

Introduction

Derrida and Spinoza? The question may come as a surprise for many; at best one of a number of possible side lines along which Derrida's thought offers itself to exploration. Yet the more explicit turn in Derrida's later work to the problem of the theological-political, suggests otherwise. Spinoza was no foreigner to the French philosophy curriculum and continued to occupy a prominent place on the reading list until late in the 20th century. A certain appreciation of Spinoza went without saying as far as the training of French philosophers in the 20th century was concerned. Beginning in the 1960s, attention to Spinoza reached new heights in France and saw the emergence of some of the new readings that still inspire current research. In addition to great commentaries and interpretations – by Gueroult and Deleuze in 1968, Matheron in 1969, as well as others – Althusser inspired a whole generation of students like Macherey, Balibar, and Moreau who would, from the 1970s on begin to offer bold new perspectives on Spinoza. The entry of this new Spinoza onto the French scene coincided with a renewed appreciation of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

Derrida, however, kept his distance from this discussion. Yet it may not have been disinterest but, ultimately, a sense of intimate affinity that led him to remain silent, a silence Warren Montag explores in his contribution. Derrida's relationship to Spinoza may also be figured as the kind of "diagonal" Gérard Bensussan suggests, an interface at the same time both profound and elusive. Bensussan examines a particular instance of this contact that highlights the intensity of a philosophical relationship worth our critical attention. If there are good reasons why Derrida never went on record publishing on Spinoza, Derrida's numerous references to Spinoza suggest the latter plays an important role in the undercurrent of Derrida's thought. Its examination offers, as I argue in my contribution, not only a better understanding of Spinoza but allows also for a better grasp of Derrida's own critical trajectory.

There are two courses where Derrida turns to Spinoza: in the context of his lectures on "Language and Descartes's Discourse on Method," given

in 1981-1982, and in “Nationality and Philosophical Nationalisms” and “The Theological-Political,” which he gave in 1985–1986. In these lectures, Derrida ventures into a discussion of Spinoza that, while carefully navigating the discourse on Spinoza, provides a suggestive approach to his philosophy. We thank Marguerite Derrida for permission to publish a selection from the first cluster in translation, and the Department of the Special Collections of the Library of the University of California at Irvine for providing us with copies of the lectures. Finally, we would also like to thank Sam Weber for his support and advice.

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