

*Un homme ivre
d'immanence:*
**Deleuze's Spinoza
and Immanence**

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Abstract: Although Deleuze's work on Spinoza is widely known, it remains poorly understood. In particular, Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza's immanentism has not been treated sufficient care; that is, with an eye to the context of its elaboration and the way in which it gradually takes on different characteristics. With this paper, I offer a synoptic analysis of Deleuze's views on immanence in Spinoza and examine how these change over the course of Deleuze's career. There are three ascending stages here: a first one, where Deleuze's attention is drawn to more recognizable issues in understanding Spinoza's views on the deep metaphysical structure of reality; a second, more experimental one, where Deleuze questions what it means to be a reader of Spinoza in light of Spinoza's theory of the body and affects; and a third, particularly iconoclastic stage, where Deleuze develops the theory of "the plane of immanence" as a way of articulating a meta-philosophical story about the place of non-philosophy at the heart of all philosophy. I trace each of these accounts, tie them together to tell a coherent and comprehensive narrative, and show what may be learned from this Spinoza that Deleuze portrays as drunk on immanence.

Keywords: Deleuze; Spinoza; immanence; affects; meta-philosophy; non-philosophy.

Introduction

The poet Novalis' well-known evocation of Spinoza as "*ein Gott-trunkener Mensch*" is said to capture a noteworthy aspect of philosophical interpretations of Spinoza during the post-Kantian era of German philosophy.¹ What I would like to offer here is a detailed analysis of Spinoza as *un homme ivre d'immanence* — that is, Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza. Recent Spinoza literature often engages with Spinoza's immanentism, especially but not exclusively in the European context,² while Deleuze's relation to Spinoza continues to receive

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1 A point emphasized as early as 1893 by Delbos (1893), 317-330. Novalis' quote is from his *Encyclopedia* (Novalis 1802, vol. 1, p. 338). Novalis' talk of Spinoza as "a man drunk on God" foreshadows in a pre-philosophical mode the interpretation provided by Hegel: inasmuch as substance is indeterminate immediacy from which no finite content can be deduced, Spinoza's system is a variant of acosmism or ancient Eleatic monism. I.e.: Spinoza is drunk on an idea of God *sans* determination. See Hegel in §151, vol. 1 ("The Science of Logic") of the *Encyclopedia* of 1830: "[Spinoza's philosophy] is, indeed, pantheistic precisely on account of its acosmism. [...] Substance, just as it is immediately construed by Spinoza without the prior dialectical mediation, is, as the universal negative power, only this dark shapeless abyss [...]" (Hegel 2010, 225). For recent discussion of Spinoza's reception in the era of Novalis, see the collection of papers on Spinoza and German Idealism, ed. Förster and Melamed, (2012). For a recent reply to Hegel's "acosmist" charge, see Melamed (2013), esp. 66-82.

2The list of recent Spinoza works written in the broadly continental European tradition where "immanence" is a central concern is long. *E.g.*: Ramond (1995), Negri (1982 [1981]), Yovel (1989). Post-Deleuzian variations on the theme of immanence in Spinoza are also widespread. Consider, for ex., Badiou, for whom Spinoza proposes a "closed ontology" (Badiou 1998) or attempts (and, instructively,

sustained scholarly attention.³ Yet to my knowledge there has been no thorough attempt at crafting a comprehensive image of the stakes of the discussion that Deleuze engages with Spinoza regarding the notion of immanence. I will show that, in fact, we must account for three stages in Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza, each of which corresponds roughly to a decade of Deleuze's career and constellates around one work of philosophy he published.

In three ascending experimental and iconoclastic stages, the Deleuzian reading of Spinoza *qua* quintessential philosopher of immanence involves: a presentation of Spinoza's metaphysics of causality and the theory of the univocity of being; a discussion of what it is to be a reader of Spinoza in light of Spinoza's theory of the affects; and, last but not least, a bold bird's-eye account of how Spinoza's philosophy toys with a tension in the relation between philosophy and non-philosophy. Upon analysis, it will be clear that Deleuze's immanence-drunk reading of Spinoza does not content itself with repeating the facile remark that Spinoza identifies God and nature. Although this foundational claim in Spinoza may constitute the sounding board of very many immanence-inclined readings or interpretations of Spinoza — along with, perhaps, the way that Spinoza's naturalism yields an uncompromising critique of doctrines of personal immortality — Deleuze's own interpretation takes "immanentism" to designate a wide swath of Spinoza's commitments and conceptual moves that do not remain strictly localizable at the level of Spinoza's onto-theology. The breadth and creativity of Deleuze's immanence-drunk reading of Spinoza deserves the attention it requires if we are to salvage this Spinozist immanentism from the risk it has of being overwhelmed by simplistic rejoinders. I will, when possible, show what I think to be the limits of Deleuze's reading and where it runs into considerable difficulties, but my principal aim is not to do more than reconstruct the reading as Deleuze presents it. I take it that a clear understanding of precisely how Deleuze ascribes to Spinoza a form of extreme immanentism is a precondition for critical work on Deleuze's Spinoza.

fails) to "ontologically eradicate the void" (Badiou 1988, 137). One can understand this as Badiou's reply to Deleuze's Spinoza — where Deleuze talks of Spinoza's doctrine of immanence, Badiou talks of Spinoza's attempt at a foreclosure of "the void" from substance.

3 E.g. the many contributions included in the volume *Spinoza-Deleuze: Lectures croisées*, ed. Sauvagnargues and Sévérac (2016).

Immanence as Fundamental Metaphysical Structure in *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*

The gradual development of Deleuze's view on immanence in Spinoza commences in earnest with the publication of his 1968 work, a secondary thesis written under the direction of Ferdinand Alquié and defended at the Sorbonne, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (hereafter "**SPE**").⁴

When looking to Deleuze's earliest text on Spinoza and his treatment of Spinoza as a thinker of immanence, we may legitimately ask: What led Deleuze to attach such importance to the concept of immanence in the first place? Perhaps, we might hope, it is a term of art bequeathed to Deleuze by the philosophical community to which he belonged, the postwar community of practitioners of *l'école française de l'histoire de la philosophie*. For many of these historians of philosophy, Spinoza is a central figure of interest; Spinoza scholarship was far from being a poor state prior to Deleuze.⁵ Thus we are led to see if earlier Spinoza literature makes strong case(s) for Spinoza as a thinker of immanence. A brief survey of the literature suggests, however, that this was not the case. The term is absent from Ferdinand Alquié's published lectures on Spinoza, given at the Sorbonne in 1958 and 1959.⁶ Sylvain Zac makes no use of the notion in either of his commentaries from 1963 and 1965 on the idea of life in Spinoza and Spinoza's interpretation of Scripture, respectively.⁷ The Spinoza's collected works *Pléiade* edition, prepared by Roland Caillois, Madeleine Francès, and Robert Misrahi, published in 1955, does not include the term "immanence" in the otherwise ample *index rerum*.⁸ Looking further back still to Charles Appuhn,⁹ Victor Delbos,¹⁰ Victor

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4 Deleuze (1968a). Translations my own.

5 See Peden (2014) for an informative history of French Spinozism in the years leading up to Deleuze. See also Lærke (2020). Gueroult (1968) and Matheron (1988 [1969]) publish their groundbreaking Spinoza monographs at roughly the same moment. Macherey (2011) emphasizes, I do not believe accurately, that Spinoza literature in 1968 would have been "*carrément en panne*" (293), were it not for the contributions of Zac (1963), (1965).

6 Alquié (2003 [1958-1959]). Alquié (1981) will however later maintain that "on a toujours considéré que Spinoza était parti d'une intuition fondamentale, celle de l'immanence de Dieu" (159), an intuition which he disputes led Spinoza to successfully ban any trace of immanence from his philosophy.

7 Zac (1963) and Zac (1965).

8 Spinoza (1955).

9 Appuhn (1927).

10 Delbos (1893), Delbos (1983 [1912-1913]).

Brochard,¹¹ Émile Lasbax,¹² Alain,¹³ Léon Brunschvicg,¹⁴ Jules Lagneau,¹⁵ and Émile Saisset,¹⁶ leading figures of more or less traditional academic French scholarship on Spinoza in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, one finds no *sustained* discussion of immanence in Spinoza. Nor does the outlier Romain Rolland (whose essay *L'éclair de Spinoza* Deleuze refers to approvingly in later works) appeal to immanence in Spinoza as a way of articulating what makes Spinoza's philosophy so attractive.¹⁷

The exception that makes the rule is provided by Paul Vernière. In his 1954 *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* the term "immanence" is indexed 12 times.¹⁸ The references involve Vernière's presentation of Spinoza's reception by: Richard Simon¹⁹; François Fénelon (for whom, claims Vernière, the thesis of the immanence of God to the world is at the center of his theodicy)²⁰; Pierre Bayle (who disputes, claims Vernière, that Spinoza's philosophy is a philosophy of immanence, as God does not penetrate all things but is all things)²¹; Henry de Boulainviller²²; Languener²³; Julien Offray de la Mettrie²⁴; Denis Diderot (who believes, writes Vernière, that any consistent philosophy of immanence such as Spinoza's must lead us to think that Nature is capable of anything whatsoever and thus that ghosts, demons, hellfire, etc., are all conceivable)²⁵; Jean-Baptiste Robinet²⁶; and François Hemsterhuys.²⁷

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11 Brochard (2013 [1912]).

12 Lasbax (1911).

13 Alain (1996 [1900]).

14 Brunschvicg (1951 [1894/1906]).

15 Lagneau (2020 [1882/1898]).

16 Saisset (1860).

17 Rolland (1931).

18 Vernière (1981 [1954]), 766.

19 *Ibid.*, 234.

20 *Ibid.*, 277.

21 *Ibid.*, 303, 336.

22 *Ibid.*, 374.

23 *Ibid.*, 399.

24 *Ibid.*, 545.

25 *Ibid.*, 592.

26 *Ibid.*, 650, 652.

27 *Ibid.*, 670, 671.

It is immaterial to our purposes here whether Vernière is correct to attribute a worry about Spinoza's immanence to so many thinkers. What *is* important is that the interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy as a philosophy of immanence is circulating at the time of Deleuze's writing. In drawing sustained attention to Spinoza as a thinker of immanence in his **SPE** Deleuze builds on a view for which there is prior support, but which does not represent as standard fare in Spinoza commentary in French.²⁸

The central point of analysis in **SPE** is not immanence itself but the notion of expression in Spinoza. The discussion of immanence is subordinated to the latter. Although there is an entire section of the book entitled "Le parallélisme et l'immanence,"²⁹ it is simply not the case that Deleuze will develop an interpretation of immanence in that entire section.

The most interesting discussion we find in this early text regarding what it means for Spinoza to be a thinker of immanence is presented in Chapter 11, "L'immanence et les éléments historiques de l'expression," where Deleuze develops a discussion of how doctrines of immanence differ from doctrines of emanation, and not, as might be expected, from doctrines of transcendence.³⁰ On Deleuze's telling, there is a conceptual proximity between doctrines of emanation and doctrines of immanence. It is this conceptual proximity that masks their genuine difference. Both are concerned with making sense of the Platonic theory of participation. That Platonic theory responds to a guiding worry in

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28 Admittedly, there is an attractive and simpler explanation on hand for Deleuze's preoccupation with immanence here, *viz.* the Husserlian influence on Deleuze. Husserl will occupy a non-negligible place in Deleuze's *Logique du sens* (1969a), where Husserl's conception of the phenomenological method as the interrogation of consciousness' immanence to itself is questioned. Moreover, both Jean Cavaillès and Jean-Toussaint Desanti already draw attention to the role of immanence in Spinoza's philosophy, and this because of the Husserlian influence. See Peden (2014) for more on their respective relations to Spinoza. It is doubtful whether Deleuze himself read Cavaillès and Desanti's writings on Spinoza. Zourabichvili (2003), 65-66, denies that Deleuze's usage of immanence is a Husserlian derivation. For a book length study of Deleuze's debt to Husserl see Hughes (2008).

Last but not least: One should note that in the important philosophical dictionary by Lalande et al. (Lalande (1932) [1902-1923]), the term "immanence" (along with "immanentism") is indexed and amply discussed (vol. 1, 342-347). In connection to that discussion, mention is made of Spinoza's discussion in *Ethics* I, Proposition 18, as exemplifying how *immanent causes* are opposed to *transitive causes* — rather than as exemplifying the opposition to transcendence that is ostensibly built into the definition of "immanent" as either: (a) meaning that which is comprised in a being and does not result from an external action; or (b) meaning that which belongs to a being and structures its or tendency to certain outcomes; or (c) meaning, in its Kantian application, that which is enclosed within the limits of possible experience.

On an aside, the André Lalande dictionary was highly regarded by peers, earning as it did the prize of the *Académie française*, and remains indispensable for assessing the state of philosophical research in early-twentieth-century France. Historians of European modern philosophy will recognize this work as belonging to the generation of commentators like the Fichtean Xavier Léon, the Leibnizian Louis Couturat, and the Spinozist Victor Delbos, along with more well-known figures like Henri Bergson. In its indexing and scholarly work, it is reminiscent of Scholastic handbooks by schoolmen like Saint Eustachius.

29 Deleuze (1968), 87-169.

30 Deleuze (1968a), 153-169.

Plato's late work: How is the multiplicity of changing empirical objects grounded in the immutability of Forms? What explains how the manifold of apparent objects depend on the Forms for their reality? Deleuze is taking up a familiar trope in Western metaphysics, seeing how Spinoza's immanentism response fits into while repudiating a tradition of accounts of the basic metaphysical structure of reality as hierarchically tiered, where at the ground level of reality there is enjoyed by whatever being can be said to occupy it a fundamentality and priority not enjoyed at other, lesser, and derived levels of reality. The Platonic worry, at least as early as Aristotle, becomes coded in terms of causality. What kind of causal power is exercised by the Forms, or at the level of fundamental reality that Plato thinks is peopled by the Forms, that might secure the participation relation of the manifold of apparent objects in the Forms?

Here's where the Neo-Platonists show up with what *seems* like a Spinozist response if we mistakenly consider Spinoza's substance or God to exercise its power remotely over *created* beings. Thus, on Deleuze's presentation, the point of resemblance between the emanative cause and the immanent cause would be that "[such causes] *remain in themselves* to produce."³¹ However, the difference would be more significant still: "If the emanative cause remains in itself, the effect produced is not in the cause and does not remain in the cause."³² The Neo-Platonists are hence led to emphasize the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*: the One is superior to Being itself; the cause "produces according to what it gives, but remains beyond what it gives."³³ Deleuze wants us to consider how the Neoplatonic metaphysical account of the emanation and procession of lower-level and degraded beings out of the One superior to all Being portrays an infinite cascade of declines in hypostases of reality. Neoplatonic ontology has a tiered, hierarchical structure articulated in terms of the remoteness of the effect from the emanative cause that is the One.³⁴

Spinoza's doctrine of immanence, on the other hand, implies the *equality of being* between the underlying, principle cause and its consequences, between the radical ground of things and the many things which are its effects. For Deleuze, what is most important here — and, on my view, central to the project of understanding Spinoza's immanentism that Deleuze sets himself in **SPE** — is that the fundamental metaphysical

.....
31 *Ibid.*, 155.

32 *Ibid.*, 155.

33 *Ibid.*, 156. The first hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides* is discussed in 137c4-142a8. The importance of the first hypothesis to the Neoplatonic thinkers is historically well-documented. See Forrester (1972).

34 By Neo-Platonists, it is fair to assume that first and foremost Deleuze means to designate Plotinus. On the problem of the "procession" of hypostases out of the One, see for ex. *Enneads* Volume VI, Treatise 9, "On the Good or the One" (Plotin, 1994). See also the discussion in Bréhier (2008 [1921-1938]), 53-62, which may have influenced Deleuze's own account.

structure of reality is one of the *immanent causal dependence* of all things on substance, and that, what is more, there is *no fundamental hierarchy* in being, since no scale of superiority and inferiority in being can be established between an immanent cause and its effects:

“That which defines the immanent cause is that the effect is in the cause, no doubt as in another thing, but is and remains it in. The effect remains no less in the cause than the cause remains in itself. From this point of view, the distinction in essence between cause and effect will never be interpreted as a degradation. From the point of view of immanence, the distinction in essence does not exclude, but implies an equality of being: it is the same being that remains in itself in the cause, and in which the effect remains as in another thing.”³⁵

Spinoza’s immanentism, we may say, has to do with Spinoza’s metaphysics being a “pure ontology” — that is, it establishes the pure affirmation of Being:

“Immanence implies a pure ontology, a theory of Being where the One is only the property of substance and that which is. What is more, immanence in its pure state demands the principle of the equality of being or the position of Being-equal: not only is being in equal in itself, but being appears equally present in all beings. And the Cause, equally close everywhere: there is no remote cause. Beings are not defined according to their rank on a hierarchy, are no more or less removed from the One, but each depends directly on God, participating in the equality of being, receiving immediately all that it can receive according to the aptitude of its essence, independently from all proximity or remoteness. [...] Immanence is opposed to any eminence of the cause, any negative theology, any method of analogy, any hierarchical conception of the world. Everything is affirmation in immanence.”³⁶

Spinoza’s doctrine can be qualified as a form of immanentism in light of the anti-hierarchical way he construes the fundamental metaphysical

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35 *Ibid.*, 156. This has recently been referred to as the immanent cause being the “metaphysical subject” of its effect. See Zylstra (2020).

36 *Ibid.*, 157. Cf. *ibid.*, 51: “The philosophy of Spinoza is a philosophy of pure affirmation. Affirmation is the speculative principle on which all of the *Ethics* depends.” Deleuze’s suggestion that “everything is affirmation” for a philosophy of immanence is likely intended to resonate with Spinoza’s conatus doctrine, according to which no negation belongs to the essence of a thing. On Deleuze’s reading in **SPE**, the conatus of a finite thing, the degree of power that circumscribes the essence of the thing, is an individuating “quantitative intensity” (178-180). For replies, see Ramond (1995), 194-205. (See also discussion in Section 2.)

structure of reality.³⁷ On an equal basis (but, with the caveat, “according to the aptitude” of their essences), all things express the causally powerful and fundamentally divine, prodigious, and creative character of Nature. That is, all things are “affirmations” in Spinoza’s ontology, and *this* is the bedrock of what it means to ascribe to immanentism in metaphysics. At this early and yet still quite “academic” point of his career, for Deleuze, the deepest facts about metaphysical structure in Spinoza are causal in character.³⁸

What does “affirmation” mean for Deleuze? In common philosophical usage, the term designates the logical act that unites a proposition to a subject but also some propositional attitudes that are brought to bear on propositions (“The door is closed” but also “I believe the door is closed.”). Surveying Spinoza, we find the controversial epistemological stance in Ethics Part 2, Proposition 49 and Scholium, where Spinoza examines the untenability of the distinction between the understanding and the will. That is, for Spinoza, propositions always present themselves burdened with propositional attitudes. To form or conceive an idea in the understanding is already to affirm what we conceive, or judge it with the will, as a function of the self-positing power of the idea itself. One can see how, at least in this regard, “everything” for Spinoza — that is, everything insofar all things are modes of thought — is truly an affirmation.³⁹ Similarly, in Deleuze, we may say that “affirmation” connotes something akin to a position in existence or a self-positing

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37 Regarding the equality of all creatures or finite things compared to God or substance, see also Ep. 54 (G IV 253, l. 5-20), where in discussion with Hugo Boxel Spinoza writes: “Your second argument [on why spirits exist] is that because spirits are more like God than the other, corporeal creatures, it is also probable that God created them. Truly, I confess I still don’t know in what respect spirits are more like God than other creatures are. I know this: that there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite; so the difference between the greatest, most excellent creature and God is the same as that between the least creature and God.”

38 This interpretation finds additional support in both Curley (1969) and Gueroult (1968). It is commonly (and wrongly) asserted that the metaphysical grounding of mode in substance is the central component of immanentism for Deleuze *tout court*. Thus, Frim and Fluss (2018) argue in conclusion to a recent study that Spinoza “accepts immanence” (read: Deleuze is correct) if by which we mean “modes inhere in God” but not if by which we mean “Spinoza precludes all notions of emanation or hierarchy, as the procession of infinite modes suggests” (214). They are right to think that *in SPE* the problem of immanentism is posed at the level of the relation of modes to God, but the inheritance relation, for Deleuze, receives little attention compared to the causal one. What is more, Spinoza’s ontology of infinite modes does not, I take it, lead to the hierarchization of being in a way that poses problems for Deleuze’s reading. To follow Deleuze, it would be nonsensical to think of infinite modes as more eminent or closer to God than any finite mode. Take the laws of motion and rest that follow immediately from the attribute of extension and are infinite in this respect. The laws insofar as they are determined as finite quantities of motion and rest in the form of finite modes of extension are not any *less* affirmations of being than the laws insofar as they are determined as immediate infinite consequences of extension. *However*, if we consider that between any two modes, that one mode can be more perfect or contain more reality than another mode, by virtue of the fact that no two finite modes will have the same amount of power to persevere in their being, it is fair to say that here we have to seriously wonder whether Deleuze’s interpretation can do the job. (See fn. 49 and *infra*, Section 2 of paper, for the discussion of “intensive magnitudes”).

39 For more on this point, see Della Rocca (2012) and Ramond (1998).

in the world, a positivity, or (to think in broadly Spinozist terms) an expression of power and perseverance in being or *conatus*.⁴⁰

We may in any case say that at this early stage of Deleuze's work, Spinoza's immanentism is hence primarily, if not exclusively, a metaphysical commitment. As seen, Deleuze's reading taps into broad implications of the nature of the causal relation between God and God's effects in Spinoza's philosophy. Let us examine Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's metaphysics of causality a bit more and see how it stacks up with other aspects of his reading along with other aspects of Spinoza's own text.

Looking to Spinoza, we find in *Ethics* Part 1 Proposition 18 and Demonstration that he equates God's being an immanent (or "indwelling") cause with, as Spinoza writes, the fact that "*Deus rerum, quae in ipso sunt, est causa*" — "God is the cause of things which are in it". Therefore, in consequence of the fact that there is no other substance nor any thing not "in God", God is the immanent and not the transitive cause of all things. God could be a transitive cause only if what God caused was not in God, if God overlooked their Creation, as in the vulgar imagination of God as kinglike. It is not straight-away clear whether this point of causal metaphysics grounds the equalizing of things' "affirmations" of reality, as Deleuze stipulates it logically must. However, as Deleuze rightly emphasizes, considered in terms of their ontological position, their "remoteness" or "proximity" to God *qua* substance, all things are equally situated and participate equally in divinity or nature.⁴¹

Following Deleuze, Spinoza's view here echoes the anti-Aristotelian (and, for Deleuze, anti-theological) doctrine that being is univocal or only admits of one meaning, that "to be" can be said in one way only. In the chapter on "the Names of God" in **SPE**, Deleuze explicitly connects the two doctrines in discussing Spinoza's distinction of the attributes in God in terms of Duns Scot' theory of the formal distinction. The attributes would be distinct by virtue of a real distinction, that is not a mere distinction of reason, yet this formal distinction remains non-numerical.⁴² The Scotist formal distinction provides us with

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40 The connection of "affirmation" with the *conatus* doctrine is explicitly made by Spinoza himself, when he writes in *Ethics* Part 3 Proposition 4 Scholium that: "The definition of a thing affirms, and does not deny, the essence of the thing; in other words, it poses the essence of the thing and does not suppress it."

41 See fn. 37, *supra*.

42 Deleuze (1968a), 54-57, esp. 56, *in fine*: "All attributes formally distinct are related by the understanding to an ontologically unique substance [*une substance ontologiquement une*]. But the understanding only reproduces objectively the nature of forms that it apprehends. All formal essences form the essence of a single substance which is absolutely singular [*une substance absolument une*]. All the substances qualified form a single substance from the point of view of quantity. Thus, the attributes themselves have an identity in being and a formal distinction; ontologically one, formally diverse, this is the status of attributes."

an “absolutely coherent conception of the unity of substance and the plurality of attributes,” yet unlike his illustrious predecessor, Spinoza does not shy away from the pantheistic implications: “In Spinoza, univocal Being is perfectly determined in its concept as that which is said in one and the same way about substance which is in itself, and about modes which are in another.”⁴³ Thus, with Spinoza, “univocity becomes the object of pure affirmation,” and it is the burden of the “idea of the immanent cause” to take up the challenge and carry the charge of univocity, “liberating it from the indifference and neutrality where it had been maintained by the theory of divine creation” — it is “in immanence that univocity finds its properly Spinozist formulation: God is said cause of all things in the same way (*eo sensu*) that it is said cause of itself.”⁴⁴

This implicit appeal on Deleuze’s part to *Ethics* Part 1 Proposition 25 Scholium is elucidatory. In that scholium, Spinoza argues that it follows from Proposition 16 that God is the efficient cause of the existence of things as much as God is the efficient cause of the essence of things. Proposition 16 itself tells us that infinitely many modes necessarily follow from the nature of God. Hence, Spinoza effectively rides together the view that given God’s nature infinitely many things must follow (and that these things depend on God both regarding their essence and existence), and the suggestion that God causes itself in the same way that it causes all things, that is by virtue of efficient causality. It is reasonable to agree with Deleuze that a Spinozist account of being’s univocity is at play here, one that *does* involve a move to a theory of causation. The causal relation between God and any other being is the same causal relation that God entertains with itself, and *this* is meant to secure the univocity (and unicity) of the self-causing substance. But how does immanent causation relate to the doctrine of efficient self-causation? That is a puzzling problem that oversteps the bounds of our discussion. To venture a guess, one might think that, for Deleuze, at the level of ultimate reality, efficient self-causation is actually conceivable in light of the fact that the causal schema in play is one where the effect remains as much in the cause as the cause itself does. In this way, the apparent nonsense involved in thinking of a cause that would pre-exist itself dissipates, since the cause remains “within itself” when causing its effects, which also remain in it.⁴⁵

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43 *Ibid.*, 58.

44 *Ibid.*, 58.

45 In Deleuze (1969b), a review of Gueroult (1968), Deleuze returns to this theory of the univocity and unity of God’s causal act in connection with his exposition of Gueroult’s “genetico-structuralist” method. Here, the immanence of God’s causal work clarifies a methodological point in Gueroult: “[If] one and the other are said *in one and the same way* (God, cause of all things in the same sense as cause of itself”, it is because the genesis of modes is in the attributes, and would not be immanent if the attributes themselves were not genealogical elements of substance. In this manner appears the methodological unity of all of Spinozism as a genetic philosophy” (432).

In reading Deleuze, however, we should be careful not to confuse this understanding of Spinoza as a thinker of the univocity of being with the Hegelian interpretation of Spinoza's acosmism.⁴⁶ There should be no question that Deleuze does not conflate the two positions. In *Différence et répétition* (the *thèse d'État* complementing the secondary thesis **SPE**), Deleuze writes that what is most fundamental to the fecundity of the theory of univocity of being is not simply that being is said in one and the same way, for a further consideration is involved that bears on the nature of difference in being or between beings: "Being is said, in one and the same way, of all individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. [...] It is of the essence of univocal being to relate to individuating differences, but these differences do not have the same essence, and do not vary the essence of being."⁴⁷ In Deleuze's happy turn of phrase, "Being is said in one and the same way of any thing of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself" ("*L'Être se dit en un seul et même sens de tout ce dont il se dit, mais ce dont il se dit diffère : il se dit de la différence elle-même*").⁴⁸ The metaphysics of *Difference and Repetition* congenially maps onto the reading of Spinoza in **SPE**, which we may presume was being executed at about the same moment. The ant is extended in the same way as the cosmos is extended, which is no different than the way that God is extended as *Natura naturata* or God is extension as *Natura naturans*. To be extended means to express an irreducible aspect of God, which all things do equally, even when all things remain distinct; it is nonsense to say the ant *is* more, or *is* differently, or *is* inferiorly extended than any other thing, that it "affirms" extension any less or any more than any other thing. We needn't try to clear up here how Spinoza's concept of "expression" is inseparable from the doctrine of immanence on Deleuze's view. Nor should we proffer a further complication for Deleuze's reading by introducing, as Spinoza himself does, a quasi-hierarchical ranking system for finite modes, as finite modes have "more" or "less" powers to act and exist. (A point which Deleuze does not entirely overlook, specifically insofar as he characterizes Spinozist essences of finite things as "quantitative" (that is *greater* or *lesser*) "intensities" — thereby providing an implicit scale for their ranking and evaluation.⁴⁹) It is sufficient for our purposes that we

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46 See fn. 1, *supra*.

47 Deleuze (1968b), 53.

48 *Ibid.*, 53. In *Logique du sens*, Deleuze substantially develops his (Spinozist) notion of the univocity of being and resolutely contrasts it with the kind of acosmism that has haunted Spinoza literature since the German *pantheismusstreit*. E.g. Deleuze (1969a), 210: "The univocity of being does not mean that there is only one and the same being. On the contrary, beings are multiple and different, always produced by a disjunctive synthesis, themselves disjoined and divergent, *membra disjuncta*." For more on the "disjunctive synthesis" see Zourabichvili (2003), 78-80.

49 Interestingly, the hierarchical character of being further forms a crucial part of Deleuze's own

have shown how, at this early stage of his reflection on Spinoza's doctrine of immanence, the central aim of Deleuze's interpretation is to emphasize the anti-hierarchical impulse underpinning the building blocks of Spinoza's metaphysics. In 1968, it was Spinoza's refusal to countenance an account of reality as ontologically tiered that underpinned Deleuze's empathy for his philosophy.

Immanence in *Media Res* in Spinoza, *Philosophie Pratique*

Deleuze's second work on Spinoza, *Spinoza, Philosophie pratique* (hereafter "**SPP**"), was published twice. Only in the second edition of 1981 does one find the decisive conclusion, "Spinoza et nous", written originally in 1978. Thus, it is the second edition that will be of interest to us here. Deleuze's Spinozism has sensibly matured in the intervening years. A new and pivotal term in Deleuze's vocabulary will be put forward in **SPP** to articulate the meaningfulness of immanence not only in Spinoza but in philosophy in general: "the plane of immanence". No doubt the swelling of creativity here has something to do with the philosophical fecundity of those intervening years spent working on *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* with Félix Guattari and teaching at the newly founded Université de Vincennes. And the image of a "plane" or flat, smooth surface, naturally resonates with the image of the "plateau" informing their masterwork, *Mille plateaux*.⁵⁰ There is one final resonance of the term. In the famous prologue to the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, Spinoza's narrator writes of their need for a fixed "plan of life" or *novum institutum*.⁵¹ Similarly, the "plane" of immanence is something of a "plan" — a sort of orientation or disposition, a Spinozist arrangement (or assemblage, "*agencement*")⁵² with and/or of what we have now, following Deleuze in **SPE**, accustomed ourselves to calling "being" — Nature or God. Spinoza's practical thought, that is Spinozism itself, is more than

ontology, as well as being emphasized in various other historical works, such as in his first work on Nietzsche. See Deleuze (1962), esp. regarding Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return of the same and its signifying that "being is selection" (217). For its role in Deleuze's ontology, see Deleuze (1968b), esp. 54 *in fine*.

50 If one listens carefully enough, one can discern how "*le plan*" distantly echoes "*la plaine*" and "*le plein*" — that is, the term evokes a flat space conducive to "*nomadism*" in addition to the plenitude of being and its affirmatory character. Musical imagery inhabits Deleuze (e.g.: "*la ritournelle*" or, more central for our purposes here, the "rhythms" that characterize the way Spinoza's finite things enter in relation with one another) and it should come as no surprise that he would himself attempt a kind of musicality of concepts.

51 *TIE* §3.

52 The typical translation of *agencement* as "assemblage" is very odd, despite its pedigree. A bit of etymology might help here. The verb *agencer* is derived in the 13th-century from **gent*, from the Latin **genitus*, "born". Thus, the original meaning of *agencer*: to embellish, as in make noble (or high-born). From there it takes on the modern meaning: to arrange or put into order. See Bloch and Wartburg (1932), 292. *Un agencement* is an *arrangement*, of furniture in a living room or flowers in a vase. It connotes things being well-disposed to achieve a desired higher purpose.

just a view on how God causes its effects. **SPP** thus opens a new horizon for interrogating Spinoza's philosophy and understanding what it means for us to be readers of Spinoza.

SPP's conclusion, "Spinoza et nous", is a very difficult text. This is somewhat ironic as Deleuze's overall aim is to emphasize how there is a way in which we can read Spinoza without any philosophical training or preparation, letting the affective dimension of the text instruct us, and come away a bona fide Spinozist. Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza as constructing a "plane of immanence" in **SPP** is, we may say, meant to respond to a serious existential worry in the interpretation of Spinoza: How do we live as Spinozists? What does it mean to read Spinoza? Better yet: How is it in reading Spinoza that we learn what it is to live meaningfully in the hurly-burly world of encounters, affects, and multiplicities? In asking this question, the Spinozist text has already been reframed. Since we come to Spinoza *in media res*, so we must take up Spinoza *in media res*, not from "the first principle" but in the middle.⁵³

Any reader of Spinoza confronts the difficulty Deleuze's approach means to untangle. Spinoza's *more geometrico* forces the commentator to move backward while moving forward, like a crab, as it were; the need to reiterate and recall basic positions in Spinoza's metaphysics as a way of justifying any later position means repeating *ad nauseam* the same old story. (In *Ethics* Part 2, in the scholium to Lemma 7 after Proposition 13, Spinoza himself seems to hint at the "prolix" or verbose and long-winded character of his *more geometrico*.) The consequences for the understanding of Spinoza are quite unfortunate. We dull the affective edge of the philosophical text.

This explains a second point in connection with Deleuze's interpretation. For Deleuze, the *Ethics* does not exist. Rather, there are multiplicities of *Ethics*. In **SPP** (as was already the case in the appendix to **SPE**),⁵⁴ there are two *Ethics*: the slow geometric unfolding of concepts above, and the lava flow of explosive scholia and polemics, the affective intensities underneath.⁵⁵ In his short and final work to be published on Spinoza, "Spinoza et les trois *Éthiques*,"⁵⁶ Deleuze maintains there are three *Ethics*, a point which he anticipates in the Conclusion to **SPP**. *Ethics* "Book V" is truly a work apart, not because of its difficulty, but because

53 Deleuze (2003 [1981]), 164. Translations my own. Cf. 166.

54 The earliest formulation of the view is in Deleuze (1968a), 313-322.

55 Deleuze (2003), 174-175. See also the footnote on 159-160: "The greater part of the *Ethics* is written from the point of view of the common notions and the second kind of knowledge; Spinoza explicitly recalls this in E5p36s and E5p41d. The third kind of knowledge only appears in Part 5, whence its difference of *rhythm* and movement." (Our emphasis). Strangely in **SPP** Deleuze seems to have forgotten the lesson of the appendix to **SPE**: the scholia are "independent" with respect to the propositions that they "double" (317).

56 Deleuze (1993).

it is so fast. The theory of textual velocities will prove fundamental to Deleuze's general interpretation:

"[...] It is Book V, which is not at all the most difficult, but the fastest, of an infinite speed, that the two, the philosopher and the non-philosopher, are reunited as one and the same being. What an extraordinary composition this Book V, and how it makes for the encounter [*rencontre*] of concept and affect. And how this encounter is prepared, and made necessary by the celestial and subterranean movements that together compose the preceding books."⁵⁷

Spinoza's "plane of immanence" is also called the "common plane of immanence"⁵⁸ or the "plane of consistency."⁵⁹ One of its defining features is to give rise to the continual re-composition and de-composition of whatever populates it; hence, for Deleuze, the principal relation between beings in Spinoza's ontology of singular things is one of composition. A plane of immanence thereby involves that which is common, insofar as it is a realm of relationality and communication. Communities are continually established, communities which also provide room for "intensities", and which outwardly extend into ever-new communal or social relations.⁶⁰

Deleuze is at pains to emphasize that any singular thing, for Spinoza, just is a relation of relations with no bottoming out in sight, a composition or play of forces localized on an infinite field of forces — a reading which conjures an image reminiscent of the *facies totius universi* evoked in Spinoza's July 1675 letter to G. H. Schuller.⁶¹ The Spinozist intuition of the irreducibly relational nature of what appear to be discrete beings calls for a novel language of analysis:

"In short: If we are Spinozists, we do not define a thing by its form, nor by its organs and functions, nor as substance or subject. To borrow terms from the Middle Ages, or from geography, we define it by its *longitude* and *latitude*. A body can be whatever, it can be an animal, it can be a sonorous body, a linguistic body, it can be a social body, a collectivity. We call the longitude of the body the totality of relations of speed and slowness, or rest and movement, between the

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57 Deleuze (2003), 174.

58 *Ibid.*, 164.

59 *Ibid.*, 164, 168.

60 *Ibid.*, 169.

61 Ep. 64.

particles that compose it from this point of view; that is, between *unformed elements*. We call the latitude of the body the totality of affects that fill up the body at every moment, that is to say the intensive states of an *anonymous force* (force of existence, power to be affected). In such a way we establish the cartography of the body. The totality of longitudes and latitudes constitutes Nature, the plane of immanence or consistence, always variable, and which does not cease to be reworked, composed, recomposed by individuals and collectivities."⁶²

The *Ethics*, like any other book for that matter,⁶³ is a singular thing, "*un corps quelconque*". It too is just a "*agencement*" or a batch of relations with Being, a bouquet of variable compositions (it has a longitude), and it too is shot through with an affective "anonymous force" (it has a latitude). Like any other singular body, the relations are rhythmic in character; the motion of the text, the movement of Spinozist thought occurs here faster, there slower. We readers of Spinoza selectively embrace those rhythms in our encounter with Spinoza.⁶⁴ While Deleuze himself posits that there are two rhythms in the *Ethics* that structure its organization (and later three), Deleuze's ear for the myriad *Ethics* ties into the broader theory of the plane of immanence as a field of relational and centrifugal compositional processes. The plane of immanence distributes multiplicities.

Further involved in Spinoza's "plane of immanence" is what Deleuze calls the "typology of immanent modes of existence" or the "ethology".⁶⁵ Bodies are interrogated in terms of how their intensive affect-grounding character is expressed in extensive compositions, that is, in terms of their complex manner of existence.

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62 Deleuze (2003), 171.

63 In the introduction to *Mille plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly elaborate a theory of "the book" as one kind of "*agencement*". See Deleuze and Guattari (1980), 9-37. As interesting as it is, I will not discuss here the famous passage in *Mille plateaux* where Spinoza *Ethics* earns the title of "being the great book on the BwO (*CsO = corps sans organes*)" (190), despite the fact that the "BwO" is explicitly connected to the "plane of immanence of desire". For discussion, see Negri (2020).

64 Deleuze (2003), 166. The idea of "rhythms" of fast and slow motion is a translation, as it were, of Spinoza's talk of the "certain and determinate *ratio* of motion and rest that characterizes the essence of a body. See the "physical interlude" after *Ethics* Part 2 Proposition 13 Scholium.

65 One can consider the entirety of Deleuze (2003), Chapter 3 ("The Letters on Evil"), a development on this theme. Cf. the succinct summary of "ethology" on Deleuze (2003), 168. Sharp (2011) argues that the "ethological" turn in Deleuze's **SPP** renews the anti-hierarchical and horizontal constitution of a flat ontology by means of the renaturalization of the human being. I have shown that the anti-hierarchical impulse lies at the heart of Deleuze's interpretation in **SPE**. I am therefore sympathetic to Sharp's interpretation although I do not think that the originality of **SPP** lies in the anti-hierarchical turn; rather, its originality lies in its theorization of the plane of immanence as such. This moves the center of gravitation in Deleuze's discussion of Spinoza away from the ground-level talk of deep metaphysical facts about substance, attribute, and mode, towards a more applied ("practical") concern with the way that we as readers embody Spinoza's thinking and fulfill Spinoza's philosophical project.

Spinoza conceives of any body as a multiplicity of bodies — a certain and determinate *ratio* of motion and rest relates a multiplicity of bodies as one single body.⁶⁶ This multiplicity in nature implies that the one and the same body can be pulled in several directions at the same time, and is what makes for the complexity of the body and its rich ray of affects. For instance, we can be both gladdened *and* saddened by the sight of a friend, as one part of the body can enter into one motion while another part into a contrary motion.⁶⁷ In building on this, Deleuze wants to show us that Spinoza's account of our being's multi-rhythmic nature draws on a further fundamental feature of Spinoza's immanentism and the ethological project, namely that that the essence or nature of any finite mode is intrinsically individuated from any other finite mode by virtue of its degree of intensity.

The notion of “intensity” (and/or “intensive magnitude”) is certainly a term of art.⁶⁸ Though it figures in the systems of both Kant and Hegel, it is perhaps Bergson who drew Deleuze's attention to it.⁶⁹ For Bergson, the term “intensive” contrasts with “extensive” or that which has the property of being in space (In contemporary jargon, this broadly maps onto a familiar distinction between internal or subjective first-person *qualia* and material states.). Yet “in the idea of intensity, and even in the word that translates it, we find the image of a present contraction and consequently a future dilation, the image of a virtual extension and, if we can speak this way, a comprised space.”⁷⁰ For Bergson, the way that we employ quantifying or numerical language for talking about feelings, pains, pleasures, and other subjective states is fundamentally based on a psychological (and metaphysical) illusion, where we incorrectly import familiar trains of thought about extensive reality into our discussions of our inner reality. Thus, we find Bergson critiquing the notion of intensive magnitudes. A so-called “degree of intensity” is demonstrably

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66 This is the definition of “*individuum*” given in the “physical interlude” of *Ethics* Part 2 following Proposition 13 and Scholium.

67 For Spinoza, insofar as we conceive ideas of bodily states as caused by externally present objects, that is, insofar as we imagine our affective states, we are necessarily subject to these kinds of conflicts in our nature, or “fluctuations of the soul”. See *Ethics* Part 3 Proposition 17 Scholium.

68 Lalande (1932) gives a clear rendition of what “intensity” may have meant for many in Deleuze's day: “term. ‘Intensity’: character of that which admits greater or lesser states, but in such a way that the difference between two such states is not itself a degree of that which is susceptible of augmentation or diminution; for ex., a feeling of pain can be greater or lesser, but the difference between a light pain and a stronger pain is not a degree of pain that can be compared to others, unlike the way that the difference between two lengths or numbers is itself a length or number which has its place on a scale of magnitudes” (v. 1, 390).

69 Cf.: Kant's discussion in chapter 2 of the *Analytic of Principles* in his *KRV* (Kant, 1998, 290-295); Hegel in §103, vol. 1 (“The Science of Logic”) of the *Encyclopedia* of 1830 (Hegel, 2010, 162-164); and Bergson (1927), chapter 1. See also Ramond (1995), 194-205.

70 Bergson (1927 [1888]), 3.

inconceivable. It is a notion in the employment of which we wish to quantify things (read, for Bergson: subjective *qualia*) that, in fact, we do not know how to quantify (read, for Bergson: that are not extended in space).

In **SPP**, Deleuze's understanding of how variable and quantitative determinations of our intensive character stand as the intrinsic markers of our being is knotted up with the way that Spinoza's plane of immanence sets the stage for the unfolding of the account of the affects.⁷¹ On the plane of immanence, where multiplicities are always redistributed, and where our own multiple natures are always open to redistribution, our own personal passage from a lesser to a greater intensive state results from the recomposing of our nature in the extensive relations through which we present exist in duration.⁷² In this way, Deleuze believes, all of existence becomes for Spinoza a "test" or "trial"⁷³ — an examination of whether our intensive and eternal or singular nature effectively expresses itself in contemporaneity with our present existence, that is insofar as some relation *x* of extensive parts instantiates in duration, grounding our present existence. But the affects become the only available guideposts here. Only the experience of our active affects can reliably testify to the truth of our natures as degrees of intensity, that is expressions of being's self-affirming power. One is thus presented with what is effectively a theory of the point of contact between the un-extended and the extended, quality and quantity, *pace* Bergson.

To further understand the stakes of Deleuze's interpretation here, it bears underscoring that, for Spinoza, the "affect" (*affectus*) *does* seem to involve two poles of a person's being. Any affect is the idea of the body's "transition" or "passage" (*transitio*) from between states of perfection; hence we may say, with Deleuze, that it effectively designates a relation between states of perfection. The greater perfection gives way to the lesser perfection, or the lesser perfection gives way to the greater perfection. In both cases, the mind forms a corresponding idea or affect. Joy, *laetitia*, is an idea of the body's passage from lesser to greater perfection, that is, the body's flourishing, whereas sadness, *tristitia*,

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71 Actually, it seems there is some equivocation or evolution in the meaning of "intensity" in Spinoza, for Deleuze. In **SPE**, the "intensity" of a mode was strictly identified with the intrinsic principle of individuation of that mode, i.e. its eternal essence included in the attribute. Deleuze emphasizes there that "the difference of beings (essences of modes) is both intrinsic and purely quantitative, as the quantity here is an intensive quantity. [...] [E]ach finite being must be said to *express the absolute*, according to the intensive quantity that constitutes its essence, that is according to its degree of power" (Deleuze, 1968a, 180).

72 In the earlier **SPE**, Deleuze carefully documents this Spinozist position on the theory of the finite mode as consisting in the claim that "to exist is to presently have a very great number of parts" where "these compositional parts are exterior to the essence of the mode and exterior to one another: these are extensive parts" (Deleuze, 1968a, 183).

73 Deleuze (2003), 58.

implies the passage from a greater to a lesser perfection.⁷⁴

It should be no surprise, then, that Deleuze considers the Spinozist theory of the affect to be a fine candidate for the mantelpiece of his interpretation of Spinoza's immanentism in **SPP**. Affects are relational in nature, too; and insofar as the mind is the idea of the body, we find ourselves "in the middle" of an affective bath or network of emotions from our first to our last days. Affects are the way the mind conceives the degree or amount of perfection of the body; the affect is conceived when our being *intensifies* and *enriches*, or when, conversely, it is distended and washed away by external forces. For Deleuze, the affect involves a relational "arrangement" (*agencement*) of intrinsic capacities and powers, and it invokes the way that the mind is always relating two poles of its body's nature, lesser and greater reality or perfection, in its "encounters" with other bodies:

"Studies that define bodies, animals, or people in terms of the affects of which they are capable have founded what today we call *ethology*. This is as true of us, people, as much as it is true of animals, as nobody knows in advance the affects of which they are capable. It is a long affair of experimentation, a long prudence, a Spinozist wisdom that implies the construction of a plane of immanence or consistence. Spinoza's *Ethics* has nothing to do with a morality; he conceives it as an ethology, that is to say a composition of speed and slowness, of powers of affecting and being affected on this plane of immanence. Spinoza cries out: You do not know what you are capable of, for better or worse, you do not know in advance what a body or a mind can do, in such an encounter [*rencontre*], in such an arrangement [*agencement*], in such a combination."⁷⁵

The plane of immanence is a plane of affirmative conjunction and the embracing of rhythms of motion, of immersion into relations. The relation is a compound of relations, but it is only ever a disjunctive synthesis. On the plane of immanence, where being is univocal, each being affirms its own character as a multiplicity, an opening onto a surface of relations and encounters which it learns to ride, to glide over ("*planer*") without being dissolved. Following Deleuze, a finite individual body might be best described as a para-consistent set of affective relations, a pattern of affective capacity and power. This is why the plane of *immanence* is also called plane of *consistency*. Spinoza's ontological units, the *quanta* of motion and rest that correspond to eternal truths, are the standard-

74 See esp. *Ethics* Part 3 Proposition 11 Scholium.

75 Deleuze (2003), 168.

bearers of the theory of immanence as a whole, where what it is to be a thing is to consistently affirm a nature in an outward expansiveness, a capacity for affects and a power of composition. How consistent, or consistent up to what point? “*Nul ne sait ce que peut un corps*” – that is, nobody knows in advance when the composition becomes a decomposition.⁷⁶ For that, there is, again, *l'épreuve éthique*; it's a matter of a “long affair of experimentation” — it is a question of successfully selecting against “*des mauvais rencontres*,” “bad encounters,” conceived by Spinoza along the model of poisons and intoxicants.⁷⁷

It is crucial that the plane of immanence remain *sans* supplementary dimension of meaning or interiority. Yet it would seem that Deleuze's reading is strained on account of the central role that he thinks intensive states occupy in Spinoza. Transcendence inevitably suggests a place “beyond” the mundane, a higher realm, God on a throne, Providential oversight... It needn't, as talk of transcendence might also refer to something contained within and squirreled away on the inside as it were, a subtracted space untouched by the commerce of all things. But what is an “intensity” if not a qualitatively enriched inner world, a thickening and deepening development? Hence, a major difficulty for Deleuze's reading in **SPP** would be why these “intensities” do not preserve an element of transcendence in Spinoza's immanentism.⁷⁸

The wrinkle in Deleuze's articulation of Spinoza's “cartography” aside, Deleuze emphatically underlines how Spinoza leaves no stone unturned in the hunt for transcendence. The extirpation of the Cartesian subject, of a mind that exists somehow outside of its faculty for thought, of a body that exists somehow underneath its capacity for affects, is just the polemical component of an irreducible drive in Spinoza *qua* thinker of immanence to abolish the meaning of the distinction between interior and exterior:

“Never is an animal, a thing, separable from its relations with the world: the interior is only a selected exterior; the exterior, a projected interior; the rapidity or slowness of metabolisms, perceptions, actions and reactions link up one after the other to constitute such or such an individual in the world.”⁷⁹

The abolition of the interior/exterior division echoes Deleuze's recurrent talk of “surfaces” and the way in which meaning only dwells at the level

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76 A point which already surfaces in Deleuze (1968a). See 193 *et sq.*

77 *Ibid.*, 61, for the account of “bad encounters” as poisons. Zourabichvili (2002) further develops the Deleuzian understanding of the notions of sickness and intoxication in Spinoza.

78 A point similarly underlined in Ramond (1995), 203-204.

79 Deleuze (2003), 168-169.

of surfaces as a fragile effect of their interplay. Spinoza's ostensibly flat ontology thus serves as a sounding bar for the intuition that Deleuze also finds at work in Lewis Carroll or in the Stoics in his 1969 *Logique du sens*. Depth is only an illusion of perspective.

Admittedly, the older interpretation of the meaning of "immanence" in Spinoza has not been totally discarded in **SPP**, as we see if we turn to the "Index of principal concepts in the *Ethics*".⁸⁰ The index dates from 1970, however. The book presents us with multiple strata in Deleuze's thinking on immanence in Spinoza. If the earlier emphasis on Spinoza's metaphysics of causality is residual, the emphasis on Spinoza's "ethology" as a project for living on and thinking through the plane of immanence will dominate the character of Deleuze's final meditations on Spinoza and immanence.

Spinoza & the Purest Plane of Immanence in *Qu'est-ce que La philosophie ?*

With the late text *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (hereafter: "**QQPH?**"), Deleuze — accompanied by Félix Guattari — provides us with a third and final version of the story of Spinoza's significance as a thinker of immanence.⁸¹ Furthering the earlier development in the conception of Spinoza's immanentism we find at work in **SPP**, Deleuze and Guattari eschew any facile conception of immanence in favor of a very idiosyncratic one. Indeed, the term "immanence" now has a particularly restricted, technical meaning, as involved in what Deleuze and Guattari call "the plane of immanence." As we have seen, this mutation in conceptual terminology was also anticipated and prepared by the earlier works. Although not exclusively spoken of in connection to the plane immanence, the plane of immanence plays *the key role* in the final story here of Spinoza's philosophy's enduring meaningfulness as a philosophy of immanence. Spinoza, we are told, conceives "the best" or "the purest" "plane of immanence."⁸² If we are to understand what Deleuze and Guattari mean, we have to begin with this lengthy detour, and figure out what "the plane of immanence" is on their view — and why, for that matter, Spinoza's grappling with it in his illustrious fashion is important to the nature of philosophy in general.

The first aspect of this meta-philosophy we must grapple with is why "the plane of immanence is not a concept, nor is it the concept of all

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80 If we look up the term "immanence" in that index, we find the following: "Cf. Attribute, Cause, Eminence, Nature." Not especially helpful... But if we then look up Cause, we are confronted with a summary on immanent causation similar to the one provided by **SPE**. (Discussed above). See esp. *ibid.*, 79.

81 Deleuze and Guattari (2005 [1991]). Translations my own.

82 *Ibid.*, 62.

concepts.”⁸³ If it is not a “concept”, what is it? What kind of speculative function does it have, according to Deleuze and Guattari? One inviting approach here, therefore, is to begin by contrasting their theory of the concept with their theory of the plane of immanence, both of which form essential components of their overall meta-philosophical theory.

“Philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, fabricating concepts.”⁸⁴ This is the first hard response we get from Deleuze and Guattari to the question: What is philosophy? When interpreting this position, some charitability is called for, of course, but *this* meta-philosophical claim at least is *prima facie* intuitively straightforward: Hegel *creates* a (Hegelian) concept of contradiction (contradiction which is surpassed); Nietzsche *creates* a (Nietzschean) concept of difference (difference which is affirmed).

The plane of immanence, in contrast with the definition of philosophy, defies common-sense. It is, we are told, the “image of thought”: it is the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, and hence what thought claims for itself by right as thinkable in the first place.⁸⁵ If concepts are fragmentary, “and born from a dice-throw,” they “resonate” on a plane.⁸⁶ If concepts are “events” of thought, the plane of immanence is the horizon of all events that are conceptualized, their “reservoir”.⁸⁷

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83 *Ibid.*, 39. See also 43, *inter alia*: “It is essential not to confuse the plane of immanence with the concepts that occupy it.”

84 *Ibid.*, 8.

85 *Ibid.*, 41.

86 *Ibid.*, 39.

87 *Ibid.*, 39. An entire chapter of **QQPH?** gives a reply to the question: what are concepts? Among much else, we learn that they are *not* discursive in nature (and, consequently, philosophy itself is not a “discursive formation”). “It is the confusion of concepts and propositions that makes us believe in the existence of scientific propositions, and that considers the proposition as a veritable “intension” (that which the sentence expresses) [...] whereas the philosophical concept most often appears as a senseless proposition (*une proposition dénuée de sens*). This confusion reigns in logic and explains the infantile conception it makes of philosophy. [...] The concept is not at all a proposition, it is not propositional, and the proposition is never an intension” (*ibid.*, 28). Meanwhile, the intentional character of concepts comes up in connection with their relation to the rules of logic — unsurprisingly, since the rules of right reasoning are said to ensure truthful access to reality via concepts. This responds a natural epistemological concern: What use do we make of concepts when we make *valid* judgements? Yet what Deleuze and Guattari understand by concept is somewhat orthogonal to the epistemological concern: “It is true that the concept is fluid, vague, but not because it is without a contour: it is because it is vagabond, non-discursive, in movement on a plane of immanence... [The concept] is not at all a reference to lived experience (*le vécu*) or the states of things, but a consistency defined by its internal components; neither denotation of the state of things nor signification of lived experience, the concept is the event as pure meaning [...]. The concept is a form or a force, never a possible function in any way. In brief, there is only a philosophical concept on the plane of immanence, and scientific functions or logical propositions are not concepts” (*ibid.*, 144-145). Note that Deleuze and Guattari are implicitly denying the broadly post-Fregean consensus of seeing concepts as subject only to the laws of logic.

The intimacy of the “concept” and the “plane of immanence” should not lead us to think philosophers deduce their concepts from their plane of immanence; the relationship between concepts and the plane of immanence is one-of-a-kind. This is true *despite* the fact that the same “elements” can be present on the plane and in the concept, even though they will not have the same “traits”.⁸⁸ It is essential in fact that the relationship between the plane and the concepts that people it not be misconstrued as a deductive one. Philosophy “creates” concepts and does not “deduce” them from prior conceptual commitments.⁸⁹ And the plane of immanence is just not the right kind of thing to allow for the deduction of concepts. It is the *image* of thought that thought draws out or traces of itself on its own. Last but not least, although the plane is that which inaugurates a philosophy, it is not itself a philosophical position, but, as we shall see, an instance of what Deleuze and Guattari want to think of as the non-philosophical as such.

Deleuze and Guattari can however affirm that their theory of the plane of immanence confirms the “grandiose” Leibnizian and Bergsonian view on philosophy as “depending on an intuition that concepts do not cease to develop through slight intensive differences”. This Leibnizo-Bergsonian meta-philosophical view is allegedly supported by the Deleuzo-Guattarian suggestion that the “intuition” here be thought of as “the enfolding (*l’enveloppement*) of infinite movements of thought that ceaselessly pass over a plane of immanence.”⁹⁰ True thought is always, for Deleuze and Guattari, claiming for itself “infinite movements” or “movements of infinity” — movements which compose the plane of immanence, like the waves of an ocean. Fundamentally it would appear the plane of immanence testifies to how philosophy, “the art” of concept creation, is always supplemented and underpinned by some necessary non-conceptual inaugural or founding gesture: thought claiming infinite movements for itself,⁹¹ staking out an “*Un-Tout illimité*”.⁹²

Philosophy is the art of the creation of concepts. Perhaps the only analogous faculty in us to our philosophical faculty is the artistic faculty, the creative drive or skill whereby we imbue meaning into things. What is more, a philosophy will pose the problems raised by the concepts that people the plane of immanence it has traced or claimed. “Philosophy is

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88 *Ibid.*, 44.

89 Furthermore, genuine philosophers necessarily conceive for their philosophies “conceptual persona” (Plato has Socrates, Nietzsche has Zarathustra...) who bring the philosophy to life, the correspondence between planes and concepts is not a matter of a mere logical implication or even one-to-one resonance. See esp. *ibid.*, 76-79.

90 *Ibid.*, 44.

91 *Ibid.*, 41-42.

92 *Ibid.*, 39.

a constructivism,"⁹³ and "one must make planes and pose problems, just as one creates concepts."⁹⁴ This helps explain why philosophers are said to "abhor discussion"⁹⁵ — a vulgar activity if there ever were one. Deleuze and Guattari form a multitude of creative voices, not a panel of critics. Each philosopher (or, to be precise, philosophy) has to draw up their own plane and the concepts which "people" it. What sense is there in having an opinion of some other concept, if one has not created it for oneself? And if one imports it onto a different plane, as one inevitably does, it withers and dies on this foreign soil. "One is never on the same plane."⁹⁶ The art of philosophy is profoundly solitary, motivated by an aristocratic ethos of lone heroism, if not precariously solipsistic — or schizophrenic. Greedy gregariousness destroys concepts, and "all thought is a fiat, and emits a dice throw."⁹⁷ Because philosophy is a constructivism, we cannot know whether philosophical activities will pose the right problems and provide the right solutions until we undertake them for ourselves: we must create our own concepts and build our plane of immanence. Mere critics chew on old bones; nothing is more pitiful than a historian who refuses herself or himself their philosophical prerogatives.⁹⁸ But when did the creative process begin, we may reasonably ask? Certainly, philosophers work with hand-me-downs; Hegel inherits if not *his* dialectical concept of contradiction the term 'contradiction' (*Widerspruch*). There is something in circulation provided by ordinary, natural language. The philosopher's act of creation cannot match a divine being's *ex nihilo* act of creation, unless these shadow concepts are, like the *tohu wa-bohu* of Genesis, primeval with the act of creation itself. It may be an impossible request for Deleuze to tell us how creation of

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93 *Ibid.*, 39.

94 *Ibid.*, 32.

95 *Ibid.*, 34.

96 *Ibid.*, 33.

97 *Ibid.*, 77.

98 *Ibid.*, 85. The meta-philosophical commentary on philosophical constructivism and the impossibility of philosophical discussion properly speaking echoes Gueroult (1979). For Gueroult, too, any philosophical "doctrine" or "system" essentially posits its own philosophical reality. Gueroult's philosophy of the history of philosophy is neo-Kantian in nature, but with a twist. As Gueroult sees it, the transcendental conditions of philosophy — that to qualify as a philosophy a thought must be systematized, because all though fundamentally strives to posit an explanatory framework for all reality — disbar many otherwise "philosophical" practices from consideration by the historian. In this respect, too, Deleuze resembles Gueroult. For recent discussion of Gueroult's "dianometrics" ("theory of doctrines"), see Lærke (2019) and (2020).

Unlike Gueroult, however, Deleuze seemingly ascribes to the view espoused by his mentor Alquié (2005 [1956]), for whom to "understand" a philosophy (read: a historical doctrine) means to *empathize* with it, which one does by performing or following the guiding "intellectual intuition" for oneself. In this way, Deleuze, we may say, makes a common ground of Gueroult and Alquié, despite their famously acrimonious opposition. See further Deleuze (1969b), on Gueroult's "genetico-systematic" method, and Peden (2014), on the Alquié-Gueroult debate.

philosophy began, even though the question is particularly pressing in the case of *historical* work. I suppose we may however find attractive the more watered-down suggestion that philosophers find themselves always already immersed into a world imbued with meaningful concepts, some of which they take up and retool in their own acts of creation.

This extreme Deleuzo-Guattarian ecumenicism will have to be moderated, however, in light of a further characterization of the plane of immanence that bears directly on the exceptional place of Spinoza in their late meta-philosophical theory.

Insofar as the plane of immanence is not a concept, it is not the creation of philosophy, since philosophy consists in the creation of concepts. It is thus “pre-supposed,” argue Deleuze and Guattari, *not* in the way that a concept relies on another concept, but in the way that concepts themselves rely on a “non-conceptual” or “intuitive” comprehension.⁹⁹ The plane of immanence stands in a paradoxical relationship to philosophy: it is “pre-philosophical” yet it also constitutes “the internal conditions” of philosophy.¹⁰⁰ “Non-philosophy,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “is perhaps more at the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself, and signifies that philosophy does not content itself with being understood only in a philosophical or conceptual manner, but addresses itself in its essence to non-philosophers as well.”¹⁰¹

Deleuze and Guattari are not the first to draw sustained attention to non-philosophy, nor even the first to maintain that understanding non-philosophy as dwelling at the heart of philosophy can clarify the nature of philosophy itself.¹⁰² We must recognize the priority of the non-philosophical. Moreover, because the plane of immanence is “pre-philosophical”, “non-philosophical,” or involves non-conceptual “intuition,” write Deleuze and Guattari, forming the plane of immanence “implies a sort of hesitant experimentation” on the part of thought; it relies on means which are difficult to avow: dreams, pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess.¹⁰³ Indeed, it is on the plane of immanence, or rather, it is in continually drawing up the plane of immanence as an infinite movement of thought, that philosophy toys with chaos, *that is* non-philosophy.

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99 Deleuze and Guattari (2005), 44.

100 *Ibid.*, 45.

101 *Ibid.*, 45.

102 This project of situating non-philosophy at the foundation of philosophy resonates with post-Kantian German thinking about the Kantian *ding an sich*. Thus, in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, for instance, the Kantian *ding an sich*, which for Kant remains non-philosophical or beyond the grasp of concepts, becomes the Fichtean I, that is, the non-philosophical *ding an sich* is reconceived as practical reason’s demand to subordinate the Not-I under the unity of the I. For more on this trajectory, see Delbos (1992 [1909]).

103 *Ibid.*, 45.

In the pre-conceptual gesture of instauration, the philosopher grapples with the extremely difficult task of selecting a cut of chaos on which their philosophy — their art of concept creation — can be undertaken. “The problem of philosophy is to acquire consistency without losing the infinity into which thought plunges.”¹⁰⁴ As a matter of fact, it is only insofar as philosophy is constituted by a selection of chaos that philosophy always takes place on planes of *immanence* — whereas *transcendence* remains derivative, a deleterious side-effect of the way thought claims for itself infinite movement as a plane of immanence. The “claiming” or seizing of infinite movements of thought, which is built into the very foundation of philosophy as its internal and non-philosophical condition, is a claiming of “*une coupe de chaos*.”¹⁰⁵ This is what makes thought “dangerous,” disruptive, and hostile to transcendence: “*la part d’immanence*” is really “*la part du feu*.”¹⁰⁶ And it is what Spinoza knew to embrace, at the cost of shattering the wall between philosophy and non-philosophy.

For Deleuze and Guattari, understanding chaos is a fraught affair. This is due to the nature of chaos: “chaos chaotizes,”¹⁰⁷ that is to say, unravels and undermines the consistency that thought gives to concepts, pushing thought to an *unstable* infinite variability. And yet, it is unavoidable, as it is involved in the very movement of infinity that thought gives as its own image when laying claim to its plane of immanence. Hence, we are all, think Deleuze and Guattari, plagued by the problem of the chaos of thought. “Nothing is more painful, more anguishing than a thought that escapes itself, fleeting ideas, ideas that disappear having been hardly sketched out, already worn away by oblivion, precipitated into others we do not master any better.”¹⁰⁸

Transcendence takes form when chaos overwhelms, as it almost inevitably must — *almost* inevitably, since Spinoza will show us that this is not *always* the case, and transcendence can be repudiated once and for all. Thus, chaos is metaphysically prior to transcendence, just as non-philosophy is prior to the conceptual art. Transcendence is the appearance opinion forms of a guard against chaos — an “umbrella,”¹⁰⁹ something static, a cliché, a thought that is made *immobile*. On the one hand, philosophy is at always war with opinion, and it wages that war by borrowing the arms of non-philosophy or chaos. On the other hand, the

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104 *Ibid.*, 46.

105 *Ibid.*, 46.

106 *Ibid.*, 46.

107 *Ibid.*, 46.

108 *Ibid.*, 201.

109 *Ibid.*, 46.

reintroduction of transcendence onto a plane of immanence is “*fatal*”¹¹⁰—inevitable, but also deadly, as it stills and “stops” the movement of infinity that thought has claimed for itself as a right.¹¹¹ One thus has “the choice between transcendence and chaos.”¹¹² All philosophers *qua* thinkers of planes of immanence call on chaos, which they both select from and ward off in drawing up their image of thought; and all philosophies are united, and can be stacked up against one another, in this delicate effort to ward off while selectively introducing doses of chaos.

“The plane of immanence is like a cut (*coupe*) of chaos, and acts a sieve (*crible*).”¹¹³ Here is where Spinoza’s immanentism finally comes into its full glory. If all philosophies have their own plane of immanence that they people with their own concepts, what sense is there in asking if one can be better than another? The answer takes up the Deleuzian presentation of Spinozism as the philosophy that shows the way out of philosophy. The best plane of immanence will be the purest plane of immanence, that is, it will have a special “sieve”, one where the infinite movement of thought is never stilled, where the floodgates of chaos remain unclosed. Spinoza therefore provides the solution to the riddle: the “best” plane of immanence is his — because his philosophy surrenders itself to the effort to call on chaos in the war against transcendence. That is to say, his system fully opens onto the non-philosophical or pre-philosophical condition of all philosophy as constituted by a “slice” or “cut” of chaos. Spinoza’s philosophy thus tells us about the absolute horizons of all philosophy:

“He who knew fully that immanence was only immanent to itself, and thus that it was a plane run over with movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates, is Spinoza. Thus, he is the prince of philosophers. Maybe he is the only one to have made no compromise with transcendence, to have hunted it down everywhere. With the third kind of knowledge in the last book of the *Ethics*, he makes the movement of the infinite and gives to philosophy infinite speeds. He reached unheard of speeds, shortcuts so astonishing that one can only speak of music, tornados, wind, and cords. He found the only freedom in immanence. He completed (*achevé*) philosophy, because he fulfilled its pre-philosophical supposition. [...] Spinoza is the vertigo of philosophy from which so many philosophers try

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110 *Ibid.*, 54.

111 *Ibid.*, 50.

112 *Ibid.*, 54.

113 *Ibid.*, 46.

in vain to escape. Will we ever be mature enough for a Spinozist inspiration?"¹¹⁴

In the concluding paragraph to the same chapter, we find sketched out in a somewhat fragmented or aphoristic form a second, similar celebration of Spinoza's uniqueness — that is, his uncompromising commitment to bear witness to “the plane of immanence” at the core of all philosophy. Here the Christological undertones become explicit. Spinoza's “completion” of philosophy is the accomplishment of its primordial task as well as the overthrowing of the stricture to which it is normally bound, *viz.* to select a “cut” or “slice” of chaos and not *all* of chaos, not *all* movements of the infinite:

“Perhaps it is the supreme gesture of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence, but to show that it is there, unthought in each plane. To think about it in this manner, as the outside and the inside of thought, the outside that is not exterior and the inside that is not interior. That which cannot be thought, and yet must be thought, this was thought once, just as the Christ was incarnated one time to show the possibility of the impossible. Thus, Spinoza is the Christ of philosophers, and the greatest philosophers are hardly but apostles, who distance themselves or approach themselves to this mystery. Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher (*le devenir-philosophe infini*). He showed, laid out, thought the “best” plane of immanence, that is the purest one, the one which neither gives itself over to transcendence nor restores any transcendence, the one which inspires the fewest illusions, the fewest bad feelings and erroneous perceptions...”¹¹⁵

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Volume 8
Issue 1

As I interpret their view here, Deleuze and Guattari are ascribing to Spinoza the following: that his philosophy circumscribes the outer limits of what *any* philosophy does when it fully turns itself over to the plane of immanence, the plan that *all* philosophies draw on in a kind of pre-conceptual gesture of inauguration. That gesture of inauguration, we have seen, yields “infinite movements of thought” — the moving, swirling, vertiginous ground which philosophy peoples with concepts, the reservoir from which philosophy draws its understanding of that which can by philosophical right be subsumed under a concept in the first place.

For Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps we may say that the ultimate lesson of Spinoza's immanentism is to show us that if we take philosophy's claim to dispose of the infinite movement of thought

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114 *Ibid.*, 51-52.

115 *Ibid.*, 61-62.

seriously, then philosophy has to accept a certain self-identification with chaos; philosophy, in including all infinite movement of thought in itself, no longer distinguishes itself from non-philosophy. The core meta-philosophical insight to be gleaned from Spinoza is that for philosophy to create maximal concepts, *and to have a maximal rational scope*, philosophy ceases to select against the chaotic character of the movement of the infinite in thought. Returning to philosophy's non-philosophical precondition becomes, in the case of Spinoza, philosophy's purpose. This is the price to pay for the abolition of transcendence — a willingness to discard the “sieve” or “screen” (*crible*) that would otherwise select against an excess of infinite movement or chaos.

Presumably this sounds decidedly exotic and “Continental” to more standard Anglo-centric conceptions both of Spinoza and of the interpreter's job. Nonetheless, it resonates strongly with recent critical work in analytic metaphysics by Michael Della Rocca, for whom the explanatory demand employed at the heart of all philosophy actually instructs us in the ultimate metaphysical insignificance of all rational explanations.¹¹⁶ The Christological character of Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of Spinoza should not be too off-putting, either. We can, if we are more comfortable with the idea, see them as proffering a kind of neo-Wittgensteinian take on the need for philosophy, once complete, to discard the philosophical ladder it employed to reach completion.¹¹⁷

There is no denying of course that immanence in Spinoza has taken on bold and strange hues in the late work of Deleuze. **QQPH?** implies a story of a Spinoza who, having become a philosopher because he found no deep and lasting joy in mercantile dealings, would have seen fit to use philosophy as a way to move beyond mere philosophy. In other words, Spinoza's “immanentism” comes to stand for Spinoza's dream of redemption via philosophy. Here is the rub. Spinoza's unhinged immanentism must appear as sheer chaos, an avenue for non-philosophy to claim philosophical rights. Its liberating force is at stake.

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116 See the recent work Della Rocca (2020) for the fullest presentation of this view.

117 A view famously espoused in Wittgenstein (1922 [1921]), 6.5

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Volume 8
Issue 1

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