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Spinoza and Popular Philosophy

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1. Introduction

The study of highly imagistic representations of Spinoza's philosophy found in popular, extra-academic literature is essential for building a rational view on Spinoza's philosophy. In fact, we can attempt a Spinozist argument for this. The mind, Spinoza argues in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, is the idea of the body. There is no idea the mind forms that is not an idea of a bodily affection. Now the mind can form ideas of bodily affections in a variety of ways, one of which is to attend to properties that the body proper and external bodies have in common. However, even when the mind is thus forming ideas of bodily affections in what Spinoza calls *ratio*, it remains the case that insofar as the mind is conceived durationally, as existing in a place and time, it must also conceive the external causes of bodily affections as present, even if they are not present. That is, the mind forms corporeal images of the bodily affections for as long as it exists durationally. The mind cannot eliminate that embodied condition; what it strives to do, however, is re-organize for the intellect the way that its bodily affections present themselves. In short, the imagination is an

eliminable condition of the mind, one that sustains its rational endeavors. The same line of reasoning should be brought to bear on the relation of academic to popular, extra-academic literature on Spinoza. Such literature has always nourished the academic literature on Spinoza. In fact, popular literature on Spinoza is an ineliminable condition of academic literature on Spinoza. Perhaps a disembodied fantasy of Spinoza literature sees the academic as capable of being perfectly cleaved from the popular, but this is a mere fantasy.

There is a second, methodological principle that should be kept in mind when attending to popular renditions of Spinoza's thought. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza shows that theology, which is written *ad captum vulgi*, does not conflict with philosophy. The philosopher achieves salvation through the understanding, whereas Scripture provides the non-philosopher with truths necessary for salvation that they do not intellectualize but which they integrate as meaningful *dogmata* to structure their lives. That is to say that it is necessarily the case, Spinoza thinks, that Scripture has a mostly unintelligible content; its very efficacy requires that it be distinct from the kind of material open to philosophical and rational inquiry. We must take Spinoza's cue here. Popular literature on Spinoza simply does not aspire to achieve the same goals as academic literature on Spinoza, even if, *fundamentally*, the outcome is the same, that is a deepening of the role of Spinozism in our reflections and enterprises.

More perplexing than the fact that we may learn something about Spinoza's philosophy from what are commonly viewed as non-philosophical works is the fact that Spinoza garnered such popular attention in the first place. Spinoza employed a decidedly technical and at times belabored Latin vocabulary, his mature masterpiece is presented in an intimidating geometrical form, and his work is, to be sure, very difficult. None of this impeded his rise to popularity. Of course, any presentation of Spinoza as a popular philosopher is highly selective. I believe that the works I focus on here can help us understand the history and character of Spinoza's role as a popular philosopher, but they are by no means the only works that can do this work. I use the term 'popular philosophy' rather loosely and take it to denote any representation of Spinoza's thinking in extra-academic settings or works. Additionally, a part of my analysis in this chapter turns on an ambiguity in the notion of 'popular' as also suggesting whatever relates to 'the people' and/or their efforts and undertakings, as a non-negligible element of Spinoza's popular reception involves what are militant public-oriented applications of Spinoza's political views.

Yet a caveat is already in order. Because the nature and extent of Spinoza's popularity varies from (linguistic or national) context to context, my exclusion of some contexts to the benefit of others means my exposition is far from exhaustive. What makes Spinoza resonate in one part of the world might be very dissimilar from what makes him resonate in another part of the world. For my part, I am interested in Anglophone and Francophone works. First, I view the respective contexts as attention worthy in that an important amount of academic *and* non-academic work on Spinoza has appeared and continues to appear in these contexts. Second, my relevant insider knowledge is restricted to the Anglophone and Francophone contexts and insider knowledge is essential to grasp what makes Spinoza popular in context. Neither of my reasons is meant to suggest that these are the most or only contexts where we can profitably analyze Spinoza and popular philosophy.

Naturally, the cementing of Spinoza's popularity belongs to a larger history of Spinoza's reception. Spinoza's role in shaping the broader course of Western philosophy was very significant, such as in the context of the radical Enlightenment as well as in the context of the development of late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century Germanophone philosophy (Israel 2001; Förster and Melamed 2012; Stetter and Ramond 2019). We simply cannot know whether Spinoza would have become so unusually popular without having already been highly regarded by his philosopher peers.

I organize the literature I examine chronologically. In the second section, I examine two late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century works on Spinoza. It was not until the mid-to-late nineteenth-century that the history of philosophy became a specialized field of research; similarly, it is only at this point that Spinoza becomes widely available in translation, in Elwes' translation in the Anglophone world, for instance, and in Saisset's translation in France (Laerke, in this volume). The works I look to here belong to this period when the work of amateur expositors of Spinoza was not *so* distantly removed from professional historians. The works in question, by Jules Prat (Spinoza 1860, 2015, and 2016) and Romain Rolland (1931), touch on two important themes in Spinoza's subsequent popularization. Prat's work involves an issue alluded to above, namely the militant application of Spinoza's political philosophy. Rolland's autobiographical work, on the other hand, stands out as an early figuration of Spinoza in the genre of self-help literature.

In the third section, I examine the fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer (Singer 1961) and Bernard Malamud (Malamud 1966). Both are highly acclaimed mid-century authors for whom Jewish culture and religion, in the Old World and the New, is a defining feature of their fictional worlds. The analysis of their respective works, Singer's short story "The Spinoza of Market Street" and Malamud's novel *The Fixer*, sheds light on two prominent commonplaces in Spinoza's popular reception: the representation of Spinoza as a hermetic thinker who stands above the common condition, and the view of Spinoza as a political and religious rebel.

In the fourth section, where I conclude this short survey of popular literature and its trends, I turn to a work which appeared within the last decade: Irvin D. Yalom's *The Spinoza Problem* (Yalom 2012). I show that this work suggests an interesting second-order issue raised by Spinoza's role as a popular philosopher, viz., the problem of Spinoza's ideal or intended audience.

2. Jules Prat and Romain Rolland

Jules Prat's (1823–1895) idiosyncratic blend of Spinozism and left-wing French Republicanism stands out as a historically and philosophically rich approach to Spinoza that has hardly been studied thus far. It is noteworthy that at no point over the course of a lifetime translating Spinoza and publishing Spinoza's works (at his own personal expense, no less), did Prat occupy a university chair of philosophy. Prat was a lawyer by training and a city administrator (director, under Baron Haussmann's supervision, of the *Service des promenades et des plantations de Paris*) by profession. As his recent biographer and posthumous editor Bernard Pautrat notes, Prat is singularly motivated by the belief that "Spinoza's doctrine, taken seriously and treated as Spinoza himself treated it, should be a tool for the transformation of man and society to achieve the greatest possible freedom" (Spinoza 2015, pp. 381–382). Here I will briefly present Prat's exposition of

Spinoza as a militant thinker whose supreme intention was to transform the political structures involving the broader public.

Prat's attempts to propagate Spinozism are decidedly informed by the worrisomely weak state of French Republicanism in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century. He undertakes the enterprise following the collapse of the Second Republic and the rise to power of Napoleon III in 1852 as a faithful "member of the generation of 1848" (Spinoza 2015, p. 375). Representative of this period in his career is the publication of his translation (the first in French) of Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* (or "TP") in 1860 (Spinoza 1860). In the same year, Prat also publishes a translation of the appendix to *Ethics* Part 4 (Spinoza 2016), meant to serve as a *vade mecum* of Spinozist living for the casual reader.

Of special note in Prat's translation of Spinoza's TP is the detailed and lengthy preface, where Prat fills in the blanks on Spinoza's behalf of what an ideal democratic constitution looks like. By systematically substituting the word "elector" for "patrician" as it appears in Spinoza's model of the decentralized aristocratic government, we can, on Prat's view, reconstruct Spinoza's ideal democratic government. Prat argues that Spinoza's ideal is, in fact, "a regime where *the Patricians of intelligence and honorability*, elected in every class of society and from any condition, by the mass of citizens, alone have the right, by the law, to administer affairs of state and the occupy the charges of the empire," and hence, that Spinoza intended to design a bona fide "Aristocratic Democracy" or a "government where there is no other nobility besides that of virtue and intelligence" (Spinoza 1860, p. 33). Hence, Prat maintains that the democratic state's institutions must be designed so that children born into any family have equal access to education and other intelligence or virtue promoting goods.

What follows is an elaboration of the model democracy's institutions cast in the mold of populist French Republican politics; Spinoza's ideal constitution for the people and the times, as it were. In a pull-out pamphlet attached to the end of his translation, Prat divulges a kind of rubric for what the state should look like with regards to specific administrative matters, like taxation, nationalized banking, public instruction, agriculture, affairs of religion, and commerce. To give one specific example, Prat reasons that in the model democracy all schools must be free of charge, and because, according to Spinoza, "the nature of children, such as that of adults, is to be composed of *one single substance, both body and mind*, public instruction must include physical education, such that the Republic must join to all schools a public gymnasium" (Spinoza 1860, p. 339). As Pautrat notes: "From rubric to rubric, we witness a rare spectacle: Spinoza, via Prat, giving birth to a Republican program and an awareness of the struggles that the Third Republic will live out" (Spinoza 2015, p. 389).

Prat's militant Spinozist Republicanism remained regrettably devoid of disciples. However, his belief that Spinoza speaks to the wider popular and their very real struggles for political emancipation prefigures contemporary understandings of Spinoza's political agenda and its applicability largely endorsed in the so-called Continental philosophical milieu. Consider, for instance, the popular work of Hardt and Negri (2001), for whom the concept of *multitudo* is called on to make sense of the state of the global proletariat; or again, the work of Lordon (2015), for whom the concept of *imperium* can congenially contribute to contemporary discussions of the purpose and value of sovereign powers. What distinguishes Prat is that he saw fit to attend to the

minutiae of Spinoza's political texts and to the institution building paradigms that Spinoza himself endorsed.

In contrast to Prat, for whom Spinoza serves as a springboard for politics, we find the Nobel-prize winning author Romain Rolland (1866–1944), for whom Spinoza serves as a touchstone of self-help. I do not mean to suggest that Rolland's elegant writing on Spinoza suffers from the sort of stultifying vulgarity and triviality frequently exhibited by self-help literature. Nonetheless, it does have the common trait of professing to find in Spinoza a kind of guru whose philosophy helps the author attain inner peace at a time when life is, he finds, extremely hard.

In his *L'éclair de Spinoza* (Rolland 1931), Rolland tells us that, like so many still, he discovered Spinoza in the high-school classroom, at Louis-le-Grand, though Spinoza was not on the national philosophy curriculum. Rather, like Spinoza himself, Rolland states, Descartes was the immediate impetus to discovering a way out of the “majestic walled garden” to “unlimited perspectives” (Rolland 1930, p. 114). He had found Saisset's edition of Spinoza's works “under the galleries of Odéon”; this became his “elixir of eternal life,” and although Rolland professes to have now later in life “freed himself from the strict rationalism of the master Benoît” [...] the work “remains sacred, equal to the Holy Books for him who believes; and I do not touch these three volumes but with a pious love. I will never forget that in the cyclone of my adolescence, I found my refuge in the profound nest of the *Ethics*” (Rolland 1931, pp. 115–116).

Rolland's tale is meant to convey the way that Spinoza can help us to free ourselves, even, he says quoting a letter from a Bengalese political prisoner who read *L'éclair de Spinoza* in translation, when conditions are most restrictive (Rolland 1930, pp. 107–108). What was then it about Spinoza that spoke so compellingly to Rolland and that provided him the means to liberate himself? It was, he writes, “the words of fire,” the image of “the surging of the white sun of *Substance*” leaping through the windows of his cold and damp bedroom in winter, yielding “metal in fusion, which fills the depths of my eyes, pouring into my own being that it consumes, and my being, like a fountain, gushing back into the vat” (Rolland 1931, pp. 119–120).

Reflection on his own mystic or irrationalist interpretation, according to which any reader can be brought into a state of fusion with Spinoza's God, gives way in Rolland to a second-order observation about the value of Spinoza's *philosophical* style, the *more geometrico*. He writes: “I do not pretend that this virtuous miracle is inherent in some magic words, nor that I had then rightly seized the true thought of Spinoza. [...] In the traced inscriptions at the entry to the *Ethics*, in these Definitions in flamboyant letters, I decrypted, not that which he had said, but that which I wanted to say, the words of my own childish thought, in its inarticulate tongue, struggling to emerge. One never reads a book. One reads through books, either to discover oneself, or to control oneself” (Rolland 1931, pp. 120–121). It is thus not the “master of the geometrical order” or the “rationalist” who won him over, though these “magnificent games of reason provide deep aesthetic joy,” but the “realist,” and Rolland finds it regrettable that this aspect of Spinoza's thought has been covered over to the point of being invisible thanks to the “heavy intellectual verbalism of professional philosophers” (Rolland 1931, pp. 123–124).

For Rolland, reading Spinoza provided him with the occasion to free him from his metaphorical state of mental imprisonment (Rolland 1931, pp. 124–125). In short, to attain this freedom one

must approach Spinoza “not with the cold eyes of intelligence” but with “the passion of the heart and the ardor of the senses” (Rolland 1931, p. 129).

Rolland’s discussion of the meaningfulness of Spinoza for his personal development is intended to draw the reader’s attention to the power provided by Spinoza for self-liberation. If more recent variants on this popular approach to Spinoza have tended to water down what Rolland maximizes in intensity in favor of highlighting a less bold, self-positive attitude that Spinoza would ostensibly help us cultivate, the guiding intuition – that Spinoza did not seek the truth merely to have intellectual dissertations written about him, but to help guide each of us in our own very personal endeavors – does not seem any less present (Guay de Bellissen 2019; Lenoir 2017; Thomass 2008). As a matter of fact, Spinoza invites such an approach in his earliest extant work, the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. With its opening paragraphs tinged in autobiography, Spinoza seems to exhort us to draw on our own experiences and reflect on past mistakes when setting out on our personal path to enlightenment.

3. Isaac Bashevis Singer and Bernard Malamud

I will now look to two mid-century fictional stories that, I imagine, many of my readers will have already encountered. The first of these is *The Spinoza of Market Street* by Isaac Bashevis Singer, a work which has already received attention from historians of philosophy (Garber 1994, Goldstein 2018). Dr. Fischelson, the story’s protagonist, is an avid Spinozist. He takes Spinoza, whom he would emulate, to admonish the emotional tumult and sociability of common folk. The twist of Singer’s story resides in showing that this is no good way to live and that common folk have it at least partly right in embracing the emotions and social relations.

Dr. Fischelson is a feeble older scholar whose lifetime goal was “to be as independent as Spinoza himself” (Singer 1961, p. 9). As a result, he “had isolated himself completely and had become a forgotten man” (Singer 1961, pp. 10–11). His one companion is Spinoza, whom he has studied for the 30 years. Dr. Fischelson’s scorn for the rabble, “immersed in the vainest of passions, drunk with emotions,” finds a theoretical footing in the alleged Spinozist teaching that emotion is never good (Singer 1961, p. 9). In stark contrast to the rabble’s debased pursuit of pleasure, Dr. Fischelson cultivates a hobby of his own: stargazing. In contemplating the Milky Way, Dr. Fischelson becomes “aware of that infinite extension which is, according to Spinoza, one of God’s attributes.” It comforts him to think that although he is “only a weak, puny man, a changing mode of the absolutely infinite Substance,” he is also “a part of the cosmos, made of the same matter as the celestial bodies.” To that extent, he is “a part of the Godhead” and he knows that “he cannot be destroyed” (Singer 1961, pp. 6–7). These moments of vertiginous euphoria, the experience of *amor dei intellectualis*, can do nothing, however, to repair his failing health.

Dr. Fischelson cannot live up to the superhuman expectations set on him by Spinoza. One day his poor health catches up with him. Market Street’s desolation mirrors his own despair. Poland is engulfed in war as Imperial German troops make their way to Tsarist Russia. Dr. Fischelson believes his time has come. His neighbor, the spinster Black Dobbe, finds him near death, prostrate on his bed, and yet succeeds in nurturing him back to life. As much a loner and outcast as he, Dobbe and Dr. Fischelson converse about the injustices they have suffered and ultimately recognize that what has blossomed between them is love. To the surprise of the community, who

took both Dr. Fischelson and Dobbe to be lost causes, they come before the rabbi and are married. Dr. Fischelson has found health and happiness. He thus must ask forgiveness from Spinoza for having become a fool.

The story is a parable. Dr. Fischelson's redemption is meant to instruct us in the inherent value of our this-worldly condition, along with the wisdom of surrendering to chance, folly, and interpersonal love. Hard rationalism coupled with a reclusive, Ebenezer Scrooge-esque lifestyle might yield intoxicating glimpses into Nature's eternal laws, but these are no substitutes for the kind of care that can only be provided by a fellow human being, and that any fellow human being, even Dobbe in her declined state, can provide. Spinoza is seen as a proponent of an anti-social attitude and ascetic virtues like poverty and chastity, having fully embraced the life of the mind and turned his back on merely mundane matters. That this is shown to be a poor way of life is one thing, but what is more, Dr. Fischelson's failure to live by Spinoza's teachings comes to symbolize the impracticability of philosophy itself. As if anticipating Deleuze's remark that Spinoza teaches philosophers to become non-philosophers (Deleuze 1981), Singer's story illustrates the view that no one, not even the most devoted scholar, can attain the rational quietus that *the* philosopher argues is the highest goal in life, though in practicing that philosophy we might still find a way out.

A telling counter example is provided by the Spinoza of Yakov Bov, the protagonist of Malamud's novel *The Fixer*. Malamud's tale, like Singer's, concerns the fall and eventual redemption of a Jewish man who scorns the shtetl and the petty ways of the community. Leaving his town to make a life for himself in Kiev, Yakov finds himself imprisoned and set to be tried in an instance of the anti-Semitic blood libel. Yakov turns to Spinoza for succor. But Yakov's Spinoza turns out to be a revolutionary.

This is the novel's very conclusion. Yakov is about to stand trial and he is daydreaming that he meets the Tsar, discusses Russia's regime of hate and violence, and assassinates him. He thinks to himself: "One thing I've learned [...] there's no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew. You can't be one without the other, that's clear enough. You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed. [...] Where there's no fight for it there's no freedom. What is it Spinoza says? If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it. Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live Liberty!" (Malamud 1966, p. 335).

This call to arms contrasts with the mid-point of the novel when the reader first discovers Yakov's affinity for Spinoza. Yakov, imprisoned in Kiev, is met by the investigating magistrate. The magistrate notes that Yakov kept a copy of Spinoza's works and a dialogue ensues. The theme of freedom is gradually brought to center stage. Yakov maintains that Spinoza teaches us that "Necessity binds us down," though we can at least know our freedom if we know we are in God (Malamud 1966, pp. 75–76). The *political* implications of Spinoza's understanding of freedom are not noticed by Yakov.

In fact, it is the magistrate who draws Yakov's attention to the political aspect of Spinoza's thinking. He asks whether Yakov believes one can be free without being politically free. Yakov recognizes that he is in tricky waters and remains silent. The magistrate then reveals what he thinks of Spinoza: "One might say there is more than one conception of freedom in Spinoza's mind – in Necessity, philosophically speaking; and practically, in the state, that is to say within the realm of

politics and political action.” The magistrate further suggests that, for Spinoza, “the purpose of the state – the government – was the security and comparative freedom of rational man” (Malamud 1966, pp. 77–78). It is as if the remainder of the novel shows how the Spinozist seed, planted by chance and then nourished by a conversation in jail, finally blossoms at the story’s conclusion. Thus, we see that, for Malamud, Spinoza’s philosophy appears in its full glory only when its reader, radicalized by extreme conditions, takes it to license revolutionary political action.

One common feature to Singer and Malamud is the way that they root their Spinozists in a Jewish world. In this, they are forerunners of the ongoing popular preoccupation with Spinoza’s own relation to Judaism (Goldstein 2006; Yalom 2012). That biographical material should prove the focal point for influential popular literature on Spinoza is unsurprising. They diverge, however, in seeing what kind of stance Spinoza’s philosophy motivates with regards to our interactions with our fellow human beings. Though perhaps some will dispute Malamud’s suggestion that there are two conceptions of freedom in Spinoza, I believe we should side with Malamud against Singer in emphasizing that Spinoza does not truly conceive freedom individualistically, and that social active affects, like generosity, play a crucial role for the “free man” (Sharp 2019). That is, though Spinoza maintains unequivocally that the “free man” strives to cultivate their own intellect, Spinoza also maintains in the *Ethics* and especially in the political works that possessing intellectual virtue is not enough on its own for lasting freedom. Rather, as the intellect instructs us, freedom requires the continuous support of mutually empowering social relations and political devices, like institutions, laws, and the like. Without the latter, we cannot achieve the basic security necessary for any life, much less an enriching and liberating one. Dr. Fischelson fails to see that in scorning his fellow man, he is at bottom only injuring himself, and that turning to Dobbe is no turn away from Spinoza. We are, Spinoza thinks, mutually dependent creatures. After all, though Spinoza himself did not himself marry or settle in romantic partnership, he does suggest in Chapter 20 to the Appendix of *Ethics* Part 4 that it need not be seen as contrary to reason. There is a clear and important place for love in Spinoza, and his understanding of erotic and sexual relations is more sophisticated than widely believed (Pautrat 2011). What makes sexual partnership so difficult to support, on Spinoza’s account, is that we are prone to “jealousy” and other sad passions insofar as we imagine the thing we love to be incapable of being shared with others (*Ethics* Part 3 Proposition 35 Scholium). God, on the other hand, is especially loveable since the joy that love consists in can be communicated to all and shared by all (*Ethics* Part 4 Proposition 36). In a sense, Dr. Fischelson’s true difficulties as an aspiring Spinozist have only just begun, then, as he must now learn to cultivate a love with Dobbe that will be guided by reason and not fraught with jealousy and tyrannical possessiveness.

4. Irvin D. Yalom

To conclude my survey of prominent trends in popular literature on Spinoza, I now briefly turn now to a recent (and very commercially successful) book of historical semi-fiction: Irvin D. Yalom’s *The Spinoza Problem*. Yalom presents the work as a “novel of ideas” and a way to celebrate Spinoza’s contributions – namely, that “ideas, thoughts, and feelings are caused by previous experiences, that passions may be studied dispassionately, that understanding leads to transcendence” – to psychiatry and psychotherapy (Yalom 2012, pp. 7–8). Yalom’s novel contains two stories in one: the story of Spinoza’s “inner life” from the *cherem* of 1656 until 1666, and the story of Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi ideologue, and his own personal interest in Spinoza. According to

Yalom, the events contained in the novel “*could* have happened”; to facilitate an access to the psyche of the protagonists (Spinoza and Rosenberg), two fictional figures are introduced: Franco Benitez and Friedrich Pfister.

There is not much to say about Yalom’s representation of Spinoza’s philosophy, which is evoked as a sort of Jewish Enlightenment-era humanism. Let us grant that the Spinoza of Yalom’s novel overlaps at least in part with Spinoza the philosopher. What is rather more interesting is the way that Yalom’s Spinoza poses an intriguing “problem” for the would-be reader of Spinoza. In turn, this problem-posing feature of Spinoza’s thought gives way to an important second-order issue involved in the study of Spinoza as a popular thinker, viz., the question of ascertaining Spinoza’s ideal audience. To be clear, it seems to be that there are at least *three* Spinoza problems. The first is the problem that Spinoza himself ostensibly posed to the Jewish community of Amsterdam. The second is the problem that Spinoza represented to the eyes of an avowed anti-Semite who, despite himself, continued to return to Spinoza’s thinking. The last, and most interesting, is the broader problem of Spinoza’s ideal or intended readership.

It might be thought, this appears to be Yalom’s intuition, that Spinoza’s *Ethics*, with its alleged psychotherapeutic remedies, is most congenially read by a person who suffers the ailments that Spinoza hopes to remedy. But herein lies the problem. If the reader is deeply mired in the passions and inadequate ideas, how can they be reasonably expected to get themselves out of that mire of passions, even with Spinoza’s help? Take the case of Rosenberg, as Yalom relays it. Through his studies of Goethe, Rosenberg recognizes that he may find in Spinoza something of genuine value for remedying his own inner turmoil and outward-directed rage. The Nazi recognizes that it is “this view of an orderly universe with predictable, mathematically derived laws, a world with an infinite explanatory power, that offered Goethe a sense of calmness.” Out of impatience and intolerance, however, Rosenberg cannot stand to read the first few pages of the *Ethics*. Rosenberg “wants what Goethe got out of Spinoza” but “feels only dread in this natural orderliness” (Yalom 2012, pp. 268–269). In Spinoza’s terms, we have here a case of the *fluctuatio animi* (*Ethics* Part 3 Proposition 17 Scholium). Yalom’s story thus serves to suggest that the reader in theory who Spinoza would be in a position to do the most for – the reader who is the most encumbered by the passions and least guided by reason – is the very reader who is least within the grasp of the Spinozist psychotherapeutic project, whereas the reader already guided by reason and thus able to practice Spinozism is the reader who needs Spinoza the least.

It is fitting, I believe, to conclude this discussion of the ever-growing popular literature on Spinoza on an open-ended note. My survey of several popular representations, applications, and appreciations of Spinoza may well indicate that the public for whom Spinoza writes is very elusive indeed, though not so much because of its having too many inadequate ideas, but rather because the public has yet to settle on which Spinoza it is they prefer. Or perhaps, as Deleuze long ago said, it is that we philosophers have not yet learned all there is to learn about Spinoza from the non-philosophers, the genuine Spinozists (Deleuze 1981, pp. 164-175). Spinoza, after all, did not write philosophy as a mere livelihood. Spinoza was neither a “professional philosopher” nor an academic. His income was very modest, but he prided himself on being freed from the constraints of a university position and declined the offer when it presented itself (Letter 48). The value of the freedom to philosophize, as he conceived it, was priceless. He did philosophy because he thought that what was at stake in philosophy was human blessedness itself. I cannot imagine he would

think his works the privilege of any one community of readers whether artists, novelists, poets, or philosophers.

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