
Towards the Future of Spinoza Studies

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1 The Contemporary Scene

It is a pleasure to contribute to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Spinoza Studies*. I congratulate the founding editors and am grateful for their invitation to reflect on an agenda for the future of Spinoza studies. Any agenda is of course merely *an* agenda, a set of preliminary speculations about future paths for research and reflection, one reader's sense of possibilities after peregrinations in the field. The 400th anniversary of Spinoza's birth and the 350th anniversary of his death approach, and the history of Spinoza reading is long.

Modest aspirations are perhaps especially appropriate in view of the vitality and variety of contemporary Spinoza studies. Spinoza's books and correspondence now attract readers whose efforts range from deciphering his thought to exploring its insights in conjunction with other fields. Pierre Macherey observes that Spinoza's thought is "actual"—alive and current—in three ways. Two are directly visible: Spinoza's philosophy as it is "actually read and worked on, that is, studied for itself," and as it resonates "with the singular preoccupations of each time," that is, as it is frequently revived and revisited. The third emerges more indirectly, because Spinoza's "problems" and "concepts, independently of every explicit citation continue to accompany other forms of thought," sometimes even in the apparent absence of their author. The paradigmatic case of this third life and current actuality is Spinoza's "unusual place" in 18-19th century European philosophy, where he is "simultaneously present, perhaps even central, and relatively ignored."¹ In these three ways, Spinoza's thought can generate critical reflection and creativity.

1 Pierre Macherey, "In a Materialist Way," in *Selected Essays by Pierre Macherey*, ed. Warren Montag, trans. Ted Stolze (New York: Verso, 1998), 125; Omri Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), for example, presents Kant as an instance of this complex relationship.

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Across these actualities, variety reigns. Among those who study Spinoza's thought for itself, the Spinozas are many, some the products of rational reconstruction, others more contextualist. Among contextualist historians, we find Spinozas influenced by Catholic and/or Protestant Scholastic philosophy, Descartes and Dutch Cartesianism, Hobbes, medieval and Renaissance Judaeo-Islamic thought, Machiavelli, Stoicism, classical republicanism, Epicureanism, forms of Neoplatonism, kabbalah of one kind or another, various Protestant Christianities, and/or contemporaneous Dutch politics, culture, and legal theory. These are all part of today's scene. Contemporary readers encounter Spinoza the atheist or pantheist; materialist (even New Materialist) or German idealist; oriented by essences or oriented by power; driven by the principle of sufficient reason or not; liberal-democratic or proto-Marxist. The fascinating and complex reception history of Spinoza, namely, the way his texts and ideas persevere in, through, and as a great many variations, has become a rich field of study,² and the list of conjunctions, including what Tracie Matysik has termed "Spinoza-inflected theoretical fields,"³ is ever-expanding. Scholars working in contemporary metaphysics, neuro-psychology, economics, environmental thought, feminist theory, Buddhist philosophy, cultural studies, affect theory, psychoanalysis, urban studies, geography, and social and political theories across the spectrum find him provocative and useful, even indispensable. It is possible to encounter Spinoza, variously, through his non-teleological and non-anthropocentric account of nature; non-dualistic account of thinking, embodiment, and affectivity; theory of imagination; notion of *conatus*; idea of freedom without volition; ideas of communication and relationality; or political reflections on power, multitudes, and *salus res publica*.

The *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* notes that things, and therefore ideas, interact among themselves (§41/G II 16–17), and E1p36 instructs us that "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (G II 77). Readers skeptical of the proliferation of Spinozas will perhaps recall Spinoza's own view that "Inadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as

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- 2 Some recent works in this library include Pierre-François Moreau & Mogens Lærke, "Spinoza's Reception," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 405–443. doi: [10.1017/9781316156186.012](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316156186.012); Mogens Lærke, "French Historiographical Spinozism, 1893–2018: Delbos, Gueroult, Vernière, Moreau," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28, no.3 (2020):653–672. doi: [10.1080/09608788.2019.1636199](https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2019.1636199) and "Les Études Spinozistes aux États-Unis: Spinoza et le Principe de Raison Suffisante ("PSR" en Anglais), Représentations, Concepts, Idées," in "Bulletin de bibliographie spinoziste XXXVI," *Archives de Philosophie* 77, no.4 (2014): 722–725; Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Pina Totaro, "Études Récentes sur les *Œuvres Postumes* de Spinoza," (unpublished manuscript, 2015); Wiep van Bunge, Henri Krop, Piet Steenbakkers, and Jeroen van de Ven, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2014); Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Daniel Schwartz, *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); David Wertheim, *Salvation through Spinoza: A Study of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ze'ev Levy, *Baruch Spinoza: seine Aufnahme durch die jüdischen Denker in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001); Olivier Bloch, *Spinoza au XXe Siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1993); Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- 3 Tracie Matysik, "Writing the History of Spinozism," *History and Theory* 55, (2016): 401–417. doi: [10.1111/hith.10818](https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10818), 417.

adequate, or clear and distinct ideas” (E2p36/G II 117). Whatever we make of the different interpretations, judging some to resonate clearly with the texts and classifying others as distant variations, nature produces everything, and readers make their judgments. As a result, readings and interpretations of all kinds happen. Have we reached the peak of Spinoza and Spinozism(s)? I doubt it. If Spinoza lived in the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic, we live in a Golden Age of Spinoza and Spinozisms.

What, then, does the field need? Let me begin with a few observations about constructive features of the field since the late 1980s—that is, within my academic memory—and why they merit our ongoing energy and care. My vantage point is mainly the North American academy, and my wishes to a significant degree reflect the commitments of a contextualist historian.

First and foremost, Spinoza studies has been an internationalized field and can become more so.⁴ The landmark 1986 Chicago Spinoza conference organized by Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau gathered scholars from North America, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Israel, and Australia.⁵ Since then, the strongest connections have been between Anglophone and Francophone readers, both among more traditional historians of philosophy and among scholars influenced by figures such as Gilles Deleuze and Louis Althusser.⁶ We can move beyond these geographic and linguistic communities, and not simply by exporting Euro-American models of scholarship and interpretive agendas. Spinoza studies is flourishing in, among other countries, Argentina and Brazil,⁷ and recent conferences have brought together scholars from the global south and north. Without reifying the categories “north-south” or “east-west,” these kinds of contacts can grow and will undoubtedly enrich our thinking. The covid pandemic has increased the number of international online conferences; as much as many of us prefer in-person gatherings, removing the

4 Cf. Moreau and Lærke: “It is hardly possible today to speak in any clear-cut way about the current reception of Spinoza in terms of national traditions in the way one could in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or even twentieth century,” Moreau and Lærke, “Spinoza’s Reception,” 437.

5 The papers from that conference appeared in Edwin M. Curley and Pierre-François Moreau, eds., *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference* (Leiden: Brill, 1990). Other examples of the international style in Spinoza studies are Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails, *Spinoza and the Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1986) and the volumes of the Jerusalem “Spinoza by Year 2000 project” directed by Yirmiyahu Yovel. Margaret D. Wilson, “History of Philosophy in Philosophy Today; and the Case of the Sensible Qualities Source,” *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (1992): 191–243 comments more generally on the internationalization of scholarship in early modern philosophy.

6 Stetter and Ramond capture current Anglo-French dialogues, see Jack Stetter and Charles Ramond, eds., *Spinoza in Twenty-First-Century American and French Philosophy: Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind, Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). For students of Spinoza’s politics, exchanges with Italian readers, e.g. Antonio Negri and Vittorio Morfino, have been important, but the Marxist tradition is but one of the traditions of Italian Spinoza scholarship. It is also the case that not all national traditions have received similar engagements. Despite the powerful influence of the 18-19th century German Spinoza reception, 20th century and contemporary German scholarship, with the notable exceptions of works by Leo Strauss, Manfred Walther, Wolfgang Barthuschat, and Ursula Renz, has had a smaller audience in the Anglophone world. Similarly, Dutch and Flemish Spinoza scholarship remains puzzlingly under-appreciated. Scholarly readers are familiar with the philological and editorial work of Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkers. The scholarship of Wiep Van Bunge, Henri Krop, Theo Verbeek, and Michiel Wielema deserves a wider readership, as does recent work by, among others, Albert Gootjes, Sonja Lavaert, Jetze Touber, and Dirk Van Miert.

7 To name but a few scholars, Marilena de Souza Chauí, Lia Levy, and Jimena Solé.

obstacle of travel costs can immediately link and expand our scholarly communities. Along these same lines, the impact of decolonial approaches to the histories of philosophy is only beginning to be felt. Spinoza's own entanglement in colonial projects has been the subject of some scholarly attention. We can go further in asking what Spinozan philosophy offers—and does not offer—to readers beyond the usual northern Euro-Atlantic contexts and what new comparative work will show us.

Second, Spinoza studies has been a test case for canon change in the Anglosphere. Once nearly invisible, then a marginal figure and eventually a specialist interest among scholars of early modern European philosophy, Spinoza is now nearly everywhere in North American journals, conferences, and departments. The number of monographs steadily increases. Edited volumes for specialists and non-specialists alike continue to appear.⁸ The “Big Six” of early modern philosophy became the “Big Seven”: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.⁹ For all sorts of reasons, canonicity has an ambivalent status, but there is no question that Spinoza falls within it. A figure of “radical” enlightenment,¹⁰ an ancestor of Freud and the “process of dark enlightenment,”¹¹ a thinker with whom leading figures of the European tradition variously draw on and/or struggle

8 Examples in English from the last decade or so include Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael Rosenthal, *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Beth Lord, *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa, *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Van Bunge et al., *Bloomsbury Companion*; Kiarina Kordela and Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Spinoza's Authority Volume I: Resistance and Power in Ethics*, and *Spinoza's Authority Volume II: Resistance and Power in the Political Treatises* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017); Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza's Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Beth Lord, *Spinoza's Philosophy of Ratio* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *A Companion to Spinoza* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

9 See Bruce Kuklick, “Seven Thinkers and How They Grew: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant,” in *Philosophy in History*, eds. Richard Rorty, Jerome B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 125–39. The absence of Hobbes from the original list shows the field's emphasis on metaphysics and epistemology and the Kantian flavor of the whole story. On Spinoza as the seventh member of the early modern list and Hobbes as an eighth, Michael Beaney, “Twenty Years of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2013): 1–12. doi: 10.1080/09608788.2013.757945. On the shifting fortunes of the history of philosophy and early modern philosophy in particular in analytically-oriented philosophy departments in the United States, see Wilson, “History of Philosophy.” A detailed historiography of Spinoza studies in the Anglophone world from Edwin Curley's *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) to the present boom remains a desideratum. Laerke, “Les Études Spinozistes,” tells part of the story. In addition to the many books and articles that followed Curley's work and the landmark 1986 Chicago conference, the many seminar conferences in early modern philosophy (originated by Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler as the Midwest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy) have played a very important role in securing the place of Spinoza studies.

10 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

11 “Dark enlightenment” is Yirmiyahu Yovel's name for the process that “provoked a sharp awakening from religious and metaphysical illusions, incurring pain and conflict in its wake. For it challenged accepted self-images and enshrined cultural identities, and thereby endangered a whole range of vested psychological interests. But for these very reasons, it was also a movement of emancipation, serving to inspire a richer and more lucid self-knowledge in man, even at the price of unflattering consequences which often shock and dismay” (Yovel, *Spinoza*, 136).

against, sometimes openly, sometimes implicitly, Spinoza has been brought into the academic establishment. Susan James imagines the situation in urban terms:

The history of philosophy is like a city. Epochs of frenetic activity are followed by periods of stagnation; philosophical movements, like neighborhoods, come in and out of fashion; and within them individual philosophers rise and fall. During the last few years, accompanied by a little restoration and town planning, Spinoza has become a more prominent feature of the philosophical cityscape. He appears in the equivalents of tourist guides, archival publications, architectural monographs and local fiction, and there is even a movement to make him a heritage site.¹²

Modern translations of Spinoza's works by Samuel Shirley, Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, Matthew Kisner, and, most importantly, Edwin M. Curley have been essential to this process.¹³ It is impossible to overestimate the significance of Curley's translations (together with his scholarly annotations), which made Spinoza widely available in a philosophically sophisticated and consistent English. All of us who philosophize with Spinoza in English—Spinozise?—are in debt to his erudite and generous labor. Equally we are immensely indebted to the editors, translators, and annotators whose labor is providing us, under the direction of Pierre-François Moreau, with a new critical edition of Spinoza's works. Leen Spruit and Pina Totaro brought the Vatican manuscript to print.¹⁴ For many of us, Emilia Giancotti's *Lexicon Spinozanum* remains a landmark.¹⁵ Spinoza's entry into the mainstream of scholarship in early modern philosophy has produced a set of contextual and canon challenges: once viewed mostly as a Cartesian epigone, Spinoza can now be read in dialogue with a host of figures in the medieval, Renaissance, and early modern archive. How Spinoza studies will evolve in dialogue with newer projects of canon change among historians of philosophy, such as the New Narratives project,¹⁶ which emphasizes the recovery of works by women and reverses the history of racist exclusions, and Peter Adamson's *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps* project, which offers an increasingly global vision of philosophy in its various forms, remains to be seen. Rethinking the *histories* of philosophy in its various forms and expanding our libraries will introduce not only new thinkers, but new issues, questions, conceptual resources, and narratives. Spinoza can never be all things to all readers, but our sense of Spinoza's thought will likely shift as our ideas of what philosophy itself might be expand. The New Narratives project, for example, has

12 Susan James, "Why Should We Read Spinoza?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 78, (2016): 109–125, 109.

13 There are modern translations into French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hebrew, Persian, and perhaps other languages as well. WorldCat shows translations of Spinoza into Arabic, Chinese, Japan, and Korean, but I am not certain whether some of the items are new translations or reprints. On the recent history of translating Spinoza in Iran, see Sina Mirzaei, "The Reception of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Philosophies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 1–18. doi: [10.3390/philosophies6020042](https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies6020042).

14 Leen Spruit and Pina Totaro, *The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza's Ethica* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

15 Emilia Giancotti, *Lexicon Spinozanum* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

16 "New Narratives in the History of Philosophy" is led by Lisa Shapiro (Simon Fraser University), Marguerite Deslauriers (McGill University), and Karen Detlefsen (University of Pennsylvania) and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The New Narratives group collaborates widely with scholars in and beyond North America who are also working on canon change and expansion.

reinvigorated discussions of social and personal freedom and the philosophy of education. Each of these is a rich topic in Spinoza's thought.

Finally, Spinoza's many friends have made for a fairly pluralistic academic community. Early members of the North American Spinoza Society will recall its small numbers and the correlative need for camaraderie. Helped by the secure place of early modern European philosophy in the contemporary university curriculum, Spinoza studies has grown as a subfield and counts among its members readers from a wide range of institutions.¹⁷ That said, no field in philosophy, especially no growing field, can escape the profession's habitual divisions, prestige economies and status hierarchies, not to mention the orthodoxies and establishments they produce. Scholarship is shot through with institutional power, and the impediments to curiosity and pluralism are many. Crossing the persistent boundaries of so-called analytic and so-called continental philosophy has enlivened the field. It might be said, too, that historians of philosophy are something of a third camp, neither analytic nor continental, and of course historians themselves are quite methodologically diverse.¹⁸ Likewise, although the Anglophone community of early modern Europeanists has been dominated by readers interested in metaphysics and epistemology, it has also welcomed readers concerned with Spinoza's ethics, politics, and theory of the affects, as well as readers studying his physics and connections to early modern medicine. Despite the popular image of Spinoza as the ultimate systematic rationalist, the most abstract and intellectualist of philosophers, Spinoza the analyst of affects, political events, and socio-political institutions is alive and well.¹⁹ Spinoza readers have moreover made common cause with others interested in thinking outside the boundaries of Cartesian dualism, Christian problematics of free will, teleology and providence, as well as anthropocentrism and the notion of human beings as *imperii in imperio*. For scholars committed to rethinking human embodiment and its relation to thinking, the centrality of imaginative and affective life, politics and institutional design, concepts of relationality, transindividuality, and ideas of human beings as *partes naturae*, Spinoza has been a philosophical forebear and continues to serve as a critical interlocutor.

17 Curricular guarantees are, it must be said, a mixed blessing. Sometimes being viewed primarily in terms of teaching makes our field less autonomous than it might be, especially when old worries about the relationship of history and philosophy prevail.

18 On method in early modern philosophy see the essays collected in Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith and Eric Schliesser, eds., *Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a recent exchange, see Michael Della Rocca, "Interpreting Spinoza: The Real is the Rational," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 523–535. doi: [10.1353/hph.2015.0049](https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0049) and Daniel Garber, "Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 507–521. doi: [10.1353/hph.2015.0045](https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0045). As Garber observes, he and Della Rocca can be said to recapitulate themes from mid-20th century Spinoza debates in France.

19 Recent essays and books by Étienne Balibar, Sandra Leonie Field, Moira Gatens and Genviève Lloyd, Susan James, Frédéric Lordon, Mogens Lærke, Vittorio Morfino, Antonio Negri, Hasana Sharp, Justin Steinberg, and Manfred Walther show the vitality of Spinoza's political philosophy. Filippo del Lucchese's series at Edinburgh University Press, which has provided English translations of the classics of French Spinoza literature (e.g. books by Alexandre Matheron and Pierre-François Moreau) has also been salutary for the field.

2 To What Else, Then, Might We Aspire?

Nearly a century ago, Harry Austryn Wolfson imagined the task for Spinoza readers as “reconstructing the *Ethics* out of scattered slips of paper figuratively cut out of the philosophic literature available to Spinoza.”²⁰ Wolfson’s view of Spinoza’s library was as expansive as his view of Spinoza’s philosophical creativity was constricted. No great philosopher is reducible to fragments torn from other books, and traditional *Quellenforschung* is manifestly a problematic way of reading a thinker so clearly engaged in redefinition, transformation, and innovation. At the other extreme, however, a completely de-contextualized Spinoza is an illegible Spinoza. Spinoza extolled the immediate clarity of Euclid,²¹ yet he painstakingly examined, clarified, and variously reconfigured, rendered untenable or discarded, and reinvented the philosophical languages he inherited. The *Ethics*, like the PPC and the CM, comments on other thinkers, and, like the TTP and the TP, begins *in medias res*.

As the list of Spinozas with which I began this paper suggests, at present we face a strikingly fragmented set of contextualizations and interpretations. As readers, we have brought our own frames of reference and archives to Spinoza’s texts and so produced our versions of his thought. We hope that we are not merely prophets attempting to describe a deity,²² yet it is difficult to gather and assemble our readings. Steven Nadler, surely one of Spinoza’s most erudite readers, cautions that

Among the great, dead philosophers of the early modern period, Baruch Spinoza is perhaps the most deeply fascinating but mysterious and enigmatic of them all. Whether it is due to the sheer difficulty of navigating the “geometric method” and esoteric jargon of his philosophical masterpiece, the *Ethics*; or because so much of his life remains for us in the shadows, given the frustrating lack of extant documentation, the “real” Spinoza seems often to escape us. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Spinoza has also become one of the most mythologized (and even fictionalized) philosophers in history.²³

Historical-hermeneutical challenges of “the ‘real’ Spinoza” notwithstanding, it seems to me that a more synthetic sense of Spinoza’s philosophy is a key desideratum for our field. We need to explore how and to what degree our various Spinozas might coalesce. Seeking a more integrated view of Spinoza’s thought should not force us to construct a perfectly unified—self-consistent and univocal—or a fully transparent Spinoza. Historical figures and their books, even in the case of philosophers we experience as systematic, are frequently quite a bit more complicated and inevitably somewhat opaque. Questions about development and moments of rethinking, genres and audiences,

20 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 3.

21 TTP 7 (C II: 185/G III 111)

22 See, e.g., TTP 2 on Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s incommensurate visions of God’s glory as it left the temple: “Isaiah saw Seraphim with six wings, while Ezekiel saw beasts with four wings. Isaiah saw God clothed and sitting on a royal throne, while Ezekiel saw him as like a fire. There is no doubt that each of them saw God as he was accustomed to imagine him” (C II: 99/G III 34).

23 Steven Nadler, “The Jewish Spinoza.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 3 (2009): 491–510. doi: 10.1353/jhi.0.0044, 491.

the impact of events such as political crises or scientific and technological change, access to books and interlocutors, as well a host of questions about unresolved matters, unthematized questions or tensions, and emergent difficulties in anyone's thinking demand our attention and engage our judgment.

We need, accordingly, both ideas about the central dynamics or axial concerns in Spinoza's thought and a suitably complex, multi-faceted, multi-directional sense of his philosophical activities. There is no reason to think that we must choose between Spinoza the reader of Latin and Spinoza the reader of Hebrew (and Hebrew translations of Arabic texts), let alone the Spanish, Portuguese, and/or Dutch Spinoza. We know, for example, that Spinoza's familiarity with Descartes, Maimonides, and Gersonides comes together in E2p7s;²⁴ similarly Spinoza's formulation of *conatus* puts him in dialogue with Latin- and Hebrew-language predecessors.²⁵ An example from political philosophy might be the intertwining of a Farabian-Maimonidean notion of political prophecy with republican themes in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.²⁶ Rather than pursuing a univocal Spinoza to the exclusion of all others, we can instead attune ourselves to the various engagements and intertexts suggested by his dense, if not always perfectly explicit, networks of reference. Far from being a closed system, the *Ethics* is an open book and opens out to other books.

For similar reasons, there is no need to "choose" between the metaphysical-epistemological Spinoza and the affective, ethical, and political Spinoza. These disciplinary sub-divisions, along with concepts such as systematicity, belong to our vocabulary, not Spinoza's. The five parts of the *Ethics* quite obviously traverse these boundaries, and sticking to them generates insuperable problems: where, precisely, would *Ethics* 5—for those of us who believe in reading it²⁷—fit in such a schema? Likewise, parts of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise* read like a mini-*Ethics*. Scholars have made significant progress in understanding the relationships between Spinoza's early and mature works, and of course the correspondence has been a crucial source of insight, but our discussions of how to conceptualize the relationships of the *Ethics*, the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and the confoundingly unfinished *Political Treatise* need to grow. Given the distinct styles and audiences and the overlapping concerns of these works, much more work is needed to think about their interconnections and how the various works respectively illuminate one another.

Whether this re-thought Spinoza will resemble the familiar picture of the arch-rationalist, systematic philosopher—the Spinoza, say, of the PSR as proposed by Michael Della Rocca or the metaphysician depicted by Yitzhak Melamed—or will emerge as a figure whose interests gather

24 Carlos Fraenkel, "Maimonides' God and Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 2 (2006): 169–215; Julie R. Klein, "Spinoza's Debt to Gersonides," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 24, no. 1 (2003): 19–43.

25 Warren Zev Harvey, "Gersonides and Spinoza on Conatus," *Aleph* 12, no. 2 (2012): 273–297. doi: [10.2979/aleph.12.2.273](https://doi.org/10.2979/aleph.12.2.273); Noa Shein, "Not Wholly Finite: The Dual Aspect of Finite Modes in Spinoza." *Philosophia* 46, (2018): 433–451. doi: [10.1007/s11406-017-9918-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-017-9918-9).

26 Although she does not explore Spinoza's use of medieval views of prophecy, Victoria Kahn notes "the way the narrative of the [*Theologico-Political*] *Treatise* translates Mosaic political theology into Machiavellian civil religion" (Victoria A. Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 134).

27 Compare Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1984), 357. Fortunately, Bennett's judgment has not been widely accepted.

around recognizable interests yet exhibit some irreducible heterogeneity remains to be seen. Different readers will of course reach their own judgments. My own view is that the parts of the *Ethics* rely on different starting points or perspectives and are interconnected but not fully derivable from or reducible to one another. Spinoza's politics, for example, while related to his metaphysics, points to the role of practical rationality; Spinoza emphasizes an imaginative and rational *ars ad concordiam et fidem* and drive for security. As shaped by imagination and human ends, politics is a set of conventions; while it is not a- or un-natural, neither does it follow deductively from claims about Spinozan nature, which in any case vary infinitely and non-teleologically. Gilles Deleuze pictured Spinoza as a sort of irrepressible corpse, the un-dead philosopher who defies easy characterization and appropriation. Having been assigned a prominent place in the succession of Cartesians, Spinoza "bulges out of that place in all directions; there is no living corpse who raises the lid of his coffin so powerfully, crying so loudly, 'I am not one of yours.'"²⁸ For Deleuze, the undead philosopher chiefly resists being assimilated to the history of Cartesianism. For us, that same powerful resistance might apply elsewhere as well. Building another coffin, or to borrow an image Spinoza reflects on, carrying the memory of broken shards and the fantasy of wholeness in a search for the promised land, is not the goal.

As a final desideratum, I suggest that we increase our attention to Spinoza as a philosopher of everyday life. Tempting as it is to focus on Spinoza's vision of freedom and the eternity of the mind, on relations of substance, attributes, and modes, or even on the design of states and institutions, Spinoza is profoundly focused on the path from ordinary to more philosophically-informed experience. The *Ethics* is, after all, an ethics, and Spinoza's moral philosophy, precisely as distinct from traditions oriented by juridical models (whether religious or Kantian) and as a distinctive evocation of Stoic and virtue ethics themes, offers much for our reflection. However, much we aspire to the forms of freedom he describes, we live, he reminds us, "in constant change" (E5p39s/G II 305) and must navigate our ordinary affairs as constructively as possible. Affects, namely "affections of the body" and at the same time "ideas of affections," manifest changes in our power to persevere in existing as emotional experience (E3def3/G II 139). They are a fundamental register of human experience for individuals and collectivities. To the extent that we can understand our affects, resolving some by causal explanation and remedying others with assistive images and maxims that enable us to act as if we understood (E5p10s, p20s), our power to persevere in existing, and so our joy, increases. Becoming philosophical is an education in desire, embodiment, and sociality as well as thinking. Without working through the intricacies and dynamics of human affairs, there is no path to freedom, for individuals or for states. Spinoza's meticulous, searching investigation of human affects, and indeed the logic of affect, with all of its fluctuations and constitutive ambivalences, plays of singularity and sharing (as communication, imitation, and contagion), and, consequently, over-determination, offers us the most concrete Spinoza, the close observer of ordinary life and guide to its transformability.

To be sure, Spinoza's readers, particularly those influenced by Deleuze, by feminism, and/or by psychoanalysis, have done considerable work in clarifying his account of passive, imaginative

28 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 15. Elsewhere Deleuze explains that Spinoza "more than any other gave me the feeling of a gust of air from behind each time you read him, of a witch's broom which he makes you mount" (quoted in Macherey, "Materialist Way, 119).

affects and active, rational, or intellectual affects as ways of living. They have, moreover, shown how affects traverse familiar boundaries of inner and outer, individual and social constitution and experience, and stability and fluidity. How Spinoza studies might interact with new scholarship in the history of affect remains to be seen. Thinking in terms of affect is another way to understand what Spinoza says about physics and cognition, and another way to reconfigure our attachments to teleology, free will, and sovereign selves. It is a perfect laboratory for learning how to think when we conceive nature in terms of power and dynamism. Other commentators have not entirely ignored Spinoza's acuity about emotional life, but it seems somehow still difficult for philosophers to put affect at the center of our study.²⁹ Spinoza, however, assigns it a central position. He is intensely concerned with the feeling of life and our experience of nature's power.³⁰

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29 Some notable recent exceptions include Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: PUF, 1994); Moira Gatens and Genvieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1999); Chantal Jaquet, *L'unité du corps et de l'esprit: Affects, actions, et passions chez Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 2004); Syliane, Malinowski-Charles, *Affects et conscience chez Spinoza: l'automatisme dans le progrès éthique* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2004); Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lisa Shapiro, "Spinoza on Imagination and the Affects," in *Emotional Minds: The Passions and the Limits of Pure Inquiry in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Sabrina Ebbersmayer (Berlin: De Gruyter 2012), 89–104, doi: 10.1515/9783110260922.89; Lilli Alanen, "Spinoza on the Passion and Self-Knowledge: The Case of Pride," in *Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 234–254; Andrea Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Noa Naaman-Zauderer, ed., *Freedom, Action, and Motivation in Spinoza's Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2019). The recently published discussion of hope by Moira Gatens, Justin Steinberg, Aurelia Armstrong, Susan James, and Martin Saar is a perfect illustration of readers from different outlooks focusing on affects. See Moira Gatens, Justin Steinberg, Aurelia Armstrong, Susan James and Martin Saar, "Spinoza: thoughts on hope in our political present," *Contemporary Political Theory* 20, (2021): 200–231. doi: 10.1057/s41296-020-00406-4.

30 This essay has benefitted from the research assistance of Dr. Nikolaus Fogle, Philosophy Librarian at Villanova University, and from the comments of Daniel Garber, Steven Nadler, Heidi Ravven, Eric Schliesser, Noa Shein, and anonymous referees for this journal. All errors and infelicities are of course due to the author alone.

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