

Editorial

Bela Egyed

As Jonathan Israel has shown in his groundbreaking study, Spinoza's ideas were central to the "radical" Enlightenment of late 17th century Europe. A century later these same ideas had a decisive impact on the development of German Idealism. Hegel, one of the leading figures of this philosophical movement, acknowledged his debt to the sage of Amsterdam. Along with Kant, Hegel mentions Spinoza as one of his most important predecessors; and notes that: "to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of philosophy" (Lectures on the History of Philosophy).

At the beginning of the 20th century Spinoza was once again the focus of heated discussions – this time among Jewish thinkers. (S. B. Stevens' essay in this volume explores the way in which H. Cohen, and L. Strauss grappled with the implications of Spinozism for the question of Jewish identity.) The 1960s saw a revival of interest in Spinoza by professional philosophers – especially in France. L. Althusser, a Marxist philosopher - not himself a Spinoza specialist -, brought attention to the importance of Spinoza's notion of "imagination" for human existence. He claimed that this notion anticipated his own notion of "ideology". He sees both, not simply as a form of "false

consciousness" but, as something that represents the lived relation social agents have to their world. In other words, he showed that imagination is – as Moira Gatens formulates it in her reply to one of our questions - "a power, not a defect, of the human being and the knowledge to which it gives rise – though partial or inadequate - is of enormous social utility". M. Hardt and A. Negri's highly influential work, *Empire*, takes Spinoza's idea of the "constitutive power" of imagination one step further.

Spinoza published only one work under his name (The Philosophical Principles of Rene Descartes). He published one anonymously: the Theologico-Political Treatise (TPT), but all of his other writings, including his letters, appeared in print only after his death. The posthumously published philosophical works are: Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being, On the Improvement of the Understanding, Political Treatise and Ethics. Of all his works, TPT and Ethics stand out. One of the great merits of the French reception Spinoza was that it refused to see Spinoza's two main works: the TPT and Ethics, as philosophically at odds with one another, and nowadays they have started to re-integrate TP among the most important works. More precisely,

it saw that Spinoza's seemingly conflicting statements about "imagination" in the two works: the first placing great importance on it, while the second considering it as a "confused and mutilated" form of knowledge, together express a fundamental insight. (H. Laux, M. Gatens and G. Boros develop this theme in the following pages more fully.)

In recent years, a significant number of works have appeared in the English language. Of particular interest is a work written, again by someone who is not a Spinoza specialist: A. Damasio. In his *Looking for Spinoza*, Damasio argues that there are significant affinities between Spinoza's psychology, and recent discoveries in neurophysiology. But, in spite of the great interest in him today, Spinoza still has his critics, not only among Jewish thinkers like E. Levinas, but also among philosophers who share Spinoza's attacks on all revealed religions. Namely, there are still those who are uneasy about Spinoza's apparent anti-humanism – his denial that human beings have a privileged position in the universe. And, others are worried about his harsh ethical, and political, realism – his view that "every individual has a sovereign right to do all that he can, in other words, the rights of an individual extend to the utmost limits of his power as it has been conditioned".

Most of us would probably agree that there are problems yet to be solved in connection with Spinoza's philosophy. One, and not the least urgent, is the question left open by Spinoza's rigorous ontological monism, the view that there is only one eternal substance, God, who is present in all, and whose freedom consists in affirming all that flows from the neces-

sity of its own nature. How, some will ask, can this deterministic view of the universe be reconciled with the ideal of an ethical, let alone historical, progress? (Syliane Malinowski-Charles and Bela Egyed, in their essays published here, shed light on this question.) The challenge for students of Spinoza is to decide whether it is possible to find within his ontological system elements that could provide the basis for the struggle for a better world; or, whether Spinoza's ethics will provide solace only for a very few, in their private lives. And, this brings us back to the question whether the reasonably optimistic prospect for a democratic politics opened up by his TPT can be reconciled with the reasonably pessimistic conclusion of the Ethics according to which only a few - the (philosophically) wise - can hope for salvation from the suffering caused by an environment that often overwhelms them, and the turmoil of their own passions.

While the emphasis in this issue of our journal is on Spinoza's political and religious views, all of the essays, and indeed all of the replies and the quotations included here, have important things to say about the way politics and religion intertwine with Spinoza's theory of knowledge and his ontology. Our contributors include some of the foremost Spinoza scholars of today. Professor S. Rosen, a highly influential historian of philosophy, has given us permission to use an essay he wrote on Spinoza many years ago (for the Strauss and Cropsey volume: *History of Political Philosophy*) as a basis for the article in this journal. Professor S. B. Smith, who also has published important essays on the history of philosophy, has written an influential work on Spinoza's political

and religious views: Spinoza, Liberalism and the Question of Jewish Identity. The article published here is a reconstruction of an important section of his book. Professor Henri Laux is a Jesuit scholar at the Centre Sevre. The article printed here is based on his most recent book: *Le Dieu excentre: Essai sur l'affirmation de Dieu*. It explores the way in which Spinoza's affirmation of God might be appropriated by a critical theism. Professor Malinowski-Charles has worked closely with me in the reconstruction and translation of her thought provoking *Affects et conscience chez Spinoza: l'automatisme dans le progress ethique*. Finally, Bela Egyed has written an essay on Spinoza's philosophy of history for this volume, based on the work of Professor G. Boros, the foremost Hungarian Spinoza scholar.

Beside the five articles mentioned above, we have included replies by some of the leading Spinoza scholars to our questions. These replies show that while there is a general consensus among Spinoza specialists about the importance of his ideas for us today, not everyone sees the value of his contributions in the same way. In addition to material prepared

specifically for this issue, we have included quotations from works which we felt have left an important mark on Spinoza's reception in the last fifty years. The influence of Althusser's Spinoza interpretation on social and political theorists has already been mentioned. We have included passages from his writings, as well as from Negri and Hardt's *Empire*, who see Spinoza's influence in a positive light; and from Zizek who does not. Deleuze's oeuvre is one of the main points of reference for many students of philosophy today. His two Spinoza studies are central to that oeuvre, (he calls Spinoza "the absolute philosopher") and we have included passages from one of them. The passages we quote from Levinas are interesting because they show why some of the outstanding Jewish philosophers of the last century might have been uneasy about Spinoza's critique of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, we have included a few passages from Antonio Damasio's influential book, not only because a number of our contributors refer to him, but also because he is uniquely qualified to comment on Spinoza's conception of mind-body unity.



Spinoza, obraz Hendrika van der Spuycka