



S P I N O Z A

DIMITRIS VARDOULAKIS

EDITOR



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SPINOZA NOW

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SPINOZA NOW

Dimitris Vardoulakis
editor



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Note on References to Spinoza's Works

THE VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS of Spinoza's works offer often significantly different interpretations of the meaning of his original Latin text. For this reason, the contributors have been free to choose their preferred translations or to translate themselves the Latin from the established text of Spinoza's works in the Gebhardt edition of the *Opera*.

In references to the *Ethics*, the Roman numeral indicates the part of the *Ethics* to which the author is referring, e.g., *Ethics* I is *Ethics*, Part I; *Ethics* II is *Ethics*, Part II; and so on. In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

A	axiom
Ap.	appendix
C	corollary
D	definition
L	lemma
P	proposition
Pr.	proof
S	scholium

For instance, *Ethics* II, P7, refers to *Ethics*, Part II, Proposition 7, and *Ethics* IV, P34S, refers to *Ethics*, Part IV, Scholium to Proposition 34.

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Editor's Note

Spinoza Now attempts to place Spinoza in a contemporary context. This project started in 2005 at the Centre for Ideas of the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia. A number of the papers published here were first presented at the conference *Wandering with Spinoza*, held at the Centre for Ideas from September 13 to 15, 2006. The editor would like to thank the director of the Centre for Ideas, Elizabeth Presa, for her unwavering belief in the value of such a project. The editor also thanks Norma Lam-Saw for research assistance.

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Spinoza Now: An Introduction

dimitris vardoulakis

THE TITLE of this collection—*Spinoza Now*—highlights the importance Spinoza places on the present moment for any political or cultural investigation. It also includes contributions that are of the present—attempts to think about, on, and with Spinoza in addressing contemporary issues and that are in response to current directions in Spinoza studies. I will address these two aspects of the title in turn.

“For this much is quite certain, and proved to be true in our *Ethics*, that men are necessarily subject to passions.” This statement, from Spinoza’s *Political Treatise* (1, §5), encapsulates the importance of the present for his philosophy.¹ Even though Spinoza insists on a knowledge from the perspective of eternity or the infinite, communal living is nevertheless permeated with the affects each one feels while living. A desire is always in the present. Thus philosophy for Spinoza is inextricably linked to life, to the now of existence.

Such a position is not a simple vitalism. The thought in *Political Treatise* that emphasizes the now may be better outlined in relation to what it opposes. Spinoza opens the *Treatise* by treating two opposing positions about human interaction: optimism and pessimism. The optimists are discussed in the first paragraph of the *Treatise*. They are those philosophers who look on the passions as vices to be avoided at all cost. “So it is their custom to deride, bewail, berate . . . or execrate” the passions. Thus they construct political theories that seek to eliminate affects. Spinoza is not simply skeptical about

such philosophizing because it “borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia”; he finds such theories so unfounded that they become amusing: “for the most part it is not ethics . . . but satire.” The optimist’s hope to suppress the present so as to imagine a future that has tamed the passions is entirely devoid of practical significance.

The pessimists are discussed in the second paragraph of the *Treatise*. They are those who are distrustful of politicians. Because politicians know from experience “that there will be vices as long as there are men,” they fear people. This leads them to practices that may be construed as cunning or wicked, especially in the eyes of “theologians, who believe that sovereign powers ought to deal with public affairs according to the same moral principles as are binding on the private individual.” However, this collapse of the distinction between private and public is yet another unfounded fancy, one that is built on fear—not hope. If past experience points to human vice, there is all the more reason to deal with that fear in contemporary political practice rather than seeking to repress it with moralizing.

As Deleuze has emphasized, Spinoza cannot be understood as a moral philosopher, and this means that Spinoza is mindful of the gap or break between false hope and crippling fear—between a utopian belief in the future and a dread of the past. Between them is located the now. At this space, *ethics* develops.

A brief overview of Spinoza’s reception is required to show the second aspect of the title, namely, how Spinoza has emerged as a figure who allows us to think of our contemporary situation.² Rejection was the first significant reaction to Spinoza’s work.³ The seed for that reaction was already sown in 1670, when Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* was published. The book contained a sustained argument against revealed religion by questioning, for example, the existence of miracles. From that moment onward, Spinoza was painted as an atheist, and to be perceived as a follower of Spinoza was indeed a dangerous position in which to find oneself. Consequently, even after the *Opera Posthuma* were published shortly after Spinoza’s death in 1677, few actually read Spinoza’s works. To compound this, twenty years later Pierre Bayle wrote an article on Spinoza in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) that interpreted Spinoza as collapsing the distinction between God and

nature—a position that was understood to lead to Spinoza’s atheism. For years to come, the philosophical community would get their “Spinoza” from Bayle’s summary.

The identification of God and nature received a name at the beginning of the eighteenth century: *pantheism*. Spinoza was seen as recognizing God in everything, which only led to the inference that he identified God in nothing. At the same time, interpreting Spinoza as a vehement atheist attracted the attention of those who were keen to challenge the superstitions of religion and the authority of the churches on revealed religion. Thus Spinoza was becoming aligned with Enlightenment, or at least with a polemical and combative strand of Enlightenment, while at the same time the prominent figures of the Enlightenment did not refer to Spinoza and distanced themselves from what they probably saw as opprobrious attacks on religion. This ambiguity erupted into the famous *Pantheismusstreit*, or Pantheist Controversy, at the end of the eighteenth century. Shortly after Lessing’s death, Jacobi contested in 1785 that Lessing had confessed to him that he was a Spinozist. Lessing was one of the figureheads of the Enlightenment in Germany as well as in Europe, and Jacobi’s claim amounted to an accusation that Enlightenment deified reason. As Frederick Beiser puts it, “the belief in Spinoza’s cosmic God seemed to be the religion of science itself.”⁴ In other words, Jacobi sought to argue that pantheism, or the identification of God with nature, was the position that any system that places reason over belief is bound to adopt. When Lessing’s friend Mendelssohn, himself a leading figure of the Enlightenment, responded to Jacobi, suddenly Spinoza emerged as the *métier* of the Enlightenment project.

If the Pantheist Controversy implicated luminaries of the Enlightenment and thereby exposed its limitations, Jacobi’s second public controversy involving Spinoza had a generative effect. This second controversy related to Fichte’s philosophy and unfolded in spring 1799.⁵ The transcendental idealist notion of the subject had now become Jacobi’s target. Jacobi again argued that there are two options, this time articulated in terms of subjectivity: either the subject is absolute, as Fichte argues, in which case the subject is deified, or there is space for belief and the subject is not commensurate with reason. This controversy played a role in Fichte’s losing

his position at Jena University, where his students included Hegel and Schelling as well as Novalis, the Schlegels, and Hölderlin—or, in sum, the figures who would effect the transition to romanticism. Thus they were all exposed to Spinoza as the figure who unraveled their professor, Fichte. Paradoxically, their exposure to Spinoza led to a different interpretation of pantheism, which was now seen as positive because it affirmed the importance of nature or what they referred to as the particular. Novalis's designation of Spinoza as "God-intoxicated man," or Hegel's assertion that the whole of Spinoza can be read in relation to Proposition 7 of Book II of the *Ethics* ("the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things"), should be understood in this context.⁶ The next couple generations of philosophers exhibit a positive receptiveness of Spinoza. For instance, Marx ranked Spinoza as one of his formative influences, whereas Nietzsche saw in Spinoza his only genuine predecessor. Thus, whereas the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries viewed Spinoza with suspicion and hostility, in the nineteenth century Spinoza became the secret conversant of romanticism and its aftermath.

A crucial reason why Spinoza was never addressed in any thorough fashion by the philosophers of the nineteenth century was that there was not much scholarship on which they could build. This was rectified in the twentieth century, which saw an explosion of Spinoza scholarship. It started in the first decades of the twentieth century with the voluminous works appearing mostly in Germany on the context of Spinoza's philosophy. In America, Harry Austryn Wolfson produced a remarkable account of the sources of Spinoza's arguments,⁷ and more recently Yirmiyahu Yovel has provided an authoritative account both of Spinoza's context and its impact on subsequent philosophies.⁸ Alongside these works that concentrate on the external circumstances of Spinoza's thought, there is another side to this approach to Spinoza in the twentieth century, one that concentrates on the internal structure of Spinoza's argument and, in particular, on the *Ethics*. Perhaps the most prominent example here is Martial Guérout's *Spinoza*. The two volumes of exegesis of Part I and Part II of the *Ethics* offer a close analysis of the philosophy that directed one toward grasping the architectonics of the

book, that is, on presenting the structure or system of the work as a whole.⁹ Edwin Curley has attempted something similar, although less voluminous, in America.¹⁰ In sum, this approach as a whole—in its concentration on both the external or contextual circumstances of Spinoza’s philosophy and the internal structure of his work—can be characterized as encyclopedic. The impact of this encyclopedic approach has been that it established Spinoza as a topic of study and disengaged the name “Spinoza” from both impassioned renunciations and their correlative, strategic appropriations.

Another approach to Spinoza emerged in the 1960s and can be characterized as an intensification of the romantic fascination with Spinoza. If, in Novalis’s already quoted phrase, Spinoza was a “God-intoxicated man” in the sense that he sought the universal in the particular, this focusing on the particular is now further elaborated, showing its implications for a philosophy of power. The two instrumental figures in this new approach to Spinoza were Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. Even though Althusser did not publish a lot on Spinoza, as Warren Montag has shown, his notion of the structure is indebted to Spinoza’s notion of the immanent cause, that is, a cause present only through its effects. Thus Spinoza gave the means to Althusser to evade a teleological or scientific Marxism that sought reality in an inexorable and analyzable chain of causal relations of production. At roughly the same time, Deleuze’s book *Expressionism in Philosophy* argued that expression in Spinoza undoes traditional representationalism in philosophy. According to Deleuze, the question that motivates Spinoza’s ethics is “what can a body do?”; that is, what kind of relations produce and are produced by the individual?¹¹ Althusser’s and Deleuze’s interpretations of Spinoza inspired a subsequent generation of scholars, such as their respective students Étienne Balibar and Antonio Negri.¹² Warren Montag and Ted Stolze’s edited volume *The New Spinoza*, also published by the University of Minnesota Press, offers the best collection of the rich range of views of this approach.¹³ We can summarize this approach by saying that it builds on the encyclopedic scholarship of the previous approach to present Spinoza as a philosopher of power, that is, as a philosopher who concentrates on immanence and particularity. In this sense, Spinoza is mobilized in the move against structures of transcendence

and universalism—or what has come to be understood as modernity.

In the past few years, a new direction has started developing that could predominate in Spinoza studies in the twenty-first century. This approach assumes the centrality of Spinoza's thought in modernity—not merely as a figure who leads to modernity but moreover as a figure whose thought is modern. Thus Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's influential critique of modern sovereignty, *Empire*, is permeated with Spinoza's influence.¹⁴ This is also evidenced by its sequel, *Multitude*, because the title-term's provenance is Spinoza's *Political Treatise*.¹⁵ Even though Spinoza is not referred to continuously in these two works by Hardt and Negri, still the Spinozan insistence on immanence is utilized in understanding current issues. There are several other examples of this approach. For instance, Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd also use Spinoza's philosophy to address philosophical and political issues of the present in *Collective Imaginings*.¹⁶ In addition, works in neighboring disciplines, such as Antonio Damasio's *Looking for Spinoza*, attempt a theoretical approach to neuropsychology based on Spinoza's theory of affects.¹⁷ This third direction characteristically uses Spinoza to think about issues related to the present. Spinoza's thought participates in current debates. Maybe this new approach is philosophy's way of catching up with other practices, such as literature, which, at least since Alexander Pope and George Eliot, has seen Spinoza as a source of inspiration.¹⁸ There are also important examples of a Spinozan influence in the arts, notably the *Spinoza Monument* by Thomas Hirschhorn (Amsterdam, 1999). There Spinoza becomes a contemporary, a participant in cultural and intellectual production, the figure who allows us to think of our modernity.

The encyclopedic approach to Spinoza that started at the beginning of the twentieth century is still valuable today because it provides a basis for further scholarship. The approach that presents Spinoza as a philosopher of power and hence aligns him with modernity can be seen as setting the foundations of the third approach: only after establishing Spinoza's import for postmetaphysical thought would it have been possible to bring Spinoza to the now. *Spinoza Now* takes the challenges faced by this latter approach seriously. It includes as broad a variety of approaches as possible. All the contributions actively engage with Spinoza, making his thought relevant today. The chapters seek to pursue Spinoza's thought by thinking with Spinoza.

The two aspects of the title—Spinoza’s own emphasis on the now and the new approach in Spinoza studies emphasizing his present relevance—should be seen as interlaced. What characterizes them both is a dynamic conception of production. For Spinoza, the past and the future are both productive of, and produced by, the present. The immutability of the static substance is only a formal principle to guarantee the infinite unfolding of being and thought. The new approach to Spinoza reproduces this dual direction of production in explicating Spinoza. But in so doing, it is also producing a Spinoza of the “now,” a Spinoza who participates as a productive force in cultural formation.

The first four chapters offer different ways of understanding the reception of Spinoza’s thought as well as forging new ways for thought through an understanding of that reception history. In the opening chapter of the volume, Christopher Norris conducts a critical overview of the way Spinoza has been received by various philosophical traditions. Norris starts by observing the great conflict in the interpretation of Spinoza, namely, that Spinoza has been viewed either as a mystic or as an atheist, either as a spiritualist or as a materialist. Tracing some aspects of this variegated history, Norris argues that its latest incarnation is the divided interpretation of Spinoza between analytic and continental philosophers. Something unites the two approaches, however, namely, the thrust to overcome dualism, either in its Cartesian or Kantian manifestation. From that point of view, Spinozan monism emerges as standing beyond the analytic–continental dichotomy. Norris does not argue that Spinoza bridges the gap between the two philosophical schools but rather that Spinoza’s metaphysics necessitates a rapprochement between analytic and continental philosophy that will be mutually beneficial.

Alain Badiou concurs with Christopher Norris about the conflict of interpretation generated by Spinoza, and especially his *Ethics*, and proposes a solution to this problem. Departing from the observation that even though the *Ethics* are written *more geometrico*—in a geometrical order—very little of the literature on Spinoza has actually paid close attention to this mathematical methodology. Examining a single proposition—*Ethics* I, P28—Badiou shows that the way the proof of the proposition is related to previous propositions, definitions, axioms, and so on, is indispensable in understanding the *Ethics*.

The geometrical order creates a web of relations that structure the *Ethics*. This mirrors Spinoza's insistence in Definition 2, at the very beginning of the *Ethics*, that the distinction between the infinite and the finite is strictly relational. The ratiocination and the order of being are, therefore, correlated. Spinoza, argues Badiou, propounds a mathematics of Being—an ontology according to which thinking or the intellect is action as such.

The implicit targets of Badiou's argument, according to which Spinoza's theory of relations can only be read in parallel with the mathematical nature of proofs in the *Ethics*, are the attempts to read the theory of relations through the theory of passions. Simon Duffy discusses the two most prominent exponents—Gilles Deleuze and Pierre Macherey—in locating the theory of relations in the third part of the *Ethics*. By exploring Deleuze's and Macherey's different interpretations of the relation between active or joyful and passive or sad affections, Duffy shows two ways of constructing a politics departing from the theory of passions. Duffy concentrates on the elusive "joyful passions," which are neither properly active nor purely passive and therefore forge a relation between joyous and sad affections.

Is there a way of mediating between the mathematical and the affective approach? Justin Clemens's chapter, in locating the emergence of the political in *in-action*, and in showing that inaction is a matter of the mathematics of Being and of affective disposition, suggests a possible mediation. This chapter presents a genealogy of the Buridan's ass paradox (*Ethics* II, P49S)—the donkey that cannot decide between two equidistant bales of hay. Clemens argues that the paradox has two ostensible targets: Descartes's separation of will and understanding and Hobbes's exclusion from the covenant with the sovereign of all those who cannot decide. As such, Buridan's ass shows the tight connections between Spinoza's ontology, epistemology, and politics. From this perspective, argues Clemens, Buridan's ass demonstrates Spinoza's materialism.

All the different approaches explored in the first four chapters have one thing in common: the insistence that Spinoza's ontology is linked to his politics. This insistence can take another, more specialized guise: the link between theology—broadly conceived to include any notion of universalism—and the political. This link is possible because of the process of interpretation—the biblical exegesis that

Spinoza proposes in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* or the notion of expression in the *Ethics* that Deleuze emphasizes. The four chapters of Part II deal with this theme.

Like Clemens, Michael Mack also addresses Descartes's and Hobbes's influence on Spinoza, but shows how it is possible to eschew an absolute universalism in favor of an inclusive universalism. Mack shows that Spinoza is not arguing against religion or theology per se but rather against the politics of domination to which Cartesian dualism of necessity leads. The reason for this is that there is a line connecting theology with teleology and anthropomorphism, which only leads to the possibility of one group claiming superiority and domination over another. Mack describes this as a self-destructive or autoimmune process. This is juxtaposed to the intellectual love of God from *Ethics* V, which Mack interprets as instating a communality, in the sense that it describes a plurality of individual minds, an affirmation of singularities. Only this communality, argues Mack, gives us a chance for a nonviolent politics.

Arthur J. Jacobson turns to the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to examine the status of prophets. It is well known that for Spinoza, there are no miracles, and in this sense prophesy is part of natural knowledge, its distinctive characteristic being that it helps in the formation of community. Jacobson further complicates this standard account of Spinoza's prophets by pointing out a paradox, namely, that if prophesy is natural knowledge, then everyone, in principle, even if not in fact, can be a prophet. This structure, as Jacobson demonstrates, can also be found in Maimonides. The effect of this structure in Spinoza is that knowledge, then, is shareable by everyone—there is a democracy of knowledge.

Warren Montag looks at scripture itself to make a related point to that raised by Jacobson. Montag points out the correlation between ontology and politics expressed in "God, or Nature" from the *Ethics* has its equivalent in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, in which Spinoza writes, "Scripture, or the mind of the Holy Spirit." This indicates that interpretation is also a partner in ontology and politics. But this is only possible, as Montag demonstrates, if interpretation presupposes that any work does not exist prior to its effects. There is no independent space of reason that remains outside a causality that includes the imagination and all the faults that characterize the

human's mind and actions. This crucial Spinozan insight is missing, argues Montag, from Jonathan Israel's image of Spinoza as the prime representative of "radical Enlightenment" that supposedly demystified knowledge, emptying it of all superstition. Conversely, Montag shows that scripture is equivalent to the *mind* of the Holy Spirit because it is the palimpsest of the interaction, inevitably and invariably at fault, of imagination and reason. Furthermore, if scripture, like Nature, is perfection, then the Bible is, paradoxically, no longer an exemplary or singular text but rather the manifestation of interpretation's role in the interplay between ontology and politics. To recall the distinction about the prophets drawn by Arthur Jacobson, scripture, in principle, has no superiority over any other text; it is more important than other texts only in fact, through the influence it exercised in the conceptualization of law and norm.

Like Montag, Cesare Casarino also departs from a close reading, in this case, a passage that refers to the "concatenation of all things" (*Ethics* I, Ap.). Casarino first points out that Spinoza uses the notion of concatenation to explicate the argument of the first part of the *Ethics*. Such an explication is rare, if not unique, in the *Ethics*. Casarino shows that this is not accidental. Concatenation is interlinked with Spinoza's understanding of interpretation that requires two simultaneous procedures: the positing of a totality, on one hand, and, on the other, the signification and performance of meaning. This dual aspect is precisely what Deleuze has termed *expression* or *sense*. But there is also a second, political consequence of this move. Concatenation and the totality it implies present Spinoza as a genuine theorist of globalization—the *Ethics* appears as a response to capital and its totalizing imperative. According to Casarino's argument, the explication that signifies and performs its meaning is not commensurable with representation in the sense that it activates potentiality in the process of interpretation: the knowledge of an object is not subjective but a feature of the object itself. This allows for singularity. As Marx showed, it is possible to think of the ontological function of God as absolute immanence. But in Spinoza, that absolute immanence is accompanied by the concatenation of all beings, which retains being's singularity. Thus Spinoza emerges as a theorist of capital and globalization who comes—anachronistically and yet all the more poignantly—after Marx.

Part III takes up the issues discussed in the previous chapters to present them in relation to Spinoza's relevance for the arts. Such an unusual approach aims not only to present Spinoza from a novel perspective that can be illuminating but in addition to demonstrate that Spinoza's thought can be applied to a variety of contexts and issues of contemporary relevance.

Sebastian Egenhofer also tackles the Marxist legacy of Spinoza's thought, concentrating on how the notion of production is indispensable in understanding the art of the twentieth century. There is an increasing shift from the imagistic to the economic aspect of production—from Mondrian's abstractions, whose process of material production is secondary, to Judd's minimalism, which makes the material manifestation the focal point, to Asher's works, operating with and against their own economic genesis. Egenhofer suggests a next stage indicated by the "precarious materiality" of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Spinoza Monument*. Here the two aspects of production are inseparable—or, even more emphatically, they allow for the conceptualization of this inseparability. The work of art is both the experience and the thought that structures that experience. In this way, Hirschhorn's work manifests that the Marxian notion of production unfolds in a Spinozan matrix, as the various ways in which the infinite can be expressed in its finite modes. In other words, only when the Spinozan link between ontology and politics is imbued with the Marxian notion of production can Hirschhorn's originality come to the fore.

Anthony Uhlmann combines issues discussed in earlier chapters—the theory of relations in Badiou and Duffy, the notion of the necessity of a gap in interpretation in Montag, and the concomitance of production and its idea in Egenhofer—to show that it is possible to develop a Spinozist understanding of the arts. Departing from Beckett's fascination with Spinoza, Uhlmann acknowledges that, at first blush, the parallelism between thought and experience, the infinite and finite, or substance and its modes poses a problem for art. But this is only so if art is under the sway of representation. Spinoza, as Uhlmann shows, had already moved beyond representation by insisting that the parallelism does not suggest a lack of contact; rather, infinite knowledge is of necessity related to its finite modes—the first kind of knowledge is implicated in the third kind of knowledge.

This theory of relations enacts gaps between its different parts. The presence of these gaps is also indispensable for the arts. A work of art does not convey a message; rather, a work of art establishes relations whose message is the (ethical) imperative to fill the gaps that, of necessity, persist. This means that, just as in Spinoza's relation of substance and its modes, modern art is both the unfolding of material relations and the thinking that accompanies them.

Mieke Bal and Dimitris Vardoulakis explore the relation between thought and matter from a different perspective, emphasizing the rupture that makes their relation possible. Spinoza addresses this by drawing the distinction between essence and existence. As Bal and Vardoulakis note, this distinction is drawn with recourse to examples from art. This is not accidental. As an analysis of three different versions of Rembrandt's depiction of Joseph, Potiphar, and his wife demonstrates, Rembrandt's work makes possible a similar distinction between image and words. The complex interpretations that arise when the image is denied an immediate meaning echo Spinoza's insistence that there is no immediate connection between thought and matter, essence and existence. From this perspective, the link between Rembrandt and Spinoza is not based on the fact that they were neighbors in Amsterdam's Jewish quarter but rather is based on adopting a similar attitude to the creation of art and culture. Thus Spinoza emerges not so much as an aesthete as a philosopher whose ontology reverberates with an understanding of the arts precisely because the distinction of essence and existence allows for creation and production.

The last three chapters provide encounters between Spinoza and other philosophers. These encounters are not primarily comparative analyses, nor are they merely the impetus for exploring current philosophical issues; rather all three encounters stage the importance of the Spinozan ontology's privileging of life over death.

Antonio Negri begins his analysis by pointing out that modern philosophy is characterized by the Hegelian move to unite essence and existence. As Bal and Vardoulakis discussed in the previous chapter, and as Negri emphasizes here again, essence and existence are never united in Spinoza. Negri further observes that Heidegger's ontological difference rests on the same premise. The disjunction between essence and existence makes Heidegger and Spinoza both

antimodernist philosophers, yet here the similarities end, for ultimately they construct contradictory, even antithetical, ontologies. Heidegger proposes an ontology of the void, emphasizing the nothingness of being, which is achieved through the projective aspect of care, the destiny that subjugates being in being-toward-death. This is, argues Negri, a totalizing move, whose reactionary political overtones are clear to see. Conversely, Spinoza's ontology understands being as plenitude, and instead of an emptiness, there are relations of power. The result is radically different from Heidegger, Negri insists. Instead of the totalizing impulse of death, we have in Spinoza the singularity of life, which articulates itself in love, the construction of being through affect. This constructive aspect makes the escape from destiny through freedom possible and, consequently, is a genuinely democratic impulse.

A. Kiarina Kordela shows that the way that death is conceived is crucial for Spinoza's political stance seen from a psychoanalytic perspective. For this to come to the fore, argues Kordela, it is important to avoid two interrelated premises that structure Antonio Damasio's interpretation of Spinoza. These are, first, that Spinoza performs an inversion of Cartesian dualism by privileging the body over the mind, and second, that consequently Spinoza's is solely a philosophy of life, one that indicates homeostasis, self-preservation, and the pleasure principle. Kordela shows that such an inversion of Cartesianism only leads to a new dualism—a dualism that can only conceive of death as a biological occurrence. As Kordela demonstrates, however, death is never solely biological for Spinoza. Instead, as the discussions of suicide evidence, Spinoza's conception of death is indispensable in social and political critique. Thus Spinoza emerges as having recourse to the death drive alongside the pleasure principle. This political dimension, then, allows Spinoza's ontology to reverberate with psychoanalysis. Like Negri, Kordela shows that this dimension emerges in Part V of the *Ethics*, in the discussion of the intellectual love of God.

Alexander García Düttmann explores the relation between life and death by staging a dialogue between Spinoza and Derrida. Düttmann begins his chapter with Spinoza's assertion that a free man fears death least of all. This entails that freedom requires a liberation from the affect of fear and, more generally, liberation from the

bondage of affect—which also means the attainment of wisdom. In Spinoza’s construal, freedom as an affirmation of life is nothing other than the acceptance of the law’s necessity—a freeing oneself from that necessity even though that necessity persists. Derrida’s notion of the law is never articulated in terms of necessity but always in terms of indecision. The absence of certain or adequate criteria precludes any certainty of the law’s validity. Derrida also sides with life, but here life is understood as the infinite deferral of the law, as the suspension of its necessity. From that perspective, the Spinozan position about freedom being the acceptance of the necessity of the law appears thoroughly incompatible with Derrida. Yet the matter is not as simple as that. For though Derrida can refute Spinoza on the grounds that it is merely idealism to impute the liberation over affect—that is, to tame being or reality by subsuming it to the law of the substance—still Spinoza can respond that Derrida’s own assertion of the impossibility of grasping necessity can be conceived as a law in itself, as the ultimate affirmation of necessity. Despite their differences, their mutual affirmation of life makes it at least possible for them to say that they understand each other.

Janouch mentions the following comment that Franz Kafka made to him:

“Accident is the name one gives to the coincidence of events, of which one does not know the causation. But there is no world without causation. Therefore in the world there are no accidents, but only here . . .” Kafka touched his forehead with his left hand. “Accidents only exist in our heads, in our limited perceptions. They are the reflection of the limits of our knowledge. The struggle against chance is always a struggle against ourselves, which we can never entirely win.”¹⁹

Kafka unwittingly expresses himself as a true Spinozist here. There is, on one hand, an unshakeable necessity. However, on the other hand, that necessity is not subject to a law, or at least to a law that can be discovered. This necessity persists despite us—and yet, simultaneously, it can exist only because of us, because of our struggles to bridge the gap that separates us from that necessity.

The insistence on the now in Spinoza's philosophy is about this gap and this struggle. Their effects are so deep that they bring disparate categories into contact, from ontology to politics and from ethics to aesthetics. What has to be remembered, however, is that the gap can never be filled, the struggle can never completely succeed or, in Kafka's words, "we can never entirely win." This must apply to Spinoza himself. Thus "Spinoza now" is not so much a statement about a truth that Spinoza's writings can reveal to us in our present situation; rather, it is the injunction to adhere to the attitude that affirms both necessity and its impossibility. It is hoped that this will lead to an engaged thought that strives to rediscover that struggle in the past and to ensure that it continues in the future.

Notes

- 1 Baruch Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, in *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 1, §5.
- 2 Given that Spinoza's biographical details are well known, I will mention here only the nodal points. Spinoza's family had emigrated to Amsterdam, the most liberal city of its time, from the Iberian Peninsula owing to the persecution of Jews. He was born there in 1632. Spinoza's life changed dramatically when he was excommunicated in 1656 and was forced to leave the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Nobody knows the exact reason for the excommunication, but it is certainly related to Spinoza's free thinking and his study of philosophy. These endeavors led to the publication of Spinoza's first book, *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, in 1663. By then, Spinoza was leading a relatively quiet and solitary life, although he had faithful disciples or admirers in the Netherlands and was in correspondence with the best minds of his time in Europe, including Leibniz. Responding to contemporary political events, Spinoza stopped writing his magnum opus, the *Ethics*, to compose the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which was published anonymously in 1670. The reaction was ferocious, and it meant that Spinoza was not confident enough to publish anything else in his lifetime. After his death in 1677, his friends collected and published his writings, including the *Ethics*, his unfinished *Political Treatise*, and his

correspondence. The best biography of Spinoza is Steven Nadler's *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

- 3 The best overview of Spinoza's reception up to the beginning of the twentieth century is Pierre-François Moreau's "Spinoza's Reception and Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 408–33. I refer the interested reader to Moreau's essay for a more detailed overview.
- 4 Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 60. See also Beth Lord, *Kant and Spinozism* (London: Palgrave, 2011).
- 5 See Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 6 For the complex relation between Spinoza and Hegel, see Pierre Macherey's classic *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero, 1979); published in English as *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- 7 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning*, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken, 1969 [1934]).
- 8 Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- 9 The first volume of Guérout's book *Spinoza* was titled *Spinoza I: Dieu*, and the second was titled *Spinoza II: L'Âme*; they were published in 1968 and 1974, respectively. A third volume that was going to treat Parts III–V of the *Ethics* was barely started at the time of Guérout's death.
- 10 Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 11 Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992).
- 12 See Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998), and Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- 13 Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, eds., *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- 14 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

- 15 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
- 16 Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- 17 Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2003).
- 18 George Eliot even translated the *Ethics*. See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. George Eliot, ed. Thomas Deegan (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981). See also Isaac Bashevis Singer's remarkable short story "Spinoza in the Market Street," in *The Spinoza of Market Street and Other Stories*, 7–25 (New York: Bard Books, 1970). Another more recent but fascinating example is Norma Cole's poetry collection *Spinoza in Her Youth* (Richmond, Calif.: Omnidawn, 2002).
- 19 Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka: Notes and Reminiscences*, trans. Gononwy Rees, with an introduction by Max Brod (London: Derek Verschoyle, 1953), 55.