Louis Althusser and the End of Classical Russian Marxism: Spinoza, Hegel and the Critique of Dogmatic Marxism

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Abstract: An attempt to restate Marx's critical method in terms of Spinozist dogmatic epistemology was central to Louis Althusser's conception of Marxist philosophy. Though it is no longer necessary to argue that this 'restatement' had almost no ground in Marx's own thinking, it was a highly significant expression of the essence of dialectical materialism. Through discussion of Hegel's critique of Spinoza, it will be argued that a democratically acceptable method of criticism of the mistaken beliefs of others, such as Marx developed in *Capital*, must take a resolutely anti-dogmatic approach which has the principle of winning subjective conviction at its core.

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> Everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but also as Subject.
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> Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[1]

Introduction

At the time of the personal catastrophe that in 1980 ended both the life of Hélène Althusser and, in my opinion, the intellectually productive life of Louis Althusser,[2] the reputation in the English-speaking world of Louis Althusser's contribution to Marxist philosophy had been very much diminished by sustained, vehement and successful attack.[3] The extent of the success of this attack was perhaps made most

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[1] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977 [1807]) (hereinafter PS) p. 10 (para. 1).

[2] Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (London: Verso, 1994) is a morbidly fascinating book, but such theoretical interest as it has arises only because of what Althusser had achieved before 1980. See Gabriel Albiac, 'Althusser, Reader of Althusser: Autobiography as Fictional Genre', *Rethinking Marxism*, 10:3 (1998), pp. 80-89 and Gregory Eliott, 'Analysis Terminated; Analysis Interminable: The Case of Louis Althusser' in Gregory Eliott (ed) *Althusser: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994). (I understand the French original of *The Future Lasts a Long Time* contains a chapter on Spinoza not translated into English and on which I therefore cannot comment).

[3] eg Simon Clarke *et al* (eds) *One-dimensional Marxism* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980). For a general review see Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso, 1987).

evident, not by any explicit critique, but by Kolakowski's contemptuous dismissal of Althusser in *Main Currents of Marxism*,[4] which set at nought, or less than nought, the most celebrated Marxist contribution to social theory and philosophy in the twenty years prior to the appearance of Kolakowski's book. Since his death, Althusser's reputation has begun to be revived, but, despite the interest of the issues raised by this revival,[5] I think it must be said that this is the case only for those sympathetic to Marxism.[6] Even for that group, Althusser's reputation still enjoys nothing like the status it did in, say, the years after the appearance in 1972 of *Politics and History*,[7] the last of the initial tranche of excellent editions of Althusser which made his key works available in English. Perhaps this is right for, much more than one would normally think fit (in contradiction of Althusser's own conception of reading), one must distinguish what is of possible value and what is of no possible value whatsoever in the philosophy of Louis Althusser if one is now to draw on that philosophy, and,

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[4] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) vol. 3, pp. 483-87. Kolakowski had discussed Althusser at greater length in Leszek Kolakowski, 'Althusser's Marx', *Socialist Register*, 8 (1971), pp. 111-28. In essence, this paper is written because I am in basic agreement with Kolakowski's claim (despite the way it is put) that Althusser's philosophy represents 'a return to old-fashioned Communist bigotry', but am in basic disagreement with his claim that 'Althusser did not make any fresh contribution to theory': ibid., 486.

[5] eg E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds) *The Althusserian Legacy* (London: Verso, 1993). For a general review see Luke Ferretter, *Louis Althusser* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005).

[6] Tony Judt, 'Elucubrations: The 'Marxism' of Louis Althusser' in *Reappraisals* (London: Vintage Books, 2009). This criticism of Althusser was first published in 1994 and reprinted without amendment in 2008.

[7] Louis Althusser, *Politics and History* (London: New Left Books, 1972).

especially with the additions to his published *oeuvre* of works he wrote since 1980,[8] the latter part is very much the larger.

Accepting as I do the very considerable value of core elements of Althusser's social theory, I do not propose to even minimally review the positive re-evaluations that have been made of this part of his work.[9] Rather, I want to focus on a position many of these re-evaluations have adopted which, though it has been expressed in works of great interest, will, I think, ultimately prove unhelpful to that re-evaluation. It is the position – indeed a very Althusserian position in that recalls the dialectical materialist stress on what Kolakowski called 'integrality'[10] - that it is necessary to find something of fundamental value in Althusser's explicit epistemology in order to justify finding something of fundamental value in his social theory. This position is exemplified in Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff's very thought-provoking *New Departures in Marxist Theory*.[11] Resnick and Wolff insist on the importance of Althusser's conceptualisation of contradiction in terms of overdetermination, and identify its key value as the way that its principled 'critique of determinism'[12] allows us to conceive of the role of contradiction in the materialist conception of history in

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[8] Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter* (London: Verso, 2006). For evaluations of this work quite at variance with mine see Warren Montag, 'The Late Althusser: Materialism of the Encounter or Philosophy of Nothing?' *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 51:2 (2010) pp. 157-70; Katja Diefenbach *et al* (eds) *Encountering Althusser* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) and Fernanda Navarro, 'An Encounter with Althusser', *Rethinking Marxism*, 10:3 (1998), pp. 93-98.

[9] For such a review see Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

[10] Kolakowski, op. cit., vol 2, p. 340.

[11] Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff, *New Departures in Marxian Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[12] Ibid., p. 68.

coherently 'anti-essentialist'[13] terms. I believe this is the core of what is important in Althusser's work, and that, because of it, Althusser's work is, as Resnick and Wollf say, 'one of the greatest contributions in the Marxism tradition'.[14] Resnick and Wolff, and others taking a similar line, are performing a signal service by reviving this aspect of Althusser's thought.

Unfortunately, Resnick and Wolff maintain that this anti-essentialism in Althusser's social theory is inextricably linked to a claimed anti-essentialism in his epistemology, which they believe is a contribution of similar value. Though they seem to have more reservations about Althusser's epistemology than they do about his social theory, they argue it is a contribution of similar weight and, indeed, give an account of Althusser's epistemology in terms which themselves involve 'overdetermination and complex contradiction'.[15] They argue that Althusser moved away from a strong distinction between science (Marxism) and ideology (bourgeois thought) and set up a workable pluralism, so that, at its core, 'the Althusserian critique … implies that Marxism can no longer be held up as science and non-Marxism as ideology'.[16] If I may quote at length:

> Although influenced deeply by the non-Marxist intellectual currents swirling around him, Althusser did nonetheless begin to fashion a distinctively Marxian epistemology. It broke radically from the essentialist epistemologies of traditional social theory, Marxist and non-Marxist. It deployed concepts of overdetermination and complex contradiction to champion truths instead of truth, differences amongst a multiplicity of theories rather than dogmatic adherence to an absolute

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[13] Ibid., p. 79.

[14] Ibid., p. 68.

[15] Ibid., p. 75.

[16] Ibid., p. 73.

> standard. Finally, it avoided the theoretical relativism that might otherwise attend such a position by articulating a basis for theoretical partisanship among alternative truths developed in and by alternative social theories.
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> From such an epistemological standpoint, the statements made within any theoretical project are interrogated in terms of their social conditions and consequences. Based on that interrogation, the statements will be accepted, rejected, or transformed for insertion into Marxian social theory. Marxian social theorists will take positions toward and make alliances with proponents of other theories based precisely on its assessment of the social conditions and consequences of these theories. All truths and theories are not equally valid or acceptable from this standpoint.
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> They are not accepted or rejected on the grounds of some absolute standard of a singular truth; such a protocol is exactly what Althusser's epistemological position rules out. They are all treated as theories with their truths; no epistemological basis exists for their rejection or acceptance. Rather such a basis exists on the different level of an analysis of each theory's social conditions of existence and its social consequences. That is why Althusser's distinctive Marxian epistemology is neither a relativism nor a postmodernism.[17]

The epistemology Resnick and Wolff outline may itself be basically sound. I myself do not think so as I believe its pluralism is irretrievably relativist, though they categorically deny this. But, however this is, I cannot, I am afraid, concede that, in its pluralism, it has any plausibility whatsoever as an account of Althusser's own epistemology, which rested on a dogmatic distinction between science and truth derived from Spinoza, who was, I presume, the principal 'non-Marxian intellectual [current] swirling around Althusser' which Resnick and Wolff had in mind. Obviously, it is Hegel who is the principal such current swirling around most western Marxism, and it is extremely important to appreciate the political significance of the fact that that Althusser made such a determined effort to replace Hegel with Spinoza in the interpretation of Marx's thought.

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[17] Ibid., p. 75.

The significance of the position taken by contributors such as Resnick and Wolff is that it shows us that, even now, the democratic unacceptability of Althusser's Spinozist epistemology is not appreciated, and, indeed, that epistemology is being reasserted in a rather direct manner.[18] Valuable contributions by Warren Montag[19] and others have deepened our appreciation of the depth of the Spinozist influence on Althusser and his contemporaries,[20] and many important texts have now been made available in English.[21] In my own opinion, earlier work particularly by Christopher Norris[22] had already clearly put Spinozist dogmatism at the heart of Althusser's epistemology. I believe that, following a tradition of Marxist acknowledgement of Spinozist influence which can be traced to Plekhanov,[23] Althusser gave the fullest

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[18] Warren Montag, 'Spinoza and Althusser Against Hermeneutics: Interpretation or Intervention?' in Kaplan and Sprinker (eds) op. cit. For a general review see Peter Thomas, 'Philosophical Strategies: Althusser and Spinoza', *Historical Materialism*, 10:3 (2002), pp. 71-113.

[19] Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* (London: Verso, 1999) and Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[20] Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

[21] eg Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* (London: Verso, 1998); Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1990); Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and the essays collected in Pierre Macherey, *In a Materialist Way* (London: Verso, 1998) pt 3 and in Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (eds) *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Of course, many important texts remain untranslated, including a five volume commentary on the *Ethics* by Macherey. For a general review see Wiep van Bungee, 'Spinoza Past and Present' in *Spinoza: Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[22] Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) ch. 1. The first identification in English of the Spinozist elements in Althusser of which I am aware was Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976) pp. 64-66.

[23] G. V. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1962 [1908]) pp. 19-20. See further Daniela Steila, *Genesis and*

expression to the dogmatism which is at the heart of dialectical materialism. And as socialism must, in my opinion, sever its links to dialectical materialism (or completely change what is meant by dialectical materialism) if it is to be a democratically acceptable form of social criticism, it is important that the revival of what is valuable in Althusser's social philosophy be severed from his democratically unacceptable epistemology. Althusser, I believe, stands in the same relationship to dialectical materialism as Engels and Marx believed Feuerbach to stand to classical German philosophy:[24] he is its most sophisticated advocate, and, as such, lays bare the core, and core shortcomings, of the philosophy.[25]

I do not think I myself can usefully add anything to the thrust of Norris' account of Althusser's Spinozism, and in criticism of Althusser's epistemology I would merely refer the reader to that account (and the contrast it poses to Resnick and Wolff). What I intend to do in this paper is show what still evidently needs to be shown, which is why Spinozist dogmatism is a democratically unacceptable basis for critical epistemology.[26] I believe the best way to do this for a readership of those concerned to evaluate Althusser's contribution to Marxism is to directly describe to

Development of Plekhanov's Theory of Knowledge (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

[24] Friedrich Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy' [1886] in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975ff) vol 26.

[25] I am aware of one similar play on the title of Engels' book: Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy', *New Left Review*, I/79 (1973), pp. 17-36. No doubt there are others.

[26] Andre Santos Compos, 'The Problem of the Beginning in Political Philosophy: Spinoza After Hegel' in Hasana Sharp and Jason E. Smith, *Between Hegel and Spinoza* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

them the nature of Hegel's criticism of Spinoza and its implications for critical method. It is not the detailed similarities of Althusser's and Spinoza's epistemologies that I want to discuss, though I trust that those familiar with Althusser will readily recognise them as they emerge particularly from the discussion of the levels of knowledge in Spinoza's thought.[27] I want to discuss the fundamental political consequences of the absence of subjectivity in Spinozist epistemology.

When I have used words related to 'dogma' in reference to the epistemologies of Spinoza, Althusser and others, I have not done so with the intention of deprecating those epistemologies in any direct way but to register that they are based on coherence theories of belief in which dogmatism is not a defect but an essential virtue.[28] The point, however, is that beliefs stated in these terms do not have a form which is adapted to the persuasion of others. They are closed systems and their form is adapted to the correct statement of the truth. Putting aside the reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,[29] Spinoza's philosophical views had no little or purchase in

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[27] C.f. Louis Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic' in *For Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1977) pp. 182-93; Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (Lonodn: New Left Books, 1970) p. 90; Louis Althusser, 'Elements of Self-criticism' in *Essays in Self-criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1976) pp. 132-41 and Louis Althusser, 'Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?' in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (London: Verso, 1990) pp. 224-230.

[28] Spinoza 'was the last major figure until Frege in the Western canon to give a subsidiary place to epistemology' because '[t]he practice of religions was never understood in a way that required a justification of defensible premises': Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 248. See further Ralph C. S. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[29] Steven M. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

their time, but his life[30] and work[31] were consciously intended to provide a pattern for others to follow. One can, I think without absurdity if one makes proper allowance for their radically different circumstances and significance, say something similar about Althusser's response to Stalinism, particularly as it formed an important strand of post-war French communism.[32] But the philosophical expression of this pattern took the form of a correct statement of dogma, and the reception of the dogma by others could not be conceived of as other than, in the end, the elimination of their erroneous beliefs and the imposition of correct ones in their place. In my opinion, which it will become obvious rests on a Kantian commitment to autonomy, this is a disaster for forms of social criticism such as socialism which ask of others that they change their beliefs. Socialism must seek to persuade, as Marx himself did in *Capital* but dialectical materialism of course did not, and doing so involves rejecting the coherence principle of truth. Comment on the political practice of dialectical materialism as a system of dogmatic elimination of error by actually existing communist power is supererogatory.

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[30] Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pt 2. The shift in the broad image of Spinoza, from the contemplative, even reclusive, philosopher conveyed by earlier biographies, to the engaged, if not political, philosopher portrayed in Steven M. Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) n.b. ch. 10, is very striking.

[31] Michael Hampe, 'Rationality as the Therapy of Self-Liberation in Spinoza's *Ethics*' in Clare Carlisle and Jornadon Ganeri (eds) *Philosophy as Therapeia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[32] Margaret A. Majumdar, *Althusser and the End of Leninism* (London: Pluto Press, 1995) and William S. Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

In what follows I will argue that Hegel placed subjective conviction at the heart of modern conceptions of epistemology, in rejection of Spinoza's conception of truth as coherence which, no matter how logically compelling given its presuppositions, carries no power to convince those who do not accept those presuppositions. The step from this to Marx's own commitment to Hegelian immanent critique as the means of winning conviction, so determinedly articulated in *Capital*, will be clear to those with a knowledge of Marx's work, though I shall conclude by underlining it.

Hegel's Critique of Spinoza

The extended critique of Spinoza in Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy apparently follows a most conventional line by beginning with an objection to the form of the exposition of the *Ethics*.[33] That book's full title is, of course, *Ethical Principles Geometrically Demonstrated* (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*), and is presented after the fashion of a Euclidean deduction. The first part, 'Concerning God', begins with eight definitions which amount to a statement that God is all substance from which the subsequent arguments proceed.[34] Now, whilst Hegel's regard for the theistic content of Spinozism extended even to identifying it as

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[33] In Wolfson's historically important work, summing up core themes in the modern interpretation of Spinoza, the adoption of the geometrical method was regarded as tantamount to an opportunistic attempt to borrow the prestige of mathematics: Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934) vol. 1, pp. 53-57. No simple objection to Spinoza's 'axiomatic presentation' could, of course, now succeed in light of Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[34] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Ethics' [1677] (hereinafter E) in *Complete Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2002) p. 217.

the source of all truth in modern philosophy,[35] he seriously objected to this geometric form of presentation of that content.[36] But it is to his deepening of the, even as he wrote, common to the point of being hackneyed criticism of the geometrical form that I want to draw attention.

Hegel believed that there was a strong contrast between the forms of presentation suitable for mathematical as opposed to philosophical truths. Formal deduction may be fit to represent the tautological statements of mathematics, which follow internally to the abstract system in which they are propounded. It cannot, however, express the knowledge of the real provided by philosophical statements of absolute truth.[37] No doubt specialist objections can be raised against these characterisations particularly of mathematical statements, but the valid basis of this contrast is that Hegel regards the separation of the content and form of philosophical statements of truth unacceptable. In Spinoza's case, it cannot allow for the intimate connections which we will see necessarily exist between the content of Spinoza's metaphysics and the form in which he chose to present these. Hegel had to carry out a radical substantive critique of Spinozism in order to demonstrate the truth of that system.[38]

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[35] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1892-96 [1840]) (hereinafter LHP) vol. 3, pp. 257, 283.

[36] Ibid., pp. 282-7; Georg W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1812-16]) (hereinafter SL) pp. 472-73 and Georg W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1991 [1817]) (hereinafter L) p. 298 (sec. 229 addn.).

[37] LHP, vol. 3, pp. 282-85; and PS, pp. 24-28 (paras. 43-47).

[38] L, pp. 226-27 (sec. 151 addn.).

The geometrical form of presentation is unacceptable, Hegel argued, not because it distorts Spinoza's system, but because it accurately expresses the absence of subjective processes in Spinoza's method of proof, which followed from the disregard for subjective conviction which we will see is central to that system.[39] Spinozism is the most consistent development of a number of Descartes' ideas about God's relationship to the created world and how we might describe it. However, Hegel showed that the development of the essential achievement of the Cartesian philosophy, the elevation of the subject to the position of the arbiter of truth, even of the truth of God's existence, requires the rejection of these ideas.[40] What is ultimately at issue here is, not a shift from, as it were, Spinoza's metaphysics of substance to Hegel's metaphysics of spirit,[41] but, as Hartmann has put it, the elimination of metaphysics,[42] brought about by a shift in the ground of epistemological justification, from objective systems to subjective conviction.[43]

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[39] LHP, vol. 3, p. 287. See further R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) ch. 1.

[40] On the influence of Hegel's views about to Descartes on his critique of Spinoza generally see Stanley Rosen, 'Hegel, Descartes and Spinoza' in James B. Wilbur (ed) *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976).

[41] J. B. McMinn, 'A Critique on Hegel's Criticism of Spinoza's God', *Kant Studien*, 51 (1960), pp. 294–314 and Henry A. Myers, *The Spinoza-Hegel Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1944) p. 40.

[42] Klaus Hartmann, 'Hegel: A Non-metaphysical View' in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972). Moyar has most valuably argued that, to be precise, what is at issue is not 'metaphysics' as such, but '[t]he general requirement to make our thinking non-dogmatic metaphysics': Dean Moyar, 'Thought and Metaphysics: Hegel's Critical Reception of Spinoza' in Eckhart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (eds) *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 213.

[43] George di Giovanni, 'Hegel's Anti-Spinozism: The Transition to Subjective Logic and the End of Classical Metaphysics' in David G. Carlson (ed) *Hegel's Theory of the*

This shift naturally had its first expressions in attempts to develop a subjectively secure theology, and very arguably the most fruitful philosophical contributions to this theme in Enlightenment thought are Kant's writings on rational theology. But it is Hegel who, in a marked instance of his efforts to divine the truth in all preceding philosophy, made the intellectual history of this shift most clear. Certainly, the contrast is stark between Kant's treating Christian Wolff as 'the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers'[44] and Hegel's dialogue with philosophy's past. However, it is not so much the depth of Hegel's knowledge of the history of his discipline as the depth of his concern to locate his own work within that history, of which he intended to show it was a product, and to justify by showing this, which I wish to emphasise here.

Spinoza's Proof of God's Existence

Spinoza demonstrated his belief in God in the following way. He defined the finitude of a thing as that thing's being limited. Limitation occurs through the existence of a thing other than the first sharing a common ground with it through which limitation of the first is exercised.[45] Spinoza then distinguished between a substance and its modes. A substance is such a thing that an account of its attributes, that is its essence or those

Subject (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Professor Giovanni has provided a most thorough account of the intellectual background in George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[44] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1781]) p. 119 (Bxxxvi).

[45] E, p. 217 (pt. 1, def. 1).

qualities of it that are intrinsically bound up in its being the thing it is,[46] can be given wholly within the thing itself without reference to other things.[47] A mode, by contrast, is a thing that must be understood by reference to another thing, for its essence lies in the substance of which it is, precisely, a modification.[48] Modes clearly may limit one another. However, a substance cannot be limited, for for it to be so it would have to share an attribute with another substance as the common ground of limitation. This is impossible, for the two would then have to share an essential quality which constitutes their existence as different substances.[49] Thus finite substances in the plural cannot exist; there can be only one infinite substance.[50]

Furthermore, this substance exists necessarily. As a substance is completely in itself, it cannot admit of an external cause, for then an account of the substance would have to refer to an external thing which is the cause. A substance therefore has existence as an attribute.[51] Its existence must be understood as an 'eternity', by which is meant that its existence cannot be thought to have a beginning and an end as this implies limitation, but should be conceived as an eternal, self-securing continuance.[52] In sum, as Spinoza famously put it, a substance is the cause of itself (*causa sui*).[53]

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[46] Ibid. (pt. 1, def. 4).

[47] Ibid. (pt. 1, def. 3).

[48] Ibid. (pt. 1, def. 5).

[49] Ibid., pp. 218-19 (pt. 1, prop. 5).

[50] Ibid., pp. 219-21 (pt. 1, prop. 8).

[51] Ibid., p. 219 (pt. 1, prop. 7).

[52] Ibid., p. 217 (pt. 1, def. 8).

[53] Ibid. (pt. 1, def. 1).

Allowing a definition of God as a being absolutely infinite,[54] which Spinoza adopts from established theological positions and of which the *Ethics* may be regarded as an unprecedentedly rigorous thinking through,[55] it is possible to identify God as the one infinite, necessarily existent substance.[56] Everything in nature, the appearance of finitude in all its forms, is but a modification of God.[57]

The Epistemology of Spinoza's Proof

Hegel's objection to these arguments as arguments is clear; there is no subjective compulsion to believe them as they avoid proving the initial definitions. The identification of God with all substance may be correct, but the truth of what remain assertions from which all else in the *Ethics* follows is never established. However, as I have suggested, Spinoza's form of presentation of his metaphysics was by no means chosen in ignorance of the necessity of providing a proof of that system. Rather it is a presentation which suppresses consideration of the subjective compulsion of belief as the proof which it does in fact furnish follows from the metaphysical positions presented, and these positions erase subjectivity.[58] The way Spinoza took up the problem of establishing truth was derived from Descartes, and the significance of this is, not so much that the solution given borrows a great deal from Cartesian

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[54] Ibid. (pt. 1, def. 6).

[55] Carlos Fraenke, 'Maimonides' God and Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44:2 (2006), pp. 169-215.

[56] E, pp. 222-23 (pt. 1, prop. 11).

[57] Ibid., pp. 224-27 (pt. 1, prop. 15).

[58] C.f. the description of egolessness in Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1979) ch. 6.

formulations, although it does, but that Spinoza had to take over the posing of this problem quite externally to his own system.

After Descartes had, from the position of doubt, radically separated subject and object, Cartesianism was naturally beset with the problem of reuniting them, and conceived of this as a problem of correlating thought and extended bodies, or at least accounting for the intuitive conviction of their correlation, after Descartes had rebuilt them as two separate substances.[59] In an argument even the basic sense of which is hard for the contemporary reader to grasp,[60] Descartes provided for some connection of mind and body through an action of the pineal gland,[61] and overall seems to have been content with accepting the common-sense necessity of correlation.[62] Malebranche regarded a change in thought or extension as the 'occasion' of a corresponding change in the other, the occasion being realised by God's continuous intervention to bring it about.[63] What has often been regarded as the characteristic Cartesian correlation of thought and extension, which treats them as if they were two perfectly synchronised clocks, can properly be traced to Arnold Geulincx.[64]

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[59] René Descartes, 'Meditations' [1641] in *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) vol. 2, pp. 50-62.

[60] On the plausibility of this argument understood, as of course it initially should be, as Descartes himself understood it, see Lisa Shapiro, 'Descartes' Pineal Gland Reconsidered', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 35:1 (2011), pp. 259-86.

[61] René Descartes, 'The Passions of the Soul' [1649] in *Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, p. 340.

[62] René Descartes, *Conversations with Burman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976 [1648]) p. 28.

[63] Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1688]) pp. 121-22 (dialogue 7, xiv).

[64] Arnold Geulincx, *Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2006 [1675]) p. 232 (annotation 19 to treatise I, ch. II, sec. II, §2). The recent availability of Geulincx's *Ethics* in English is

Authoritative modern scholarship is radically questioning the value of giving much substance to this metaphor, and behind this to our idea of occasionalism as it is derived from the metaphor,[65] but, with respect to this scholarship, it would still appear that all occasionalist ideas as such have recourse to special hypotheses which cannot be integrated into the body of Cartesianism and indeed tend to conflict with it. Geulincx's clocks metaphor, for example, would seem to require that thought is as equally determined as extension as a condition of their synchronisation, a conclusion profoundly at odds with the doctrine of free will.[66]

Spinoza's own position has affinities especially with the determinism of the clocks metaphor, but he was able to dispense with the unsatisfactory recourse to special actions by God. Spinoza put an end to all such notions by subjecting the conundrums bound up in the attempt to maintain the dualism of thought and extension

no doubt largely due to its being able to be published with Samuel Beckett's extensive notes on the book, and that Beckett made generous acknowledgement of Geulincx's influence on his thought: David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2012).

[65] Steven M. Nadler, *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians* (Oxford University Press, 2011) ch. 1.

[66] This is the implication of this metaphor developed by Leibniz in the doctrine of pre-established harmony: Gottfried Leibniz, 'Third Explanation of the New System' [1696] in *Philosophical Texts* (Oxford University Press, 1988) 192. See further Stuart Brown, 'Malebranche's Occasionalism and Leibniz's Pre-established Harmony: An "Easy Crossing" or an "Unbridgeable Gap"' in Stuart Brown (ed) *Nicholas Malebranche* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991). From the modern ethical and political point of view expressed in Voltaire, *Candide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1947 [1759]) it is well enough recognised that, if interpreted benevolently, 'pre-established harmony' is a ridiculous idea. It should also be noted that the determinism involved can, if interpreted malevolently, become a terrible idea, graphically portrayed in James Hogg, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 [1824]). See further Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1965) ch. 7.

to his own rigorous monism.[67] His intervention is abruptly conclusive in the consistency which it obtains from being developed within a system which aims to destroy dualism or indeed any sort of essential pluralism at all. Spinoza argued that those attributes which God as the one infinite substance possesses must be infinite as God must possess all possible ones, and each must in itself be infinite in the sense that it must cover all possible cases which evoke it.[68] Each attribute must be wholly discrete from and unlimited by any other, for it is an essential quality which cannot be shared.[69] There are, then, an infinite number of completely different attributes which God possesses but, taking up the Cartesian problem, Spinoza focuses upon thought and extension.

It is a commonplace that Descartes' rebuilding of the world from the position of doubt by no means proceeded according to the strict rules of formal deduction which he professed. However, within Cartesianism an emphasis on thought and extension as two substances is presented as arrived at by such a deduction. This emphasis can therefore be considered to be intrinsically bound up in that philosophy, even if as a characteristic weak point. There is no equivalent warrant for such an emphasis in Spinoza. When he followed Descartes here, he not only brought thought and extension quite empirically into his philosophy, which might equally be said of Descartes, but unlike Descartes, he then treated thought and extension as having the

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[67] See A. Wolf, 'Spinoza's Conception of the Attributes of Substance' in S. Paul Kashap (ed) *Studies in Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972) p. 22.

[68] E, p. 221 (pt. 1, prop. 10).

[69] Ibid.

status of mere inclusions. Within Spinozism the distance between thought and extension is not so much explained as explained away, for the special focus upon these two attributes is then destroyed as they are collapsed into a lot with any other attribute of the one infinite substance.[70]

Spinoza distinguished between ideas of extended bodies within what he regarded as the infinite attribute of thought (*idea*) and the extended bodies themselves within what is equally regarded as the infinite attribute of extension (*ideata*).[71] The idea of a circle, for example, is distinct from a circle itself; it does not have a centre, a circumference, etc. as does the latter.[72] When thought and extension are treated as infinite attributes of God, rather than as separate substances whose status with regard to God's ultimate substance is ineradicably vague as was the case with Descartes, the problem of their correlation totally disappears. As they are both infinite, it is impossible that there can be an extended body without an idea of it, nor an idea of an extended body without a corresponding extended body.[73] In allowing two separate attributes, Spinoza's position seems dualistic, but this is to employ a misleading terminology.[74] For though these terms capture the appearance of things, they completely fail to capture how Spinoza conceived of the truth of this appearance.

Thought and extension are only two qualities attributed to God by the human intellect; two aspects of the same thing. That they correspond is a misleading way of

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[70] SL, p. 472.

[71] E, p. 246 (pt. 2, prop. 5).

[72] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect' [1657-60] (hereinafter TEI) in *Complete Works*, p. 10.

[73] E, p. 227 (pt. 1, prop. 16).

[74] Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962) p. 87.

saying that they are of the same substance. The problems of correlating dualistically conceived thought and extension are disposed of as the dualism itself is denied. As Spinoza puts it: 'the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,'[75] and this is so because there is really only one order and connection,[76] that of the one infinite substance. By treating the human body as part of the infinite attribute of extension and the human intellect as part of the infinite attribute of thought, Spinoza is able to produce a philosophical psychology, if I might put it this way, which completely identifies changes in one with changes in the other.[77]

The problem of truth as envisaged in epistemologies of correspondence between perception and its object thus becomes irrelevant for Spinoza. His treatment of epistemological questions was, as it had to be, wholly situated within the attribute of thought. He distinguished between ideas of extended bodies and ideas of ideas of extended bodies.[78] These latter constitute reflexive knowledge (*cognitio reflexiva*) of the adequacy of ideas, and are the area of knowledge in which a grasp of the truth is established.[79] As correspondence of *idea* and *ideata* can be no basis of truth, reflexive knowledge must identify what ideas are true by specifying a criterion of the true form

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[75] E, p. 247 (pt. 2, prop. 7).

[76] Ibid., p. 246 (pt. 2, prop. 4).

[77] Ibid., pp. 243-77 (pt. 2).

[78] TEI, p. 10.

[79] Ibid., p. 11.

of an idea irrespective of content. Hence Spinoza defines the adequacy of an idea as that idea intrinsically displaying the marks of truth.[80]

Any distinction between beliefs which is made wholly internally to thought must involve a coherence epistemology. Taken individually, no idea of an extended body can be untrue. But it is possible to build up ever more complex accumulations of ideas which show, by the lack of fit of other parts of the pattern, that these latter are relatively false. In the *Ethics* Spinoza distinguished between three levels of truth.[81] (Apart from mistakes or dream thoughts, which are incoherent even by the standards of normal conceptions),[82] there is knowledge of the first kind which is termed opinion or imagination. At this level, discrete conceptions occur with individual modifications of the human body, forming the vague experience (*experientia vaga*) of unrelated ideas. It is possible that certain of these ideas will come to be linked as their precise individualities are subsumed under a perception of the resemblances of similar ideas, and they will coalesce into a generic type or universal notion (*notio universalis*). Such a notion is still itself confused, being developed from merely an automatic psychological process of classification in the human mind and not according to any explicitly coherent plan.[83]

However, along with imagination there must be some adequate ideas. In having an idea of an extended body it is implied that one gains an idea of those qualities

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[80] E, p. 244 (pt. 2, def. 4).

[81] E, pp. 267-68 (pt. 2, prop 40 schol. 2). C.f. TEI, pp. 7-10 in which four levels are distinguished. I repeat that I will not discuss the way Althusser himself adapted these levels and based the epistemological break on them.

[82] Ibid., pp. 15-18.

[83] E, pp. 266-67 (pt 2, prop. 40 schol. 1).

which are common to extension as such and which are thus present in the particular and the general.[84] In contrast to universal notions, these common notions (*notiones communes*)[85] are not confused agglomerations but are recognised as logically necessary to the conception of extended bodies as such.[86] They are the basis of knowledge of the second kind, reason. It is from the analysis of such notions that an increasingly complex and integrated truth will be reached. The end point of this process is the third kind of knowledge, intuition (*scientia intuitiva*). Intuition is the development of reason to the apogee of certain formal consistency, expressing complete knowledge in a single, integrated, total system in which all truth is simply and immediately available.

Spinoza's conception of the mark of truth is directly indebted to the Cartesian position that what is clearly conceived is true, in which clarity of conception is identified with Euclidean deduction.[87] Spinoza's first publication codified Cartesianism, as far as he felt was possible allowing for its inconsistencies, according to the principle of that deduction,[88] and the *Ethics* is a mature reworking of this approach. But if Spinoza's paradigm of truth is developed very directly from certain of Descartes' ideas, the fashion in which it is established as true departs completely

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[84] Ibid., pp. 265-66 (pt. 2, props. 38-39).

[85] The etymology of this term, which is drawn from one of the names Euclid gave to his axioms and which in Spinoza's philosophic milieu stood for necessarily true elements of the human intellect, is most interesting. See Gottfried Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* (Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1704]) secs. 48-51.

[86] E, pp. 265-66 (pt. 2, props. 38-39).

[87] Descartes, 'Meditations', op. cit., 37-43.

[88] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Principles of Cartesian Philosophy' [1663] in *Complete Works*, op. cit.

from the sceptical spirit of Cartesianism. Descartes held that it could be possible, without proof to the contrary, that even clear ideas of extended bodies could be false if God was a deceiver and merely fabricated the conditions which lead to those ideas being held to be true. Descartes did in fact regard it as possible to rule out this possibility of deception by a deduction from the idea of God's perfection.[89] That basing a belief on the truth of clear ideas identified with formal deduction on a deduction is an indefensibly circular argument was urged against Descartes by a number of his contemporary critics. Although Descartes appears to have believed that this objection did not really raise serious difficulties for his philosophy,[90] he cannot be thought to have satisfactorily responded to it.[91] Spinoza is extremely critical of Descartes' ever allowing the possibility of deception, arguing that if one has a clear

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[89] Descartes, 'Meditations', op. cit., pp. 37-43.

[90] René Descartes, 'Objections and Replies' [1641-42] in *Philosophical Writings*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 100-5, 171 and Descartes, *Conversations with Burman*, op. cit., 5-6.

[91] How Descartes could miss the force of the objections raised against him here turns on an interesting question about the precise sense in which he meant the knowledge of God to act as a guarantee of truth: M.J. Levett, 'Note on the Alleged Cartesian Circle', *Mind* n.s., 64:182 (1937), pp. 206-13; Alan Gewirtz, 'The Cartesian Circle', *Philosophical Review*, 50:4 (1941), pp. 368-95; Willis Doney, 'The Cartesian Circle', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16:3 (1955), pp. 324-38; Edwin Curley, *Descartes Against the Sceptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) ch. 5 and Cottingham's introduction to Descartes, *Conversation with Burman*, op. cit., xxvi-xxxii. Nevertheless, I do not think that the answer to this question of interpretation at all affects the applicability of the charge of circularity to Descartes' fundamental epistemological position. For a comprehensive review of the problem see John Etchemendy, 'The Cartesian Circle: *Circulus ex Tempore*', *Studia Cartesiana*, 2 (1981), pp. 5-42 and Michael Della Rocca, 'Descartes, the Cartesian Circle and Epistemology Without God', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 70:1 (2005), pp. 1-33. Nor, whilst it certainly has its own interest, does it really help Descartes' position to note that a considerable part of his own work, particularly in natural science, departs from his formal method: Stephen Gaukroger, *Cartesian Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) chs. 3-4.

idea of God this immediately precludes this possibility, which it is thus pointless to argue against independently.[92] At issue here is Spinoza's general rejection of adopting the doubt that is the heart of Cartesianism and which raises the radically sceptical possibility of daring to doubt God's truth.[93]

Spinoza argued that if it is necessary to establish the grounds of any potential knowledge prior to the achievement of substantial knowledge as such, then, as the knowledge of those grounds is itself a knowledge which presumably would need to have its own foundation established, the whole project of doubt is bound to fail as it will lead to an infinite regress of argument. This is indeed the characteristic fate of foundationalist epistemologies. One consequence of recognising the force of an argument such as Spinoza's has been the profession of philosophic agnosticism with respect to truth, and this is perhaps the principal connection of Descartes to the development of English empiricism up to Hume.[94] In response to such sceptical conclusions, Spinoza claimed that by a similar line of reasoning it might be possible to show that it is impossible to work in iron, as to do so requires tools but the tools needed can themselves be made only after completing the work. If this particular analogy may be weak, Spinoza does capture a real issue in the evaluation of skepticism.[95] However, his own response to this issue is to deny any pertinence at all to Descartes' epistemological questioning from the position of the subject. Spinoza

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[92] TEI, p. 22.

[93] Descartes, 'Meditations', op. cit., pp. 12-15.

[94] David Hume, *Enquiries*, 3rd. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1748]) pp. 149-55.

[95] Willis Doney, 'Spinoza on Philosophical Scepticism', *Monist*, 55:4 (1971), pp. 617-35.

insists that allowing a native strength in the human intellect which enables it to recognise a true idea is an essential condition of having any truth at all.[96]

This is a position fully supported by Spinoza's metaphysics. As the second and third kinds of knowledge which Spinoza distinguishes are based on adequate ideas, it necessarily follows that relative falsity is restricted to only the first kind.[97] His position clearly involves allowing the adequacy of ideas defined as adequate, but this Spinoza is able to do. Reflexive knowledge is itself within the attribute of thought, and because of the infinitude of that attribute, every idea, including every adequate idea, has a reflexive idea of itself. The reflexive idea of every adequate idea must reveal that adequacy if it is to convey the true character of the idea. It is bound up in having a true idea that one must thereby know that it is true, otherwise one would not have an adequate reflexive idea of it as true. In having a true idea one thereby has the standard by which one is able to know it is true and to distinguish it from the false: 'truth [is] a standard both of itself and of falsity'.[98] I believe that there is an irremovable air of casuistry about this to which I will return, but to be sure the conclusion follows quite consistently internally to Spinoza's system.

Spinoza was right to observe that in his monistic system the possibility of God's deceit need not be considered as the dualism which would make it possible is dissolved and there are no two things which could conceivably be out of phase. It is inevitable in Spinoza's view that there are true ideas, and the epistemological problem

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[96] TEI, pp. 9-10.

[97] E, p. 268 (pt. 2, prop. 41).

[98] Ibid., pp. 268-69 (pt. 2, prop. 43 schol.).

therefore is not one of establishing their truth but of demonstrating it.[99] In sum, Spinoza says: 'He who has a true idea simultaneously knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt of the truth of the thing perceived'.[100] The problem of truth as such has no intrinsic place in Spinozism, and this system is able to completely resolve the difficulties of this problem as they arise in Cartesianism by destroying the very distinction on which they rest. In this way, Spinozism arguably is the purest coherence theory of truth ever devised. It certainly brings to its most confident and thorough point the Cartesian attempt to provide the deductive rationalist cosmology which had been sought by Galileo.[101] But the principal consequence of this is that, as we shall now see, Spinozism requires of those who are to believe in it only mere surrender to its presuppositions.

The Ethics of Spinoza's Proof

An understanding of Spinoza's ethical philosophy must be grounded in his treatment of the problem of relating God the creator to nature the created, which in an important sense is a wider problem than correlating thought and extension. In seeming to set nature in some sense free of God, separating God and nature gives rise to many of the most profound difficulties grasping what sense that can be made of God's omnipotence. As with the distinction between thought and extension, it is more accurate to say that Spinoza did not provide a solution to the problems caused by a

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[99] TEI, pp. 12-3.

[100] E, pp. 268-69 (pt. 2, prop. 43).

[101] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970) pp. 64-65 (sec. 11).

dualistic division but destroys the division by incorporating it into his system, the rigorous monism of which then dissolves it. Spinoza's thinking out of the implications of God's infinitude led him to deny that the separation of creator and created can arise.

If God is infinite, then nature cannot be set aside as separate from God. To use what is only an illustrative metaphor, God might extend for an infinite distance outside of nature, but if so God cannot possess all the attributes of nature as it is these that are allowing us to distinguish nature from God. God thus cannot possess the omnipresent, more than quantitative infinitude which Spinoza holds to be essential.[102] For Spinoza, God is the immanent cause (*causa immanens*) rather than the transient cause of nature.[103] Rather than being the initial cause of nature which now continues on its own course, God is the continuing cause, in the sense of essential ground, of nature, being conterminous with nature as the substance of all modification.

Although Spinoza distinguishes between nature conceived as a creation (*natura naturata*) and nature as the cause or ground of itself (*natura naturans*)[104] as a way of orienting himself to the traditional theological difficulties of God's relationship to nature, the thrust of his system is again towards denying the reality of such a distinction. Spinoza referred to the one, infinite substance as 'God or nature' (*Deus sive natura*),[105] and this became the focal point of the profound antagonism of

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[102] E, p. 224 (pt. 1, props. 13-14). See further Errol E. Harris, *Salvation from Despair* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) pp. 33-47.

[103] E, p. 229 (pt. 1, prop. 18).

[104] E, p. 234 (pt. 1, prop. 29 schol.).

[105] Ibid., p. 321 (pt. 4, pref.).

traditional theology towards Spinozism which reduced it almost to a scandal better not talked about until the end of the eighteenth century.[106]

It is in this connection that we can examine the famous Spinozist maxim that 'determination is negation'. This formulation is known from one of Spinoza's letters in explication of his doctrines,[107] and is not as such present in the *Ethics*. Yet the principle denoted is itself continually present. It affirms that the particular determination of the possession of a quality implies the negation of all other possible alternative qualities. Finite things as defined by their particular determinations must be the negation of other finitudes. As God is absolutely infinite, it follows that God must be the complete negativity of all finitude. That is, as a finite thing negates the infinite number of all other determinate finitudes, God, as the substance of the infinite number of modes and attributes, must embrace every finite thing. God's infinitude is the ground of every finite thing, for the existence of the thing does not inhere in itself but in the partial negation of God's infinitude. The significance of this treatment of determinate finitude is that, as we have seen reached by a different route in the *Ethics*, it renders God's infinitude not as something beyond finitude but as conterminous with it, as the omnipresent ground of each finite thing. This is, as Spinoza puts it in another letter, the 'actual infinite'.[108]

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[106] LHP, vol. 3, p. 256. An interesting collection of papers on how Spinoza's views continued to be discussed under these circumstances is Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klievер (eds) *Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700* (Leiden: brill, 1996).

[107] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Spinoza to Jarig Jelles, 2 June 1674' in *Complete Works*, op. cit., p. 892 (letter 50).

[108] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'Spinoza to Lodewijk Meyer, 20 April 1663' in *Complete Works*, op. cit., p. 790 (letter 12).

Spinoza's distance from traditional theology is most starkly apparent in the absence of free will in his system consequent upon the above representation of God and nature. All finite things are modifications of God's infinite substance. This substance is their essence,[109] which is their truth.[110] God is infinite and must encompass all possible things. The arrangement of finite things cannot be different than it actually is, for then the possibilities of the creation of nature would be larger than the existent infinite God or nature.[111] Spinozism thus allows no possibility for maintaining human free will. It is the separation of creator and created which allows a space for free will and doctrines of personal salvation. These are lost in Spinoza's monism, and thus he gives a completely deterministic philosophical psychology of will and action.[112]

The title *Ethics*, then, is a paradoxical one, provoking a questioning of the normal meaning of 'ethics'[113] in a way which follows from the central theme of Spinoza's whole intellectual effort. Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology and ethics are linked together most intimately by a fundamental attempt to redefine the ethical away from consideration of how to utilise free will towards consideration of how to

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[109] E, p. 232 (pt. 1, prop. 25).

[110] Ibid., pp. 232-34 (pt. 1, props. 26-9).

[111] Ibid., pp. 235-36 (pt. 1, prop. 33).

[112] Ibid., p. 235 (pt. 1, prop. 32) and pp. 320-82 (pts. 4-5). See further David Bidney, *The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza*, 2nd. edn. (New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1962).

[113] Alfred J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) p. 9 and G. H.R. Parkinson, *Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954) p. 89.

come to terms with its absence.[114] Spinoza, in a close parallel with his attitude towards the problem of truth, regarded free will and the classical problems of ethics as illusions which result from an incomplete knowledge of the nature of the human mind and body.[115]

The actual tone of Spinoza's ethics follows from a belief in God's beneficence which enters into his metaphysics from Christian theology, but in the terms of his own system this is a completely arbitrary belief for him to adopt.[116] I will not discuss the blessedness[117] of the intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*),[118] but rather will trace it back to the metaphysics which it colours. The coherent link of the metaphysics and the ethics is the quietism of the latter. Spinoza came to terms with the absence of free will by redefining freedom as the knowledge of, and thus the rational acceptance of and compliance with, complete determinism. This is ultimate reason. The central injunction of these ethics is to understand events under the aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*).[119] As from the point of view of God's infinitude all of existence is set out as an eternal timelessness, to allow the limited human intellect's notion of temporality to affect judgments is an error. Under the aspect of

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[114] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Glasgow: Collins, 1962) pp. 28-34.

[115] E, p. 265 (pt. 2, prop. 35 schol.).

[116] A. E. Taylor, 'Some Inconsistencies of Spinozism' in Kashap (ed) op. cit., pp. 292-3.

[117] E, p. 382 (pt. 5, prop. 62).

[118] Ibid., p. 377 (pt. 5, prop. 33).

[119] E, p. 270 (pt. 2, prop. 44, cor. 2).

eternity, an event which the intellect places in past is just as significant as one in the present or the future, other things being equal.[120]

The full sense of the aspect of eternity emerges when we broaden it from its association with ideas of time, to which Spinoza was trying to deny ultimate reality, and consider its wider ethical implications. Whilst Spinoza allowed that preoccupation with everyday interests constitutes such an enormous obstacle to cultivating reason that to expect everyone to order their lives by it is utopian,[121] particular human passions are to be subjected as far as possible to the acknowledgment of determinism. The free person is to attempt to approach as near as possible to God's complete knowledge by transcending the limitations of human emotions and intellect.[122]

Hegel shows a degree of sympathy with these deterministic consequences of Spinozism which allows him to comprehend the underlying conception of the relationship of God and nature which gives rise to them. He disputed[123] Fichte's allegation[124] that Spinoza could not have believed in his own philosophy for it contradicts the necessity which he (Spinoza) surely felt to regard his own conduct as

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[120] Ibid., pp. 229-30 (pt. 4, prop. 42). See further Harold F. Hallett, *Aeternitas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930) pp. 3-33.

[121] Benedictus de Spinoza, 'A Political Treatise' [1675-77] in *Complete Works*, op. cit., p. 682 (ch 1, para 5).

[122] Thomas C. Mark, *Spinoza's Theory of Truth* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1972) pp. 91-128.

[123] Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977 [1801]) 87.

[124] Johann G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970 [1795]) p. 81. See further Allen Wood, 'Fichte on Freedom: The Spinozistic Background' in Förster and Melamed (eds) op. cit., pp. 121-35.

willed by himself. Spinoza, notwithstanding the remarkable degree to which he would indeed seem, as far as knowledge of his life extends, to have lived up to his own philosophy,[125] is quite able to regard such belief in his own free will as might have assailed him as the product of his own humanly limited knowledge. But if Spinozism may be considered to contain, as it were, convincing replies to simple denials of its authenticity, Hegel was determined to press home objections to the suppression of subjectivity which in turn take these into account.

Hegel's Critique of Spinoza: Pantheism and Acosmism

Let us begin with that most striking and initially famous, or notorious, alleged consequence of Spinozism, its pantheism. Hegel in fact regarded criticism of Spinozism as pantheistic as incorrectly put. F. H. Jacobi's *Letters on Spinoza*, one of the most influential discussions of Spinoza in the early Hegel's philosophical milieu, accused Spinoza of atheism[126] in that in his pantheistic system there is no transcendent God, only nature.[127] Against this, Hegel insisted that if pantheism is taken as the endowing of nature with the significance of God's being, then Spinozism is its exact antithesis.[128] Spinoza denies finite modes any substance. These modes are

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[125] Abraham Wolfson, *Spinoza: A Life of Reason*, 2nd edn (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1969) and Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, op. cit.

[126] Friedrich H. Jacobi, 'Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn (1785)' in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 1994), p. 233: 'Spinozism is atheism'.

[127] Ibid., p. 219: '[Spinoza's] God … does not belong to any species of things; it is not a separate, individual, different thing'.

[128] LHP, vol. 3, pp. 280-2; and L, pp. 97 (sec. 50), 226-27 (sec. 151 addn.).

perceived by the human intellect, and this intellect and the bodies it perceives are in God certainly. But they are regarded as being wholly insubstantial, being only modifications of the one substance. The truth of modes is that they have no ultimate reality. Spinoza's belief, Hegel showed, is acosmistic rather than pantheistic;[129] it turns on destroying finitude and declaring only the infinite God to be real.

Though Hegel found this feature of Spinozism to be, not an atheism,[130] but a content that he described, as we have seen, as the source of truth in modern philosophy, this by no means was unreserved praise of Spinoza's system. Rather it was a profound criticism, though one which is just the opposite of Jacobi's. The shortcoming involved here is not that God is excluded, but rather that, in Hegel's words, there is 'too much God'.[131] The statement that God is the substance of all finite modification is so abstract that there is no enlightenment in it. There is no specific relation between any particular determination and the ground of itself in God, and though God might be the immanent cause of all modification, nothing is thereby gained with respect to knowing the specific cause of any particular modification. The infinite is reduced to being merely a great void into which all things may be cast, but

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[129] F. C. Copleston, 'Pantheism in Spinoza and the German Idealists', *Philosophy* 21:78 (1946), pp. 42-56 and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, 'Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza and the Reality of the Finite', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 48:1 (2010) pp. 77-92 and G. H. R. Parkinson, 'Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38:3 (1977), pp. 449-59, 450.

[130] Efraim Shmueli, 'Hegel's Interpretation of Spinoza's Concept of Substance', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 1:3 (1970), pp. 176-91 and Efraim Shmueli, 'Some Similarities Between Spinoza and Hegel on Substance', *The Thomist*, 36:4 (1972), pp. 645-57.

[131] LHP, vol. 3, p. 282.

in so being cast, are merely lost.[132] Spinoza took the particular qualities which he empirically found in experience and destroyed them by demonstrating what he believed is their truth, for that truth is that they are wholly inessential, and this may be captured in the one statement that they are of God.

This lack of any concrete relation of the finite and the infinite is the occasion of some of Hegel's most striking aphorisms. In simply treating all finitude as of God we are given 'the night in which all cows are black'.[133] This infinitely sweeping truth is not, as it stands, of value, and it is not because it is so completely embracing. Just as to say 'all animals' does not constitute a zoology, so this reduction of all finitude to one infinite is uninformative.[134]

Hegel's Critique of Spinoza: Finitude and Subjectivity

Hegel's critique of the destruction of the reality of finitude in Spinozism amounts to more than showing that there are certain unfortunately deterministic implications of Spinoza's position for subjectivity. It demonstrates that it is impossible to establish that position. We have seen that the rigour of Spinoza's monism dissolves certain seemingly perennial problems such as the proof of truth and the comprehension of creation. To even orient his system to such problems Spinoza was compelled to use a forced terminology which has no integrated place in the *Ethics*. The connotations of duration of time in the idea of causality, for example, are obviously completely

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[132] Ibid., pp. 287-89.

[133] PS, p. 9 (para. 16).

[134] Ibid., p. 11 (para. 20).

foreign to the aspect of eternity, and in Spinozism 'cause' denotes something much more like logical ground rather than cause and effect. In respect of the use of the language of correspondence in the treatment of truth, Spinoza made it plain that he would have wished to revise the entire vocabulary of the conceptualisation of this issue.[135] In his ethics we have seen the extent to which he carried through such a revision to the extent that free will seems to be annihilated. But how far can this way of dealing with dualisms which have continually been used to discuss seemingly existential intractable problems, be pursued?

Let us consider the basic distinction between finite modes and infinite substance which lies behind the various dualism we have seen Spinoza dissolve. Now, in the full sense of God's omnipresence at which Spinoza is driving this distinction disappears. But if this is allowed, it obviously will include the very sense of the original distinctions through which it is itself developed. Spinoza's reduction of all finite modifications to one substance in order to make God omnipresent cuts two ways. After the reduction robs the modes of their truth, how are we to understand Spinoza's own beginning which allows such modes? Starting with a distinction between finite modes and infinite substance and attempting to completely erase the former to leave the latter makes the starting point itself incomprehensible.[136] Kojève no doubt went

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[135] E, pp. 269-70 (pt. 2, prop. 44 schol.).

[136] Schelling's critique of Spinoza is acute on this point: Friedrich W. J. von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1797]) 28: 'as it came from his hand [Spinoza's] system is the most unintelligible that ever existed'. See further Friedrich W. J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1833-34]) pp. 64-75. Schelling's critique of Spinoza is discussed generally in Dalia Nassar, 'Spinoza in Schelling's Early Conception of Intellectual Intuition' in Förster and Melamed (eds)

too far but the point he makes cannot be dismissed: 'to take Spinoza seriously is actually to be – or to become – mad'.[137] The crucial point is that an attempt to dispense with the finite limitations of the human intellect must founder as those limitations are the only material that intellect has.[138]

If we return to the form of the presentation of Spinoza's system, it is now possible to clearly see what Hegel found so unsatisfactory about it; far more than a question of style. The geometric form, Hegel and many others alleged, furnishes no proof of the initial definitions. However, the full meaning of those definitions emerges only as one goes further into the *Ethics*, and it is quite possible to begin from almost any point in the first part and recapitulate the initial definitions. Those definitions themselves could also surely be reformulated. It is certainly both inaccurate and unhelpful, then, to attempt closely to identify these definitions as such as the fundamental, illicit presumption upon which Spinozism rests without consideration of the background strengths (and weaknesses) of that system.[139] But this can hardly be held to vitiate Hegel's critique.

This is so, in the first place, for a textual reason. Apart from the commentary on the *Ethics* in his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel does not in fact pay any regard to the letter of that text but proceeds from the maxim that determination is

op. cit. and Michael Vater, 'Schelling's Philosophy of Identity and Spinoza's *Ethica more geometrico*' in Förster and Melamed (eds) op. cit.

[137] Kojève, op. cit., p. 120.

[138] J. M. Frizman and Brianne Riley, 'Not Only *Sub Specie Aeternitatis* But Equally *Sub Specie Durationis*', *The Pluralist*, 4:3 (2009), pp. 76-97.

[139] Parkinson, op. cit., pp. 57-90.

negation, which he thought 'the absolute principle of Spinozism'.[140] I have argued above that this maxim captures the principle of Spinoza's treatment of the relation of the finite and the infinite, set out in a different fashion than in the *Ethics*, and in this I have followed the typical way in which Hegel discusses Spinoza.[141] This textual point leads us to one of more substance. It is in the principle of its treatment of finitude and infinitude that Hegel locates Spinozism's ultimate unacceptability. Spinoza perforce allows, in a number of ways which capture human experience, a contrast between finitude and absolute infinitude into his system, but far from being integrated into that system they undergo the extinguishing of their meaning within it.

This surely undermines the epistemological and ethical injunctions put forward in the *Ethics*. Aspiring to a life completely ordered by reason may, as we have seen Spinoza recognise, be hindered by immersion in everyday interests, and so equally might ascending to the third level of knowledge be handicapped by a lack of commitment to the necessary effort.[142] However, it is not merely difficult to attain these excellent and rare[143] goals as they are established in Spinozism. The true, the good and the freedom which possession of them can generate are set up by Spinoza as goals only God can realise.

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[140] SL, p. 472.

[141] Yitzhak Y. Melamed, '*Omnis Determinatio Est Negatio?*' in Förster and Melamed (eds) op. cit., pp. 175-96.

[142] TIE, pp. 3-4.

[143] E, p. 382 (pt. 5, prop. 62 schol.).

Spinoza wanted to say that the more we approximate to the aspect of eternity, the more we are realising our perfection.[144] But this runs against the monolithic quality of intuition which secures the good and the true by a consistency which denies a positive value to any approximations. If the good and the true are unreachable and the limitations of any finitude are absolutely insubstantial under the aspect of eternity, then it is impossible to grasp the motivation and significance of any such effort of improvement of knowledge and ethical conduct as that to which Spinoza devoted his life. The example set by that life can be coherently followed only by being integrated into another philosophical[145] or theological[146] ethics. In Spinozism itself there seems to be an unbridgeable gulf between human subjectivity and those goals.

Such a gulf is in fact very literally present in Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge. As we have seen, there actually are two distinct types of epistemology involved in the kinds of knowledge, a distinction which Spinoza himself did not recognise and which cross-cuts the presentation of the kinds of knowledge as the progressive series he certainly intended.[147] In what is in fact a convergence with early

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[144] Ibid., p. 377 (pt. 5, prop. 31 schol.). See further T. M. Forsyth, 'Spinoza's Doctrine of God in Relation to his Conception of Causality' in Kashap (ed) op. cit., pp. 13-5.

[145] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961) pp. 552-62. The criticism of Russell in Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) p. 38, whilst of course grounded in a most illuminating account of Spinozist substance (ibid., pp. 4-28), seems, with the greatest respect, to be metaphysical in just the sense Russell and Curley both reject.

[146] Ruth L. Saw, *The Vindication of Metaphysics* (London: Macmillan, 1951) pp. 137-71.

[147] C. De Deugd, *The Significance of Spinoza's First Kind of Knowledge* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966).

empiricism and especially Hobbes rather than with Descartes' rationalism,[148] Spinoza's category of imagination provides an empirical psychology of experience. Spinoza's account of this first kind of knowledge is not concerned with the potential adequacy of the ideas found in it but rather with explaining the existence of ideas other than adequate ones.

It will be recalled that *experientia vaga* - itself a significantly Baconian expression[149] - is composed of individual ideas occurring with particular modifications of the finite human body. Because of the finitude of the human body and intellect, such discrete ideas must arise and so it is inconceivable that there could ever be a human situation without such imaginations. They are psychologically part of the human lot.[150] However, not only does this argument show that it is impossible to dispense with error, but it also tends to establish that there is no possibility of gaining truth.

Universal notions based on the coalescence of imaginations are not adequate ideas, and are indeed separated from the ground of adequacy in common notions. There is no progression but rather a complete break between universal and common notions. Common notions have no root in *experientia vaga*, and turning to the second kind of knowledge it is clear that the adequate principle upon which ideas are now to

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[148] TEI, p. 9 n i.

[149] Francis Bacon, 'The New Organon' [1620] in *The New Organon and Related Writings* (Indianapolis, IN: Library of Liberal Arts, 1960) p. 94 (bk. 1, aph. 98). See further Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza* (London: Duckworth, 1880) p. 126 n.

[150] This follows even leaving aside the point that as individual experiences of this sort are obviously part of God's infinitude they are as necessary as any other thing brought about by God's determination: E, pp. 263-64 (pt. 2, prop. 34).

be ordered wholly departs from the earlier psychological account and involves the criterion of coherence. Allowing some common notions gives even the human intellect some truth from which Spinoza might deduce more. But the source of the notions is not in the human intellect; it is in the system to which they will give access.[151] Their truth is guaranteed by the criterion of coherence which is contrasted to the, as it were, incoherence of *experientia vaga*. The gulf between the first and second types of knowledge is that between the types of knowledge possibly generated from the human intellect and the truth, the truth involving the denial of reality to imaginations.

Spinoza attempted to give this departure an anchor within the human intellect when he claimed that that intellect must have the native strength to recognise true ideas. But the crucial word here is 'recognise' as the truth of certain ideas is, it will be remembered, guaranteed by Spinoza's metaphysics and he was thus able to pursue the consequences of certainly having at least some true ideas in reflexive knowledge. I remarked above that I thought there was an irremediable casuistry about this position, despite its following consistently within Spinoza's system. This casuistry lies in there being a failure within Spinoza to link truth to the limited human intellect, which necessarily leads him into a circular argument when attempting to prove that truth. Native strength is itself dependent upon the metaphysics and yet, of course, the truth of the metaphysics turns on allowing it.

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[151] Guttorm Fløistad, 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge Applied to the Ethics' in Kashap (ed) op. cit., pp. 256-7.

Spinoza seems to have been to some degree aware of this profound difficulty, and at one point claims that the human intellect shares some part of God's eternal quality, grounding some idea of human immortality.[152] I cannot presume to generally understand Spinoza's treatment of immortality, which has confounded the greatest of Spinoza scholars,[153] but I think it unarguable that Spinozism requires that the individual intellect must in some way have an immortal aspect.[154] Hegel's critique shows that the crucial failure of Spinozism is that it fails to link truth to finite human subjectivity, and this does seem to be the source of Spinoza's related failure to give any proper sense to this quality of immortality. Native strength does not cover the gap here but rather covers it up. After all of Spinoza's rethinking of Cartesianism and cutting through of its paradoxes, his proof of the existence of God founders in a way that has clear affinities to Descartes' problem of circularity, not least in that it leads to postulating what is only a special hypothesis in the context of his system, the immortality of sharing in God's eternal quality.

This should tell us, as it told Hegel, that issues far more fundamental than the specific constructions of any system are being raised. Spinoza developed the objective truth of the theological components of Cartesianism through to the most coherent statement of their truth, and that statement makes it clear that such truth annihilates subjective knowing. But the very finality of the coherence of this statement marks a

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[152] E, p. 374 (pt. 5, prop. 23).

[153] eg Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, op. cit., p. 84.

[154] Alan Donagan, 'Spinoza's Proof of Immortality' in Marjorie G. Grene (ed) *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) p. 252.

radical historical change in historical perspective. The truth of modern philosophy since Descartes is that we must begin with the human subject. It is on this ground that Hegel shows that Spinoza's system must be regarded as unfounded.[155]

Conclusion: Hegel, Marx and Immanent Critique

The point for us here, however, is that a number of historically important modern philosophies have not recognised that truth must lie in subjective conviction. Dialectical materialism, including its, in my opinion, most sophisticated statement by Althusser, has been historically the most important of these. A link between the subjective beliefs of those who must be convinced and the truth of the Marxist positions is never established, save as the correction of the error of beliefs dismissed as false consciousness and corrected by the political action of those who are (for reasons not themselves properly explained) in possession of the truth. In this conclusion, I will say a little more about Hegel's place amongst the positions taken towards Spinoza in contemporaneous German philosophy as a preliminary to turning to the significance of his critique of Spinoza for contemporary socialism.

I have mentioned that the discussion of Spinozism in the philosophical milieu of the early Hegel was highly influenced by Jacobi's *Letters on Spinoza*. Jacobi displays a firm conviction that to try to prove the existence of the infinite God by means of the finite human intellect is quite contradictory. The very truth of that infinitude implies the transcendence of the truths of the intellect. As he regarded the content of Spinozism so highly, it would seem that Hegel had much the same as Jacobi to say,

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[155] L, pp. 11-24 (sec. 64).

but in fact Hegel and Jacobi push in quite opposite directions. The thrust of Jacobi's criticism is that the atheism he finds in Spinoza is the necessary consequence of any attempt to move from the finite to the infinite by means of reasoned argument, and Jacobi's own philosophy accordingly expressed an attempt to establish an immediate, intuitive grasp of the truth of God.[156] This is obviously an entirely different idea of 'intuition' to that found in Spinoza, one which paradoxically tries to make its being rooted in an unsystematic, unsupported assertion the ground of its adequacy to the totality of the infinite. But it entirely captures the necessity of mere assertion of truth that Spinoza himself cannot eliminate from his own epistemology.

Hegel certainly follows Jacobi to the extent that he agrees that absolute truth cannot be established after the fashion of Spinoza's method.[157] But whereas Jacobi regards coherent subjective knowing as inevitably inadequate to faith in God, for Hegel the issue is to develop a faith adequate to subjective knowing.[158] Turning upon his insistence that Spinozism is acosmistic rather than pantheistic, Hegel's project is not to carry out a destruction of finitude which Spinoza failed to complete but rather

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[156] Jacobi, 'Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn (1785)', op. cit., 230-1: 'How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already discern with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty, which not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented … This therefore is the spirit of my religion: Man becomes aware of God through a godly life, and there is a peace of God which is higher than all reason; in this peace there is the enjoyment and the intuition of an inconceivable love'.

[157] SL, p. 727.

[158] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977 [1802]) (hereinafter FK) pp. 136-43; LHP, vol. 3, pp. 410-23 and L, pp. 109-12 (secs. 62-63).

to allow finitude a coherent place even in absolute truth. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel puts forward a conception of Spirit, an epistemology and an ethics which all give subjectivity a location within the absolute.[159]

I do not doubt that, in terms of identifying exactly what is indefensible about Spinozism, Kant's criticism of the ontological proof[160] is the most devastating criticism furnished by classical German idealism.[161] When existence is shown to be incapable of being logically predicated of even God's being, then the *Ethics* collapses into a sort of word spinning which could not possibly realise its aims.[162] However, this sort of criticism would be meaningless were it itself not made in a context where subjective judgment is given epistemological privilege as the criterion of conviction in a belief, even belief in God.[163] Consolidating the achievements of Descartes,

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[159] Alexandre Kojève, *An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornall University Press, 1969) pp. 117-22.

[160] Immanuel Kant, 'Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion' [1817] in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 358-86.

[161] Though, incidentally, Hegel points to a lack of historical sensitivity in Kant's attack on the ontological proof in the first *Critique* (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., pp. 563-69 (A592-602, B620-31).) being directed at a weak formulation of it, that of Mendelssohn: FK, p. 85. Furthermore, the set critical object of Kant's lectures, apart from short remarks on Eberhard, is the Wolffian Baumgarten.

[162] Of course, were Spinoza able to defend his treatment of substance, a strong argument for the existence of God would follow: J. Michael Young, 'The Ontological Argument and the Concept of Substance' (1974) 11 *American Philosophical Quarterly* 181. It is just this line which Hegel pursues in his attempt to restore the ontological argument in response to Kant: FK, pp. 67, 85; LHP, vol. 3, p. 66; SL, pp. 63-66, 708; L, pp. 98-100 (sec. 51), 271 (sec. 193) and Georg W. F. Hegel, 'Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God' in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1895 [1832]) vol. 3, pp. 353-9, 363-4.

[163] This is a crucially different issue from whether God's existence, as a proposition about the state of the world, is synthetic or analytic. Reflection on this issue allowed Earle to mount a remarkable defence of the ontological argument: William A. Earle,

Hegel's critique of Spinoza makes this most fundamental shift in human perspective the issue.[164]

Unless it distinguishes between Marxism as dogma and Marxism as the thought of Karl Marx, then an attack on Marxism as a theology is not merely drastically unfair to Marx but also to Hegel as a major source of Marx's views. This is a textual argument now barely worth making. But I trust the argument here shows just how inaccurate this attack is in principle. What is actually being criticised in this attack is not so much belief in a secular God as dogmatism of belief, and in this sense Hegel's epistemology cannot be criticised as religious as it is in principle non-dogmatic. Hegel's metaphysic arises from his failure to sustain observance of this principle. One is obliged to say that Hegel's attempt to demonstrate the existence of God, even in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is, despite the extraordinary power of various or perhaps even all of the separate arguments in that book, overall, not merely uncompelling, but completely implausible. It is in this sense that even the *Phenomenology* can be regarded as a metaphysic in the way Hartmann has shown Hegel sought to avoid. Hegel did anticipate the conclusions of the *Phenomenology* and the *Phenomenology* does not justify them according to the standards of winning subjective conviction through immanent critique which Hegel established. The *Phenomenology* is a demonstration of those conclusions which makes continuous reference to the subject,

''The Ontological Argument in Spinoza' in Grene (ed) op. cit. p. 219 (see also the following chapter 'The Ontological Argument Twenty Years Later').

[164] And so, if one does not accept the necessity of the shift, Hegel (and Marx) will have 'worsened the situation': Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) vol. 2, p. 49 (see chs. 2, 4 generally).

but in the end gives the subject no truly autonomous status as it figures in Spirit's self-realisation.[165]

As I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere,[166] Marx's economics, both as he himself, by making the greatest efforts, arrived at what can properly be regarded as his own positions, and as he painfully sought to express those positions to those who engaged with them, were a thoroughgoing immanent critique of classical political economy. The positions of classical political economy were initially accepted, and the argument for socialism and communism arose from pursuit of the resolution of the contradictions which critique exposed in those positions, which were expressive of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. The argument originated in the subjective beliefs of those committed to the capitalist mode of production and could succeed only if it could, in principle, convince those persons to alter their beliefs in order to resolve the contradictions in those beliefs. It was, in principle, an argument which had to work, and could only work, through persuasion.

It did not, of course, work, and I have elsewhere argued that this was because communism, as Marx overall had it a utopian condition of blissful relief from

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[165] Certain re-evaluations of Spinoza's understanding of subjectivity in light of its Hegelian critique are, in my opinion, undermined for this reason. It is one thing to find in Spinoza 'a profound articulation of individuality, selfhood and freedom', as does Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) p. 7. Spinoza historically did and now does offer some of the most valuable modern reflections on how one should conduct oneself. One need not ultimately agree with Spinoza, or indeed anyone, in order to find value in what they say. But all this is a different thing from Spinoza establishing the truth of his views relating to subjectivity in line with belief in his system.

[166] David Campbell, *The Failure of Marxism* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1996).

scarcity, cannot be derived from the critique of classical political economy,[167] which, in addition to pointing towards the necessity of overcoming capitalism, also points to scarcity being an ineluctable, indeed existential, condition.[168] This is much less important here than seeing that Marx's critique of classical political economy was one that, in principle, could win subjective conviction, and it is my opinion, which motivates the writing of this paper, that a non-communist immanent critique of economics, which I will persist in calling a socialist critique of economics, is the pre-requisite of progress beyond capitalist limits.

Of course, if the argument of this paper is accepted, we are left with the crucial problem in the interpretation of Althusser of understanding the thinking behind 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' and other valuable perceptions of the ineluctable complexity of social formations when that thinking cannot be reconciled with Althusser's Spinozism. And herein lies the fundamental paradox of Althusser's Marxism. 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' is the result of the combination of Marx's thought with theories which cannot possibly be regarded as owing their origin or status to that thought; Freud as approached via Lacan being the principal one. The result is sometimes excellent because it is convincing to those with an interest in social theory and an open mind. But this is not how Althusser wanted 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' to be evaluated. He wanted it to be evaluated as a statement of Marxist dogma (in the sense I am using the term). This required him to claim that it

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[167] David Campbell, 'The Critique of Bourgeois Justice After the Failure of Marxism' in Antonin Kerner *et al* (eds) *Current Legal Issues in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom* (Prague: Charles University Press, 2003).

[168] David Campbell, 'How Sensible is the Left-wing Criticism of Money, Exchange and Contract' (2011) 20 *Social and Legal Studies* 528.

had an origin in Marx's thought, which in turn led him to grossly misrepresent what Marx actually had thought. The cost to Althusser himself of doing so was great, for as he doggedly maintained this misrepresentation, and the method of reading behind it, the ridiculousness of his formal dogmatic claim overwhelmed the considerable substantive interest of what he had done, and he became rightly subject to the type of criticism represented by Kolakowski's disdain.

It is a very welcome aspect of the re-evaluation of Althusser since his death that previously difficult to obtain works of the 40s and early 50s have been brought to prominence and translated into English.[169] In these works, though it is a shock to those, like myself, who came to know Althusser through his work of the 60s and 70s, we see Althusser's own positive engagement with Hegel, and if the rejection of Althusser's dogmatic epistemology takes with it the epistemological break literally understood, not only as applied to Marx but to Althusser himself, then important lines of investigation are opened up. But this is, of course, for the future.

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[169] Louis Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel* (London: Verso, 1997).