

Introduction

Spinozism: A Source of Enthusiasm

In April 2008, *Le Monde* published an interview with Jean-Luc Marion in which the philosopher and soon-to-be-elected member of the Académie française discussed the enduring fascination with Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77) in modern intellectual life.¹ For Marion, Spinozism's capacity to accommodate a host of positions is its main source of appeal. Reflecting on Henri Bergson's remark that every philosopher in truth has two philosophies, Spinoza's and his own, Marion observes:

One can just as easily become a convinced Spinozist (or a firm opponent) with a materialist and atheistic interpretation of the *Ethics* as with a mystical-religious one. A vitalist interpretation works just as well as a logicist one, a scientific and modern interpretation just as well as one that makes it Neoplatonist, Jewish, or even Christian. You start to suspect that Spinozism accompanies the philosophy of each philosopher precisely because it is not a philosophy itself but an ideological complement to all, the refuge of faith for nonbelievers.

Marion is struck that a philosophical system committed to exposing "our irrepressible need for ideology" can nourish so many ideological abuses. "It is above all the *Ethics*," he says, "in its ahistorical extraterritoriality, its splendid abstraction and its unbridled ambition, that fascinates us because it poses the question of the power and limits of philosophy itself." But Marion wonders whether going to such extremes does not end up revealing philosophy's limits as an enterprise. "Spinoza can disappoint his reader because he leaves him suspecting that philosophy doesn't have the means for its own ambition. But he delights the thinker because he keeps intact

all of his ambitions for philosophy, even the imprudent ones.” In the end, Spinozism posits a transgressive role for rational thought, “an irrational belief in reason” that makes philosophy itself an object of quasi-theological affirmation. “Whence the perverse impression that we must believe in the *Ethics*, and that if we don’t, then the *Ethics* itself will explain which mental disorder is preventing us from doing so.”

Marion’s discussion of Spinoza was consistent with the other interviews that appeared under the rubric “Le Monde des philosophes” in the newspaper’s book section throughout 2008. In each instance, the apparent idea was to have a contemporary philosopher speak on a canonical figure with whom he or she had, if not an antagonistic relationship, at the very least a fraught or conflicted one. For example, André Glucksmann, the author of a series of antitotalitarian polemics in the 1970s, had been asked to discuss Plato, a conversation that found its counterpoint the next month when the arch-Platonist Alain Badiou set his sights on Aristotle.² The editorial decision to solicit Marion’s views on Spinoza was particularly inspired, not simply because Marion has long been recognized as France’s leading expert on Descartes, a familiar target of Spinozistic criticisms, but also because of his status as arguably the preeminent living inheritor of the phenomenological tradition in France.³ *Le Monde’s* choice was serendipitous for this book as well, since it resulted in an interview that clarified its core thesis at a time when it was still very much a work in progress. In their elegant simplicity, Marion’s comments not only manifested a set of irreconcilable differences between phenomenology and Spinozism; they also made clear that those differences resulted from a fundamental disagreement about the value of rationalism as a philosophical ethos.

By insisting on Spinozism’s core liability as one of transgression, a failure to respect the limits of rational thought, Marion lent his remarks a striking historical resonance. Despite their casual delivery, his censures recapitulated those Immanuel Kant leveled against Spinozism in the pages of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1786. Responding to suggestions that his own philosophy would lead, like Spinozism, to the ruin of morality, Kant insisted that whereas Spinoza claimed to possess knowledge of “supersensible objects,” such as God, “the *Critique* completely clips dogmatism’s wings.”⁴ For Kant, the value of the “rational faith” on offer in his philosophy was that it did not mistake itself for knowledge, a value that was especially clear when counterpoised to Spinoza’s demonstrative insistence on

the role of determinant necessity throughout existence. Against Spinoza's rationalist conviction, rational faith in God, the source of morality, was a matter of presupposition, not demonstration. With its claims about God arranged in the manner of a geometrical proof, Spinoza's philosophy resulted in an enthusiasm or *Schwärmerei* of reason to rival if not exceed the fanaticism of religious zealots.⁵

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in name and principle, led to a decisive shift in European intellectual history, a "Copernican Revolution" in his famous phrase, whereby reason itself became the object of critique rather than the unproblematic source of metaphysical speculation or empirical inquiry. The critique of reason assumed many guises in the nineteenth century, from Marx's historico-political approach to Darwin's naturalism on to Nietzsche's "transvaluation of all values." It was only with the political catastrophes of the twentieth century, however, that the philosophical rejection of rationalism acquired a new ethical and political force. Faced with Nazism, Stalinism, and imperialism, any historical confidence in reason's beneficent role seemed misplaced. What's more, the critique of rationalism spanned the left and right of the political spectrum, from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Michael Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics*. In all cases, an overweening confidence in reason and its capacity to divine some truth about the world, or to introduce some true order into the world, seemed to verify Kant's concerns about Spinozistic *Schwärmerei* and its deleterious moral and political effects.

In France, the main vehicle for the critique of reason was the reception and reworking of German phenomenology over a period of decades, from the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre to the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. Consequently, when France's leading phenomenologist reiterates the critique of Spinozism in the pages of *Le Monde*, he evokes something more than Kant's foundational concerns. His comments are also reflective of the manner in which Spinozism and phenomenology came to be regarded as antagonistic approaches to philosophy in France. Over the past decade, a series of major studies has established phenomenology's crucial role in the innovations of twentieth-century French thought, placing particular emphasis on the impact of Martin Heidegger's existential and ontological reconfiguration of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Much of this history has focused on how phenomenology was re-

shaped—or indeed deconstructed—by a French engagement that sought to decouple the method from the nefarious implications of Heidegger’s indulgence in Nazism in order to salvage it as the basis for a contemporary philosophical ethos and ethics.⁶ This book is a history of a countervailing strand of development in which a series of French thinkers sought to salvage rationalist philosophy from its phenomenological denigration by reconfiguring it in Spinozist terms. In their view, the travesties of modern life were not instances of rationalism run amok; they were instead consequent upon a dearth of rationalism, to the profit of myth. For the Spinozists discussed in this book, phenomenology was likewise a stimulus to thought: a negative stimulus.

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Louis Althusser deployed military metaphors often and would no doubt have recognized that this book seeks to intervene on two fronts. First, it participates in the resurgence of interest in Spinoza’s philosophy in contemporary scholarship, a diverse enthusiasm that runs from Jonathan Israel’s promotion of Spinoza as the theoretical progenitor of democratic modernity to various “new materialisms” that find in Spinoza’s metaphysics the resources for an emancipatory politics of affect.⁷ Second, the narrative that follows aims to develop a fuller picture of twentieth-century French intellectual history, one that builds on the scholarship that has established the reception of phenomenology as the main arc in the story.

In addition to highlighting the central role of philosophy, one further consequence of this recent work has been to confirm what has long been recognized, if not explicitly thematized: “French Theory” is best regarded as a transatlantic if not global entity rather than a French one. In other words, the history of French Theory is a history that took place mainly outside France’s borders in a variety of cultural and disciplinary contexts in the Anglophone world.⁸ What this means is that the history of French Theory is not strictly commensurable with the history of philosophical and theoretical developments that were later disseminated under that name. In this regard, the emphasis on the local reception of phenomenology in France has yielded a more accurate historical picture of this body of thought in its original formulation, insofar as we understand historical accuracy here to mean correlating as closely as possible to what the subjects in question understood themselves to be doing. It is often remarked, for

example, that the French make no distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism, the former term alone sufficing to name a gamut of critical interrogations of philosophy and the human sciences that dominated French intellectual life in the 1960s and, to an extent, into the 1970s.⁹ In the American history of French Theory, the famous 1966 Johns Hopkins symposium “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” which included presentations from such luminaries as Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes, began as an episode in the reception of structuralism and ended with the advent of poststructuralism.¹⁰ The turning point occurred when Derrida presented his famous deconstruction of the elements of “play” in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s otherwise austere formalism. Events such as this established the initial terms of intelligibility for Derrida abroad, presenting him as a thinker concerned mainly with the vicissitudes of structuralist poetics.¹¹ Recent work has made clear, however, at least until the next wave of revisionism, that Derrida is best understood as a philosopher, one responding to the challenges inherent in the phenomenological enterprise.¹²

None of this is to deny that there was something called “structuralism” in France or that it unified a variety of theoretical projects. But the picture of the 1960s as a moment when structuralism burst onto the scene to render existentialism obsolete, only to be replaced in turn by a post-structuralism in which leading figures of existentialism—Nietzsche and Heidegger chief among them—reemerged in a more theoretically sophisticated light is too crassly Hegelian in its form to be satisfactory. Much as recent work has established the roots of deconstruction in a longer story of phenomenology’s reception, this book provides a different view of the genealogy of structuralism by focusing on the rationalist resistance to phenomenology that reached its pinnacle in the 1960s with the philosophical projects of Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. To be sure, the postwar introduction of linguistic formalism into the human sciences, from anthropology to psychoanalysis, was a transformative moment in twentieth-century French thought. But one of the main implications of this book is that this formalism acquired the purchase it did because it resonated with the insights of a rationalism rooted in the initial French response to phenomenology in the interwar years.¹³

Here, some preliminary questions insist: Isn’t France’s native son René Descartes typically regarded as the father of modern rationalism? And did Paul Ricoeur not identify a “latent rationalism” as “one of the

fundamental springs of Husserl's thought?"¹⁴ In a sense, this book uses "rationalism" as a term of art, although it joins others in emphasizing the extent to which structuralism as a diverse theoretical phenomenon was grounded in a more basic philosophical rationalism, the lineaments of which are beginning to come into view.¹⁵ As an investment in rationalism as an ethos—understood as a commitment to the capacity of reason, however it is conceived, to supervene on the spontaneous insights of lived experience—becomes a more clearly discernible trait of modern French thought, developing a fuller and more nuanced account of that rationalism becomes a more urgent task.

The traits that distinguish Spinozist rationalism from Cartesian rationalism are of special importance to what follows; an ongoing debate about the distinction is in fact one of the central threads of the story. For Husserl certainly did consider his phenomenology to be a new kind of rationalism, and he readily claimed Descartes' patronage by naming the lectures in which he introduced phenomenology to a French audience the "Cartesian Meditations." But Husserl's choice of title also indirectly points to the significance of Spinozism. For phenomenology was quickly assimilated to a Cartesian framework in France, which meant that it became a matter of focusing on the phenomenon of subjectivity and a subject's encounter with, or embeddedness in, the world. A Spinozist rationalism, by contrast, refused the notion of a "subject"—the *cogito* of Descartes' immortal phrase "I think therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*)—as the starting point for philosophy. Ricoeur helps us specify our terms here as well in his description of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism as a "Kantianism without a transcendental subject."¹⁶ The demotion of the subject to a consequence of other, more fundamental forces, rather than a founding instance, is one of the unifying themes of postwar French thought, common to projects as disparate as Althusser's Marxism and Levinas's ethics. At issue is whether those anterior processes or forces are in principle amenable to a rational elucidation, however abstract or incomplete. A Spinozist thinks they are.

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The specific ways in which Spinoza's rationalism came to be regarded as an antidote to phenomenology is the stuff of what follows. It should be noted, however, that readers seeking a comprehensive account of twentieth-century French Spinoza scholarship—there must be a few—

will appreciate that such is not the aim of this inquiry. Like any canonical figure, Spinoza has garnered a more or less continuous stream of attention since the institutionalization of academic philosophy in the late modern period, and twentieth-century France is no exception to a trend that spans multiple national cultures. Key figures include Sylvain Zac and Robert Misrahi, both of whom published important assessments in the postwar period that focused on Spinoza's moral and religious writings, precisely those aspects of his thought overlooked in the reception that is the focus here.¹⁷ And while Léon Brunschvicg, a towering figure of Third Republic philosophy, plays an important role in what follows, his contemporary Victor Delbos, who authored two major studies of Spinoza, receives no attention.¹⁸ The most striking absence to readers familiar with the field will be Alexandre Matheron, whose book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* is often cited alongside Gueroult and Deleuze's major studies as helping to usher in a "Spinoza Renaissance" in France at the end of the 1960s.¹⁹

The issue of genre partly explains these omissions. With the possible exception of Martial Gueroult, none of the authors covered in this book could be regarded as "Spinoza specialists." Rather, they are thinkers for whom aspects of Spinoza's thought played an instrumental role in their own projects. Beyond the specialists, however, it will also be noted that there is no engagement with the works of Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, or Antonio Negri, the Italian Marxist whose writings on Spinoza came to form a core component of contemporary French Spinozism.²⁰ The rationale for neglecting these important figures is at once historical and theoretical. In the first place, it's true that, following upon the open secret of Spinoza's importance to Althusser and his students, the near-simultaneous publication of Gueroult, Matheron, and Deleuze's studies helped bring about an efflorescence of political engagements with Spinoza's thought that persists in France to this day.²¹ The intensity of this shift alone marks it as the beginning of a separate story, although the sheer volume of scholarship it has generated would also make writing an intelligible history of this contemporary period very difficult. More important is the genuine transformation in the content of Spinozism that accompanies this turn and that points to the substantive reasons for terminating the inquiry at this point. For it is only after 1968 that Spinoza's political writings and the later sections of the *Ethics*, containing his writings on affect and emotion, begin to merit wider attention in France. Zac's works notwithstanding, prior to

1968 Spinoza is a rationalist metaphysician and epistemologist. The relevant texts of his corpus are the first two books of the *Ethics*, containing his foundational metaphysics of substance and his theory of the mind or soul, and his incomplete early writing, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, a popular text for French philosophy exams due to its incomplete nature and its status as a foil to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.

To be sure, Spinoza's other writings begin to get a hearing largely because of the success with which Althusser and Deleuze reestablished his philosophical importance. But the tools that Althusser and Deleuze used to do this were inherited from a previous generation of thinkers who first used Spinoza's rationalism to combat the influence of phenomenology in philosophy of science and the history of philosophy as a discipline. Beginning with the foundational work of Jean Cavailles, the first three chapters tell the story of how and why Spinozism came to be seen as a privileged intellectual resource for demonstrating the nominally "irrationalist" tendencies of phenomenology. Specialists in early modern metaphysics may be familiar with Ferdinand Alquié and Martial Gueroult as authors of seminal works on Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Malebranche. And although Cavailles is beginning to procure an intrepid readership keen to understand the role played by the philosophy of mathematics in recent French thought, his student Jean-Toussaint Desanti has garnered scarcely any attention beyond the hexagon.²² By and large, these philosophers remain unknown quantities to an Anglophone audience. Consequently, the chapters that detail the uses of Spinozism in their thought also serve as more general introductions to their ideas and projects.

The second part of the book looks at the ways that two very familiar thinkers, Althusser and Deleuze, deepened and began to develop the broader implications of this work. In this regard, their efforts form the hinge that connects the history recounted in this book with contemporary Spinozism. But their efforts were not the same effort, and the discrepancies between the transformations they wrought in Spinozism have had lasting effects.

With Althusser, we witness the ne plus ultra of a rationalist resistance to phenomenology. To be sure, Marxism serves as the terrain on which Althusser will draw his line in the sand, but the substance of his argument is consonant with variants of Spinozist rationalism developed elsewhere by Cavailles and Gueroult. Where their concerns were, for lack

of a better word, academic, in Althusser's intransigence we find a rationalist critique of any political thought grounded in phenomenology, an intransigence shaped and politicized to a degree by the negative example of Desanti, an underappreciated figure in the development of Althusser's thought. In breaking with various precedents internal to French Marxism, Althusser's intransigence paves the way to the theoretical exhaustion of Marxism as a positive political platform, to the extent that it offers no constructive, much less programmatic, guidance for a transformative political agenda. As an alibi for his bravura, Althusser liked to cite Lenin's remark that when a stick has become warped, sometimes excessive force is required to straighten it out.²³ I want to suggest that, in applying this force, he broke the stick. But given that the stick in question was an eschatological Marxism, the results were eminently salutary. For if it was mainly a series of historical events that steered French intellectuals away from Marxism into various "post-Marxisms,"²⁴ it was Althusser's theoretical project that brokered a significant reworking of Marxism among intellectuals reluctant to jettison the Marxist tradition altogether—not just theoretically but politically. In other words, if Althusser's Marxism was a "failure," it was a glorious one. Philosophically robust, it ushered in a variety of projects, acting as an inspiration in some cases and a provocation in others.²⁵

With Deleuze, the story is different. Whereas Althusser endowed Spinozism with a political valence that was thoroughly negative and anti-programmatic, Deleuze fundamentally transformed the philosophical meaning of Spinozism in the French context and, more than any other thinker, ushered in the vitalist Spinoza—the Spinoza of affect—that has become the dominant Spinoza in the humanities today. Deleuze's place at the end of this inquiry is thus not simply a consequence of chronology. Rather, if the guiding thread of this book concerns an antagonism between Spinozism and phenomenology, the ultimate significance of Deleuze is that his metaphysics achieves a synthesis—a disjunctive synthesis, in his vernacular—that finally brings these strands together. Indeed, Deleuze's philosophical project in the 1960s, which culminates in his major work *Difference and Repetition*, is precisely to develop a post-Heideggerian rationalism that does not simply evade Heidegger's critique of metaphysics but accounts for Heidegger's ontology in turn. The resultant system purports to describe a scenario that is more fundamental than Heidegger's fundamental ontology, the "groundless ground" of Spinozan Substance. In Foucault's

oft-cited discussion of an opposition between philosophies of consciousness and of the concept in twentieth-century French thought—an opposition first conceived by Cavailles and later glossed by Elisabeth Roudinesco as Cartesians versus Spinozists—he also suggests his generation saw as its task to overcome this opposition.²⁶ We also know that elsewhere Foucault remarked, in a fawning if no doubt jocular vein, that “perhaps one day the century will be known as Deleuzian.”²⁷ If it was Deleuzian, its philosophical content lay in this reconciliation. This explains, too, why the Spinozism recounted in this book bears a critical relation to contemporary Spinozism. Grounded as much of it is in Deleuze’s thought, Spinozism today contains elements of the very Heideggerianism that was targeted by the Spinozists of a previous generation.²⁸

Making this case, which goes against a prevalent notion that Deleuze is opposed to Heidegger when he is not simply indifferent to him, requires an extensive engagement with the details of Deleuze’s philosophical arguments, just as it requires attention to the care with which Spinoza’s earlier partisans developed their uses of his thought. It might be justly wondered, if Heidegger is an important condition for Deleuze’s thought, then why does he not number among the heroes of Deleuze’s counterhistory of philosophy, one that runs from Duns Scotus, via Spinoza, Hume, and Nietzsche on to Bergson? Here context is key. For even if Deleuze felt “bludgeoned to death” by the history of philosophy as an academic institution,²⁹ the questions and concerns he brought to these unsung heroes were shaped by his quintessentially French philosophical education and the same shock wave of phenomenology that galvanized the rest of his generation. To put it bluntly, Deleuze’s counterhistory of philosophy is something of a red herring, and his own remarks about the acts of ventriloquism that informed his writings in the history of philosophy are perhaps best taken with less salt than his colorful descriptions of philosophical “buggery” might otherwise suggest. It could be that reading Deleuze in this way somehow compromises his singularity. But this seems a small price to pay to emphasize his exemplarity. By focusing on Deleuze’s metaphysics, and taking seriously his own lack of compunction in describing what he does as metaphysics, this book contributes to a growing appreciation for the substance, ambition, and depth of Deleuze’s philosophy. To be sure, the “Capitalism and Schizophrenia” project that he coauthored with Félix Guattari remains an important moment in French political thought, one that con-

tinues to pay dividends in a variety of projects. But as Guattari becomes increasingly regarded as the main political force in the pairing, the one who gave political teeth to a metaphysical rethinking of power and desire in dispersed interpersonal terms, Deleuze is acquiring a hearing as a philosopher whose commitment to abstraction is regarded less as a liability than a source of theoretical fecundity far beyond the political fortunes of “desiring machines” and nomadic “lines of flight.”

As for Althusser, to decouple, even for heuristic purposes, his philosophical thought from his political agenda—a move that runs contrary to some of his own pronouncements on the matter—requires a sustained inquiry into his arguments if it is to be justified. If Althusser’s philosophy is irreducible to his Communist commitments, it must be demonstrably so. But such a case is plausible only in light of the renewed hearing that Althusser is receiving today. Indeed, if a reception shift is discernible in estimations of Deleuze, with Althusser the shift is even more dramatic. Multiple reasons account for this change, not least the outpouring of publications from his archive that yield a fuller picture of his intellectual project and its development. The continued importance of the work of his students and collaborators—from Badiou to Balibar—also elevates Althusser’s status. The irony is that as Althusser becomes a more historical figure, his thought becomes more relevant. It also becomes amenable to a more sober assessment, for arguably no other thinker in recent French thought has been as controversial as Althusser. First is the defining tragedy of his personal life: the murder of his wife, H el ene Legotien, during a psychotic episode in the autumn of 1980, an event that Althusser describes in harrowing detail in his memoir, *The Future Lasts Forever*. The second factor was his continued allegiance to the French Communist Party (PCF) at a time when its project seemed bankrupt and the deference to Soviet apologetics that his membership implied struck many as unconscionable. Adding insult to injury was the fact that just as Eastern European dissidents were invoking the language of humanism and various other themes of the “early Marx” for their cause, Althusser was targeting humanism as the philosophical enemy. Charges of Althusser’s “Stalinism” are reflective of this context for his reception in the Anglophone world, a context shaped both by a more general notion of “Western Marxism” opposed to the Leninist legacy and a dissidence movement that sought to put paid to the travesty of “really existing socialism.”³⁰

Historical distance has tempered this assessment of Althusser in myriad ways. It has become clear that, if hostile reactions abroad to Althusser's antihumanism are intelligible only in light of the local vicissitudes of a more general crisis of Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s, the gestation of Althusser's ideas on the subject are intelligible only in light of the specific and admittedly insular context in which they developed: the space of post-war French philosophy and the internecine quarrels of French party politics. Recent work has focused on the internal debates of the PCF that shaped Althusser's interventions, and editors of Althusser's posthumous publications have helpfully situated these writings and others in the context of various institutions of French philosophy.³¹ At the summit of these developments is Warren Montag's remarkable *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, which has set a new standard of interpretation for Althusser's work. Montag's title suggests the point: Althusser makes sense and remains relevant only in light of a contextual determination of his thought, one that places it alongside other tendencies and developments in French philosophy. Althusser's Spinozism is no exception in this regard.

As for the calamity of Althusser's personal life, no amount of hand-wringing or schadenfreude would suffice to establish a relationship between this event and Althusser's philosophy. Althusser's lifelong struggle with manic depression is a matter of record, and the facts of the event and its aftermath, which resulted in no trial and Althusser's being committed to a mental hospital for an extensive period, are not disputed. The analysis of Althusser's thought in this book presumes no relation between his ideas and this tragedy, which raises the question of why it is important to bring something up only to insist that is irrelevant. First, and most basically, the endnotes did not seem an appropriate place to speak about H el ene Legotien's death. But if the event is not relevant to the contents of Althusser's thought, it is certainly relevant to the vagaries of its reception. Given that Althusser's reception history is embroiled with his personal biography, in a way that is not the case, for example, with twentieth-century receptions of Spinoza, the key factors of that biography are all relevant for making sense of the initial reception and consequently for the different reception that Althusser is getting today. That he killed his wife is typically the first or second biographical fact that new readers learn about him and fades in relevance for making sense of his thought and commitment to Marxism alongside other biographical factors, for example, his upbringing.

ing in Algeria, his experiences as a foot soldier and prisoner of war, and the particulars of his position as a student and later instructor at the *École Normale Supérieure*.

These biographical factors are certainly germane to understanding the origins of Althusser's political commitments and theoretical investments. But there is a difference between understanding ideas and understanding where they came from, however much the one may illuminate the other. This distinction is operative in this book and leads on to one final rationale for its method and structure, and for its focus on philosophical argument.

Like many disciplines, intellectual history thrives on internal debates about its methodology. That said, it is easily observed that methods tend to become incoherent the moment they become articulated as such. While this book has some "contextualist" elements—contextualist in the dual sense that it considers both how thinkers worked with inherited discourses and how they were responsive to institutional and political pressures (including the pressures of "academic politics")³²—the arguments it pursues are basically "internalist," in the sense that the real drama of this history takes place in the theoretical efforts of the Spinozists in question. This means taking arguments seriously as arguments, irrespective of the ostensible purposes for which they may have been initiated or fashioned.

Not coincidentally, this kind of internalism, which insists that philosophical arguments have an integrity and transmissibility that are irreducible to their context, biographical motives, or strategic purposes, also has its own Spinozist imprimatur, for few philosophers in the canon are as ahistorical as Spinoza. Indeed, this was Hegel's fundamental grief against Spinoza, whose most pointed injunction was to see things "under the aspect of eternity." Writing the intellectual history of Spinozism thus results in a dilemma. The dilemma is not so much that historicizing Spinoza's ideas necessarily betrays them, for there are many ways to historicize. One way, the one Jonathan Israel has pursued in his gargantuan history of the Radical Enlightenment, is to take Spinoza's word as gospel and to catalogue its dissemination. Another way is to regard Spinoza's ideas as exemplary of a recurrent challenge to orthodoxy, one that needs to be either resisted or endorsed wherever it arises.³³ Still another is to treat Spinozism as a kind of floating signifier that serves as a vehicle for various ideological commitments. The more sophisticated versions of this approach—such as

the one Marion flirts with—ground this pliability in Spinoza’s ostensibly monistic metaphysics; if everything is in everything else, then Spinozism can mean anything—because it all means the same thing in the end.

This book takes its subjects’ philosophical engagement with Spinoza very seriously. In fact, it considers this engagement to be the substance of the history in question. The philosophers under consideration here spent the lion’s share of their professional lives thinking, so to write the history of what they were doing is to write the history of their thinking. This requires using the available means of the historical record—correspondence, institutional data, private notes, and public performances—but it means focusing mainly on the texts in which their ideas took form and were expressed. But to take this thinking seriously also requires that it be approached sympathetically rather than skeptically or, to put it even more emphatically, enthusiastically rather than suspiciously. It means taking seriously a conviction shared by all the protagonists of this volume—that in the end philosophical arguments are regarded as persuasive not because they seem useful but because they seem right.

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Here, however, we alight on the driving tension of the narrative: the desire nevertheless to derive something useful from a philosophy that seems to be correct. For with the exception of the dispute between Alquié and Gueroult, which serves as a kind of abstract distillation of the philosophical disagreement at the heart of the story, each valorization of Spinozist rationalism is accompanied by a problematic attempt to generate a politics out of this rationalism. In the case of Cavallès, the effort to derive a politics is not his own but that of his theoretical inheritors. With Desanti, it is more properly speaking the struggle between Spinozism and phenomenology that plays a role in his shifting political convictions. Althusser’s effort has been noted, but in regard to Deleuze, suffice it to say that, prior to his collaboration with Guattari, the political implications of his arguments were by and large held in abeyance or obscurely encoded in his arguments. Taken together, what these episodes suggest is that using Spinozism to identify the troubling political consequences of phenomenology—which are deemed to be consequential to its philosophical inconsistencies—winds up producing no positive alternative of its own. The consequence of this follows in an almost syllogistic way. If Spinozism is regarded by

these thinkers as the most compelling rationalism available, and if it generates no politics, it suggests that a compelling rationalism is not equipped to generate a politics. What it is especially well equipped to do, evidently, is to reveal the problems that result from any effort to derive a politics from a philosophy, especially but not exclusively, when that philosophy is a phenomenological ontology. Continental philosophy has been bridled for several generations by efforts to comprehend how such a gripping philosophy—Heidegger’s—could be complicit with such troubling ends. Shielding the insights of Heidegger’s thought from political instrumentalization has consequently become something of an imperative.³⁴ Yet when it comes to Spinozism, it is evidently unnecessary to shield philosophy from its political instrumentalization; the philosophy does it for us.

This claim must seem bizarre in light of the proliferation of Spinozisms today, with their variously liberal and emancipatory inflections. It seems to be a lesson one can draw from the philosophical efforts recounted in this book all the same. To argue that Spinoza’s rationalism—his metaphysics and epistemology as they were understood in this specific context—entails no politics is not to suggest that Spinoza did not write many cogent things about politics. His political treatises are rightly acquiring the place in the history of political thought they deserve.³⁵ But it is to suggest that Spinoza’s philosophy can be used to undermine the pretensions of any mode of political thought that seeks a metaphysical foundation—even if that metaphysics is Spinoza’s. Such a formulation no doubt tests the boundaries between the paradoxical and the obnoxious, and there is little to be gained in attempting to justify it in advance. Kant shunned Spinozism because it “leads directly to enthusiasm.” Consequently, his critique erected roadblocks to a concept of reason that “transgresses all boundaries” in search of a shortcut to the absolute. It is ironic, then, that the history of Spinozism suggests the virtues of a more circuitous route. Perhaps this is what Spinoza himself meant when, following upon scores of definitions, axioms, and digressions, he concluded his *Ethics* with the proposition that “beatitude is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself.”³⁶