of their own agency in the world. Yet, the power by which rocks persevere in being—and many are far older than any human—is their proper freedom, even if the ability to fly through air involves a minimal amount of their peculiar power. In other words, rocks require a certain degree of power and freedom to be rocks, but they cannot fly without a great deal of external assistance. All human activity and existence involves a determinate and irreducible measure of power, but it is often *not* the power we attribute to ourselves and “boast of possessing.” Yet, this is far from a moral failure. Just like the rock flying through the air, we are determined to imagine that we are “completely free.” Indeed, we cannot think otherwise without developing the powers and dispositions that allow us to experience ourselves differently in the world. We are not simply the arrogant bourgeoisie (at least not by nature) or the silly insects that neglect to look outside the window of the stagecoach. Our power of thinking is constrained to apprehend our desire as self-generated, just as we are determined to consider the actualization of our desires to be unaided by a multiplicity of ambient powers that can never be accounted for in their entirety. Although we do not immediately recognize this fact, everything we do is, at the same time, both a product of some degree of freedom and in large measure a gift that can never be repaid. (Of course, these gifts, being from amoral nature rather than divine grace, include the capacity to destroy, maim, and exploit.) Yet, at the level of uncorrected imagination, we remain like flies in stagecoaches and rocks hurtling through space: we imagine ourselves to be the origin of our power, thought, and action.

Peppered throughout Althusser’s corpus are comparisons between Ideology, as he is trying to reconceive it, and Spinoza’s imagination, or “first kind of knowledge.” As with Ideology, imagination conveys the world as we find it, consciousness as it spontaneously appears, and ideas as “conclusions without premises.”³¹ In the “Underground Current,” Althusser sketches Spinoza’s version of “man’s” thinking life.

That he starts to think by thinking confused thoughts, and by hearsay, until these elements ‘take’ form, so that he can think in ‘common notions’ ... is

important, for man could well remain at the level of hearsay, and the thoughts of the first kind might not 'take hold' with those of the second. Such is the lot of most peoples, who remain at the level of the first kind and the imaginary—that is, at the level of the illusion that they are thinking.³²

The illusory aspect is multiple. First, as will be familiar by now, one misapprehends the subject of thought. The illusion is that *they* are thinking. That is, individuals imagine themselves to be the origin of their ideas, when, in actuality, they do not think independently of myriad other beings, especially those of their immediate surroundings, social milieu, and political environment. Second, their ideas do not originate fully formed and coherent, but are the "crystallizations" of a sort of primitive accumulation of impressions, experiences, affects, and similar ideas. The accretion is observed and undergone as an idea, as it were, but imagination alone does not apprehend the process of accumulation, or even the fact that any given idea is the result of a complex set of encounters and relationships among ambient ideas. Just like all accumulations in human history, an idea is the outcome of a decentralized play of human and nonhuman forces, direct and indirect violence, as well as pleasure and strength. Third, we experience the illusion that we have discrete minds, which are autonomous agents of thought, forms of self-awareness that transparently disclose the nature of our mental reality. Althusser reminds us, however, that for Spinoza, there is no *cogito*, nothing to promise that a human thinker will generate true and adequate ideas.³³ The modal nature of human existence, we will see below, entails that humans cannot be considered in isolation from one another, or from any kind of mode within their vicinity, such that it is never a matter of *ego cogito* but always and necessarily a matter of *homo cogitat* (IIax2): I think if and only if we think. One can go further and affirm that, even as Spinoza's concern is above all with human knowledge, it remains the case that *homo cogitat* only because *natura cogitat*. Nature, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, has its being in and as thought (Ip15). While the human individual is affected most powerfully by those modes most similar to her,³⁴ her power to think is very much determined, amplified, and constrained by those around her, whatever those proximate beings may be. The "social" or transindividual character of knowledge (which might equally be called "natural"), for Spinoza, is neither accidental nor optional. It is an ontological fact, grounded in the nature of minds, along with the bodies to which they belong. To understand further the ontology of minds, we must turn to the dreaded conception of the "attributes."

“I am in Ideology,” or the Attribute of Thought

There are few concepts in Spinoza’s ontology as difficult as the “attributes.” Briefly, Spinoza’s ontology consists in the infinitely complex, unbounded totality that goes by the names “nature,” “substance,” or “God,” which is simply all there is and all that could ever be. Nature is expressed in infinitely many attributes, or “ways of being,” of which we know two, thought and extension. Each way of being is further articulated into infinitely many modes. Thus, there are infinitely many bodies within the attribute of extension and infinitely many ideas within the attribute of thought. Spinoza defines an attribute as “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence” (Idef4). While attributes are perceived by the intellect, they constitute the “essence” of substance. The essence of substance, unlike that of modes, necessarily includes “existence” (Ip20). Thus, they are real, actual constituents of nature.³⁵

Because thought and extension are “essences of substance,” Deleuze contends that they are not accidents or qualities *attributed to* substance, but rather *attributive* powers that give their way of being to something else, their affections or modes. Thought, then, is an active power of being, not a property that a mind predicates of substance. Thought is better understood as something that nature does, a “dynamic form” of being.³⁶ The attributes name distinctive ways of *being* the same thing, not merely diverse ways of *knowing* the same thing. “Man,” according to Spinoza, “consists of a mind and a body,” which are the same thing (Iip13c). One can study nature differently, however, if one examines the reality of thought, which is irreducible to the reality of extension, and vice versa. Because they are one in substance, different attributes do not interact; bodies do not move minds and minds have no power over bodies. Below, I will ascertain the power of thought independently of the realm of bodies, but it should be borne in mind that they can only be separated for analytic purposes. The body is powerful in precisely the same measure as the mind, just as the mind is passive in the same measure as the body. The problem of mental liberation, therefore, is the same as the problem of corporeal liberation, but described, apprehended, and analyzed in different terms.³⁷

Spinoza makes clear that every intellect, or mind, whether finite or infinite, is an affection, or modification of thought: “By intellect (as is known through itself) we understand not absolute thought, but only a certain mode of thinking” (Ip31d). Even the infinite intellect, or the mind of God, is a modal determination of thought, to which Spinoza refers as “*natura naturata*,” or an effect of nature, not “*natura naturans*,” a primordial causal

expression of nature. Thus, in the ontological order, thought both precedes and exceeds minds. Thought is an absolute activity of being, unlimited by any of its particular determinations. Deleuze, in his more programmatic and brief monograph, notes that Spinoza radically subordinates consciousness to thought. He remarks that Spinoza takes the “body as a model,” which has its parallel in thought. “It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.*” Just as we remain unconscious of the activities of our organs, bloodstream, immune system, and so on, we too remain unconscious of the various ideas that impact and circulate within our minds.³⁸ Deleuze asserts that Spinoza, against much of the tradition of philosophy, radically devalues consciousness in favor of thought, and thus furnishes “a discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as *the unknown of the body.*”³⁹ Minds always belong to a power of thinking that infinitely surpasses their own.

The unconscious that constitutes the unknown of the mind belongs to thought itself rather than to individual minds. Each mode is in a relationship of reciprocal dependence most profoundly with its immediate “neighbors,” to speak somewhat loosely, and, ultimately, with every other affection (mode) within its attribute. “Thought” describes a kind of being in common, which unites all of its modes, all ideas, in a particular causal community of interdependence. Since minds are modes, they, by definition, exist conditionally rather than autonomously. “Singular things,” in the terms of Matheron, “cannot exist but *in community.*” This community of “universal interaction” is such that each being acts upon every other, and is in turn acted upon by every other.⁴⁰ Minds, then, are naturally and necessarily subject to other minds, along with infinitely many other ideas within the productive and infinite power of thought. Thus, the parallel I offer above of our ignorance of the various activities within our individual bodies is misleading. We are not only ignorant of what might be said to be within our minds or bodies, we are also ignorant of the myriad relationships and forces that make our minds and bodies what they are.

Perhaps the notion of a power of being in which minds dwell, have their being, exist, and act is what prompts Althusser to note in the ISAs essay that only a Marxist or a Spinozist affirms that “I am in Ideology.”⁴¹ To think at all is for one’s existence to be comprised of the power of thought, to be given over to thought, to be composed of rather than endowed with ideas, to live in a medium that is an a-centric force field of powers far exceeding one’s particular being. Moreover, the only way to gain a critical purchase on Ideology or one’s imaginary life is to affirm that one cannot but be *in* thought, in this

determinate and infinite form of nature's power. One becomes "rational," in Spinoza's terms, or "scientific," in Althusser's, only on the condition that one grasps the *mens*, or power of thinking, for what it is.

Since Althusser warns us that "mind" and "soul" are poor translations for the concept of *mens*, we must be careful not to rely on our familiar images of human thought. For Spinoza, a *mens* is a radically dependent singular thing, an idea composed of many ideas, which desires to persevere in being. It can only preserve and enhance its being by coordinating its activity and undergoing enabling encounters with other ambient ideas. The ideas of any given individual are the result both of some bare measure of its proper activity, its singular "essence," and the accumulation of haphazard and deliberate encounters with other ideas. The ideas that gain force and power in the mind are, to a large degree, indifferent to the particular mind, or its strivings. That is, they are not necessarily the truest ideas, but the ideas with the most life support, as it were, from fellow ideas. Ideas, like bodies, are augmented by amenable encounters with similar ideas and weakened by destructive, contrary encounters. Spinoza asserts that, "Nothing positive which a false idea has is removed by the presence of the true insofar as it is true" (IVp1). True ideas have no superadded power by virtue of their veracity. There is no force proper to truth *qua* truth. Or, to use Althusser's vocabulary from the "Underground Current," truth is not a "gel." True ideas do not "take hold" or exert themselves upon subjectivities any more forcefully than absurdities, unless there is a constellation of other similarly true ideas to nourish and sustain them.

One might consider the attribute of thought to be a kind of ecosystem of ideas. The image of the ecosystem highlights the fact that ideas, like all living things, desire to persevere in being, and only survive in a favorable environment. Since they desire to continue to exist and to enhance their lives, like any mode, they must strive, although usually unconsciously, to link up with ideas that promote and enable their existence, regardless of their truth or falsity.⁴² Ideas exist in a kind of energetic field, and ideas correspond to all of nature, human and nonhuman, rational and arational. One can thus imagine that in most, if not all environments, partial and confused ideas flourish, because they have more similar ideas to fortify them. Moreover, nature itself, or thought as a primordial expression of nature's power, is indifferent to human truth and flourishing.⁴³

A further reason human minds are constituted by a preponderance of confused and problematic ideas is the fact that the self-affirming "illusion that we are thinking," that thinking is our possession, is pleasurable. Such immediate pleasure prevents us from examining the system of relationships

upon which our thoughts depend, the premises, or histories, belonging to conclusions, such as “I am free,” or “I consent to the law.” Spinoza implies that humans desire to view themselves as free (Iapp), but such a desire might have been “taking hold” precisely in his era of emergent capitalism and liberalism.⁴⁴ The idea that one is born free and equal by nature, as Locke maintains in the *Second Treatise of Government*, may have been useful for resisting aristocratic rule in the seventeenth century, but Spinoza was already suggesting that it might prevent the construction of concrete forms of freedom, power, and association, foreclosing more radically democratic possibilities. We might examine our own epoch and communities for the ideas that attract us, those ideas to which we cling in the face of myriad contradictions. In healthy environments, we will be drawn to those ideas that enable us to think effectively, to persevere with more vitality and joy. In the most amenable situations, our ideas would reflect fewer of our reactive, anxious, and fearful passions. We might be wary in particular of those passionate ideas that compel us to desire security over autonomy, or isolation and independence over community and shared power.⁴⁵ Spinoza frequently advocates “joining forces” (IVp35s; cf. IVp18s), perhaps especially the forces of ideas. Such joining is a practice, an effort, but one that must affirm that young ideas are fragile, require care, cultivation, and nourishment in order to grow enough for their virtues or vices to be revealed. Since they are living, growing, and changing, our ideas must remain open to revision, critique, pruning, or amplification. Thus, the project of ideology critique, from a Spinozan perspective, is not content to recognize pernicious or damaging ideas and affects circulating in one’s environment, but requires an ongoing practice of sustenance and attention to new insights, promising ideas, and counter-hypotheses. Spinoza’s portrait of ideal life encourages us to consider which practices and relationships might strengthen and care for fragile, young, and emerging ideas that counter disabling constellations through association with and production of similar ideal strivings.

To affirm that, rather than thinking, one is “in thought” or “in Ideology” is to begin to ask the question, in Foucault’s words, of what thought “silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.”⁴⁶ To be able to ask the question of what thought silently thinks depends, in the first place, upon an accumulation of favorable encounters that has taken hold. Favorable ideas would be those that enable the mind better to understand the conditions of its power and activity, and thus to aid its perseverance. To ask the question of what thought “silently thinks,” of course, is not sufficient. One must gather the forces of similar ideas, which can amplify one’s power of thinking. One must both yield to and engage enabling ideas with the passionate

agency proper to modal life. The enabling crystallization must then be deployed in the service of cultivating forces that might counter the massive accumulation of ideas and affects that promote servitude, abject passivity, and misery.

Patient Agents

Althusser famously calls Ideology an “omni-historical” reality.⁴⁷ With Spinoza, we can affirm that the mind dwells in thought by nature, eternally and inescapably. It belongs to a power of nature that it can never transcend, encompass, or comprehend in its totality. Any mind remains subject to infinitely many other ideas; yet, it is likewise a subject, an actor that, in an irreducible way, composes part of reality, or nature.⁴⁸ To be a finite power of thinking, or a composite idea, is to be vulnerable to and affected by infinitely many other powers of thinking. At the same time, to be is to impact others, enable or constrain their power of thinking and being. A *mens* is an agent and a patient at once, vulnerable to and responsible for the life of ideas. One is always in thought, as in Ideology, yet this ecosystem is dynamic and infinitely variable. This means that Ideology and thought are not only what we are *inside* by virtue of our finitude, but thought and Ideology are also what we *do*, enact, and animate simply by existing as thinkers.

Any constellation of forces, any crystallization of ideas, doctrines, or patterns of thinking is the result of what Althusser calls “aleatory encounters,” encounters without any metaphysical guarantee. The encounter, Vittorio Morfino suggests, “emerges out of and is founded on a triple abyss: [it] 1) can not be; 2) can be brief; [and] 3) can no longer be.”⁴⁹ That is, nothing guarantees that an idea, be it true or false, is accessible to any given consciousness, be it collective or individual. Nothing guarantees it will endure sufficiently so as to have any significant impact on a mind or event. And, finally, nothing guarantees it will continue to live and promote either uncritical existence within ideology or critical rationality conscious of its own provisionality and vulnerability. Although it is rare that one is in an environment comprised mostly of enabling ideas, nothing conspires to make any particular pernicious assemblage of ideas reign. If patriarchy, for example, often appears to be an omni-historical, transcultural reality, it still requires the constant nourishment and incessant reproduction of supporting forces in order to postpone its death. Patriarchy hangs over an abyss of contingency, like any other form of misery or joy.

When Montag notes that, with Althusser, ideology no longer concerns consciousness or minds,⁵⁰ he likely aims to highlight the materiality of ideology, its existence in practices and institutions, its reproduction in corporeal habits, rituals, performances, and discipline. I used the claim that ideology is no longer a question of minds to promote the notion that it is a matter of relationships among ideas and the irreducible excess of thought with respect to individual minds. Thought, for Spinoza, is one way of describing nature, which has a precise corollary in extension. Thus, an analysis of ideology in and as thought cannot replace an analysis of the life of ideology in extension. Montag's work on Spinoza illustrates that servitude can be understood as a result of physical forces, bodies determining other bodies. He affirms with Spinoza that minds do not persuade and manipulate bodies, but rather bodies become corporeally invested in and habituated to their servitude. As a corollary, ideas are moved, causally determined by other ideas. Likewise, ideas resist ideas and endeavor to preserve and enhance themselves. In Spinoza's words, "the cause of one singular idea is another idea, *or* God [nature], insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea . . . , and so on, to infinity" (IIp9d). This proposition echoes an earlier one that makes the same claim about "singular things" in general: finite beings exist and act by virtue of the affections of other finite beings (Ip28). Spinoza repeats the assertion with respect to ideas in the second part to underscore that ideas, too, are singular things that endeavor to exist and act, and only succeed insofar as they are in relationship with others of their kind. The lives of ideas are determined by and dependent upon the forces, desires, and strivings of other ideas, just like the lives of bodies. This is why freedom and power depend upon caring for our minds as much as for our bodies. Moreover, we must care for mental life in the face of its necessary opacity. The vitality and strength of our minds depend upon infinitely many other ideas of which we are not and can never become fully conscious. The question becomes, how do we care for and enable our ideas? How do we come to understand the enabling and disabling relationships that comprise our thinking power? I will conclude with some suggestions.

What is to be Done?

Spinoza's meditations on imagination in the appendix to part I of the *Ethics* yield the paradox that we are slaves precisely because we imagine that we are free. But if we affirm that we are in thought, rather than its authors, we can gain a critical perspective upon this inevitable aspect of our modal existence. Thus, the task is not to abandon imagination, the way we

spontaneously perceive ourselves as thinking beings, but to develop an appreciation of its peculiar character. In other words, a Spinozist does not aim to leave imagination behind, as if that were possible, but to take it up in a new way, to know and apprehend the same things differently, as one becomes able to act more effectively in the world.

Regarding Spinoza's "third kind of knowledge," which is closely linked to nonillusory freedom in Spinoza, Althusser claims that

[W]e are never faced with a *new* object but simply a new form of appropriation (the word is Marx's) of an object that is *always already there* since the first kind of knowledge [imagination]: the 'world,' the *Lebenswelt* of the first kind, is elevated while remaining the same What changes is never the being itself of things ... but the relation of appropriation that the human subject enters into with others.⁵¹

This new relationship of appropriation concerns as much one's relations with others as it does one's relations to oneself, one's body, one's power of thinking, and one's place in nature. Freedom, paradoxically, depends upon the lived, critical understanding that one's freedom is not given but constructed, made out of the materials at hand, and only by affirming what kind of being one is, within all of the paradoxes and constraints of subjective life.⁵² Freedom is a recomposition and reappropriation of what is given by imagination, ideology, and the shared reality of historical, social, and natural life. Such recomposition represents not just a perspectival shift, however, but involves a simultaneous recomposition of constituent corporeal relations and activities. If one affirms that thinking otherwise entails being otherwise, relating to oneself, one's body, and ambient beings in a new way, one begins to glimpse why ideology critique is so difficult.

What is at stake in the reappropriation of images that are given to us in perception is not primarily a question of truth, but is most importantly a question of power. The reappropriation of imagination involves altering the understanding of our freedom. On the one hand, it belongs to our power and dispositions to filter and modify the very appearance of things. On the other hand, we are given over to a reality that is in large part already constituted. Spinoza calls this "nature," a reality that we can never transcend. Yet, we are part of this reality, irreducibly constitutive of the world as it is, responsive and responsible, a force in the causal communities of ideas and bodies, thought and extension. As Spinoza notes, "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (Ip36). Reappropriating the imagination involves apprehending the given world as, concomitantly, ours and excessive of our being, as what we cannot but be affected by and that which we cannot but affect and shape. Although our individual power is "infinitely

surpassed” by the totality of the external world (IVp3), it is significantly greater if one acknowledges one’s constituent constraints, the limits imposed by human finitude, history of experiences, political and social milieu, as well as the character of one’s nonhuman environment. It is likewise increased by the knowledge that one’s effects depend upon the ability to link up with other strivings, to join other bodies and ideas in joyful practice and resistant re-construction.

Spinoza’s suggestions for the collective cultivation of reason and joyful affects in light of our radical finitude remain underdeveloped. The need for the shared development of thinking power is often more of a conclusion than a premise of his analysis, and thus does not receive more than abstract prescriptions for the task for which his entire philosophy calls. A consideration of ideas as more or less powerful by virtue of their life force entails, from my perspective, a collective rather than an individual struggle for thinking and living well.⁵³ The *Ethics* contains many of the suggestions I have outlined here for coming to affirm and to act in light of being enabled and constrained by ambient beings and ideas. The text concludes with an elaborate affective therapy that has often been interpreted to pertain to individual, even solitary, thinkers (Vp1-p20), even as it acknowledges that a hostile milieu would make such an effort nearly impossible (IVappVII). Spinoza is clear in the *Ethics* that reason includes a desire to enjoin as many others as possible in one’s intellectual striving (e.g., IVp18s and IVp36), but, even if he affirms that the rational person desires life in a state of friendship (IVp73), he is not very clear about the precise practices, institutions, or environments that fortify thinking.

In the political writings, however, he counsels repeatedly for the organization of large deliberative assemblies. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, he promotes democracy on the basis of its support of relatively powerful and enabling ideas: “in a democracy there is less danger of a government behaving unreasonably, for it is practically impossible for the majority of a single assembly, if it is of some size, to agree on the same piece of folly.”⁵⁴ Even more forcefully, he claims in the *Political Treatise* that collective deliberation brings into being ideas that could never emerge from the meditations of a solitary leader, however sage.

[W]hen all decisions are made by a few men who have only themselves to please, freedom and the common good are lost. The fact is that men’s wits are too obtuse to get straight to the heart of every question, but by discussing, listening to others, and debating, their wits are sharpened, and by exploring every avenue they eventually discover what they are seeking, something that meets with general approval and that *no one had previously thought of*.⁵⁵

Spinoza advocates deliberation as a productive process that generates ideas that might best guide a collectivity in accordance with its own power of perseverance and flourishing. He recommends large assemblies, I would like to suggest, because ideas need to be connected and their strivings joined to one another by actual proximity. Although Spinoza could not have anticipated cyberspace, or perhaps any form of mass media, one might argue that we require actual copresence of human bodies to engender the vital affective interaction of thinking powers that produces adequate ideas. Moreover, such mental assemblages are more effective than the isolation and refinement of particular, intelligent individuals. Because true ideas cannot become powerful simply by virtue of being true, but must mobilize a great many other similar ideas, many thinking powers must pool their efforts to bring into being and sustain ideas that aid beings in their vitality and flourishing. Ideas, no matter how true, will die without many others to sustain them. The fragility of any particular idea, again, speaks to the difficulty not only of arriving at enabling ideas, but of sustaining and strengthening them.

What is at stake in the survival and nourishment of good, adequate, and enabling ideas, moreover, is the endurance of human and other natural beings. In other words, we should strive for robust, powerful ideas, ideas that include knowledge of their causes and thus know themselves, not because we want to acquire and know something like truth, but because we are ideal assemblages. Our thinking power is not just an instrument that enables us to manipulate the world or direct our lives; it is an important way in which we exist. As finite beings, we desire to exist as powerfully and joyfully as possible, which is maximized for human beings only by way of coordinating our thinking power with ambient agencies. Since we depend upon, affect, and are affected by powers other than human, we should consider how our minds are constrained and enabled not only by social relations, but by any and all relations. Precisely how to live and cultivate our nonhuman relations receives even less attention from Spinoza than how to arrange and develop our social relations. He affirms that the life of wisdom includes pleasurable involvement with natural beauty, enjoyable smells, decoration, and, especially, a diversity of food and drink (IVp45s and IVappXXVII). He treats such relationships largely as instrumental for the education of the body and its mind. Yet today more than ever, nonhuman nature demands our thoughtful attention and engagement, as we must carefully consider our mutual vulnerability to one another.

As I have argued, what matters is not only or even primarily how true, or how adequate an idea is, but how strong it is, how much life it has by virtue of fellow ideas. Ideology critique—be it in the form of feminist or

Marxist political theory—often functions to determine that some constellations, or families of ideas are pernicious and disabling to those who internalize them. A Spinozist analysis of ideal vitality forces one to consider what might be involved in the task of developing a counter-force to dissolve and break up an oppressive network of ideas. One must aim not only to demystify them through understanding their structural character, but also to bring to life alternatives to displace them, force them out of existence, or weaken them. Because it is above all a matter of relations of power and force among ideas, Spinoza emphasizes that many, many humans thinking together is the key to living well. He thus characterizes the aspiration of reason as that all “should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek the common advantage of all” (IVp18s). Although Spinoza was thinking firstly of gathering a thinking assemblage of masculine human beings, his own ontology prompts us to figure critique as the seizure and amplification of ourselves and one another in and as constituents of the power of thought.

Notes

1. For example, Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

2. Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

3. Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza*, trans. Timothy S. Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

4. Most notably, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey.

5. Louis Althusser, “The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza,” trans. T. Stolze, in *The New Spinoza*, edited by Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7. Hereafter “The Only Materialist Tradition.”

6. I use ideology in the broadest possible sense, which I defend below. It is perhaps closest to Althusser’s use of “Ideology” in his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation,” even as I refer to something excessive of human representation. Althusser distinguishes between “Ideology” in the capitalized singular and “ideologies.” Ideology is the invariant fact that human representations are mediated by the peculiar character of the social structure in which subjects live. Ideologies, on the other hand, refer to particular discourses that are motivated by a set of interests. Following Althusser, I consider ideology in the singular to refer to the more neutral sense of the social (though any distinction between “social” and “natural” makes little sense in Spinoza’s terms) determination of ideas rather than an explicitly interested discourse. In *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. B. Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). Hereafter “Ideology.”

7. Althusser, “The Only Materialist Tradition,” 9.

8. I will proceed to cite Spinoza parenthetically in the body of the paper with the standard notation, using Edwin Curley’s edition and translation, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). Citations refer to the part (= Roman numeral), proposition (= p), demonstration (= d), scholium (= s), corollary (= c), appendix (= app), preface (= pref), and definition (= def).

9. Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition," 6.

10. See, especially Chapter 2 of *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999). For other examinations of the relationship between Spinoza and Althusser, see Peter Thomas, "Philosophical Strategies: Spinoza and Althusser" *Historical Materialism* 10.3 (December 2002): 71–113; Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991); Caroline Williams, *Contemporary French Philosophy: Modernity and the Persistence of the Subject* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001); Jean-Pierre Cotten, "Althusser et Spinoza," in *Spinoza au XXIème Siècle*, edited by Paul-Laurent Assoun (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), and Althusser himself, "On Spinoza," *Elements of Self-Criticism*, trans. B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1976).

11. Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition," 5.

12. *Ibid.*, 6, and *E Iapp*.

13. Karl Marx, *Capital, volume 1*, trans. B. Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 280.

14. Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 78.

15. *Ibid.*, 63.

16. One can likewise approach the question of freedom from the point of view that one is but a tiny particle within the infinite power of extension, a singular body amidst infinitely many other bodies, as Montag's work has done elegantly. My focus here, however, is how ideas move ideas.

17. Matthew Sharpe's is an interesting recent discussion of ideology as structurally analogous to aesthetic judgment, "The Aesthetics of Ideology, or 'The Critique of Ideological Judgment in Eagleton and Žižek,'" *Political Theory* 34.1 (February 2006): 95–120.

18. Most notably, Terry Eagleton, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. See *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1.3 (1996): 201–220, and the introductory essay in *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), edited by Žižek, respectively.

19. Laclau, "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," 202.

20. Although Marx's texts themselves are considerably more ambivalent and complicated than some, perhaps even most, of the traditions to which they gave rise, his texts can be understood, at least partly, to be objectively responsible for the effects they produced. From a Spinozan perspective, texts are bodies that affect and are affected by other bodies, some of which accord with the striving unique to them, or their particular "nature," but most of which are accidental products of energetic interactions between myriad forces.

21. See the interview of Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980): 109–133.

22. Evidence for this claim can be found throughout the *Ethics*, but especially, *E Idef2*, *IIp7*, *IIIp2*.

23. I am thinking, especially, of Warren Montag to whom I am deeply indebted, even as I offer this corrective supplement to his analysis of corporeal determination; see *Bodies, Masses, Power* (London: Verso, 1999).

24. This is a bit of an overstatement, since Negri, Balibar, and Montag all examine the play of imagination and reason, the first two kinds of knowledge, but the sensual, affective, and corporeal remain the privileged sites of explanation for the tradition of Marxist interpretation.

25. Spinoza famously remarks: "To man, then, there is nothing more useful to man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together as far as they can, to preserve their being, and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all" (*E* IVp18s). Space prohibits an analysis of this notion of utility, which I will take up in another paper.

26. For example, Margaret Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and 'Minds': Comments on Spinoza's Theory," in *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

27. Althusser, "Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, edited by François Matheron and Olivier Corpet, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), 183. Hereafter "Underground Current."

28. Antonio Gramsci, "Fable of the Beaver," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

29. Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1995), Epistle 58. Although I cannot address this within the scope of the paper, Spinoza and Althusser have different targets in their critiques of conscious freedom. Althusser is likely critical of a phenomenological or existentialist model of "consciousness" as radically free interiority, which is alien to Spinoza except insofar as it originates in Descartes. Althusser rather polemically equates Ideology in the omni-historical sense to consciousness itself, suggesting that the precious consciousness of his peer intellectuals is invariably an expression of its social relations structured by domination. Spinoza, however, is concerned with superstitious and theological subjectivity that imagines human and divine freedom as unconstrained caprice rather than natural necessity.

30. Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition," 12.

31. "Conclusions without premises" is a notion from Spinoza (*E* IIp28d) that recalls "symptomatic reading" as the investigation of answers to questions unconsciously, or not yet posed; Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: Verso, 1970).

32. Althusser, "Underground Current," 178.

33. *Ibid.*

34. That is, usually other humans, but Spinoza would hardly be surprised by wolf and bear children, since corporeal similarity is something that emerges as much through repeated contact as from given biology. There is no such thing as an essential human, bear, or wolf nature, but only infinitely many individual natures, or essences.

35. For a more detailed defense of this claim, see Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza*, Ch. 4 (Paris: Maspero, 1979).

36. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), page reference is to French edition, *Spinoza et le Problème de l'Expression* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1968), 36.

37. Cf. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, xxi.

38. To preserve the irreducibility of the attributes to one another, however, one must bear in mind that the "body as a model" is an analogy to the life of ideas. Taking the body as a model entails that one understand something by way of something else. The story of the body in Spinoza may be even more properly called "allegorical" insofar as it tells us about ideas. Allegories, of course, are still indicative and useful ways of understanding things, but the difference (allegory from *allos*, other or different) that holds apart the phenomena must be kept in mind.

39. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 18–19.

40. Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et Communauté Chez Spinoza* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 19.

41. Althusser, "Ideology," 175.

42. Jane Bennett also notes parenthetically that "ideas strive to enhance their power of activity;" "The Force of Things: Steps Toward and Ecology of Matter," *Political Theory* 32.3 (2004), 353.

43. What I call "human truth" refers to Spinoza's doctrine of adequate ideas, which are ideas that contain the ideas of their causes. Due to the autonomy of the attributes, in my interpretation, Spinoza's is not a correspondence theory of truth, where an idea is true insofar as it corresponds to its object (except in the case of the divine intellect, which has a grasp of the totality of ideas). For humans, we have adequate ideas that include knowledge of their causes, when ideas emerge more from our power of thinking than from external powers. Since we are largely moved by external powers, we mostly generate inadequate ideas, or ideas that do not include an apprehension of what brought them into being. (*E IIdef4*).

44. Spinoza seems to attribute a kind of spontaneous, yet mistaken (in contrast to Hobbes), ontological individualism to the fact that our bodies filter our experience of the world. The Marxist analyses of, for example, Macpherson, force us to ask whether such an interpretation of our experience is historically imposed rather than the inevitable consequence of embodied subjectivity. See C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

45. For a Spinozist analysis of our affective milieu during the war on terror, see Hasana Sharp, "Why Spinoza Today? Or, 'A Strategy of Anti-Fear,'" *Rethinking Marxism* 17.4 (October 2005): 591–608.

46. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 9.

47. Althusser, "Ideology," 161.

48. Cf. Smith, "What Kind of Democrat was Spinoza?," *Political Theory* 33.1 (2005), 13.

49. Vittorio Morfino, "An Althusserian Lexicon," *Borderlands e-journal* 4.2 (2005).

50. Montag, *Louis Althusser*, 56.

51. Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition," 9.

52. Cf. André Tosel, *Du Matérialisme, du Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994).

53. Many do not share my interpretation and argue that freedom and rationality for Spinoza can only be had by few individuals and are largely solitary projects. My argument here leads to the notion that even thinking, wisdom, and philosophy must be collective efforts, where collective is interpreted broadly to include inorganic conditions as well as human assemblies. For an argument that wisdom and philosophy are solitary endeavors, see Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*.

54. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), Ch. 16, 178.

55. *Political Treatise*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), Ch. 9, par. 14, my emphasis.

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