

L'Amour intellectuel de Dieu: Lacan's Spinozism and Religious Revival in Recent French Thought

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Irony is attached to this past fall's transferal of the remains of André Malraux to the Panthéon. The desacralized church of St.-Geneviève, recycled by the Revolution for the purpose of storing the ghosts of questioners of old faiths, now contains the body of the man whose most currently relevant achievement is perceived to have been his prediction that religion and not Enlightenment values would make possible and dominate the century that is about to be born. Michel Tournier's novel of the life of Moses appeared during this same autumn,⁽¹⁾ and in an interview published on the occasion, the author excitedly reflected upon what in France has been called "le retour du religieux." "Read the newspapers, and books," he said, "they only speak of God. We are headed towards a century of religion; Malraux was totally right."⁽²⁾ And here is Régis Debray, juxtaposing two famous prophesies, the first from Sartre, one the ex-revolutionary now feels to have been embarrassed by another, that of Malraux: "Between [the statements] that Marxism is the unsurpassable horizon of our time.' and 'The twenty-first century will be religious or it will not be,' the course of events seems to suggest that a choice has now been made."⁽³⁾ This seemed to have been the only Malraux the year knew anything of. A third such 1996 reference, this from Luc Ferry : "The famous line of Malraux on the possibility of planet-scaled religious event marking the twenty-first century has caused us to speculate endlessly."⁽⁴⁾ The man whom Lyotard (plausibly) described as having believed in nothing but himself,⁽⁵⁾ is seen as imagining only a posterity that would exclude him, is reassigned by posterity as futurologist of faith.

The timing of the Malraux celebration might have made its opportunistic sense for the Gaullist government, eager for symbolic legitimacy at the moment when the more tangible variety proved unavailable, but it could not have been more curiously off at the moment the prediction of Malraux rushes towards its vast confirmation. As early as 1982 Marc Augé wrote that "the easily perceptible current of the day in

France is the intellectual rehabilitation of religion and the Bible.”⁽⁶⁾ Alain Finkielkraut reported: “And it is in this melancholic climate of farewells to the hopes of modernity that now begins a spectacular renaissance of religious feelings. [. . .] History once succeeded God; God has now succeeded his successor.”⁽⁷⁾ Christian Jambet, formerly of the tradition of “la pensée 68:” “Religious belief has now become a central fact, a way of feeling power where power had almost entirely disappeared. After World War II religion meant the abdication of thought. But it now again has a role in the drama of thought.”⁽⁸⁾ Ghita Ionescu, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1993: “[T]he real sea-change in the modern French moral and mental attitudes is the restoration of the dominant Catholic spirit.”⁽⁹⁾ A year later in the same periodical, Henri Astier sought to explain the relative indifference of the French to 300th anniversary of Voltaire’s birth: “Since the late 1970s, a markedly spiritual trend has made a comeback in French philosophy, in the writings of authors like Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas.”⁽¹⁰⁾ And more than a decade after the first examples of this movement, Jean-Pierre Vernant could observe: “Only ten years ago the people of my generation could be astonished to notice that religion no longer belonged to the past but to the present. One gets used to one’s own astonishment, to such an extent that one is no longer astonished. It is true that today the resurgence of religion has taken on a considerable scale.”⁽¹¹⁾

“Too much God,” Hegel famously complained of Spinoza. The charge has echoed through the Left Bank as this current has taken on ever greater vitality. The birthday of Voltaire may have been a dry affair, but this also Parthenoned ghost has retained some residue of his former authority. “Ecrasez l’infâme,” the same Debray suggested, as he here contrasts the past with the present: “In Paris, Marxist theory was then all the rage, ‘all powerful because it is true.’ Its place has now been taken by the sacred and the return to the spiritual in no less terrorist a form. ‘Heaven inside our heads’ has eclipsed the earth and the Holy Scriptures have pushed aside the duplicated leaflets.”⁽¹²⁾ A discomfited Julia Kristeva reported on the agenda as of 1984: “At the moment we’re in the middle of a regression which is present in the form of a return to the religious, a return of a concept of transcendence, a rehabilitation of spiritualism. It’s a vast problem which can be interpreted in various ways. It is not uninteresting. There are now in France all sorts of spiritualistic movements: pro-Christian, pro-Jewish, pro this, pro that.”⁽¹³⁾ “Sartre was all right until he fell into the hands of the Jews,” an early disciple said.⁽¹⁴⁾ At the end of her life, rancorous Simone de Beauvoir described how Sartre spent his last decade discussing the meaning of the Torah with the, on her account, intolerably rude Jewish philosopher Benny Lévy, who like a number of former Maoists sought to reuniversalize through developing an interest in a draconian critique of representation.⁽¹⁵⁾ Related is Sollers’s complaint of Simone de Beauvoir’s undisguised hostility to the late Sartre’s frequentations: “The dubious company he kept. . . . former revolutionaries now turned toward God and learning Hebrew. . . . It’s

as if that's what shocks her most-God and Hebrew." Kristeva's husband imagines the words of an urgently indignant final Althusser: "For now the Opium's making a comeback-religion itself. . . That really is the last straw! Where can such a crack in the edifice have sprung from? Such a terrifying leaking away of meaning? Vigilance must have been relaxed. . . God? No Really! Anything but that!"[\(16\)](#) In January of 1996 Catherine Clément seconds the critique of laxity: "The rationalist rigor that has marked the years since the war is now threatened by the onslaught of religion that is not limited to the rise of fundamentalisms in far-off lands."[\(17\)](#) Complaining continues in May of 1996, when Christian Delacampagne wrote: "Alas, we have been flooded with this current return of the religious."[\(18\)](#)

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Not only have we in this country not taken the measure of this vast phenomenon, with its dozens of figures and hundreds of books, but we have not even so much as honored it with the most uncomprehending, briefly dismissive cringe.[\(19\)](#) Among the most visible early examples was the 1979 appearance of Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Le Testament de Dieu*, a book that describes itself as owing its reasoning to Girard and Levinas,[\(20\)](#) whose own works have their complex roles in this tradition. Perhaps the earliest example would be the Lacan-inspired theology found in *L'Ange*, by Christian Jambet and Guy Lardeau.[\(21\)](#) Sartre's 1980 *Nouvel Observateur* interviews that dealt with his new, warm feelings about religion provoked the raising of eyebrows already described.[\(22\)](#) Deserving of prominent mention are the numerous books of the Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion,[\(23\)](#) as well as the journal *Communio*, in which he has had a prominent role. Numerous also are the books of the Jewish thinker Daniel Sibony, author of, for example, *Le groupe inconscient*,[\(24\)](#) *La Juive*,[\(25\)](#) and *Les Trois monothéismes*.[\(26\)](#) The books of Sibony, as well as the biblical readings of Mary Balmay-her *Le Sacrifice interdit; Freud et la Bible*[\(27\)](#) and *L'Origine divine; Dieu n'a pas créé l'homme*[\(28\)](#)-together with those of Bernard Sichère, for example his *Histoires du mal*,[\(29\)](#) provide examples of the impact upon this current of Lacan that will be my major focus in what follows.

Two Christians have their roles-the novelist Christian Bobin[\(30\)](#) and the philosopher Jean-Louis Chrétien, author of *La Voix nue; phénoménologie de la promesse*.[\(31\)](#) Michel Serres's 1993 book on the legend of angels is but one example of many of his texts that have their roles in this current.[\(32\)](#) There has been the widely followed debate over the extensively translated work of the Catholic theologian Eugen Drewermann. The most recent books in this tradition to have achieved best-seller status would be philosopher Ferry's book, *L'Homme-Dieu ou le sens de la vie* (dealing in part with the public interest in Drewermann), and André Comte-Sponville's *Petit Traité des grandes vertus*.[\(33\)](#) The most dramatic and intellectually compelling of recent examples is certainly *C'est Moi la vérité*, a reading of the

gospels by Michel Henry. This eminent historian of philosophy and thinker in the phenomenological tradition, author of much respected books on Marx, Husserl, Freud and Kandinsky, here describes what he feels to be the superiority of the logic of Jesus to the Western philosophical tradition: “Religious beliefs, two-thousand and more years old, only they are in a position today to instruct us about ourselves.”⁽³⁴⁾ Notable as well are the writings of Shmuel Trigano, including his *La Nouvelle Question juive*,⁽³⁵⁾ and the new journal of Jewish thought, *Pardès*, with which he has been associated. Not untouched by Lacan as well are the projects of Christian Jambet, previously mentioned author of *L’Ange*, who now is an enthusiast and scholar of the history of Shiite Islam.⁽³⁶⁾ For American followers of French developments, the tip of the iceberg has been Derrida’s new writings on religion.

Central has been the issue of the Biblical interdiction of representation, the issues of the ethical content, the sociological and political consequences of the Second Commandment and its relation to the First. A perspicacious critic has been caused by this emphasis to remark: “Everything is coming to pass as if the iconoclastic discipline of the people of Moses, after a millennial incubation in the theological compost, were regaining its critical virulence in the languages of the sciences and of the soul.”⁽³⁷⁾ Now, as the theological ban on images can be understood to constitute a critique of the charismatic and charismatically excited unanimities, what Gans calls “the figural,” the mediation that generates “compact” communities, we can easily understand its partial embrace by that body of thought we have come to term “critical theory.” Here immediately coming to mind are the selectively warm remarks concerning Jewish thought we find in the writings of Adorno, Benjamin, Lyotard, or Derrida. The ambition of this movement, which it is my aim to contrast with “le retour du religieux,” can be efficiently described. It is this—the complaint of charismatically organized group closure (appearing in Adorno in philosophical terms as “identity theory”) from the perspective of the only minimally dialectical version of this same phenomenon, almost sociologically inert, historically but not economically ineffectual images of narcissistic closure.

Distinctions are required, Derrida noted: “Narcissism! There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended. What is called non-narcissism is in general the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other, open and closed, generous and not.”⁽³⁸⁾ To use the vocabulary of economist Fred Hirsch, the organizing symmetry of critical theory involves the juxtaposition of the positional, or exclusive, versus the relatively uninvidiously distributed availability of the deaggrandized versions of an identical resource—the image of reflexivity.⁽³⁹⁾ The great polarities that anchor critical theory illustrate the point: the distinction between molar and molecular in Deleuze and Guattari, for example, between what Bataille terms “low materialism” and what he

understands as “sacrifice,” between the spoken and the written word of Derrida, between what Adorno calls “identity theory” and the modest irreducible by which it is said to be unaggressively undone, the included and excluded forms of the parasite in Serres,[\(40\)](#) the split between what Lyotard terms ugliness and “la belle totalité” in his *Discours, figure*.[\(41\)](#) The intractability of this symmetry is demonstrated by the large number of synonyms it has generated, synonyms that are all recognized to possess gratifying levels of explanatory power.

3

The goal in each case is the production of what I would call “sustained unpunishability.”

Banal now is notice of the fact that what we term postmodern thought requires heterogeneity to rescue from the universals that are perceived to be oppressive. Yet this same postmodern automatically generates a climate within which there flourishes an identity politics, required, it would seem, if there is to be a basis for negotiating between the differences it must inexhaustibly create and defend. Economist Joseph Schumpeter has provided an explanation for the co-existence of these two requirements that might appear to be impossible to reconcile.[\(42\)](#) “Sustained unpunishability,” in his terms, would be what was fervently aspired to by the risk-taking, innovation-oriented entrepreneur, who, more than cheap labor, or the availability of raw materials, is the market’s decisive resource. For Schumpeter, the taboo-violator (the “intellectual” is his term for him) requires a protection that cannot be denied, for he is the figure of the entrepreneur-his unfettered outlandishness creates a field of permissions that sustain the market hero with whom he has a necessarily fraternal relation:

In capitalist society—or in a society that contains a capitalist element of decisive importance—any attack on the intellectuals must run up against the private fortress of bourgeois business which, or some of which, will shelter the quarry. [. . .] In a purely bourgeois regime like that of Louis Philippe, troops may fire on strikers, but the police cannot round up intellectuals or must release them forthwith; otherwise the bourgeois stratum, however, strongly disapproving some of their doings, will rally behind them because the freedom it disapproves cannot be crushed without also crushing the freedom it approves. [. . .] In defending the intellectuals as a group—not of course every individual—the bourgeois defends itself and its scheme of life.[\(43\)](#)

This providentially disruptive figure is thus what Serres calls the included third

parasite. On the symbiosis he writes: “[W]here does this come from, this need to have such a rogue traveling with you? To such an extent that you even risked your life in running to protect him! In the same way that he lives off you, is it maybe the case that you couldn’t survive without him?”⁽⁴⁴⁾ Without his antisocial energies we could know only the torpor of the anthropological situation. But precisely because of his minimal sociability, his insistence upon seeing differently, he is, as Schumpeter argues, perpetually, self-protectingly at the same time self-damagingly, in the process of secreting organizations and values that would limit the scale of his anarchic freedoms. The entrepreneur must protect himself from himself, but as he does so, his identity as providential delinquent is ceaselessly menaced.

It would be, Schumpeter has argued, the hypertrophy of these anarchy-disciplining structures- state development, punitive or caring bureaucracies with their “new class intellectuals,” what Carl Schmitt called “motorized legislation,” that would deaden the innovative drive, and drive up the costs of transactions. The view of the police-loving outlaw may appear odd coming from an economist, but it is very modernly recognizable. Here is Nietzsche: “Thus we immoralists require the power of morality: our drive of self-preservation wants our *opponents* to retain their strength. . . .”⁽⁴⁵⁾ Finally a perverse branch of feudalism, according to Schumpeter, capitalism is not a self-sustaining formation, as it is parasitic upon traditional values it can also only have life through insulting.

What critical theory notices, in its own languages, but what Schumpeter was perhaps too early to see, is that decisive distinctions are to be made according to the character of the friendly fire the entrepreneur calls down upon his anarchic procedures, according to the levels of lethargy produced by the secreted disciplinary structures, according to whether the discipline comes from within or without, whether it is empathically motivated, emptily administrative or theologically grounded and if theologically grounded, the extent to which this theological position can be deployed to legitimize variously organized heteronomous administrative cultures, whether or not it can be called upon to sponsor charismatic organizations, for example. Distinctions are to be made according to which the disciplinary force—that cannot be dispensed with—is lived as entropic. To sustain the animating unpunishability is the challenge faced by the entrepreneur, to limit the impact upon his excesses of the antidote he creates to protect himself from the consequences of the resentment he produces as he produces. This is a fact of which, as we shall see, modern philosophy is very much aware. The categories of critical theory have provided our vocabulary for not simply noticing the Schumpeterian irony, but also for describing the conditions that would make possible the levels of sustained unpunishability needed for the free development of the entrepreneurial spirit.

It is with this as background that I would like to take notice of the fact that an unmissable feature of this “retour du religieux” is a convergence, that is sometimes aware, sometimes unaware of itself as such, upon key aspects of the thought of Spinoza. Levinas has written two essays on Spinoza.⁽⁴⁶⁾ There are the books by Robert Misrahi and Catherine Challier, to mention but a few.⁽⁴⁷⁾ He was the only philosopher, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ They have called him “the Christ of philosophers,” and “the prince of philosophers,”⁽⁴⁹⁾ and dedicated two books to him in addition to passages in other of his volumes. Vincent Descombes has written a useful book, in which he has convincingly described the centrality of Kojèvian Hegelianism in French thought since the 1930s.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Hegel was indeed the name of the game, but Spinoza became the name of the wanting out of the game. Here is Deleuze:

In the reproach that Hegel will make to Spinoza, that he ignored the negative and its power, lies the glory and innocence of Spinoza, his own discovery. In a world consumed by the negative, he has enough confidence in life, in the power of life, to challenge death, the murderous appetite of men, the rules of good and evil, of the just and the unjust. Enough confidence in life to denounce all the phantoms of the negative. Excommunication, war, tyranny, reaction, men who fight for their enslavement as if it were their freedom—this forms the world in which Spinoza lives. [. . .] In his view, all the ways of humiliating and breaking life, all the forms of the negative have two sources, one turned outward and the other inward, resentment and bad conscience, hatred and guilt. ‘The two archenemies of the human race, Hatred and Remorse.’ He denounces these sources again and again as being linked to man’s consciousness, as being inexhaustible until there is a new consciousness, a new vision, a new appetite for living. Spinoza feels, experiences, that he is eternal.⁽⁵¹⁾

Related to Deleuze’s praise is Ferry’s notice of the Nietzschean relation to what he terms “this new Spinozism” (that he finds in Serres, for example):

[It]connects with one of the profound intuitions of Nietzschean vitalism, according to which life constitutes ‘the most intimate essence of being,’ the ultimate foundation of all things as well as the basis of all valorization. Recall that in the name of such a reference to life, Nietzsche came to denounce ‘the absurdity’ of the Platonic-Christian opposition between this

(tangible) world and the (intelligible) world beyond. According to him, this dualism merely conceals a pathological and 'decadent' desire to negate real existence, which is nonetheless *the only life that truly is*, in favor of a pure fiction produced by the lucubrations of a sick imagination. Such is the essence of morality and religion, forever destined, neurotically so, Freud would later say, to seek a meaning to life *elsewhere*.[\(52\)](#)

Revealing here is the overly easy collapse of Spinoza and Nietzsche. Doubts are in order here for, as Foucault among others have noticed, including Nietzsche himself, Spinoza presented a particularly difficult challenge as well as a strong model for Nietzsche.[\(53\)](#) Equally important in France in causing Spinoza to be viewed with affection would be the possible compatibility with Marx. Althusser was famously intrigued by Spinoza. One of his associates, Etienne Balibar has written often on Spinoza,[\(54\)](#) and another, Pierre Macherey, author of no less than seven books on Spinoza, is responsible for the book with, for the French, the decisive title: *Hegel ou Spinoza ?* "It is Spinoza who constitutes the true alternative to the philosophy of Hegel" he here argues.[\(55\)](#) The ground of the Marxist interest is explained by Fredric Jameson, as he asks: "How then to coordinate our very limited positions, as individuals or indeed as historical subjects and classes, within a History whose dynamics representationally escape us? The lesson was given as far back as Spinoza, surely the most dramatic of all the thinkers of totality, when he recommended a kind of stoic adjustment as a part or component, to that immense whole of being or nature of which we are the merest partial reflexes."[\(56\)](#)

But compatibilities with Marx and Nietzsche would seem revealingly to break down in the case of the thought of Bataille, Marxist and Nietzschean, against whom Spinoza has been posed as decisive contrast. Three examples follow. Invited to the inauguration of an urban legend, André Masson sent his excuses. Bataille had asked some twenty friends to the forest at Marly to silently meditate before a lightning-struck tree. Was the artist present? Bernard-Henri Lévy quizzed participant Klossowski: "No. He always maintained a certain reserve. As a fervent Spinozist, he reasoned differently."[\(57\)](#) "The system of Spinoza is a white pantheism; that of Bataille a black pantheism," Sartre wrote,[\(58\)](#) putting in the most condensed form the opposition that will be the concern here. In viewing Spinoza as decisive contrarian, Sartre, who was a reader of Julien Benda, was perhaps influenced by the author of *Belphegor*, who had seen in Spinoza the single solution to all that he viewed as unacceptably modern (Bergson was, for him, its proper name.)[\(59\)](#)

his friendship with Bataille, and opening a space for something new as he moralizes the symmetry that had been noticed by Sartre: “It is the eternal meaning of the sacrifice, to which no one can resist, unless animated by that faith, so difficult to sustain, which, perhaps, one man alone has been able to formulate in a plausible way—namely Spinoza, with his *Amor intellectualis Dei*.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This remark on the sacrifice that is difficult to avoid without Spinoza as guide, was made in the “Eleventh Seminar,” in the midst of Lacan’s analysis of the Holocaust that is here seen to reproduce the logic of archaic ritual.

In France Lacan is quite routinely seen as a religious thinker. This is very clear in the many books of Sibony, for example, or in Marie Balmay, or in Sichère who has called Lacan “Doctor of the Law of the Jews.”⁽⁶¹⁾ But, if this thought is Jewish, it is in a special sense, one that caused one Jew to be expelled from the Synagogue in Amsterdam in 1656. As much of the recent Spinozism and near-Spinozism can be traced to Lacan, finds its footing in Lacan, the following of his path to the “polisseur de lunettes” as Lacan affectionately names him,⁽⁶²⁾ will clarify further developments in the current and facilitate necessary broader conclusions concerning the historical function of “le retour du religieux.”

Lacan’s impressively rigorous route to Spinoza begins with his break with Freud’s pansexualism, replaced in his system with a focus upon, to use his expression, “the great winged hornet of narcissistic tyranny.”⁽⁶³⁾ Under the influence of, to use Lacan’s own words “my master Kojève,”⁽⁶⁴⁾ the psychoanalyst understood “narcissistic tyranny” in terms of the struggle for recognition between the Master and Slave that Hegel had described, and that Kojève had redescribed in the way that has proved so influential. Their struggle, in Lacan, involves the battle to have access to what he termed “the object small *a*,” that mysterious nothing that is the cause of all desire, that object that is the sign of the absence of an object, therefore the absence of desire that characterizes the glorious (an) affectivity of the Hegelian Master, who, it will be recalled, risks his life for nothing in order to establish his sovereignty. We have seen Derrida noticing that there are many narcissisms and Lacan would have agreed, as there are differently gregarious experiences of the object *a*. Differently managed, our relations with the *a* can assume the most apparently benign of forms or those of ultimate evil. Episodes from two Lacanian vacations illustrate the point regarding the diversity of experiences of the *a*:

It’s a true story. I was in my early twenties or thereabouts—and at that time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical, something physical, in the country say, or at sea. One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port.

At that time, Brittany was not industrialized as it is now. There were no trawlers. The fishermen went out in this frail craft at their own risk. It was this risk, this danger, that I loved to share. But it wasn't all danger and excitement-there were also fine days. One day, then, as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean, that's what we called him-like his family, he died very young from tuberculosis, which at that time was a constant threat to the whole of that social class-this Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me-*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*

He found this incident highly amusing-I less so.[\(65\)](#)

A dangerous joke this was, and deeper into the same seminar we learn of the extent. The social function of the nothing is further explored in a passage in Augustine mentioned several times by Lacan, one in which the author of the *Confessions* describes the rage he felt seeing his brother at his mother's, for him, useless breast:

Invidia comes from *videre*. The most exemplary *invidia*, for us analysts, is the one I found long ago in Augustine, in which he sums up his entire fate, namely, that of the little child seeing his brother at his mother's breast, looking at him *amare conspectu*, with a bitter look, which seems to tear him to pieces and has on himself the effect of a poison. In order to understand what *invidia* is in its function as a gaze it must not be confused with jealousy. What the small child, or whoever, envies is not at all necessarily what he might want-*avoir envie*, as one improperly puts it. Who can say that the child who looks at his younger brother still needs to be at the breast? Everyone knows that envy is usually aroused by the possession of goods which would be of no use to the person who is envious of them, and about the true nature of which he does not have the least idea.[6](#)

Such is true envy-the envy that makes the subject pale before the image of a completeness closed upon itself, before the idea, that the *petit a*, the separated *a* from which he is hanging, may be for another the possession that gives satisfaction. . . .[\(66\)](#)

The object-cause-of-desire is no object, or rather just barely an object, its minimal externality, minimal otherness, suggestive of the possibility of the lack of need for

an object—it is the object form of lack of need that characterizes the Master's (an) affectivity, as we have noticed. Now what Lacan calls sacrifice in his analysis of the Holocaust is very difficult to avoid because of the fact that this desire to have exclusive access to the experience of unmediated relations with the object *a*, and to be recognized as being in this position of exclusivity, is the basic human drive. The Holocaust is the same experience, albeit very differently scaled. The urge is to cause oneself to be seen as sole owner and proprietor of the *a*, that is to say to experience the objectlessness of the narcissistic condition. The scene of sacrifice, he writes in another text, is a scene of seduction: "Let us say that the religious person leaves to God the ownership of the cause of desire, but that he thereby cuts off his own access to the truth. Thus is he led to give back to God the cause of his desire—this is properly the object of sacrifice. His demand is organized around the imagined desire of a God whom one must then seduce."⁽⁶⁷⁾ The wasting is a trick—the person or the group in a position to waste is the hoarder of the *a*. Derrida knows this: "But the sacrifice recaptures with one hand what it gives with the other, and its account must be kept on a double register."⁽⁶⁸⁾ An angry god, one we invent to function as humiliated witness to the ability to waste, this the role taken by Lacan himself in the fishing story, or the angry Augustine of the *Confessions*, presides over the experience of sacrifice, it is argued, his rage before the spectacle of human wasting, that is the contrastive experience of the *a*, being the guarantee that he, the god, the sacrificed to, contrasts himself depressively with the figure of realized desire that is the sacrificer.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Gans writes, compatibly, that "the figural. . . is also the sacrificial."⁽⁷⁰⁾ To be added to this remark is the fact that the sacrificial is the experience of the shift in the address of the figural—synonym of Freud's ego ideal, synonym of the entity that exclusively hoards the object *a*—from one position to another. A depression is overcome as one moves from the unfavorable to the favorable pole of a contrast.

This fishing scene is to be juxtaposed with another, less painful vacation snapshot. During a wartime visit to the home of his friend Jacques Prévert, Lacan was exposed to the poet's collection of match boxes and its associated reward, empty match boxes, on the surface resembling the useless empty tin can of the earlier episode:

It was the kind of collection that it was easy to afford at that time; it was perhaps the only kind of collection possible. The match boxes appeared as follows: all the same, they were laid out in an extremely agreeable way that involved each one being so close to the one next to it that the little drawer was slightly displaced. As a result, they were all threaded together so as to form a continuous ribbon that ran along the mantelpiece, climbed the wall, extended to the molding, and crept down again next to a door. I don't say that it went on to infinity, but it was extremely satisfying from

an ornamental point of view.

Yet I don't think that was the be all and end all of what was surprising in this "collectionism," nor the source of the satisfaction that the collector himself found there. I believe that the shock of novelty of the effect realized by this collection of empty matchboxes—and this is the essential point—was to reveal something that we do not perhaps pay enough attention to, namely, that a box of matches is not simply an object, but that, in the form of an *Erscheinung*, as it appeared in its truly imposing multiplicity, it may be a Thing.

In other words, this arrangement demonstrated that a match box isn't simply something that has a certain utility, that it isn't even a type in the Platonic sense, an abstract match box, that the match box all by itself is a thing with all its coherence of being. The wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd character of this collection pointed to its thingness as match box. Thus the collector found his motive in this form of apprehension that concerns less the match box than the Thing that subsists in a match box.[\(71\)](#)

This found object pastoral is a "little fable of the revelation of the Thing beyond the object," showing "one of the most innocent forms of sublimation. Perhaps you can even see something emerge in it that, goodness knows, society is able to find satisfaction in." Importantly he concludes: "It is a satisfaction. . . that doesn't ask anything of anyone."[\(72\)](#) Beyond use because *beneath* it, the boxes were just any body's now, and savingly so.

7

Now these objects are already familiar to us as occupying the poles of critical theory that habitually poses the image of an anonymously distributed insignificance against that of its provocative, exclusive capture. The indifferent distribution of indifference—match box vacation, is deployed to defeat the image of exclusive capture—sardine can vacation. An undernarcissism, a deniable narcissism, is summoned to replace its sociological polar-cap-producing charismatic double. This would be the distinction made by Serres between strong and weak parasites, that of Kojève between the Master who risks life for nothing and the modest successor form who, as post-historic snob, seeks recognition without fear of a violent comeuppance, as the object of his predilection is not provocatively, because exclusively housed by his person.[\(73\)](#) Lacan: "The patient says to his partner, to the analyst, what amounts to this—*I love you, but, because I love in you something more than you—I'objet petit a—I mutilate you*."[\(74\)](#) This summarizes what occurs in sacrifice and what is avoided through the free circulation of the same object, the free levitation of which it has been the major project of critical theory to guarantee.

The reason for the choosing of sides is clear enough if we turn to the insights of Generative Anthropology, or if we consult the confirming Jean-Pierre Dupuy, for example, who writes: “[T]he economy is the negation of the crowd: the economy emerges entirely against the crowd; it is the return of the crowd that it works above all to prevent.”⁽⁷⁵⁾ What is meant here is that charismatically generated unanimities do not produce the scattering affectivities that make markets possible.

This point can be differently made. In *Envy and Gratitude*, Melanie Klein describes how the infant’s living of the contrast of the experience of its own weakness and dependency with that of the seemingly omnipotent source of its nourishment causes a killing desire that is immediately renounced.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Her description of a site of impossible happiness occupied by the figure who generates at once envy and gratitude recalls the grounding insight of Generative Anthropology that the sacred center is a dangerous place. The moment of the renunciation of murder is that of the birth of what Klein terms “the envious superego,” that agency that blocks the drive to insist upon worldly centrality. As this story is clearly compatible with Lacan’s, who borrows elements of it, we can say that what he terms sacrifice is the pedagogy of envious superego development. If, as Bataille knew, sacrifice is the critique of the charismatic individual, whose destruction is employed as mediation to produce the charismatic group, the of the imagery of the charismatic for the sake of its undoing, for the purpose of the creation of the envious superego, then the *esthetic* critique of representation is the charismatic *autocritique*, the using of the charismatic against itself for the sake of its free, ubiquitously, minimally contrastive life, the sustained unpunishability that we have described as required to excite the production of market effects.

One produces envious superego, the other blocks its development through generation of minimally inciting, prestressed figurality, one that is always already at a vanishing point, having placed *itself* at this vanishing point, not having been placed there by another. The immanent usurpation of critique makes unnecessary any external correction. The yield is this: asyndetically arranged images of autoaffection, minimally constrained, because immanently constrained, minimally adhesive, because minimally contrastive. The esthetic critique of representation is not about the end of contrast but the creation of an unmanageable and therefore manageable surplus of intentionally minimally effective, that is historically neutral but economically powerful contrasts. The metaphor is from a letter of Leibniz to Sophie-Charlotte: “When one throws into the water at the same time several stones, this produces a number of circles that cross without destroying one another . When the number of stones is very great the eye can no longer keep track.”⁽⁷⁷⁾ In either case, whether it is through the esthetic critique of sacrifice or through sacrifice, an ethics is produced through the experience of an invidious contrast, more or less intensely lived, as the fact remains in each case that a circle has been created by a

stone.

Spinoza for Lacan is the name of the vacation from both vacations. Spinoza calling it in all its forms “satire,” rejected contrast *tout court*, rejecting it with a perhaps uniquely powerful consistency, and this is what has moved his logic to the center of current concern: “[S]atire is everything that takes pleasure in the powerlessness and distress of men, everything that feeds on accusations, on malice, on belittlement, on low interpretations, everything that breaks men’s spirits (the tyrant needs broken spirits, just as broken spirits need a tyrant.”[\(78\)](#) If Lacan’s two vacation objects stories are read together, without mention of his theological position that he has emphatically attached, it is as a postmodernist that he appears—as in the postmodern one form of satire is used against another. But at the invocation of the name of Spinoza he disappears from our map; no longer does he maintain residence in the space produced by the tensions of the organizing symmetry of critical theory as I have described it above. Now the esthetic (as well as sacrifice) always involves the overcoming of a contrast one feels oneself to have been disadvantaged by, but this is quite different from the totalizing elimination of all experiences of derision, however they may be scaled, through the description of the absolute ontological impossibility of contrast—this being the position of Spinoza. From a letter to Oldenberg: “I attach to nature neither beauty nor ugliness, neither order nor confusion: things cannot be said to be either beautiful or ugly, ordered or confused, except according to our imaginations.”[\(79\)](#)

8

Strictly, there can be no Spinozist esthetics.[\(80\)](#) Thus the absurdity of the following position of Schlegel: “Why won’t you arise and revive those splendid forms of great antiquity? Try for once to see the old mythology, steeped in Spinoza. . . and everything will appear to you in new splendor and vitality.”[\(81\)](#) Only an imagination unhappy and false could argue that there would be possible a reconciliation of this position with the great classical expulsions that only know of contrast.

Christopher Norris has written that “[N]early all the great debates in present-day literary theory have their origin in one or another aspect of Spinoza’s work.”[\(82\)](#) True, but not as he intends the point, for curiously unmentioned by him is Spinoza’s striking relation to the decisive matter of mimetic desire. Spinoza’s point of departure is identical to that of the Kojèvian Lacan, and hence the logic of Lacan’s saving conclusion. In the *Ethics* there is abundant, central notice of the mimetic foundation of human interaction. Desire is the very essence of mind, he tells us, but objects are not desired on the grounds on intrinsic properties alone: “[W]e do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and

desire it.”[\(83\)](#) This will is mimetically animated: “If we think that someone loves, desires, or hates something that we love, desire or hate, that very fact will cause us to love, desire or hate the thing.” And: “Emulation is the desire for some thing, engendered in us from the fact that we think others to have the same desire.”[\(84\)](#) Thus, “Anything can. . . be the cause of pleasure,” because it is the mediation that is decisive.[\(85\)](#) The key notion in Spinoza of “external cause” is translatable as the presence of Girard’s triangulation: “Love is merely ‘pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause,’ and hatred is merely ‘pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause.’”[\(86\)](#)

Unhappy contrasts and with them mimetic entanglements are dissolved into the monism of divine substance in the doctrine of “God or Nature,” according to which whatever is, is God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God:

This doctrine [*Deus sive Natura*—“apart from God no substance can be or be conceived”] assists us in our social relations, in that it teaches us to hate no one, despise no one, ridicule no one, be angry with no one, envy no one. Then again, it teaches us that each should be content with what he has and should help his neighbor, not from womanish pity, or favor or superstition but solely from the guidance of reason.[\(87\)](#)

The critique of all transcendence, of the imagined external causes that are responsible for all human unhappiness, and Spinoza’s suggestion of the necessity of the *summum bonum* that is the intellectual love of the God who is coextensive with all of nature, is understood to solve the problem of the ignorant servility of passion faced when man becomes a god to man, and the transfer of this imbalance into the seduction scene of sacrifice. Spinozism thus involves, to quote Christian Jambet, “the supreme denial of the *a*, from which we turn away in order to affirm rebellion.”[\(88\)](#) If mediation there is in this system, then it would have the character here described by Schlegel: “For the perfect Christian-whom in this respect Spinoza probably resembles most—everything would really have to be a mediator.”[\(89\)](#)

Maimonides, a thinker studied by Spinoza, sought to explain the golden calf episode by arguing that a people that had so long inhabited a land of images could not be expected to remain completely uninfected with idolatry even after liberation. Spinoza’s entire system might be described as developing from this position regarding the partial contamination by figurality. At the opening of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* he complains of what he felt to be the incoherence that exists between the ban of images and the fact that Moses is said to have heard the voice of God.[\(90\)](#) This selective critique of representation leads to the image of an unextended divinity, thus the possibly of Lacan’s angry God. Consequences of

charismatic slippage might include the owing of perfection to an external final cause, the idea of power as domination, the comparing of God's power to that of kings, a power that can advertise itself as divinely sponsored, and thereby lead the people of Israel to the alienation of the servitude to an earthly absolute. Fall-out from the claim of exposure to the voice is the possibility of reciprocal oppression, the social volatility due to the struggle for glory amongst various emerging leaders who may assert exclusive divine legitimacy. Within the culture of the voice of God, even the greatest of leaders cannot guarantee the absence of discord produced by anarchic claims of election: "Moses had gained the strongest of holds on the minds of his people not by deception but by his divine virtue, for he was thought to be a man of God whose every word and action was divinely inspired; yet even he was not exempt from. . . murmurings and criticism, and far less so were other monarchs."[\(91\)](#) The figure and the social order of the change of address of the figural (sacrifice) will not have been annulled unless God appears as the immanent rather than the transitive cause of all things.

9

The logic of Generative Anthropology has made possible a sensitivity to this issue of figural residue in Christianity. Eric Gans writes:

Even if the figure of Christ cannot legitimately be called a figure of resentment, it remains a potential focus of concentration for the resentful, like the grain of sand that brings about crystallization in a solution at the saturation point. Pure water remains unaffected; but how many can apply this metaphor to their souls? The historical revelation of the single son of God cannot but provoke the envy of those not so honored, whatever assurance we are given of his infinite imitability. Today one might ask, for example, why not the daughter of God? No figure can be general enough to include the entire human community; as soon as attention is concentrated on it, someone is bound to see in it a sign of exclusion.[\(92\)](#)

But Spinoza finds the birth of the problem within the Old Testament itself, and locates the solution in the annulation of the transcendental separation between God and humanity that would eliminate the danger of the resentment of the human periphery. Whenever "the dialogue between center and periphery is unequal,"[\(93\)](#) whenever there is the ontological separation of divine and the world, there will be, following Spinoza, the inexhaustible tensions produced by lack and the concomitant threat of charismatic slippage, the threat of the drift from the unexperienceable to the charismatically experienceable, from its strongest forms to the modern variety of the coveting of the position of the victim, this last being denounced by Spinoza in

his critique of pity that is found in the *Ethics*.

The themes of the indivisibility of divine substance, of God as immanent rather than the transitive cause, of the infinity of mediation, are very much on display in Michel Serres' long poem in prose on angels:

For pantheism, everything is divine. Trees and stars are gods. You are a god too, you whom I love and who are now listening to me. So are angels still pantheists? Certainly they are, because by the fact that they pass everywhere and occupy all space, they enable divinity to be seen at all points; your guardian, who shadows you like your shadow, makes me see that you are God, just as my guardian, who abandons me, makes me forget it every day. There are so many angels, they exist in such extraordinary numbers, that one finds them everywhere, testifying to divine ubiquity.[\(94\)](#)

And in the same spirit:

No difference separates gods from men, archangels from animals, profane love from sacred love, body from soul, beauty from the beast, prayer from sex, coitus from high mystique. . . . The end of the reign of angels sounds with the birth of the Messiah, who makes flesh divine and incarnates love: immanence encompasses everything, in its unmoving equilibrium.[\(95\)](#)

In the absence of this position, Serres writes, implicitly setting Spinoza against Hobbes: "the war of all against everyone will continue to rage."[\(96\)](#)

Spinoza is revealingly absent in *Grammatology*. Is Grammatology a secular Spinozism, unable finally to sustain itself as such, a Spinozism waiting to happen?

Impossible to not notice the Spinozan cast of the following remark of Derrida, from his *Donner la mort*, because it involves the suggestion that the monotheist critique of representation falls short, and that a radicalization of it should be used against the tradition within which it is only selectively found:

Perhaps one should, following the Judeo-Christian-Islamic injunction, but also risking turning it against this tradition, think God and the name of God without this representation or this idolatrous stereotyping—and to then say: God is the name of the possibility for me of keeping a secret

that is visible from within but not from the outside. As soon as there is this structure of consciousness, of being-with-oneself, of speaking, that is to say to produce an invisible meaning, as soon as I have in me, that to the invisible word as such, a witness that others do not see, and who is thus at the same time other than me and more intimate to me than myself, as soon as I can keep a secret relation with myself and not say everything, as soon as there is secret and secret witness in me, there is what I call God, there is what I call God in me, there is the possibility of calling myself God, a phrase that is difficult to distinguish from "God calls me," because it is on this condition that I call or am called in secret. God is in me, he is absolute self, he is this invisible structure of interiority that one terms, in the Kierkegaardian sense, subjectivity.[\(97\)](#)

10

But Derrida is certainly no Spinozist.[\(98\)](#) And neither is Michel Henry, who is immediately critical of anything resembling the "intellectual" love of God or involving the arrogance of an "intellectual" access to his existence. But if there is implied complaint of Spinoza here, it might be said to be leveled from the perspective of a meta-Spinozism. The author of the *Ethics* would be describable by Henry as offering only a partial solution to what he had felt had been the only partial solution to the figural that was the key flaw in the logic of Moses. Henry, who does not mention Spinoza, shares with him the belief that the experience of the radical otherness of God can only result in charismatic slippage. Following from this is the sense that a reorganization of the anesthetic is necessary—the critique of the figural must have its basis in an immanence rather than a transcendence. Spinoza had a higher view of Jesus than of Moses, consequently; and consequently Henry only has the harshest remarks for the Old Testament Law.

The umbrella distinction organizing Henry's book is the one he makes between belonging to "the truth of the world" and the authentic relation to what he terms "Life," by which he means living in the love of God, lived, as in Spinoza, as immanent and ubiquitous, fully, unhierarchically shared throughout all of experience. Repeating Lacan's first step, Henry describes what he terms "the world" as dominated by the experience of the spectacle. To belong to the realm means to seek to appear to the other as image and to be troubled by image of the other. Recalling the young Sartre or Lacan, he writes that "projecting itself outside of itself, towards a self, the ego finds outside of itself only a phantom."[\(99\)](#) The consequences are depressive: "[One is] conditioned. . . to despise oneself, to count oneself as nothing. . . admiring everything that is less than what one is, and despising all that is more than what one is."[\(100\)](#) As in Spinoza there is an

association of the figural and with the idea of external cause, associated by both with resentment and feelings of impotence following from and resulting in the drive to identify: “Imaginary driftings [produced by external cause] are due to feverish representations of a . . . sickness. . . that involves turning against oneself, no longer desiring to be what one is, seeking to identify with another.”[\(101\)](#) In Henry, as in Lacan, the image-impulse results in a movement towards sacrifice.[\(102\)](#)

The true person is said to not be the empirical individual, because this is a creature of the spectacle, always losing him or herself to the image of another. Authentic subjectivity participates in the essence of Life that is the self-love of God with whom we are all said to be fully coextensive. In this situation the other is no longer experienced as outside, as humiliating external cause: “Life [associated strictly with God’s self-love and self-revelation] experiences itself without distance, without difference.”[\(103\)](#) The pantheism is, like Serres’, lyrically thorough-going: “The Revelation of God is his autorevelation [. . .] [It] does not consist in the unveiling of a content that is foreign to his essence and communicated, one would not quite know how, to several initiates. To reveal himself to men can only mean for God to share with them his eternal self-revelation.”[\(104\)](#) “The Word of Life” involves the defeat of all contrast, and thus the opening for the emergence of the esthetic that Gans saw in Christianity is closed, as anestheticism is reinvented on a basis that is identical to the one organized in Spinoza.

Now one could refer to a specifically French Spinoza requirement. We need scarcely fear contradiction if we characterize this current as the latest example of French totalism, as a product of the nostalgia for the universalizing vocation of the French intelligentsia, seeking, in its Leftlessness, new grounds to assert the prerogatives of its historical role, refusing to allow itself to be consigned to what Pareto called “the graveyard of aristocracies.” Spinoza’s thought might understandably appear to reconcile the sometimes mutually exclusive imperatives involved in the French sense of national destiny and belonging, so effectively described by Louis Dumont as forcing into uneasy coexistence the revolutionary heritage that is the drive to universalize, with the insistence upon the French, Catholic difference.[\(105\)](#) Bergson described himself as a Spinozist.[\(106\)](#) And so did Alain. Writing in 1946, in an introduction to one of his Spinoza texts: “It is astonishing that Spinoza reconciles the pure monk and the pure Jacobin in the same person.”[\(107\)](#) He continues, describing adherence to Spinozism to be a matter of patriotic necessity:

Such is the meaning of Spinozism, a meaning that is positive and very easy to grasp, on the condition that one is persuaded that one is in the presence of the universal spirit. This conviction will cause thinking to be bearable to you and suddenly you see yourself as a man in the light of the

axiom 'Homo homini deus.' This view would be the key to the future Republic and of the view of equality associated with 1848. I say equality because it is impossible for to not have passions and because all affection ceases to be a passion as soon as one has an adequate idea of it. This is the secret of peace, which in every case is the peace of the soul, this being a truth that is very much misunderstood. In this manner we will form the Party of Spinoza, that we will be careful not to call the party of Jews, but it is the party of Jews nonetheless. Without combat then Nazism, fascism and every kind of despotism will be defeated, and evil established to be the impotent thing it is (because it is nothing). Such will be the immediate future, the one contained in this little book.[\(108\)](#)

11

But it is the larger issue of the market's reconciliation with itself that should concern us, the issue of the postmodern's inability to advance against the Schumpeterian irony. This transcends in significance the specifically French issue of the reconciliation of key, seemingly incompatible features of one nation's historical experience-in Spinoza's appearing to Alain at once as Jacobin and monk.

As much as critical theory seeks to enlist the sponsorship of the theologically grounded anesthetic, it is clearly reluctant to simply dissolve into its harshest terms. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this point as they describe Spinoza as the patron saint of drug addicts and schizophrenics,[\(109\)](#) these last being manifestly less kin of Spinoza than of the prehumiliated heroes of waste of modern literature, of nineteenth-century dandies, tubercular courtesans, Beckettian marginals, etc. Because of his critique of transcendence that buttresses refusal to be involved in contrast, Spinoza is sensed to provide the extended wings of delinquency, enables it to live more easily, by supplying a discipline that Schumpeter had described as required, but one that is friction-free, thus not entropic.

The partial purchase of which I speak can be found in Bataille. The following Spinozist remark from *Madame Edwarda*: "God is nothing unless he is the transcendence of God in all senses."[\(110\)](#) But elsewhere on the same page there is this: "God is a whore. . . in all respects similar to all others." At one moment we can find Derrida, as we have seen, wishing away residual figural features within the Judeo-Christian tradition, at another we spot him providing examples of unparalleled clarity of prehumiliated estheticism. In *Glas* he collapses the strategies of Jean Genet with the logic of the Jewish law of circumcision:

By first incising his glans, he defends himself in advance against the

infinite threat, castrates in his turn the enemy, elaborates a kind of apotropaic without measure. He exhibits his castration as an erection that defies the other. The logical paradox of the apotropaic: castrating oneself already, always already, in order to be able to castrate and repress the threat of castration, renouncing life and mastery in order to secure them.[\(111\)](#)

Fused in these examples are contrasted experiences of contrast-in one a fascination that comes to an end at the moment it is produced (in the prehumiliated), and in the other there is a monism that excludes the possibility of such a sequence, however minimally visible it might be. The remark about the philosopher's alliance with drug addicts and schizos obviously makes no sense at one level. But less interesting than the issue of an unembarrassedly inexact account of the positions of Spinoza is the possibility that the yoking of logically mutually exclusive critiques of figurality may be designed to satisfy a historical requirement. This need would be the necessity of blocking the decay that is the work of the Schumpeterian irony, the erosion of the deviant energies that are checked by certain premodern moralities the market had allowed to continue to exist in order to rescue itself from the consequences of its providential disruptions. These ethical systems now come to be perceived as insufficiently respectful of difference, because they are involved in ontological imbalance and thus have the potential to sponsor the dreaded, compactingly affective charismatic and its terrible posterity, "the envious superego." In the positions of Deleuze and these others we see the market aspiring to guarantee difference through a specific kind of neutralization of the charismatic. The contrastively experienced figural is submitted to a double critique, through the pincer-like deployment of two complaints of representation, complaints that are oppositely vantaged, the tools of intensely conflicting imperatives. The logical failure involved, however, is of no consequence, disappearing as it does behind the likelihood of a shared material success.

As Philippe Ariès remarked, a novel intellectual position is only able to establish itself if it is "very close to" as well as "slightly different from the general feeling of its age." "If it were very different," he continued, "it would not even be conceivable by its author, or understandable. . . . If it were no different at all, it would pass unnoticed."[\(112\)](#)

Spinoza is lauded in part because, as Comte-Sponville notices, he supplies "a theory of desire in which a notion of lack is missing."[\(113\)](#) It is possible to say this, for, as Emilia Giancotti writes: "By opposing the Cartesian concept of extension to his own, Spinoza confirms . . . his original conception of substance and its attributes as a dynamic principle which, though it remains one, is realized by pluralizing itself to

infinity. This structure makes the moment of mediation superfluous, since it is already within substance itself.”[\(114\)](#) But we have already noticed Schlegel convincingly describe Spinoza as depicting the ubiquity of mediation. Hypermediation is indistinguishable from its opposite. Antisocial energies become nearly indistinguishable from the system that disciplines the excess.

12

We have seen Schumpeter arguing that capitalism was a feudal structure. The entrepreneur was a new human type, but not a free-standing one, finally a childish one who could not be the Enlightenment hero described by Kant, characterized escaping the need of a self-imposed tutelage. Schumpeter would have argued that Kant’s figure would be capable of sustaining his newly free activities only on the condition that he permit the general field of his experience to be saturated with the values he would have appeared to have renounced, thus causing this field to be lived as a permanent state of ethical dissonance. But this partnership, characterized by Schumpeter as feudal, is always in the process of dissolving, its distinct elements blurring progressively to the disadvantage of the figure of anarchic impulse it had been engineered to preserve. The mutually exclusive requirements of postmodern thought- for unabsorbed difference on the one hand and a totalization on the other, a totalization that assumes the form of identity politics or empathic moralities, mirror the Schumpeterian the poles that are destined, according to him, to not forever remain poles. The immanentization of the divine in the “Deus sive Natura” doctrine provides a new structure of security, a superior one in that there is not here the sclerotic undoing that is caused by this competing pull. This Sartre dimly grasped when he called Spinoza the opposite of Bataille.

Critical theory has always understood the internalization of disciplining myth as making possible the birth of the free modern self-Bataille said in response to the Holocaust: “We must practice upon ourselves what we once practiced on others.” Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* wrote that the history of the modern subject was that of the introversion of sacrifice.[\(115\)](#) But this position, the “prehumiliated,” could be argued to be no less feudal; it is the feudalism of the immanentization of mythological tutelage, producing the estheticized version of entrepreneurial energies that are intentionally constrained. Spinoza’s immanentization that replaces the immanentization of sacrifice that we find in the prehumiliated involves far more than the mere replacement of one discipline with another, for one is entropic and the other is arguably not. So sponsored, the entrepreneur might cease to be a figure of medieval sociology, as he might need to be no longer preemptively reduced, daring only to appear as drug addict or schizo.

“Among millions of decaying worlds, there is once in a while an acceptable

one!"[\(116\)](#) Nietzsche's cry is that of Schumpeter's market, gasping in the heavy atmosphere within which it has been said to be condemned to breathe. And we can thus understand the appeal of Spinoza, who is imagined to suspend the iron law of cultural thermodynamics as it is described in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. The entrepreneur in this logic will no longer be threatened with the erosions that Schumpeter had darkly described, with being diminished by the cowering eruptions of transcendence, with being beamed up and away as self-offering to the angry god whom Spinoza had unmasked, with the eroding of his energies by the low burning empathies of the caring state, the pity that is inseparable from derision that Spinoza condemned. But rather, now as newly, unentropically sustained, the force is with this figure, who is with us, eternal below, for transcendence has been vanquished in this thought, but not the at once disciplining and energizing love of God that is what the world in this new ethical oxymoron has now become.

13

Notes

1. *Eléazar ou la source et le buisson* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).[\(back\)](#)
2. "Entretien avec Michel Tournier," *Lire*, October 1996, p. 36.[\(back\)](#)
3. *A Demain De Gaulle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), pp. 16-17.[\(back\)](#)
4. *L'Homme-Dieu ou le sens de la vie* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), p. 127.[\(back\)](#)
5. *Signé Malraux* (Paris: Grasset, 1996).[\(back\)](#)
6. *Génie du paganisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 79.[\(back\)](#)
7. *La Sagesse de l'amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 128.[\(back\)](#)
8. *Le Monde* (co-authored by Guy Lardreau) (Paris: Grasset, 1978), p. 146.[\(back\)](#)
9. In a letter to the editor, on "Catholicism in France" (April 9, 1993) p. 15. [\(back\)](#)
10. "The Unfashionable Gadfly," *TLS* (December 9, 1994), p. 16.[\(back\)](#)
11. "Quand quelqu'un frappe à la porte. . . , " in *Le Religieux dans le politique* (Paris: Seuil: 1991), p. 9.[\(back\)](#)
12. *Critique of Political Reason*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso Editions, 1983), p. 4. See also Debray's *La Puissance des rêves* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).[\(back\)](#)
13. "Two Interviews with Julia Kristeva," *Partisan Review*, I (1984), p. 130.[\(back\)](#)
14. Quoted by Paul Webster and Nicholas Powell, in *Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (London: Constable, 1984), p. 249. [\(back\)](#)
15. *La Cérémonie des adieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).[\(back\)](#)
16. *Women*, trans. Barbara Bray (N. Y.: Columbia UP, 1990[1983]) p. 98. See also pp. 172, 292 and 355. On the matter of whether or not Althusser was either shocked or disappointed by the revival of interest in religion, see pp. 410-431 of Bernard-Henry Lévy's *Les Aventures de la liberté* (Paris: Grasset, 1991).[\(back\)](#)
17. "La Raison contre la religion," [interview with François Ewald] *Magazine*

littéraire, no. 339 (Jan. 1996) p. 39. See also Clément's novel, *La Putain du Diable* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996). [\(back\)](#)

18. "Derrida, dans l'épreuve de l'aporie," *Le Monde*, 3 mai, 1996, p. ix. [\(back\)](#)
19. An exception to my charge of indifference would be the specialized study of Judith Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France Since 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). [\(back\)](#)
20. (Paris: Grasset, 1979). [\(back\)](#)
21. (Paris: Grasset, 1976). [\(back\)](#)
22. Published eventually in book form in *L'Espoir maintenant; les entretiens de 1980* (Paris; Verdier, 1991). [\(back\)](#)
23. Including *La Croisée du visible* (Paris: La Différence, 1991), *Réduction et donation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris; Fayard, 1982), *Prolégomènes à la charité* (Paris: La Différence, 1986) and *L'Idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977). [\(back\)](#)
24. (Paris: Bourgois, 1980). [\(back\)](#)
25. (Grasset, 1983). [\(back\)](#)
26. (Seuil, 1992). [\(back\)](#)
27. (Paris; Grasset, 1986). [\(back\)](#)
28. (Paris: Grasset, 1993). [\(back\)](#)
29. (Paris: Grasset, 1995). [\(back\)](#)
30. *Le Très-bas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). [\(back\)](#)
31. (Paris: Minuit, 1990). [\(back\)](#)
32. *Angels, A Modern Myth*, trans. Francis Cowper (Paris and New York: Flammarion, 1995). [\(back\)](#)
33. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995). [\(back\)](#)
34. *C'est moi la vérité* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), p. 169. [\(back\)](#)
35. (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). [\(back\)](#)
36. See *La Logique des Orientaux. Henri Corbin et la science des formes* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) and *La Grande Résurrection D'Alamût* (Paris; Verdier, 1990). [\(back\)](#)
37. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les Iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p.7. [\(back\)](#)
38. "There is no One Narcissism," in *Points. . . ; Interviews, 1974-1994* trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 199. [\(back\)](#)
39. *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). [\(back\)](#)
40. For his most thorough development of the issue, see his *Rome; the Book of Foundations*, trans Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). [\(back\)](#)
41. (Paris: Klinksieck, 1978). [\(back\)](#)
42. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1950 [1942]). [\(back\)](#)
43. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 150. [\(back\)](#)
44. *Angels, A Modern Myth*, p. 116. [\(back\)](#)

45. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 197.[\(back\)](#)
46. "Le Cas Spinoza," in *Difficile liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), pp. 152-157. The view here is hostile. Levinas speaks of "le rôle néfaste joué par Spinoza dans la décomposition de l'intelligensia juive." (p. 155). See also "L'arrière-plan de Spinoza," in *L'Au-delà du verset. Lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), pp. 201-208. [\(back\)](#)
47. Misrahi's writings on Spinoza include: *Spinoza* (Paris: Seghers, 1964), *Le Désir et la réflexion dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Gordon and Breach, 1972), *Ethique philosophique et théorie de l'état. Introduction au Traité politique de Spinoza* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), *Le Corps et l'esprit dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1992), *Le Bonheur* (Paris: Hatier, 1994). He is also a translator of the *Ethics* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990). On Spinoza, Chalier has written *Pensées de l'éternité* (Paris: La Nuit surveillée, 1993). Other major books include André Tosel's *Spinoza ou la crépuscule de la servitude* (Paris: Aubier, 1984), Alexandre Matheron's *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1988 [1969]), as well as his *Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle. Etudes sur Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), Pierre-François Moreau's *Spinoza; l'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), Alain Billecoq's *Les Combats de Spinoza* (Paris: Ellipsis, 1996), Antonio Negri, *Spinoza subversif* (Paris: Kimé, 1994), Henri Laux's *l'imagination et religion chez Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1993), Genivière Brykman, *La Judéité de Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1994). Most of André Comte-Sponville's books contain discussions of Spinoza. See for example his *Petit Traité des grandes vertus* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995) and *Une Education philosophique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996). Chantal Jaquet has written two books: *Spinoza ou la prudence* (Paris: Quinette, 1997) and *Sub Specie aeternitatis* (Paris: Kimé, 1993). Philosopher Patrick Rödel has written a novelized life, *Spinoza, le masque de la sagesse* (Paris: Climats, 1997).[\(back\)](#)
48. *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1994) p. 48.[\(back\)](#)
49. *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1994) pp. 48 and 60.[\(back\)](#)15
50. *Le Même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française* (1933-1978) (Paris: Minuit, 1979).[\(back\)](#)
51. *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, trans Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), p. 13.[\(back\)](#)
52. *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (U of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 79.[\(back\)](#)
53. See "La Vérité et les formes juridiques," in Foucault, *Dits et écrits (1954-1988)*, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 549.[\(back\)](#)

54. For example, *Spinoza et la politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990).[\(back\)](#)
55. (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 13. His other books on Spinoza include an *Avec Spinoza* (Paris: P. U. F, 1992) and a five volume commentary on the *Ethics—Introduction à l’Ethique de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994-96). [\(back\)](#)
56. *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 69-70.[\(back\)](#)
57. Quoted in *Les Aventures de la liberté* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), p. 172.[\(back\)](#)
58. “Un Nouveau mystique,” *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975 [1947]), p. 225.[\(back\)](#)
59. Trans. S. J. Lawson (London: Payson and Clarke, 1929), p. 118.[\(back\)](#)
60. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) p. 275. For another discussion of Spinoza, see *Le Séminaire. Livre VII: L’Ethique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p. 212. For mention of Lacan’s interest in Spinoza, see Robert Misrahi, “Spinoza en épigraphe de Lacan,” *Littoral*, 3-4, February 1989 and Elizabeth Roudinesco, “Lacan et Spinoza, essai d’interprétation,” in *Spinoza au XXe siècle*, ed. O. Bloch (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992).[\(back\)](#)
61. *Le Moment lacanien* (Paris: Grasset, 1983), p. 27.[\(back\)](#)
62. *L’Ethique de la psychanalyse*, p. 212.[\(back\)](#)
63. *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 122.[\(back\)](#)
64. For a study of Lacan’s dependency upon Kojève, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan, The Absolute Master*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).[\(back\)](#)
65. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978) p. 95. [\(back\)](#)
66. *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 116. See also, in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I. Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*. ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans with notes by John Forrester. New York: Norton, 1988), p. 171.[\(back\)](#)
67. “La Science et la vérité,” in *Ecrits*, p. 872.[\(back\)](#)
68. *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 259.[\(back\)](#)
69. Lacan’s view of sacrifice seems influenced by Sartre’s view of masochism: “Masochism is less an effort to fascinate the other through his experience of me as an object than it is a project to fascinate myself with my objectivity for the other.” *L’Etre et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 443.[\(back\)](#)¹⁶
70. *Signs of Paradox. Irony, Resentment and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 152.[\(back\)](#)
71. *Le Séminaire. Livre VII*, p. 136.[\(back\)](#)
72. *Le Séminaire. Livre VII*, p. 137.[\(back\)](#)

73. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 437.[\(back\)](#)
74. *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 263.[\(back\)](#)
75. *La Panique* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1991), p. 54.[\(back\)](#)
76. *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, ed. R. E. Money-Kyrle, Vol. III (New York: Free Press, 1975).[\(back\)](#)
77. Quoted By Michel Serres, in *Le Système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), p. 371.[\(back\)](#)
78. *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. by Samuel Shirley; edited and introduced by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), p. 181.[\(back\)](#)
79. Letter #42 to Oldenberg, quoted by Marianne Schaub, in "Spinoza ou une philosophie politique galiléenne," in *La Philosophie*, ed. François Châtelet, Vol II (Paris: Marabout, 1972), p. 140.[\(back\)](#)
80. Levinas sees this in *L'au-delà du verset* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), p. 205.[\(back\)](#)
81. *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, trans. (University Park and London; Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p. 86. [\(back\)](#)
82. *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blaackwell, 1991), p. 12.[\(back\)](#)
83. *Ethics*, p. 110. [\(back\)](#)
84. *Ethics*, p. 149.[\(back\)](#)
85. *Ethics*, p. 113.[\(back\)](#)
86. *Ethics*, p. 113. [\(back\)](#)
87. *Ethics*, p. 100. [\(back\)](#)
88. *L'Ange* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 79.[\(back\)](#)
89. Friedrich Schegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow, foreword by Rudolphe Gasché (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 50.[\(back\)](#)
90. Trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989). [\(back\)](#)
91. *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, p. 291.[\(back\)](#)
92. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 160[\(back\)](#)
93. *Signs of Paradox*, p. 153.[\(back\)](#)
94. *Angels*, pp. 90-91.[\(back\)](#)
95. *Angels*, p. 185.[\(back\)](#)¹⁷
96. *Angels*, p. 290.[\(back\)](#)
97. *Donner la mort* (Paris: Metailié, 1992), pp. 101-102.[\(back\)](#)
98. There is no mention of Spinoza in the most thorough study to date of Derrida's relation to religion-John D. Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997).[\(back\)](#)
99. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 181.[\(back\)](#)
100. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 345.[\(back\)](#)
101. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 148.[\(back\)](#)
102. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 225.[\(back\)](#)

103. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 43. [\(back\)](#)

104. *C'est moi la vérité*, p. 37. [\(back\)](#)

105. *L'Idéologie allemande. France-Allemagne et retour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 249-294. [\(back\)](#)

106. "Tout philosophe a deux philosophies: la sienne et celle de Spinoza." Quoted in Philippe Soulez and Frederic Worms, *Bergson* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 25. [\(back\)](#)

107. *Spinoza; suivi de Souvenirs concernant Jules Lagneau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 21. [\(back\)](#)

108. *Spinoza*, pp. 22-23. [\(back\)](#)

109. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 153). [\(back\)](#)

110. *Madame Edwarda*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. III, p. 12. [\(back\)](#)

111. *Glas*, p. 46. The hidden imperfection of the body is one of Benjamin's themes: "And as birds seek refuge in the leafy recesses of a tree, feelings escape into the shaded wrinkles, the awkward movements and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love, where they can lie low in safety. And no passer by would guess that it is just here, in what is defective and censurable, that the fleeting darts of adoration nestle." *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), p. 68. [\(back\)](#)

112. *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), p. xvii. [\(back\)](#)

113. *Une Education philosophique*, p. 245. [\(back\)](#)

114. "On the Problem of Infinite Modes," in *God and Nature. Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 113. [\(back\)](#)

115. Trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), pp. 55-56. [\(back\)](#)

116. *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 33. [\(back\)](#)

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