

# **SPINOZA NOW**

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EDITOR



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### 3

## The Joyful Passions in Spinoza's Theory of Relations

THE THEME OF THE CONFLICT between the different interpretations of Spinoza's philosophy in French scholarship, introduced by Christopher Norris in this volume and expanded on by Alain Badiou, is also central to the argument presented in this chapter. Indeed, this chapter will be preoccupied with distinguishing the interpretations of Spinoza by two of the figures introduced by Badiou. The interpretation of Spinoza offered by Gilles Deleuze in *Expressionism in Philosophy* provides an account of the dynamic changes or transformations of the characteristic relations of a Spinozist finite existing mode, or human being.<sup>1</sup> This account has been criticized more or less explicitly by a number of commentators, including Charles Ramond.<sup>2</sup> Rather than providing a defense of Deleuze on this specific point, which I have done elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> what I propose to do in this chapter is provide an account of the role played by "joyful passive affections" in these dynamic changes or transformations by distinguishing Deleuze's account of this role from that offered by one of his more explicit critics on this issue, Pierre Macherey.<sup>4</sup> An appreciation of the role played by "joyful passive affections" in this context is crucial to understanding how Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza is implicated in his broader philosophical project of constructing a philosophy of difference. The outcome is a position that, like Badiou in the

previous chapter, rules out “intellect in potentiality” but maintains a role for the joyful passive affects in the development of adequate ideas.

### **The Distinction between Joyful Passive Affections and Sad Passive Affections**

In his interpretation of Spinoza’s theory of relations in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze assigns a specific role to joyful passions. They are characterized as a significant determinant in the dynamic changes or transformations of the characteristic relations of finite existing modes. The theme of joyful passions is pivotal in distinguishing Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s theory of relations from that offered by Macherey in *Introduction à l’Ethique de Spinoza, la cinquième partie*.

While discussing the General Definition of the Affects at the end of Part III of the *Ethics*, Macherey formulates the problem that effectively distinguishes his interpretation of this aspect of the *Ethics* from that of Deleuze.<sup>5</sup> He raises the following question: “Can the soul be completely active, without at all being passive, or does it rather find itself permanently placed between the two extremes of passivity and activity, following regimes which make it lean sometimes to the side of activity, sometimes to that of passivity? And then what are the thresholds which swing one of these regimes into the other?”<sup>6</sup> Each of the two interpreters approaches this problem differently.

Macherey and Deleuze are in accord with regard to the fixity of singular essence, but their interpretations differ with regard to the transformations of the characteristic relations determinative of singular things. According to Macherey, the affective life of a singular thing is constituted by its ideas or passions, which are expressed as an “uninterrupted affective flux.”<sup>7</sup> The transformations of the characteristic relations of a singular thing correspond to the varying degrees to which the uninterrupted affective flux hinders or limits the active expression of a mode’s power to act within the range of a maximum and a minimum. All a mode’s power to act is expressed, however, according to the uninterrupted affective flux; it is simultaneously expressed both actively and passively. The passive affections, or the passions, are the mark of a negation, and inversely, the active affects, or actions, are the active expression, or affirmation, of a singular thing’s power to act. Macherey considers passion,

with its logical mark of "negativity," to be that "which is found most naturally in man." The question for Macherey is therefore "to know whether man can ever completely escape this logic and engage in actions which are not marred by such a limitation?"<sup>8</sup>

Deleuze, however, considers the transformations of the relations characteristic of modal existence to implicate a mode's capacity to be affected. A mode's capacity to be affected is constituted by its active affections. Passive affections, on the contrary, function only to limit its capacity to be affected. This limit functions within the range of a maximum and minimum; that is, a mode's capacity to be affected, which is affirmed by its *conatus* as the expression of its power to act, is open to variation within the "general limits" of this range.<sup>9</sup> According to Deleuze, the variation of a mode's power to act is directly limited by the passive affections to which it is subjected, rather than proportionally limited, as Macherey proposes.

The difference between Macherey's and Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's theory of relations rests with their respective interpretations of the role of passive affections. According to Macherey, they remain an integral part of the existence of a singular thing, being expressed by its *conatus* even though hindering its capacity to actively, or more perfectly, express its fixed power to act. According to Deleuze, on the contrary, only active affections function integrally as part of modal existence. Passive affections function rather to limit the existence of a finite mode, that is, of the active affections constitutive of its capacity to be affected, which is affirmed by its *conatus* as the expression of its power to act.

This, however, does not exhaust the differences between their respective interpretations of passive affections but rather prepares for a further distinction. Deleuze argues that "the opposition of actions and passions should not conceal the other opposition that constitutes the second principle of Spinozism: that of joyful passive affections and sad passive affections."<sup>10</sup> Spinoza first introduces the notions of joy and sadness in the *Ethics* II, P11S, by making explicit reference to them as passions: "By joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection. And by sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection." The other reference that Deleuze cites is from the *Ethics* III, P58, where Spinoza introduces joys and desires whose active character sets them

apart from those joys and desires that are passions because they are determined by external encounters. Spinoza writes, "Apart from the joy and desire that are passions, there are other affects of joy and desire that are related to us insofar as we act." These are the only two explicit references to passions which are joys to be found in the *Ethics*. In *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze characterizes these joyful passions as "joyful passive affections," and it is from this starting point, with joyful passive affections, that Deleuze begins his account of the transformations of the characteristic relations of finite existing modes.

Macherey concedes that "the notion of a 'joyful passion' is not in fact entirely absent from Spinoza's text, at least at first glance."<sup>11</sup> However, when he offers an account of the transformations of the characteristic relations of singular things, the notion of a joyful passion does not retain the same significance that Deleuze assigns it in *Expressionism in Philosophy*. In fact, "joyful passions" are implicated quite differently in Macherey's reading of the *Ethics*. However, before developing Macherey's account of what he calls "passionate joys," the role played by joyful passive affections in Deleuze's account of the transformations of the characteristic relations of finite existing modes needs to be explicated.

### **The Role of Joyful Passive Affections in Deleuze's Account of Modal Existence**

Deleuze actually prefigures his discussion of joyful passive affections at the beginning of chapter 15 of *Expressionism in Philosophy*, when he argues that "our passive joy is and must remain a passion: it is not 'explained' by our power of action, but it 'involves' a higher degree of this power."<sup>12</sup> What does Deleuze understand by correlating a passion with an increase in a mode's power to act? This would seem to contradict his concept of the role of passive affections in the determination of a finite existing mode, that is, insofar as they function solely to limit its existence. This suggestion of a contradiction is reinforced by the fact that Deleuze follows his introduction of the distinction between joyful passive affections and sad passive affections by the statement that "one increases our power, the other diminishes it."<sup>13</sup>

Deleuze seems to be arguing that although joyful passive affections are passions, they function more or less actively and therefore



can be seen to occupy an intermediate place between passions and actions, or in effect, to mediate between them. However, a closer reading of *Expressionism in Philosophy* reveals that a different logic is being developed, one according to which joyful passive affections mediate not between active and passive affections but rather solely between different active affections. To explicate the mechanism by means of which this logic operates, it is necessary to determine exactly what the relation is, then, between a joyful passive affection and the increase in power to which Deleuze relates it.

Deleuze suggests that we “come closer to our power of action” insofar as we are affected by the joy of a joyful passive affection.<sup>14</sup> He argues that “passive joy is produced by an object that agrees with us, and whose power increases our power of action, but of which we do not yet have an adequate idea.”<sup>15</sup> However, he maintains that “it never increases enough for us to become the adequate cause of the affections that exercise our capacity to be affected.”<sup>16</sup> The initial affect is a passion because we are affected from the outside by an external object; however, this object agrees with our nature and, consequently, is not harmful to us. We therefore do not experience the passive affection as the passion of sadness because our power to act is not diminished by the encounter. One would expect a feeling of ambivalence to be experienced because at this stage, our perfection has been neither augmented nor diminished. Yet, insofar as the external body “agrees” or “has something in common with our nature,” the potential for the combination of the power to act of the external body with our own, and therefore the increase in power that this would involve, promotes the feeling of joy that allows the overall affect to be described as a joyful passive affection. What Deleuze understands by an object that “agrees” or “has something in common with our nature” is one with which we can be further integrated. Each relation “agrees” solely insofar as it can be further integrated in relation to another, thus generating a new, more composite relation. Therefore the concept of finite existing modes or individuals whose natures agree corresponds to the potential for their complication or integration in a more composite relation. Insofar as the effect of this external body on our own is experienced as an affection that is explained by the external body, it remains an inadequate idea of the imagination, and therefore a passion. To distinguish passive joys

from active joys, Deleuze argues that an “active joy we produce by ourselves, it flows from our power of action itself, follows from an adequate idea in us.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Deleuze, joyful passive affections are passions because they limit the expression of our power to act and yet correspond to a feeling of joy because they are somehow implicated in an increase of that power. This can only work if joyful passive affections are understood to function at the limit imposed by passive affections. The joy of a joyful passive affection can therefore be understood insofar as it affirms that limit while simultaneously announcing the potential for positive transformation, that is, the surpassing of the limit or an increase in the power to act, rather than functioning solely as a limit marking the point beyond which a finite existing mode ceases to exist, as do sad passive affections.

Only to the extent that this initially inadequate relation results in the production of active joys, and therefore in an increase in our power of acting, are joyful passive affections implicated in the transformative process. Joyful passive affections indicate a partial or inadequate idea of something common to both our own body and an external body that affects it. They indicate the potential for an increase in our power to act but are not themselves directly related to that increase in power. It is rather the active affections that follow from joyful passive affections that are directly associated with the increase in power. The suggestion of a contradiction between joyful passive affections as passions and the increase in our power associated with them is therefore unfounded. Deleuze’s use of the concept of joyful passive affections should rather be understood to be the articulation of the process of transformation, or increase in power, that actually takes place in the generation of active joy by means of the accumulation of joyful passive affections.

### **The Simplest of Common Notions**

Spinoza maintains that the ideas that we generally have of ourselves, and of external bodies, are only inadequate ideas or passive affections that indicate an encounter between some external body and our own. A joyful passive affection, because it is a passion, is always the result of an external cause and is thus always indicated by an inadequate idea. However, because it is a joyful passive affection, it

indicates that there is something common to an external body and our own or that it has a nature compatible, or potentially convergent, with our own.

According to Deleuze, the experience of a joyful passive affection can induce the formation of the corresponding common notion. The first common notions formed by an individual are those that apply to its body and to another whose nature agrees directly with its own and therefore affects its body with joy. When our Mind forms an idea of what is common to the external body and our own, it forms a common notion. The joyful affection then ceases to be passive and becomes active. By indicating that there is something common, that there is a connection between the bodies, a joyful passive affection can initiate the formation of a common notion. A common notion is an adequate idea of the relation, which therefore incorporates the cause of the affection within the very idea of that affection. Deleuze maintains that Spinoza describes an affection that expresses its cause in this way as no longer passive but active. The joy of a joyful passive affection no longer indicates an inadequate idea of an object that agrees with us but the necessarily adequate idea of what is common to that object and ourselves. An adequate idea of the affection is formed when the cause of the affection is attached to what is common to the bodies involved, that is, when the potential for the integration of their natures is actualized. This is the “leap,” of which Deleuze speaks, from inadequate to adequate ideas, from joyful passive affections to active joys, from passions to actions.

### **The Relation between Passivity and Activity in the Affective Life**

Macherey does not agree with the division of passive affections into joyful passive affections and sad passive affections. In “The Encounter with Spinoza,” he claims “rather bluntly that for Spinoza all passions, without exception, are sad—even those that are or appear to be joys. Or that they are all ultimately sad, in a sort of passionate entropy.”<sup>18</sup> Macherey distinguishes what he considers Spinoza to be referring to in the *Ethics* II, P11S, and the *Ethics* III, P58, as “passionate joys” from that which Deleuze characterizes as “joyful passive affections.” Contrary to what he considers to be Deleuze’s point of view, Macherey maintains that passionate joys, “which are in fact imaginary joys linked to encounters with external bodies, cannot be assembled

into a coherent stable group, but rather tend inevitably to conflict, tending not towards composition but towards decomposition.”<sup>19</sup>

In the *Ethics* III, P17, Spinoza introduces the theme of the *fluctuatio animi* in the case of a sadness that doubles as a joy. Macherey explains this case in the following manner: Spinoza “starts by presenting a sad affect attached ordinarily to an object . . . then he shows how, by contamination, because the object in question appears to resemble another object which ordinarily gives us joy, this joy is artificially transferred onto the first object, which is then the cause ‘by accident’ of this affect.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore the *fluctuatio animi* permanently exposes the joy associated with this affect to the risk of reversing to sadness. This is why Macherey considers all passions, “including joys that are passions,” to have a “sad destiny,” which cannot somehow be transformed into something active, which Macherey accuses Deleuze of attempting to do with joyful passive affections. Macherey maintains that a joyful passive affection, as characterized by Deleuze in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, is “a contradiction in terms, corresponding at best to a passing, unstable and literally non-viable state of our constitution.”<sup>21</sup>

The first common notion that we can have, according to Macherey, is *amor erga Deum*, whereas for Deleuze, the first common notions that we can have are the simplest common notions, which represent what is common to our body and to certain external bodies by which we are effected. Macherey does not deny that there are the simple common notions of which Deleuze speaks; however, he does deny that from them we can deduce adequate ideas without first having attained the love toward God, which he therefore considers to be the first common notion capable of leading to adequate ideas. Macherey considers the love toward God to establish the basis for the regulation of the affective life and therefore to be the first step in the production of the second kind of knowledge, whereas for Deleuze, the love toward God represents one step in the transition from the second kind of knowledge to the third kind of knowledge. The idea of God as the cause of all things, that is, the general common notion of the love toward God, is, for Macherey, the primary point of reference for adequate ideas. All adequate ideas without exception therefore include, by means of the love toward God, the idea of God as their cause. According to Deleuze, however, adequate ideas are

constituted locally by means of the simplest of common notions or the shared knowledge that each involved idea or body is the common cause of the adequate idea. An adequate idea for Deleuze is therefore determined in direct relation to the bodies or ideas that interact with one another as causes of the adequate idea, without necessarily requiring reference to the general common notion of the love toward God. It is on the basis of this argument for the deduction of adequate ideas from simple common notions that Deleuze's understanding of joyful active affections is distinguishable from the account of "passionate joys" offered by Macherey.

### **A Joyful Passive Affection Can Be Reversed to Sadness**

The difference between the "passionate joys" of Macherey and the joyful passive affections of Deleuze is brought out effectively by the discussion of the *fluctuatio animi* in "The Encounter with Spinoza." In fact, Macherey argues that the "*fluctuatio animi* . . . completely undermines the notion of joyful passions" presented by Deleuze.<sup>22</sup> Macherey understands a "passionate joy" to be a joy "by accident," that is, a sadness that is doubled as a joy, and he maintains that Spinoza chose this case, "and not that where a joy is impaired by becoming tinged with bitterness," to determine the theme of the *fluctuatio animi*.<sup>23</sup> The joy of a passionate joy is a joy whose cause remains unknown; it is therefore associated with a passion and, according to Macherey, must reverse to being sad. Macherey contends that Deleuze's interpretation of a "joyful passion" as a joyful passive affection presents a joy that does not reverse as expected, which leads him to ask "if there is in joy something stronger and more stable than in sadness, which protects it against this risk of reversal?"<sup>24</sup> Macherey can be understood to be suggesting with this question that Deleuze's response would be yes, because for Deleuze, the sadness of a sad passive affection simply limits the existence of an existing finite mode, whereas the joy of a joyful passive affection not only affirms the limit but simultaneously announces the potential for positive transformation, that is, to go beyond the limit imposed by the passive affections in general. In this way, Deleuze does seem to interpret joy as being stronger and more stable than sadness, which could therefore protect it against the risk of reversal. Macherey responds to the question by arguing that "the extremely condensed

way in which the content of this question is exposed in proposition 17 and in its scholium, only permits the question to be posed, but hardly gives any means to respond to it."<sup>25</sup> In fact, Spinoza only gives the example of a sadness that doubles as a joy in his explication of the *fluctuatio animi*.<sup>26</sup> Macherey therefore argues that such "a harmful pleasure, whether inflicted or suffered, would clearly for Spinoza be a passion imbued with *fluctuatio animi*, ineluctably producing a negative legacy of sadness."<sup>27</sup> By referring to a joyful passion as "a harmful pleasure," or simply a sadness that doubles as a joy, Macherey reduces the Deleuzian concept of a joyful passive affection to that of a passionate joy.

Deleuze, on the contrary, considers the ethical view to provide a means of responding to the question raised by Macherey. Deleuze does not deny that "passionate joys," as described by Macherey, are experienced by finite existing modes, nor that such a joy can be doubled or reversed to sadness and therefore be lost to the *fluctuatio animi*. And Deleuze in no way guarantees that every joyful passive affection will always produce an active joy. According to Deleuze, a joyful passive affection "may always . . . be interrupted by destruction, or even simply by the sadness of the loved object itself."<sup>28</sup> In other words, insofar as a joyful passive affection is a passion, its cause can be confused with another external cause or image of an object or body, which effaces the joy and renders the joyful passive affection sad. There is therefore nothing inherently stable or coherent in a joyful passive affection that stops it from falling prey to the *fluctuatio animi*. Instead, Deleuze is arguing that despite the difficulty in distinguishing a passionate joy from a joyful passive affection, the joy of a joyful passive affection can be isolated before it becomes prey to the *fluctuatio animi* and in this way contributes to the formation of a common notion. Macherey does not at all agree with Deleuze on this point. Macherey argues, on the contrary, that nothing can turn a passionate joy into an action because, being a passion, it necessarily tends toward a *fluctuatio animi*; that is, for him, "all passions without exception . . . [tend] towards a *fluctuatio animi*."<sup>29</sup>

Deleuze's concept of a joyful passive affection is the concept of a joy that can be reversed to sadness or, conversely, that can contribute to the formation of common notions. The uncertainty of a joyful

passive affection is carried over into the common notions that can be formed from it when Deleuze maintains that the isolation of a joyful passive affection does not bypass the need for common notions "to be formed, and formed either more or less easily, and so being more or less common to different minds."<sup>30</sup> Macherey is in agreement with Deleuze on this point when he writes that "that which distinguishes the souls of different men, is the place occupied by those common notions in relation to other ideas, inadequate ideas."<sup>31</sup> However, the theme of joyful passions remains one of the points around which their respective interpretations of Spinoza's theory of relations diverge.

Deleuze's position can be presented as follows. According to Deleuze, the "natural situation" of our existence as human beings is such that we are filled with inadequate ideas and passive affections. This is so because, according to Spinoza, we "are continuously affected by external bodies" (*Ethics* II, P47S). Before we can form common notions, we must learn to distinguish sad passions from joyful passions, what Deleuze describes as "a starting point in joyful passions."<sup>32</sup> Sad passions are inadequate ideas that arise from the experience of random encounters with external bodies, whereas joyful passions are inadequate ideas that arise from the encounters with external bodies that have something in common with our own. The immediate idea that we have of these external bodies that have something in common with our own is partial and therefore imaginary. Insofar as this encounter is associated with the experience of joy, we can form an idea of there being something common to the external body and our own. We desire to increase this initial joy by striving to determine or to form an idea of what it is that is specifically common to our body and the external body by means of the simplest of common notions. Our chances of achieving this, which is in no way guaranteed by the joyful passive affection, are improved to the extent that we relate or imagine several things at once as similarly common to our body and the external body, thereby increasing the number of affections associated with the joy of the joyful passive affection—what Deleuze describes as "the accumulation of joyful passive affections."<sup>33</sup> Although joyful passive affections are inadequate ideas of the imagination and, as such, involve

privation of the knowledge of their cause, they are at the same time affections that 'involve,' or implicate, that cause.<sup>34</sup> The imagination is composed of inadequate ideas that, through an understanding of their cause, by means of the mechanism of joyful passive affections and the simplest of common notions, may be transformed into adequate ideas, thereby constituting reason. In this way, the joyful passive affection is the mechanism by which the mind moves from an inadequate idea to an adequate idea and by which the body moves from experiencing a passion to an action. Deleuze argues therefore that "the active joys that flow from common notions find as it were their occasional causes in passive affections of joy,"<sup>35</sup> and according to Deleuze, the only way of reaching an adequate idea is by means of the mechanism of joyful passive affections.

## Notes

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992).
- 2 Charles Ramond, *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), 189–231.
- 3 See Simon Duffy, *The Logic of Expression: Quality, Quantity, and Intensity in Spinoza, Hegel, and Deleuze* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006), chap. 6.
- 4 Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza, la troisième partie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995). All citations quoted from this text are my translations from the French. See also Pierre Macherey, "The Encounter with Spinoza," trans. Martin Joughin, in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, 139–61 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
- 5 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, trans. Edwin Curley, 408–617 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- 6 Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza*, 20.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 9 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 225.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 246.



- 11 Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza*, 153
- 12 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 240.
- 13 The whole passage reads, "The opposition of actions and passions should not conceal the other opposition that constitutes the second principle of Spinozism: that of joyful passive affections and sad passive affections. *One increases our power, the other diminishes it*. We come closer to our power of action insofar as we are affected by joy"(Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 246; emphasis added).
- 14 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 246.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 274.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 241.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 274.
- 18 Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza*, 153.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 162–63.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 166.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P17: "If we imagine that a thing which usually affects us with an affect of Sadness is like another which usually affects us with an equally great affect of Joy, we shall hate it and at the same time love it." *Ethics* III, P17S: "This constitution of the Mind which arises from two contrary affects is called vacillation of mind [*fluctuatio animi*], which is therefore related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination (see *Ethics* II, P44S); nor do vacillation of mind and doubt differ from one another except in degree. But it should be noted that in the preceding Proposition I have deduced these vacillations of mind from causes which are the cause through themselves of one affect and the accidental cause of the other. I have done this because in this way they could more easily be deduced from what has gone before, not because I deny that vacillations of mind for the most part arise from an object which is the efficient cause of each affect."
- 27 Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza*, 156.
- 28 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 244.
- 29 Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza*, 155.

- 30 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 307.
- 31 Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza, la seconde partie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 291.
- 32 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 307.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 283.
- 34 For an account of this “involvement” according to the logic of different/ciation, see Duffy, *Logic of Expression*, chaps. 6–8.
- 35 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 307.