MICHAEL MACK

# SPINOZA
## and the SPECTERS of MODERNITY

*The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud*

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All translations are mine if not otherwise indicated.

# Introduction: Spinoza's Alternative Modernity

*Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things?*
*Henry James*, The Portrait of a Lady

This work is a study in religion, literature and cultural theory: it takes its terms of reference from the seventeenth and late eighteenth century in the cultural history of the Enlightenment, but has implications for understanding global politics in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary issues are, however, not the main focus of this book. Neither is this a study in the intellectual background of Spinoza, Herder, Goethe, George Eliot, Rosenzweig and Freud. It engages with key intellectual texts not along the methodological lines of either history or cultural theory but rather reads them as forms of literature. The book is not, however, confined to the study of literature. Neither is it of exclusively historical value. This is what I have in mind when I combine intellectual history with cultural theory: I practice intellectual history that is productive of contemporary thought but the main focus is not the contemporary scene but a literary reading of "past" texts which bring to the fore their present day relevance.

This hybrid methodological approach has important implication for a new understanding of what Spinoza, and in a further intellectual shift of thought, Herder criticizes as societal self-destruction. In related but different ways Spinoza and Herder take issue with a form of self-preservation that is not sustainable and thus turns out to be self-destructive. This concern with sustainability has become an urgent contemporary issue due to certain military, economic and ecological crises which we confront in the present. Reading "past" texts in the context of present-day concerns does not necessarily mean that history transmutes into a work of fiction. On the contrary, it is the very "pastness" of Spinoza's, Herder's, Goethe's and George Eliot's work that makes it relevant for an engagement with present-day issues: it is distinct in its ethical message from the self-destructive practices that shape much of our economical and ecological current situation.

The historical texts discussed in this book have a contemporary relevance precisely because they are not products of our age but are rather distinct from it and in their distinction are thus capable of producing thought which is relevant to rethinking the problems we are facing now.[1] As a discussion of mainly "past" thought this book does not manifest a new cultural theory in its own right but it may contribute to twenty-first century thought—hence its tangential references to Derrida's work on philosophy in times of terror.

1 For a brilliant discussion of this see Jeffrey Andrew Barash's "Why remember the Historical Past," in Günter Fink (ed.) *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik*, Vol. 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) pp. 79–91 (p. 87).

The book draws new theoretical conclusions from a study of Spinoza's legacy in the age of Goethe and beyond, largely transmitted through the writings of Herder. It develops a cultural theory based on that legacy. By legacy I mean the ways in which a person's thought impacts on, rather than merely influences, contemporary thought. In the context of this project it describes how a line of writers and thinkers reconfigured Spinoza's ideas and how these ideas thus became effective in society at large. The legacy of Spinoza is important because he was the first thinker to theorize narrative as the constitutive fabric of politics, identity, society, religion and the larger sphere of culture.

This book takes forward a novel approach toward the study of modern history and cultural theory as first developed in *German Idealism and the Jew*. That work focused on the problematic nature of Kant's autonomy-heteronomy divide. While the Kantian position of an autonomous self is intrinsically liberating, his stark contrast between a free society and one enslaved to 'the goods of this world' has rather violent connotations and implications. Kant's moral philosophy, however, has often come to serve as the foundation for a non-violent, and therefore rational, modern and postmodern sense of European identity. What has been overlooked in this context is Kant's exclusion of societal manifestations that he associates with naturalistic contingency (African societies, Tahitians—whom he equates with cattle in his review of Herder's *Ideas*, as will be discussed in Chapter 6—Jews, Orientals etc.).[2]

For writers who critically confronted this demotion of naturalistic contingency and embodied life (as analyzed in *German Idealism and the Jew*), however, Spinoza's anti-teleological thought became an inspiration for their literary revision of Kant's idealism. The book takes forward the analysis developed in *German Idealism and the Jew* by discussing Spinoza's writings on politics and ethics as an alternative to a Kantian conception of modernity. Spinoza provides the intellectual and historical common ground where the more private

2 Related to this divide between rational or free and irrational or naturalistic communities is Kant's concern with humanity's assumed division into superior and inferior races. Scholars (Robert Bernasconi, among others) have recently shown how Kant was the first to legitimate racism on scientific grounds. (This topic will be discussed in Chapter 7) As John Gray has put it: "It was Immanuel Kant—after Voltaire the supreme Enlightenment figure and, unlike Voltaire, a great philosopher—who more than any other thinker gave intellectual legitimacy to the concept of race. Kant was in the forefront of the science of anthropology that was emerging in Europe and maintained that there are innate differences between the races. While he judged whites to have all the attributes required for progress towards perfection, he represents Africans as being predisposed to slavery, observing in his *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), 'The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling.'" Gray, *Black Mass. Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 61.

realm of literature and the public sphere of the political can meet and interact with each other. Spinozist writing and thought seems to confound binary oppositions, such as the one between private and public.

Here opposites are not fundamental. They do not oppose each other but are complementary to each other. Spinoza's legacy seems to be a ghostly one: it opens up a space where apparently incompatible entities visit each other as if one were haunting the other. The specter whom Marx conjured up in his *Communist Manifesto* (1848) had already made an appearance in the hugely influential *On the Doctrine of Spinoza* (*Über die Lehre des Spinoza*) with which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi provoked the Spinoza controversy in 1785. Jacobi makes clear that he endeavors to put an end to the haunting with which Spinoza's ghost seems to keep Germany enthralled.

What is crucial here is that the haunting in question does its work by confounding clearly defined forms. Revisiting Marx's Specter of 1848, Derrida has recently argued that ghostliness disturbs and disrupts the presence of an identity that purports to be identical to itself. A specter performs this rupture so that one cannot be sure whether its disappearance is not at the same time its appearance: "a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*."[3] Jacobi attempts to turn the indefinable specter of Spinoza into the clearly definable doctrine of Spinoza. What makes him so uneasy about the absence of definition is that it gives rise to undecidability. It is difficult to decide against someone whose image has not been clearly depicted with definite and recognizable features. Jacobi sets out to clarify matters by pinpointing the exact structure and shape of Spinoza's teaching so that it can be opposed.

According to Jacobi only the delineation of a stable form would be capable of preventing the visitation of the ghost Spinoza. "**It would be of great use to publically represent the doctrine of Spinoza in its** true shape [Gestalt] and according to its necessary connections" writes Jacobi.[4] What follows concerns the absence of shape or the confounding of clearly defined entities—in other words, the haunting exerted by the ghost Spinoza:

> **A spectre [Gespenst] has recently been haunting Germany in various shapes (I wrote to Moses Mendelssohn) and it is held by the superstitious and by the atheists in equal reverence . . . Perhaps we will witness some day that an argument will arise over the corpse of Spinoza equal to the one which arose between the archangels and Satan over the corpse of Moses . . .** [bold in the German original].[5]

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3 Derrida, *Specters of Mars. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.

4 Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau, Gottlieb Löwe, 1785), p. 168.

5 Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, p. 168.

Jacobi composes and publishes the writings gathered together in *On the Doctrine of Spinoza* in order to exorcise the persistent impact of a figure that appears to be an anti-Moses of sorts. Whereas the archangels and Satan's argument over the corpse of Moses concerned a clearly defined doctrine, the impending one over the corpse of Spinoza is malicious, because no one can be sure what it is actually about. Significantly, an early eighteenth-century German translation of Johannes Colerus' Spinoza biography associates the Spinozist God with the deleterious impact of a ghost. It may well be that Jacobi enlarges this association of Spinoza's alleged atheism with the haunting of a malicious specter: "If one considers, however, his opinions one concludes that the god of Spinoza is nothing but a fictive Ghost, an imagined god, who is the opposite of God."[6] Countering such deleterious influences, Jacobi endeavors to deprive the corpse of Spinoza of its confounding and haunting power. He does so by giving a clearly defined shape to what Spinoza represents (*Gestalt*). Jacobi constructs Spinoza's *Gestalt* (shape or form) in order to banish Spinoza's *Gespenst* (Specter).

The present book shows how unsuccessful Jacobi's attempt was. Far from having put an end to Spinoza's legacy, Jacobi in fact provoked a controversy that hugely increased the appreciation of the writing, life and thought of the Dutch Jewish philosopher within the public sphere of the late eighteenth century. Indeed Spinoza became the representative for an alternative modernity that differed from the categorical and hierarchical components of Kant's modern moral and political philosophy.

Rather than whole-heartedly embracing the Kantian project of modernity, writers and thinkers in the age of Goethe put Spinoza's concept of self-preservation to creative use by highlighting the self-destruction implicit in the modern quest for unlimited power. Having Spinoza's *conatus* (self-preservation) as their point of intellectual orientation writers and thinkers in the age of Goethe discussed in different but related ways how the emerging increase in human power was accompanied by an erosion of limits toward human self-destruction. They criticized precisely this self-destructive element in a teleological and deterministic narrative of history that demoted the past and cast non-European "primitive" societies as morally debauched and epistemologically retarded.

Spinoza's vision of a non-hierarchical modernity together with its various creative inflections and revisions in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century has particular significance for contemporary political philosophy and cultural theory. The broad findings of the study center on the way in which Spinoza has endured as a major, if not to say, the major inspiration of visions of modernity that are nonexclusive—or, in other words nonideological—and non-hierarchical. The center of analysis is the contemporary relevance of Herder's thought and the creative rereading of Herder's Spinozist historiography in the work of his tutee Goethe as well as in Eliot's proto-Zionist novel

6 Johannes Colerus, *Das Leben des Bened. von Spinoza* (Leipzig: Johann George Loewe, 1736).

*Daniel Deronda*. Herder's "invention" of the concept culture is a creative development of Spinoza's notion of self-preservation (*conatus*).

The book establishes the contemporary relevance of Herder's Spinoza-inspired critique of Kantian teleology in the study of both nature and history. Rather than discuss Herder as a reader of various writers and thinkers (as is commonly done in German influence studies) this study establishes Herder as a philosopher who is capable of enjoying a remarkable contemporary relevance. His relevance consists in his divergence from the standard Enlightenment conception of history as unilateral progress and his reinterpretation of history as diverse. In this account history does not find its fulfillment in a single goal (as is argued in teleological thought).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Spinoza was infamous for having pulled down the hierarchical divide between the realms of the transcendent (God and the mind) and the immanent (Nature and the body). Goethe and his former mentor Herder set out to adapt this Spinozisit undertaking to the changed life world of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They took issue with some tendencies in Enlightenment thought which condemned the historical past to insignificance. A new reading of Herder's writing and thought contributes to an understanding of temporality as a non-hierarchical, gradual development of diversity out of and within a common substance of interconnectedness and interdependence.

This discussion is important because it offers a way out of the self-destructive social set up that drives much of contemporary global policies.[7] The new cultural theory that informs my approach toward the study of modernity is a timely response to what has recently been characterized, in the philosophical analysis of both Islamic fundamentalism and "the war on terror," as autoimmunity or the self-destruction of our contemporary global society. Jacques Derrida in an interview with Giovanna Borradori characterized autoimmune processes as "the strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection"[8] and they thus invariably refer back to their opposite: to the Spinozist theory of self-preservation. These self-destructive processes result from triumphal declarations of moral, epistemological, military and religious superiority of one societal formation over the one which functions as its "enemy." Here clearly the spheres of religion and politics meet in a rather disturbing manner.

## *I*

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Nancy Levene's assessment of Spinoza's oneness with the biblical conception of God, she may have a point in

7 See Gray, *Black Mass*, 73.

8 Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 94.

emphasizing the validity of a Spinozist contribution to the study of religion.[9] The present book, however, does not only discuss Spinoza (as well as thought inspired by Spinoza) in the context of religious studies because it has a much wider reach. In addition to religious studies, it engages with the disciplines of literature, philosophy, history as well as with the political and social sciences.

It is worth emphasizing that Spinoza refuses secular radicalism because he values those aspects that in different forms of religion give rise to ethical actions. This brings us to one of the main wagers of this book; Spinoza introduces a non-hierarchical vision into the conception of modernity. Spinoza does not privilege one religion over another or one ethical system over another, because one of his main endeavors is to do away with privilege and other forms of hierarchical rankings—be it between reason and revelation or between different ethnic and/or religious groups. As Levene has put it,

> unlike many of Spinoza's medieval precursors, for whom reason and revelation were hierarchically related, and unlike many of his contemporaries, for whom reason and revelation agreed in all important respects except for the supernatural claims of the latter (to which reason gives uniformed but deferential assent), Spinoza attempted to put the perennial question on a footing which leaves both sovereign.[10]

Contrary to his geometrical method, the content of Spinoza's thought is filled with uncertainty. He argues for the coexistence of different ways of life.

The historical context in which Spinoza developed his thought is clearly pertinent for a better understanding of his skepticism toward certainty in political life. He was born into a confused cultural set up. He was a Jew of Marrano origin. The situation of the Marranos was far from being "certain" in that it "favored doubt of Christianity quite as much as doubt of Judaism."[11] It was "disposed to alienation from all revealed religion."[12] Within the wider sphere of Amsterdam politics Spinoza encountered the uncertain power struggle between orthodox Calvinist and *Remonstrants*.[13] Even though he clearly sided with the egalitarianism of the *Remonstrants*, Spinoza did not attempt to overcome a state of epistemological, religious and political uncertainty.

It seems an egalitarian approach allows for a certain amount of ambiguity. Indeed, Spinoza makes the limitations of human knowledge the basis of his thought: he focuses on the discrepancy between empirical reality and our conception of it. He argues for the indistinguishable unity of body and mind so

9 See Levene, *Spinoza's Revelation. Religion, Democracy, and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 240.

10 Levene, *Spinoza's Revelation*, p. 234.

11 Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, translated by E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 53.

12 Ibid.

13 For a brilliant discussion of the wider political context see Etienne Balibar's *Spinoza and Politics*, translated by Peter Snowdown (London: Verso, 1998), 16–31.

that bodily distractions emerge not as the opponent of thinking but as its proper core. In this way uncertainty encapsulates philosophical inquiry. Spinoza blurs the distinction between conceptual boundaries: the corporeal is not the imperfect, because there is no such thing as imperfection. We are all equally imperfect or, rather, perfect.[14] Spinoza radically breaks down the hierarchical divide between those who succeed and those who seem to fail. Warren Montag refers to this conscious espousal of ambiguity when he interprets Spinoza's *Ethics* as follows:

> The idea of a God or nature which does not in any way pre-exist its own realization (E I, Prop. 33, scholium 2) forces us to reject the notion of imperfection: "By reality and perfection I mean the same thing." The notion of final causes, like that of free will, however, is no less real for being false.[15]

Part of Spinoza's critique of final causes, and teleology in general, is his critique of an anthropomorphic conception of God. Here he confirms the gap between humanity and divinity; not, however, to uphold a hierarchical conception of God but in order to upend attempts by specific religious groups to claim quasi-divine authority in their struggle for economic and military power against other social formations.

## *II*

Spinoza's rational inquiry is concerned with the avoidance of violence. He analyzes the ways in which anthropomorphic conceptions of God further violent forms of social interaction. This book discusses the long life of the Spinozist critique of anthropomorphism. The critique of anthropomorphism emerges as a political theology that has abandoned the institution of sovereignty. It is this theological and political engagement that gives rise to a Spinozist conception of modernity. It is an alternative to the dualist notion of modern rationalism as propounded by Descartes and Kant.

Spinoza was of course to some extent a Cartesian.[16] Similarly Spinoza and Kant's respective projects share many features. Both are rationalists and universalists. They arrive, however, at their respective conceptions of both reason and universalism rather differently. Pauline Phemister has justifiably argued that "Spinoza often opposes Descartes while Leibniz, in opposition to both, nevertheless forges a path midway between the two, melding truths from each

14 For a brilliant discussion of this point see Montag's *Louis Althusser* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 53.

15 Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power. Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999), 40.

16 For detailed discussion of Descartes' influence on Spinoza see Tammy Nyden-Bullock's *Spinoza's Radical Cartesian Mind* (London: Continuum, 2007).

into a new theory."[17] Crucially—and in striking contrast to Descartes—there is lack of binary oppositions in Spinoza's formulation of a radical Enlightenment. He does not play off the mind against the body, nor does he oppose the particular with the universal. While Spinoza has a strong commitment to rationalism in common with Descartes, Hobbes and Kant, his version of reason is more inclusive of what is considered lowly, bodily or even irrational than any other philosopher in the rationalist tradition.

There is another important difference between the modernity shaped by Kant's moral philosophy and Spinoza's modern ethology. It is a difference, which Constantin Brunner has analyzed in his 1909 introduction to K. O. Meinsma's *Spinoza and his Circle*. Brunner argues that Kant's rationalism has ironically fallen prey to what Spinoza criticizes as superstition and anthropomorphism. How can we account for a superstitious Kant? Brunner pinpoints Kant's superstition in his belief in progress (*Entwicklungsglaube*). He traces the way how "the transformation of superstition out of religion emerges in the doctrine of progress as part of Immanuel Kant's philosophy."[18] The central part of this book (Chapters 3 to 7) analyzes Herder's important critique of Kant's doctrine of progress.

We may justifiably describe Herder as the inventor of the concept "culture". This study offers the first analysis of how Herder's notion of culture is a creative development of Spinoza's *conatus*. Spinoza's *conatus* describes the ways in which the particular participates in the universal: by preserving oneself one contributes to the preservation of the entire universe of which we all are an infinitesimal part. This book articulates a line of thought which has often been silenced in standard accounts of modernity: that of an inclusive rather than exclusive universalism—one that does not condemn the particular and one that does not oppose it to the universal but rather makes the two dependent on each other.

This book focuses on Spinoza's rupture with the metaphysics of God or nature and Herder's shift away from Cartesian and Kantian categories of the cogito. The rupture and shifts introduced by Herder and Spinoza revolve around a doubling of thought where we first radically separate entities that have become conflated with each other—this is precisely what Spinoza does when he says that we superimpose our conception of nature or God onto nature and God; thus distorting truth while proclaiming to have found "the truth." In the second doubling movement of thought this separation performs unity. We are part of God or nature precisely because we are aware of being separate from it. This awareness of separation makes us realize that we are part of that from which we are separated. We are a part of nature but just

17 See Phemister's, *The Rationalists. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 18.

18 Brunner "Spinoza Gegen Kant und die Sache der geistigen Wahrheit," in K. O. Meinsma, *Spinoza und sein Kreis. Historisch-Kritische Studien über Holländische Freigeister*, trans. into German by Lina Schneider (Berlin: Karl Schnabel, 1909), pp. 1–83 (p. 5).

that: only a part and not the whole and hence we are not able to comprehend the whole of which we are a part.

Franz Rosenzweig calls this principle of holistic separation Spinoza's paganism. The chapter following the discussion of Herder's Spinozist account of reason introduces the reader to Goethe's related critique of an exclusive type of rationality which understands itself as being separated from and opposed to the "primitive," "uncivilized," "merely natural and thus irrational." Rosenzweig defines paganism in terms of Spinoza's abandonment of categories. Notional thought is prone to fall prey to anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphic conceptions of God enact the distortion of categories in its most glaring form as they conflate human deficient logic with the logic of being. The logic of being, however, is nature as it exists undisturbed by the partiality of limited human thought. According to Rosenzweig paganism is Spinozism: both distinguish between thought and being while nevertheless not opposing one against the other.

Rosenzweig establishes an intriguing link between the new thinking of phenomenology and Spinoza's retreat from traditional metaphysical thought that remains mired to the fixity and timelessness as encapsulated by the term essence. According to Rosenzweig Spinoza inaugurated a revolution within metaphysics. This may sound strange, because Spinoza is often seen as a disciple of Descartes. Yet Spinoza's discussion of the anthropomorphic conception of God in traditional theological and philosophical discourse introduces not only a shift within but also, more radically, a break from traditional metaphysics. What makes his thought so radical is the fact that it instantiates the crucial phenomenological differentiation between our limited human categories and the being of nature or God. Within traditional metaphysics the categories are meant to grasp the true existence of world. According to Spinoza, and Herder afterwards, we are, however, never fully able to fathom the laws of the cosmos. If we presume to do so we have already fallen prey to anthropomorphism and anthropocentricism.

Our inability to grasp nature's complete set of laws does not mean that we are incapable of reaching an adequate view of our limited world. This is precisely what George Eliot sets out to do in her Spinozist characterization of literary realism as the performance of an inclusive universalism.[19] Chapter 8 discusses the ways in which Eliot presents a critique of ideology in *Daniel Deronda* when she argues for the Spinozist right of a universal particularism. In related but different ways Eliot, Herder, Rosenzweig and Goethe conceive of reason in narrative terms. The writers and thinkers discussed in this study further develop Spinoza's shift away from the nonnarrative and static toward

19 For a study of Spinoza's influence on George Eliot see Dorothy Atkins' *George Eliot and Spinoza* (Salzburg: Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 1978). Arkins, however depicts Spinoza in light that contradicts recent assessments of his non-hostile approach to the emotions (Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd and Damasio's recent studies, for example).

the complementary and diverse. Mental awareness that goes so far as to be mindful of the mind prepares an alternative conception of modernity and rationality. The concluding chapter to this book connects with the opening chapter by discussing the ways in which Spinoza and Freud are rationalists with a difference. It is so far an unarticulated conception of another modernity and rationality that the following study attempts to uncover. As has been intimated above, the uncovering in question is not only historical. The conclusions of the study do not lose their intellectual significance and impact within the context of the late nineteenth century. The work of historical exegesis does not confine itself to the rather closed sphere of philological influence study. By unearthing and delineating the blueprint of a truly universalist Enlightenment this book also unfolds a novel social and cultural theory.

## Chapter 1

# Descartes, Spinoza or the Goal that Destroys Itself

*No philosopher of the seventeenth century has acquired more literary buzz in the twenty-first century than Benedict de Spinoza, who lived from 1632 to 1677.*
*Don Garett,* Times Literary Supplement *19 October 2007*

### 1. Introduction: Spinoza and the Critique of Hierarchy

Why did Spinoza prove to be such a vital source of inspiration for both the romantic approach toward diversity and for the contemporary philosophical discussion about politics and ethics? This chapter will delineate the ways in which Spinoza's philosophy offers a novel conception of what it means to be enlightened at precisely those points where it diverges from Descartes' conception of rationality.[1] Chapter 2 will then discuss how Spinoza's notion of self-preservation (the *conatus*) encloses in itself a blueprint of a cooperative vision of society. The possible ramifications of this vision are the subject of the discussion in the chapters that follow chapter 2. They will mainly focus on how Herder creatively reconfigured Spinozist philosophy in his critique of goal-oriented conceptualizations (i.e. teleologies) of history as well as in his various controversies with what he thought to be monolithic formations within the eighteenth-century enlightenment. This chapter offers an introduction to the ways in which Spinoza' *Ethics* lays the foundation for various visions of a type

1 Spinoza's reading of Descartes' is a complex topic of research. Genevieve Lloyd has ingeniously analyzed how Spinoza calls into question the connections established by Descartes' in particular, and the philosophic tradition in general, "between individuality and the concept of substance." Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 10. Lloyd argues that Spinoza diverges from Descartes by paradoxically pushing Cartesian thought to an extreme point where it is no longer Cartesian. In this way Spinoza undermines Descartes's distinction between will and intellect by widening the cracks which have already developed as part of the traditional philosophical concept of autonomy: "But there are for Descartes restraints on this power of autonomous choice; and Spinoza exploits them to collapse the Cartesian distinction between will and intellect into his own doctrine that the power of the mind resides in understanding only—an understanding that is itself subject to the necessities that govern the rest of nature. In the lack of accompanying will, however, understanding does not remain a bare cognitive state. It becomes conative, though not in a way that could be summed up in Descartes's idea of the will as wishing or shunning, seeking or avoiding. The essence of Spinoza's conative understanding becomes not choice but acquiescence. And this is at the center of his difference with Descartes." Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, p. 62.

of enlightenment that rather than rejecting, embraces cultural diversity and the plurality of the material viz. embodied world.

Does the ethology which Spinoza advanced in his *Ethics* have singular significance for the formulation of a viable contemporary social theory?[2] Spinoza's presence can be found in the thought of divergent twentieth- and twenty-first century thinkers. Spinoza's thought seems to exert a peculiar sense of contemporaneousness.[3]

This is not to claim that Spinoza anticipated the social problems that haunt our seemingly inclusive global society. Instead of dislocating Spinoza's thought from his particular historical setting, this chapter analyzes how his *Ethics* delineate the project of a kind of modernity that offers an alternative to the current Kantian approach toward defining the modern. Within the latter part of the eighteenth century—under the immense influence of Kant's transcendental philosophy—history came to represent modernity: the future of humanity seemed to promise its immanent perfectibility. In my recent book *German Idealism and the Jew. The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*[4] I have shown how these attempts at constructing a "perfect" otherworldly world within this one were premised on the exclusion of worldly imperfections. Judaism and the Jews represented these bodily remainders of contingency as well as political and ethical deficiency: it was thought that with the progress of history, worldly imperfections would vanish from the world just as Jews and Judaism would cease to exist in the perfect modern state of the future.

2 The term "ethology" describes the broad reach of Spinoza's *Ethics* which is not concerned with a narrow conception of the ethical but includes the political, medical, and the larger sphere of culture. Genevieve Lloyds has intriguingly argued that Deleuze's term "ethology" emerges from a political reading of the *Ethics* as a work which is closely related to the *Theological-Political Treatise*: "Whether or not we accept Deleuze's direct political explanation of the interruption, the insertion of the *Theological-Political Treatise* into the chronology of the writing of the *Ethics* should alert us to the importance for Spinoza of the relations between the metaphysical, the ethical, and the political." Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 26.

3 See Louis Althusser's, "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza," trans. by Ted Stolze, in Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (eds), *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 19997), 3–19; Etienne Balibar's *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. by Peter Snowdown (New York: Verso, 1998); Gilles Deuleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992) and his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988); Antonio Negri's *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) and his recent, *Subversive Spinoza (un)Contemporary Variations*, ed. by Timothy S. Murphy, trans. by T. S. Murphy, M. Hardt, T. Stolze and C. T. Wolfe (Manchester: Manchester University Press); Martha C. Nussbaum's *Upheaval's of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

For writers who critically confronted this demotion of naturalistic contingency and embodied life, Spinoza's union of mind and body became an inspiration for their literary revision of Kant's idealism.

This chapter implicitly discusses Spinoza's writings on politics and ethics as an alternative to the Cartesian legacy within a predominantly Kantian conception of modernity. Spinoza upends the hierarchical dualism between mind and body that prepares the ground for the construction of Kant's moral philosophy. As Stuart Hampshire has put it: "The union of mind and body is so close because the mind monitors changes in the body, and the brain is both the instrument and the object of the monitoring."[5] There is a non-hierarchical relationship between mind, brain and body so that neither "is more fundamental than the other."[6] This chapter focuses on the ways in which Spinoza overturns fundamental oppositions and makes them complementary until we reach a reach state of the coexistence of the diverse.[7] It analyzes how Spinoza's *Ethics* delineates the blueprint for a non-hierarchical and nonexclusive understanding of human sociability. Accordingly, it takes issue with a recent trend in scholarly literature that attributes a hierarchical framework to Spinoza's understanding of ethics.[8] Recently, Steven B. Smith has thus argued that the *Ethics* radicalizes Descartes' divide between the biological viz. natural realm of the body and the intellectual sphere of the mind.

There is some scholarly disagreement as to how radical the divide was that Descartes established between mind and body. Susan James has taken some critics to task who overemphasize the divisiveness of this divide: "By treating *The Meditations on First Philosophy* as Descartes's philosophical treatment, scholars have created a one-sided interpretation of Cartesianism in which the division between body and soul is overemphasized and sometimes misunderstood."[9] Stephen Gaukroger, in contrast, has argued that, even though his

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5 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. xlii.

6 Ibid., p. lii.

7 In this respect my argument further develops and radicalizes Genevieve Lloyd's discussion of Spinoza's philosophy as outdoing the false opposition between the individualistic and the communitarian. Lloyd has ingeniously analyzed the way in which Spinoza's notion of the self includes that of the other and thus offers a striking contrast to the philosophical tradition: "The self evoked in Epicurus's discussion of death is an all-or-nothing affair—solidly there during life, totally absent at death. For Spinoza, in contrast, the mind's self-awareness during life involves, as we have already seen, a blurring of the boundaries between its own body and that of the others that impinge on it. To the extent that a mind comes to an adequate understanding of itself as an individual—that is, of the essence of the body of which it is the idea—it must understand other things together with itself." Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics*, p. 120.

8 Compare Don Garrett's "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism" in Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (eds), *New Essays on the Rationalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 310–335.

9 James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 106.

thought underwent significant changes throughout his life, Descartes did "at no stage" abandon the belief "that human perceptual cognition, still less human behavior, could be explained fully without reference to an immaterial intelligence."[10] Gaukroger astutely historicizes Descartes' emphasis on the immaterial and, associated with it, his highly ambivalent attitude to embodied life. He traces Descartes' mind-body divide to the Christian religious renewal of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that attempted to recuperate qualities which it associated with the origins of Christianity: "hatred of the body and the world, the pervasiveness of sin, and a sharp sense of the fleetingness of time."[11] John Cottingham has certainly abstained from overemphasizing Descartes's divide between body and mind,[12] but he none the less acknowledges Spinoza's striking departure from a Cartesian mind-body dualism:

> When Spinoza himself speaks of the mind and body as being "united", or of their "union", he emphatically rejects the Cartesian idea of union as an intermingling or joining together; what is meant, rather, is that mind and body are *unum et idem*, one and the same.[13]

Recently Steven Nadler has confirmed this crucial difference between Descartes' and Spinoza's philosophy in relation to their respective writings about mind and body: "For Spinoza, there is a fundamental identity between mind and body—and thus a fundamental unity to the human being—that goes much deeper than any difference there may be between them."[14] According to Smith, however, Spinoza seems to emphasize the difference rather than the unity between the corporal and the cerebral.[15]

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10 Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 7.

11 Ibid., p. 25.

12 See Cottingham's *The Rationalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 131.

13 Ibid., p. 132.

14 Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 135.

15 Smith claims that Spinoza's critique of teleology devalues nature in order to celebrate human goals as the pinnacle of moral achievement. Here nature represents the immorality of the corporeal which Smith opposes to the morality of humanity's cerebral life: "The belief in divine teleology, we have seen, is a prejudice that is itself explained by the tendency to attribute to nature or God the same kinds of purposes that we have as human beings. We are, Spinoza appears to say, teleological beings and we cannot help fancifully ascribing similar ends to other objects in nature and history." Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life: Freedom and Redemption in the Ethics*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 53. Smith ignores that what he is describing is precisely the object of Spinoza's critique: Spinoza certainly does not approve of ascribing human purposes to either God or nature. On the contrary he unmasks such ascriptions as deluded, anthropomorphic fantasies. Spinoza is far from endorsing a "we cannot help" approach which Smith seems to be advocating here.

Instead of critically questioning this binary opposition between nature, on the one hand, and intellect, on the other, Spinoza here appears to reaffirm the supremacy of the latter over the former. This hierarchy of values results from imputing a deterministic teleological agenda to the underlying conception and structure of the *Ethics*. On this view, Spinoza's denial of teleology on the part of both nature and God only paves the way for his enthronement of humanity as the agent of moral progress in the universe.[16]

Rather than endorsing human goals as part of the telos of the universe, Spinoza tries to separate our particular endeavors from any grand scheme of God or Nature. Even though we are part of nature, Spinoza takes great care to emphasize that we *are not* nature (but only a tiny part of it). Our cognitive faculties are far too inadequate to comprehend the world in its necessity and complexity. Clearly, Spinoza does not share Descartes's elevated view of the mind's adequacy. In this context it is pertinent to draw attention to Genevieve Lloyd's ingenious analysis of how Spinoza conceptualizes inadequacy in terms of being an inalienable ingredient of the human condition: "The Cartesian mind is completely knowable to itself regardless of the existence of the body—the most accessible of all objects of knowledge. Spinoza's self-knowledge, in contrast, is mediated through bodily self-awareness and must share its inadequacy."[17] The inadequacy of our minds—being ideas of our bodies—should make us mindful of our minds. The mindfulness of the mind also involves a critical engagement with absolutist conceptions of teleology.

Spinoza does of course not deny that we need to have goals. However, he emphasizes that we must stay cognizant of the particularity of these goals. We must not conflate our particular everyday tasks with what we take to be the goal of the universe at large. A conflation of the two takes place in anthropomorphic conceptions of God or nature. Anthropomorphism elevates human goals. Spinoza, in contrast, demotes these goals to the sphere of the passions or, in other words, the appetites. Demotion is the wrong word here, because Spinoza does not refute the validity of the passions. What he takes issue with is the aggrandizement of human inclinations into the quasi-objectivity of the truth of nature or God. The term demotion thus only relates to its antonym, elevation: demotion serves to balance out the effects of elevation without establishing a hierarchical structure. Spinoza attempts to put the human into its proper place—but not within a hierarchical order—and hence he counteracts an elevation with demotion. He does, however, not necessarily rank the one (the universe in its entirety or God/Nature) over the other (humanity as being only a part of the universe without representing the universe).

So Spinoza does not deny that we need goals but crucially he describes our lofty aspirations as appetitive. He does so as part of his larger attempt at disentangling the confusion of our intellectual, but always already particular, goals with the universal state of God or nature. As Spinoza states in the preface to the fourth part of the *Ethics* "Nature does nothing on account of

16 See Nadler's, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 199.
17 Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, pp. 20–21.

an end."[18] He goes on to detect behind the teleology of a universal "final cause nothing but human appetite."[19] It is important to note that Spinoza does not berate us for having appetites. He criticizes, however, the projection of our particular goals or appetites onto the whole of the universe. This confusion of the particular with the universal is dangerous because it makes absolute what is only a part of the whole but not the whole itself. The promulgation of any given teleology of the universe serves to both justify and enthrone as absolute value the hierarchical validation of what is only a part (i.e. humanity or rather one prioritized fraction of it) but not the whole of nature. Moreover, the confusion of our particular goals or appetites with nature or God is deceptive and leads to a loss of reality.

A deterministic conception of the world as predictable is the offspring of this loss of reality. Contrary to common perception, Spinoza is not a determinist, as the term is commonly understood. As Hampshire has astutely pointed out:

> A determinist, as this label is commonly understood, has the single idea that any human behavior is to be explained by well-confirmed natural laws which, taken together with a statement of initial conditions, exhibit the behavior, whatever it may be, as always in principle predictable. This is not the kind of understanding, and of self-understanding, that is proposed by Spinoza and Freud.[20]

Here Hampshire establishes an intriguing account of both Spinoza and Freud as nondeterministic and non-teleological thinkers. Both Freud and Spinoza unmask the mind's construction of a universal goal as the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic projection of particular appetites onto the world in its entirety (see Chapter 9). Both thinkers focus their ethical work on how a "man's discrimination between good objects and bad objects will be explained to him as imaginative projection upon reality of unconsciously remembered incidents in his personal history."[21] Both trace quasi-absolute and quasi-universal accounts of reality back to their source within the sphere of personal, particular appetites. Significantly both focus their analysis onto the sphere of religion, because it is here that humanity is perhaps most prone to confuse its limitations with God or nature.

Clearly, Spinoza's critique of a certain kind of theology is directed against the elevation of human teleology into a quasi-divine sphere (i.e. what Spinoza calls anthropomorphism). This anthropomorphic conception of God/nature renders absolute human conceptions of teleology that are intrinsically egoistic. As Hampshire has astutely pointed out, reflection, in contrast, "entails the suppression of egotism in our relation with the external world."[22] According to

18 Spinoza, *Ethics*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley with an introduction by Stuart Hampshire (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 114.

19 Ibid.

20 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, p. 195.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p. xxiii.

some strands within recent Spinoza scholarship (i.e. Smith and to some extent Nadler) the *Ethics* ultimately extols rather than questions humanity's egoistic and teleological superiority over the heteronomy of God/nature. No wonder then that Spinoza emerges as a Kantian *avant la lettre* (as we will see, this Kantian view of Spinoza's *conatus* is based on a reading of Spinoza as Hobbesian thinker).[23]

This view argues that the *Ethics* reaffirms the centrality and superiority of human agency which the Copernican revolution had threatened to overturn. The earth might no longer be the center of the universe. Human epistemology and morality, however, vouches for the supremacy of man's rational constitution over anything that might be subsumed under the category of the merely natural (the body) or irrational (God). Smith thus argues that Spinoza only undermined teleology in order to debunk the role of God or nature in the life of the world: "The denial of any sort of natural teleology or divine providence has an ethical corollary. The *Ethics* deflates the idea that our moral judgments of approval and disapproval have any counterpart in nature."[24] From the perspective of this interpretation, Spinoza indeed anticipates Kant's further development of Descartes' mind-body divide. Spinoza does not question this divide. "Rather", writes Smith, "Spinoza maintains that there are at least two different and irreducible conceptual vocabularies, a language of bodies in motion and a language of minds with reasons and purposes."[25] Smith conflates Spinoza's approach with a Cartesian hierarchy that subjects the assumed irrationality of the body to the purported purposefulness of the mind in order to "challenge" contemporary thought and scientific inquiry.[26]

Instead of marshalling Spinoza as bulwark for the defense of an antiquated conception of what should constitute rationality, this chapter follows the approach of the neurologist Antonio Damasio. While having previously discussed the scientific inadequacy of the Cartesian mind-body divide in his study *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*,[27] Damasio in his new book argues that Spinoza's *Ethics* develops a social theory that dovetails with recent scientific findings about the homeostatic relationship between the mind and the body. According to Damasio, Spinoza's anti-teleological thought helps advance a non-hierarchical understanding of humanity's place within nature. In what sense does Spinoza criticize teleology? His philosophy is anti-teleological in so far as it refuses to recognize a purposeful design in nature. As a corollary of his critique of teleology Spinoza abandons a prioritization of the mind over and above the body. This non-hierarchical stance moves his

23 In this way Spinoza's *Ethics* seems to anticipate the austerity of Kant's categorical imperative: "Like Kant's categorical (moral) imperative, the dictates of reason transcend personal differences and make universal demands on human behaviour." Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 227.

24 Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life*, p. 52.

25 Ibid., p. 80.

26 Ibid., p. XII.

27 (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994).

thought into close vicinity of that of Darwin and Freud.[28] Following Damasio's approach, this book focuses on Spinoza's attempt to abandon a mind body dualism. It is this element in Spinoza's thought that accounts for his centrality in philosophical as well as literary discussions about an ethics that embraces rather than discards the diversity of embodied life.

Spinoza did not only align the life of the mind with that of the body. He also established an invariable link between the equilibrium of the individual and that of the society to which he or she belongs. As Genevieve Lloyd has astutely put it: "The mind is the idea of a body which is what it is, and does what it does, by virtue of being part of wider wholes reaching up to the totality of the material world."[29] The connection between the biological and the epistemological on the individual scale thus prepares the ground for the larger sphere of intersubjective relations that connect the preservation of the self to the survival of the other. As a neurologist Damasio emphasizes the scientific validity of Spinoza's social philosophy. "The biological reality of self-preservation", writes Damasio, "leads to virtue because in our inalienable need to maintain ourselves we must, of necessity, help preserve *other* selves."[30] The two related expressions "perfection" and "virtue" within the *Ethics* serve to amplify the signifying field of that concept that describes the future viability of life's ongoing existence, namely, the central word *conatus*.

Spinoza's understanding of the *conatus* does not prioritize either the mind or the body: "The *conatus*, the drive to self-maintenance and coherence, is a universal feature both of any person's mind and of his body."[31] Hampshire here lists coherence and self-maintenance as crucial elements of the *conatus*: they describe not a teleological form of development but a perpetual state of perfection throughout the ebb and flow of life's generation and regeneration. What Spinoza understands by perfection is precisely the *conatus* as the future viability (rather than plan or goal) of life's endurance and duration. Hence this book interprets Spinoza's notion of perfection not in terms of teleology, but in terms of sustainability on both an individual and a social scale.

An analysis of Spinoza's biological approach toward social theory paves the way for a novel account of human agency which does not prioritize the concerns of the mind over those of the body. Rather, both entities emerge as being intrinsically interconnected. This interdependence of mind and body does not mean that they are identical or perform indistinguishable tasks.

Spinoza famously characterizes the mind as the idea of the body. This view establishes an isomorphism between the two entities while at the same time not questioning their distinct identities. As the idea of the body, the mind is responsible for actions performed within the external and material world of embodiment. The mind does, however, also depend on the well being of the body.

28 Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (London: Harcourt, 2003), p. 13.
29 Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics*, p. 96.
30 Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, p. 171.
31 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, p. xxix.

According to Spinoza there is therefore not a hierarchical relation in which one commands the other. Rather the mind has to take care of the body and the body has to take care of the mind in order to ensure the preservation of the self (*conatus*). This equilibrium between the cerebral and the material by no means calls into question Spinoza's status as a rationalist. On the contrary this interpretation confirms Spinoza's rationalist credentials while also illuminating the originality of his approach.

Spinoza is a rationalist with a difference. He is a rationalist because the mind is central to his understanding of humanity. Nevertheless he conceives of the mental as being not opposed to but intrinsically linked with the physical. What the mind does is important because it has a considerable impact on the material world. This does, however, not mean that it is an unquestionable authority. The mind's work has to be questioned, because if its operations go wrong many things are likely to result in destruction in the embodied world of politics and society at large.

Anticipating Freud's analytical approach towards the ambiguities of the psyche, Spinoza argues that we have to be mindful of our minds. This is the originality of his approach: it is not hierarchical in so far as it does not prioritize one side over and above another; but at the same time it places a strongly rationalistic emphasis on the mind's central position as a place where one has to be on one's guard in order to ensure the preservation of embodied life. It is this close relationship that Spinoza establishes between the cerebral and the biological that moves his philosophy to the center of contemporary scientific discussion in the field of neurology and psychology. As Stuart Hampshire has pointed out, Spinoza "gives the strong impression of thinking like a biologist."[32] This intermingling of the biological with the mental implies that Spinoza does away with the boundaries that divide the natural sciences from the humanities. Spinoza's hybrid (boundary-crossing) approach has significant repercussions for a novel conception of the relationship between philosophy and social criticism. The aims of this undertaking are accomplished through an analysis of how different communities may come to realize that their respective truth claims are not absolute, but have a certain narrative element to their foundation. Toward this end, this book analyses Spinoza's as well as some Spinozist attempts at building a society in which the self and the other are not in competition but are instead dependent on each other. Does this narrative notion of identity deserve to be called relativist? Rather than being a relativist Spinoza is a realist. He is anti-relativist, because he criticizes an epistemology that trims down reality to its conception of the world.

A suspicious reader would object that Spinoza's philosophy had a revolutionary impact only within the self-enclosed field of Biblical hermeneutics. The innovative force of Spinoza's thought was, however, not confined to the realm of Bible criticism—it had a much larger reach. As Jonathan I. Israel has recently pointed out, Spinoza's revolution "overtly challenged the three principle pillars of medieval and early modern society—monarchy, aristocracy, and

32 Ibid., p. xlvii.

the Church—going some way to overturning all three."[33] For an accurate discussion of his critique of theology as politics, it is therefore necessary to discuss Spinoza's ontological critique of all kinds of epistemological mediations (be they theological, economic, sociopolitical or scientific). At this point he breaks with Cartesianism. It is therefore worth presenting a brief account of Spinoza's departure from the epistemological foundations which Descartes inherited from Plato.

## 2. *Spinoza's Critique of an Absolutist Epistemology*

The middle of the seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of a new age. This new era set out to introduce philosophy as the master-discourse that would, from then on, increasingly shape the outlook of Western European society on an all-encompassing level. It would have an impact not only on academic matters, but would saliently contribute to new developments in divergent fields such as the applied sciences and economics. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, philosophy attempted to dethrone theology as master narrative. This attempted dethronement of theology provided the ideological basis for critical inquiry into all kinds of areas within society.

Whereas Descartes affirmed the validity of the established order in both political and theological matters (as he preeminently did at the opening of his *Meditation on First Philosophy* of 1641),[34] Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) advocated the application of a scientific method to the study of biblical texts. In the *Ethics* (which was published posthumously in 1677), Spinoza would extend Descartes' rationalist approach from the field of Bible criticism to that of theology, anthropology, politics and social analysis.

While emphasizing the distinction between philosophy, on one hand, and theology as well as politics on the other, the metaphorical description with which Descartes characterizes the novelty of his philosophical method nevertheless implies the totalizing potential of his undertaking. In what ways does Descartes' use of metaphor undercut his seemingly humble self-limitation of philosophy as a self-enclosed entity which pays its respect to the spiritual and worldly powers that be? In his *Discourse on Method* (1663), Descartes compares his philosophical approach to the pulling down of an old house:

> And just as in pulling down an old house we usually preserve the debris to serve in building up another, so in destroying all those opinions which I considered to be ill-founded, I made various observations and acquired many experiences, which have since been of use to me in establishing those which are more certain.[35]

33 Israel, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, p. 714.

34 Gaukroger emphasizes "Descartes' strong adherence to Catholicism and his general avoidance of theological questions [. . .]." Gaukroger, *Descartes*, p. 4.

The destruction of the old building serves as the foundation for the construction of the new, which promises a more all-encompassing sense of certainty.

A house, however, symbolizes a unified whole made up of particular entities. Descartes is thus at pains to emphasize that the abolition at work in his philosophy does not threaten the theological foundations of the body politic. So Descartes is tearing down the house while leaving its foundations intact. Scholars have in fact analyzed the ways in which Descartes' writing supports rather than undermines the cultural and social relevance of the Catholic Church. He supports the status of the Church through his adhesion to Suarez's novel theological argument, according to which there is radical divide between the world of nature and the sphere of divine grace. This theology has been dubbed a theology of "pure nature" in order to distinguish it from the Augustine's and Thomas Aquinas's conception of nature as being capable of receiving the divine gift of grace.

Descartes' philosophical dualism between body and mind may be the offspring of the theological divide between the realms of pure nature and grace. According to Jean-Luc Marion, Descartes in fact radicalized Suarez's theology of pure nature. How did he do so?—by erasing a certain semantic meaning from the term *capacitas*: Augustine and Aquinas used this expression not to denote nature's and humanity's autonomous capabilities (i.e. nature's/humanity's independent power) but its openness towards the reception of the gift of divine grace. Marion argues that Descartes pushed "the semantic variation until *capacitas* was de facto understood as a strict synonym of *potentia*."[36] *Potentia*, however, describes a purely natural sphere: the realm of nature's autonomy which Suarez and, following him, Descartes strictly separate from the workings of divine grace. Could it be that Descartes' rationalist approach is in fact a theological one, one that radically departs from Augustine's and Aquinas's theology of grace but none the less develops and radicalizes Suarez's "modern" theology of "pure nature"?

Descartes endeavored to sever the union between theology and philosophy—as illustrated by his immanent use of the traditionally theological term *capacitas*. Has his undertaking been successful? Marion polemically asks "could Descartes be an unacknowledged theologian of pure nature?"[37] This seems to be the case. Marion points out that "starting with Descartes, the relation between man and God is apprehended by modern metaphysics in terms of power (*pouvoir*) and capacity (*puissance*)"[38] and he argues that this Cartesian

35 Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. by David Weissman with essays by William T. Bluhm, Lou Massa, Thomas Pavel, John F. Post and Stephen Toulmin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 19.

36 Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 91.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 95.

development "is in large part thanks to the theology of pure nature."[39] What are the implications of this discussion for a better understanding of Descartes' revolution? It may well be that Descartes attempts to demolish one theological dwelling space (the one built by Augustine and Aquinas when they formulated a theology which allows for nature's openness towards the gift of divine grace). He preserves its debris, however, in order to have the necessary materials for the construction of a new one.

Indeed, Descartes avers that the house he is in the process of tearing down has nothing to do with the societal architectonics of both an absolutist monarchy and the Catholic Church's claim to infallible truth. At the opening of his *Meditation on First Philosophy* he thus takes great care to depict the philosophical as a self-enclosed field of inquiry whose critical potential stops short at questioning the political and theological powers that be. He then proceeds to emphasize that his mind-body divide serves as an epistemological bastion in support of Leo X's orthodoxy. "As regards the soul," Descartes argues,

> although many have considered that it is not easy to know its nature, and some have even dared to say that human reasons have convinced us that it would perish with the body, and that faith alone could believe the contrary, nevertheless, inasmuch as the Lateran Council held under Leo X (in the eighth session) condemns these tenets, and as Leo expressly ordains Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and to employ all their powers in making known the truth, I have ventured in this treatise to undertake the same task.[40]

The supremacy of the mind over the body proves the immortality of the soul and thus reaffirms the social order that divides those that work menially from those who are engaged in non-menial work.

By 1660, however, Spinoza—due to his Marrano background[41] and no doubt spurred by his expulsion from the Jewish community in 1656—abandoned Descartes' purported differentiation between philosophical discovery, on one hand, and religious as well as social life, on the other. In order to improve the welfare of humanity, Spinoza argued, the philosopher cannot avoid addressing human issues in their entirety. He thus did away not only with the traditional philosophical-theological dualism between body and mind, but also with philosophy's self-restriction to a limited field of social influence. As J. Samuel Preus has shown, Spinoza "attacks" philosophy for its "elitism."[42] In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza questions the social and political repercussions of both a superstitious kind of theology and philosophy:

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39 Ibid.

40 Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 50.

41 Spinoza's Portuguese ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism in the early part of the sixteenth century. Marrano was originally a swear word—denoting "pig"—which became common usage as a label for these New Christians. As Yirmiyahu Yovel has described with considerable detail, religious uncertainty characterizes the Marrano experience: Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 24.

> Spinoza's attack on the philosophers has a novel twist: they were traditionally the sworn enemies of "superstition," but here he accuses them of perpetuating it by conniving with the theologians. Superstition, more or less harmless by itself, can have dire political consequences, as already noted. Hence, Spinoza's critique of the philosophers is an integral part of his argument in the cause of liberty and a democratic hermeneutic.[43]

Spinoza attempted to make philosophy relevant for the life of the people and as we shall see, Herder radicalizes Spinoza's undertaking by attempting to dissolve philosophy into the social and natural sciences. It was therefore no longer the occupation of a privileged group. Instead philosophy became a democratic endeavor. Nadler argues that Spinoza's support of democracy is one of the reasons why he originally set out to ensure that a Dutch translation of the *Ethics* was available.[44]

By questioning a hierarchical divide between mind and body, Spinoza in fact undermined the societal force of various ideologies that have their foundation in specific epistemological assumptions (be they theological, philosophical, scientific or economic). In this manner he opened the way for an understanding of humanity that does not force abstract standards upon the specific contexts of human minds and bodies. He therefore did not merely differentiate theology from philosophy. If he had done so he would simply have followed in Descartes' footsteps. Crucially, Spinoza marked off philosophical strivings and scientific claims to epistemological certainty from the inevitable uncertainties of embodied social life. These inevitable uncertainties are the result of the incompleteness of our knowledge. Had Spinoza only driven a wedge between theology and philosophy he would have been close to replacing the monolithic assumptions of the former with those of the latter. Instead, Spinoza questioned the validity of all kinds of human epistemologies, thus encouraging us to be mindful of our minds.

The Spinozist critique of various kinds of intellectual endeavors (not just those of "theology") thus resulted in a blurring of the boundaries which demarcate the realm of sensuous enjoyment from that of cerebral work: "All these things [relating to both bodily enjoyment and cerebral work]," Spinoza argues,

> indeed, show clearly that both the decision of the mind and the appetites and the determination of the body by nature exist together—or rather are one and the same thing, which we call a decision when it is considered under, and explained through, the attribute of thought, and which we call determination when it is

42 Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 178.

43 Ibid.

44 Jonathan Israel as well as Steven Nadler rightly emphasize Spinoza's democratic outlook. See Nadler's *Spinoza. A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 226–227.

> considered under the attribute of extension and deduced from the laws of motion and rest.[45]

As corollary, and as has been intimated above, Spinoza reveals "the decisions of the mind" as "nothing but the appetites themselves."[46] In this way he reveals how purposeful viz. teleological thought emerges as what is seemingly opposed to it, namely, the sphere of the appetitive: "By the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite"[47] ("*Per finem, cujus causa aliquid facimus, appetitum intellego*").[48] Unpacking this short sentence helps us understand the relationship between Spinoza's critique of teleology and his deconstruction of the Cartesian mind-body divide. The *telos* of the final (*finem*) aim itself constitutes the motif force of the appetitive (*appetitum*). In order to be able to do something (*facimus*) we rely on the bodily function of the visceral (*appetitum*). The geometrical method thus serves as an instrument for the self-reflection of the mind (*intellego*) from its dependence on bodily desire. Self-consciousness can therefore not do without desire, precisely because it is desire's self-awareness. Spinoza's philosophical inquiry into the dependence of the mind on the body has crucial consequences for a reanimation of his social and cultural theory. This issue will be discussed in the following section.

## 3. *The Theological Foundations of Teleological Thought*

Critics have so far not sufficiently discussed how Spinoza's critique of theology works as social criticism.[49] Why does Spinoza broach the issue of anthropomorphism? What exactly is the target of his critical inquiry? He takes issue with the teleological thought inherent in anthropomorphic conceptions of God. According to Spinoza, neither philosophy nor theology exists in a self-enclosed sphere of influence. Rather any type of epistemology that plays a dominant role in a particular society at a particular time inevitably shapes specific social relations. Significantly, Spinoza discusses theological anthropomorphism in the context of prejudices that permeate different societal fabrics. He analyzes how social prejudices

> depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God.[50]

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45 Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 73; Spinoza, *Opera* Vol II, ed. by Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), p. 144.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 117.

48 Spinoza, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 210.

49 My argument builds on that developed by Antonio Negri, Etienne Balibar and Warren Montag.

50 Spinoza, *Ethics*, pp. 25–26. Spinoza, *Opera*, Vol. II, p. 78.

Here Spinoza criticizes not so much the worship of God but human self-adulation. The parallelism between the phrases *hominess . . . ut ipsos* and *Deum . . . ut ipsum* serves to emphasize precisely this point: humans attribute human forms of behavior to God's nature, since they perceive themselves as divine. Spinoza thus reveals "religious" worship of God as deification of the self.

This adulation of the self by the self hinges upon the espousal of teleology as the *sine qua non* for the definition of what distinguishes the human from the nonhuman and thus the divine from what lacks divinity. Everything that belongs to the order of nature, as perceived in terms of God's creation, supposedly strives toward a *telos*, toward an end [*omnes res naturales . . . propter finem agere . . . ipsum Deum omnia ad certum aliquem finem dirigere, pro certo statuant*]. Various social prejudices gain momentum, thanks to the philosophical positing of teleology as the certain criteria by means of which we have to distinguish between logical viz. theological forms of life and those which are illogical and are thus excluded from the order of God's creation. In this way social prejudices result from the equation of the rational (and thus Godly) with teleology. Only those forms of life alone are worthy of sustenance which evince a goal-oriented structure. The teleological thus functions as the lynchpin around which the anthropomorphic conception of God and nature revolves.

Spinoza's *Ethics* focuses on how it comes that dichotomous ways of thinking are an outcome of perceiving the divine from the perspective of teleology. By enthroning the finality of the goal as the main criteria of rational action, society intellectually justifies all kinds of exploitative power-relations. Under Spinoza's scrutiny, teleology emerges as a cover-up for the pursuit of self-interest that disregards the well-being of the other. The end of purpose-driven action coincides with the single-minded pursuit of one's advantage in the present without paying attention to the disadvantageous consequences that might accrue in the future. The anthropomorphic conception of a goal-directed God thus provides theological justification for man's domination over nature:

> It follows, *second*, that men act always on account of an end, namely on account of their advantage, which they want. [. . .] Hence they [humans] consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. [. . .] For they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers, of Nature, endowed with human freedom who had taken care of things for them, and made all things for their use.[51]

The end (*finem*) of human action describes that which the self conceives of as being useful (*utile*) for itself. Spinoza does of course not devalue self-advantage. What he thus criticizes in teleological thought is not self-interest *per se*. Rather he excoriates those modes of perception that represent the self as the center of life. According to Spinoza it is certainly not wrong that

51 Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 26. Spinoza, *Opera* Vol. II, pp. 78–79.

humanity lives on the fruits of nature. He criticizes certain teleological modes of thought, then, for divinizing a utilitarian relationship toward the external natural world. While it is worth emphasizing that Spinoza does not take issue with utilitarianism as such, it is equally important to show how he warns against both the loss of perspective and the logical fallacies that go along with a self-inflation of humanity. The target of Spinoza's critique of anthropomorphism is not theology as such but Descartes' conception of "pure nature" that subjects the merely mechanical natural world to the power and will of God's representative on earth: humanity.

Countering the anthropomorphism within the theology of pure nature, Spinoza makes clear how humanity's will and power (as manifested in teleology) self-destroys itself at the point where it loses track of human limitations. It thus sacrifices the sustainability of life to the quasi-divine power of redemption that posits in the future the attainment of its goals. Spinoza's rationalism is not hostile to theology as such.[52] Why is this so? Because Spinoza understands by reason a faculty that limits the unlimited reign of the passions and thus curbs the exhilarating presumptions of humanity's omniscience and omnipotence. Infinity describes the void that separates our limited human perception from the unlimited view of nature or God. The appearance of the concept describes the disappearance of the being that it names.

Spinoza's infinite mode denotes this abyss that separates our limited power of comprehension (concepts and categories) and the being of nature or God. What Spinoza thus criticizes as theology is that element that endows humanity with the domination over nature. Spinoza does not berate humanity's rule over nature. What he takes issue with is the forgetfulness of the limit that makes such rule possible. Humanity's domination comes at the cost of being mindful of our particularity within the infinity of Nature or God. Teleological thought denies that the natural world has an independent existence. Instead nature (*omnia naturalia*) serves exclusively as means (*media*) for the self-preservation of humanity. Spinoza therefore unmasks Suarez's and Descartes' theology of pure nature as anthropomorphism and as an exclusive teleology.

At this point, self-preservation appears in a rather ambiguous light. Crucially, an exclusive teleology instantiates an irrational kind of *conatus*: here the self preserves itself to the detriment of those circumstances and forces that enable the survival of the other, but this exclusive strategy has the potential to hit back, mirroring the flight trajectory of a boomerang. Spinoza's understanding of self-preservation discloses a critique of violence. The self that does violence to the other will be hit by violence whose force is equal to that perpetrated by the self in the first place. Jean-Paul Sartre's questioning of colonial violence is pertinent here. Sartre refers to the image of the boomerang in order to

52 Rather than denying the social relevance of religion and theology, Spinoza subjects theological inquiry to historical analysis. As J. Samuel Preus has put it, "Spinoza construed all scriptures and religions as natural products of history rather than as things supernatural." Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*, p. 158.

illustrate the social and cultural repercussions of a presumptuous kind of self-preservation that is in actual fact nothing but self-destruction: "It is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and we do not realize any more than we did the other times that it's we who have launched it."[53] Unlike Sartre, however, Spinoza does not maintain that "violence, like Achilles' lance, can heal the wounds that it has inflicted."[54] Spinoza argues that wounds can only be healed through the realization that self-preservation is tantamount to assisting rather than injuring the other.

One might counter this argument about the political relevance of the *Ethics* saying that Spinoza does not explicitly talk about self-destruction. Does Spinoza's notion of the *conatus* adumbrate a critique of societal self-destruction? T. W. Adorno has implicitly raised this question while discussing Elias Canetti's response to the Nazi-genocide.[55] In an important conversation with Canetti, Adorno has drawn attention to Spinoza's thought on self-preservation:

> Horkheimer and I have in fact analysed the problem of survival in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In so doing we came upon the realisation that this principle of survival, which you [i.e. Canetti] in your terminology call the moment of survival, namely the situation of survival in the succinct sense—as it was for the first time, one could say in a classical manner, formulated by Spinoza—that this motive of survival, transforms itself into a destructive force, into the destructive and always at the same time into the self-destructive force if it turns wild, as it were, if it thus abandons the relationships to those others which stand opposed to it.[56]

Adorno here astutely points out that Spinoza is careful to emphasize that the will to survival is a social phenomenon. It has to be inclusive of others. If it turns exclusive it paves the way for self-destruction. Then the immunity of the individual disintegrates into autoimmunity. (Adorno underscores this point when he says, "that this motive of survival, transforms itself into a destructive force, into the destructive and always at the same time into the self-destructive force if it turns wild, as it were, if it thus abandons the relationships to those others which stand opposed to it.") Adorno's interpretation of Spinoza's *conatus* has an illuminating bearing on an accurate understanding of the autoimmunity or self-destruction inherent in some aspects of our contemporary global society. Thus Derrida has recently discussed how autoimmune processes such as "the strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, 'itself'

53 Sartre, "Preface" in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1979), p. 20.

54 Ibid., p. 30.

55 For a detailed discussion of this topic see, M. Mack, *Anthropology as Memory. Elias Canetti's and Franz Baermann Steiner's Responses to the Shoah* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001).

56 Canetti, "Gespräch mit Theodor W. Adorno," in Canetti, *Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche*, (Munich: Hanser, 2005), pp. 140–163, p. 141.

works to destroy its own protection"[57] invariably refer back to their opposite: to Spinozist attempts at self-preservation. These self-destructive processes result from triumphal declarations of moral, epistemological, military and spiritual superiority of one societal formation over the one that poses, or is seen to pose, as its enemy. This awareness of one's own triumph accompanies the perceived increase of one's power. Spinoza shows how proclamations of one's own superiority often go hand in hand with a loss of reality.

How does the occurrence of a loss of reality dovetail with Spinoza's philosophical writing about the *conatus*? As the discussion of Adorno and Derrida has shown, the theme of self-preservation combines medical and political concerns. Thought about a loss of reality clearly derives from psychoanalysis. The emotive, or in other words the psychological, and the political meet in Spinoza's discussion of the *conatus*. His work on self-preservation is highly interdisciplinary: here philosophical inquiry vibrates in a force field where political, medical, theological, psychological and literary currents crisscross each other.

Politics, medicine, theology and psychology focus on the self and its relation with others. The self cannot survive without others and vice versa. This is precisely Spinoza's approach. He ties self-preservation to an engagement with the well-being of others. If self-preservation remains folded in upon itself the preservation of the self turns self-destructive (i.e. what Adorno has called self-preservation turned wild). This exclusive and all absorbing concern of the self with itself precisely describes the psychoanalytical phenomenon of a loss of reality. As the psychoanalyst and Hannah Arendt scholar Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has pointed out, "a psychotic person is one who cannot recognize reality, cannot become oriented in space and time, and is not mentally connected to other people; the mind of a psychotic is enwrapped in itself as if it were the whole world."[58] Spinoza attempts to remedy a loss of reality not through a psychological technique but via a philosophical investigation into its political, social and emotive causation.

What causes the societal drift towards unreality? A given society that seeks to establish its supremacy over and above other societies' claims to significance attempts to make reality conform to its epistemological standards. An inability to engage with epistemologies that differ from that of one's own conception thus does not evince realism. On the contrary, it indicates relativism, precisely, because it does not come to terms with the differing and always changing complexities of diverse social realities. The denial that the external world exists as an inviolable entity—as formulated by Descartes in his radicalization of Suarez' theology of pure nature—justifies political actions based on

57 Jacques Derrida in Borradori (ed.), *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 94.

58 Young-Bruehl, *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 170–171.

the principle of domination (*aliquos rectores*).[59] This hegemony deprives nature of animation (i.e. Descartes' mechanical understanding of the non-human world) turning it into a zombie-like means that does not have a life of its own [*Nam postquam res, ut media, consideraverunt, credere non potuerunt, easdem se ipsas fecisse*].[60]

The anthropomorphic or teleological conception of God does not only give rise to the ruthless and self-destructive exploitation of nature, but it also lays the foundation for violence and ethnocentric discrimination within society itself. Teleological thought pitches the *telos* of one community against that of another. The difference in religious worship thus furthers war between different social units; each of which deifies its specific way of life that goes along with its specific (anthropomorphic) conception of God. Under this teleological-theological constellation, particularity comes into conflict with universality. Self-preservation mutates to self-destruction at the point at which goal-directed behavior turns exclusive. Within this process, the self ignores the fact that the pursuit of perfection does not coincide with the single-minded attainment of a goal that it sets for itself as self-enclosed entity. Perfection has rather to do with what enables the sustainability of life, that is to say, with the avoidance of social exclusion and the abandonment of defensive reactions that aim to affirm one's superiority over another. How Spinoza conceptualizes perfection not in terms of a particular goal but in terms of the sustainability of the entire universe will be discussed in the following chapter.

59 Spinoza, *Opera* Vol. II, p. 79 (see previous quote ftn. 45). For a critique of autonomy as domination see Mack's, *German Idealism and the Jew*, pp. 42–62.

60 Spinoza, *Opera* Vol. II, p. 79 (see previous quote ftn. 48 and 49).

which the different colors of the skin run into each other, cultural differences are part of a common human denominator. Reason recognizes difference but does not make it absolute. It bridges over what is different while not equating what differs from each other. Herder's peculiar combination of difference and universalism inspired Goethe's critique of theological and philosophical ideologies of exclusion. Goethe's classicism clearly has taken on board Herder's critique of an appraisal of ancient Greece to the detriment of Egypt and Israel.

## Chapter 7

# Talking Humanly with the Devil: From Rosenzweig via Spinoza to Goethe's Hospitality in *Faust* and *Iphigenia on Tauris*

To express my ideas briefly: Goethe was the Spinoza of poetry. The whole of Goethe's poetry is animated by the same spirit that is wafted towards us from the writings of Spinoza. That Goethe paid undivided allegiance to the doctrine of Spinoza is beyond doubt. At any rate, he occupied himself with it throughout his life; in the introductory passages of his Memoirs, as in the concluding volume recently published, he has frankly acknowledged this to be the case. I cannot now recollect where I have read that Herder, losing his temper at finding Goethe permanently engaged with Spinoza's works, once exclaimed, "If Goethe would just for once take up some other Latin book than one of Spinoza's!" Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.

This chapter focuses on the way in which Goethe developed and deepened Herder's Spinozist approach toward sacred texts. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Herder appropriated and transformed Spinoza's naturalism by making it compatible with a non-dogmatic understanding of religion. Goethe follows Herder when he propounds a highly unorthodox theology in both his rereading of the Faust tradition and in his idiosyncratic interpretation of the Iphigenia myth. In this chapter I will introduce Goethe via the highly original, and thus far, neglected link which Franz Rosenzweig establishes between, what he calls, the "unrevealed truth" of Spinoza's paganism and the fluidity which Goethe introduces into literary and theological discussions through his peculiar characterization of evil (in his tragedy *Faust*) and the non-civilized (in his drama *Iphigenia on Tauris*).

Like Herder, albeit to a far lesser extent, Goethe engaged in biblical criticism. I will introduce Goethe's representation of how Faust translates the first sentence of the Gospel according to John via a brief analysis of his aphoristic essay *Israel in the Desert*. This essay sheds light on Goethe's relationship with sacred texts: one that is equally removed from the derisory tone of Enlightenment thought as it is remote from the dogmatic ethos of religious orthodoxy.[1] Goethe depicts Moses as staggering through the desert. This dizziness of the

1 For a discussion of this point see Peter Hofmann's *Goethes Theologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2001); Willy Schottroff's "Goethe als Bibelwissenschaftler" in D. Kimpel/J. Pompetzki (eds), *Allerhand Goethe. Seine Wissenschaftliche Sendung aus Anlaß des 150. Geburtstages und des 50. Namenstages der Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 111–137; Gerhard Sauder's "Der junge Goethe und das religiöse Denken des 18. Jahrhunderts" *Goethe-Jahrbuch* Vol. 112 (1995), pp. 97–110 and H. B. Nisbet's "Religion and Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 219–231.

purported founder of Jewish monotheism links him backwards, as it were, to the religious uncertainty and plurality of polytheistic or "pagan" religions (strikingly Freud relies on Goethe's characterization of a staggering, dizzy Moses, when he propounds his peculiar theory of Judaism's Egyptian origins in *Moses and Monotheism*).

The brief description of Goethe's Moses establishes a spring board for a larger discussion of Goethe's Spinozist or, in Rosenzweig's unprejudiced usage of the term, "pagan" reading of the Christian Faust and the Greek Iphigenia myth. As translator of these myths Goethe relies on what he describes as the "ghostly" quality of Spinoza's thought. Spinoza's thought seems to induce a desert like dizziness by doing the work commonly associated with that of a ghost: it haunts seemingly autonomous entities with their opposite so that the mind becomes dependent on the body. Even the "high Lord" God does not approach the devil as his antagonist but undertakes what seems to be impossible for humans: he speaks humanly with Mephistopheles.

## 1. *Rosenzweig's New Thinking and Goethe's Spinozist Paganism*

In his essay on "The New Thinking" Franz Rosenzweig propounds a philosophical, literary and theological defense of paganism. Indeed he depicts the first part of his magnum opus *The Star of Redemption* as a radical departure from the old philosophy in so far as it is pagan rather than narrowly metaphysical. Such a statement needs to be unpacked. In a sense Rosenzweig contrasts the pagan with the metaphysical. What does he understand by the term metaphysics? Rosenzweig's old thinkers are metaphysicians, because they try to reach down to the essence behind and beneath the things of the phenomenal world. The "meta" of metaphysics denotes this search for an essence. Once this search has reached its goal, the old philosophy would (so it hopes) be capable of capturing the static and thus unchangeable truth of the physical world we encounter day after day. Rosenzweig begs to differ. Rather than apprehending the truth of our world, the old thinking proffers a distorted image of it. According to Rosenzweig, metaphysics reduces any given entity to what it is not. No wonder then that he detects behind metaphysics a kind of thinking which he demotes as old and from which he sets out to depart.

Rosenzweig's qualms about metaphysics, however, do not have primarily to do with knowledge concerns (i.e. epistemology). They have a much larger reach, because Rosenzweig addresses not merely an academic discipline (i.e. that of philosophy) but the complexity of human life in its entirety. This complexity expands over three broad realms: world, humanity and divinity. Reducing one of these entities to another metaphysical thought is not only theoretically or epistemologically questionable (i.e. it distorts our ways of knowing) but it is also problematic in terms of social practice, because it does violence to life not merely in the conceptual but in the performative sense: life

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