

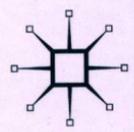
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KANT AND SPINOZISM

TRANSCENDENTAL
IDEALISM AND
IMMANENCE
FROM JACOBI TO
DELEUZE



BETH LORD

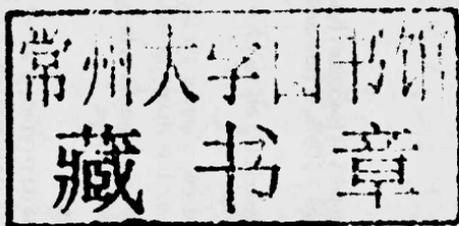


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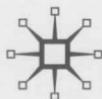
Transcendental Idealism and Immanence
from Jacobi to Deleuze

Beth Lord

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*For my parents, Barry Lord and
Gail Dexter Lord*

Series Editor's Preface

The presence of Spinoza in critical philosophical reflection has grown as the years have gone by. Once thought of as a mere corrective to Descartes, albeit still thereby confined within Cartesian thought, Spinoza has increasingly been resorted to as the basis for a sustained challenge to the 'modern' philosophical conception. This general rehabilitation of Spinoza is, however, one that reverses in a signal way the damning verdict passed on his philosophy during both his life-time and for over a century afterwards. Paradoxically, Spinoza is re-discovered and prospects for re-reading him are canvassed for the first time, in the aftermath of the reaction to Kant's Critical revolution. This is paradoxical in lots of respects, not least that the rationale for resort to Spinoza in the wake of the Critical revolution is hardly an obvious move.

In this work we have charted the move from seeing Spinoza as an adversary to critical philosophy to an ally of it. The stages of the work re-trace both the ways Spinoza is used and abused in the process of response to the Critical revolution and also how Kant's own evolving reaction to 'Spinozism' can be understood. The first important motif of this work is the way in which philosophers are captured within an image, an image that freezes some elements of their thought, distorts others and works to render comprehension of their work very difficult. This process of formation of an image of thought is one that is, however, not entirely static. The second motif of the work concerns how this image can be open to change by a process of interaction between subsequent positions that comprehend and fail to comprehend each other partly through exchange of an image of previous thought. The possibilities of philosophical comprehension are themselves revealed to be tied to a process of illusory relation to positions different from both one's own and those of the thinker captured within an image.

Kant's own diagnosis of philosophical illusion is one that describes its appearance as inevitable. 'Human reason has this peculiar fate, that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.' (Avii). What Kant does not do, until the final chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is to describe a 'history of pure reason'. When, in the last chapter

of the *Critique*, he does finally describe such a notion, it is one that indicates a division that 'future workers must complete' (A852/B880). This suggestion that such a history is a possible one is one that has been subjected, however, to remarkably little investigation. One of the results of the inquiry being presented in this book is that the history of pure reason belongs within the province of transcendental illusion.

Kant's reaction to Spinoza and, even more, to 'Spinozism', is one that charts a series of mis-recognitions, and not merely or even especially on Kant's own part. The attempt to view Critical philosophy within the confines of perspectives formed to a large degree by the image of Spinoza was one that ensured that the nature of the revolution Kant had intended to carry out was persistently misunderstood.¹ Kant's contemporaries understood the nature of his philosophy in ways that varied rather dramatically and which consistently contrasted with the comprehension Kant himself had of it. In this mis-recognition of Kant the seeds were sown for a *riposte* from Kant himself to his contemporaries that helped to ensure that the gap between the Critical philosophy and a positive reading of Spinoza widened.

In this work Beth Lord shows how this peculiar situation creates a very specific type of history, a particular set of patterns of reading of the Critical philosophy and the attempted recovery of themes derived, in some important sense, from the work of Spinoza. In opening this out for renewed investigation Lord, to a certain extent, travels again paths that have others previously have taken.² Despite this, however, new connections are forged here and an opening is made for understanding how twentieth-century French philosophy can be seen to have a reaction to the period of the immediate context of Kant's Critical revolution that, whilest drawing from German Idealism, is also at variance with that movement. Of all the philosophers who have taken inspiration from Spinoza none is more prominent than Gilles Deleuze and yet the ways in which Deleuze's engagement with Spinoza also involves a negotiation both with Kant and with the critical readings and mis-readings of Kant that are inflected by 'Spinozism' is a story that is here certainly newly told.

Questioning received understandings of the nature of philosophical modernity is a central point of *Renewing Philosophy*. In assuming a posture to the history of the reaction to Critical philosophy that uses and abuses the image of Spinoza Lord has provided more than just a particular history, even one that is rarely accessed and assessed. She has also provided us here with a signal comprehension of the philosophical problems of comprehending the history of philosophical modernity itself. There is, here, an opening to a kind of renewal that arises from

a form of comprehension of historicity that is itself philosophically complex. It is as part of such an engagement with modernity that this work stands as part of this series and it is to be hoped that the work will both encourage further both such philosophical reflection and a deeper awareness of the complex intertwined nature of philosophical positions, one that enables a simple freezing of the way any given position should be presented. Most significant in this regard is the way the nature of the rise of immanent understanding in philosophy can be seen, and what types of resistance to it are both useful and instructive of the need to view transcendental illusion as something integral to the prosecution of philosophical understanding, seeing it therefore as also historically requiring, for the furtherance of philosophy itself, the further proliferation of misunderstandings. This paradox may well provide one of the deepest lessons of this deeply engaged book.

GARY BANHAM
Series Editor
Renewing Philosophy

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Abbreviations

Texts by Immanuel Kant

- C *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- CJ *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987)
- CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929)
- CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- LM *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- MFNS *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in Kant, *Philosophy of Material Nature*, trans. and ed. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985)
- NF *Notes and Fragments*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Curtis Bowman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- OP *Opus Postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- OPA *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- WDM ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’, in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath, trans. Peter Heath et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the standard A and B editions. All other references are to the Akademie volume and page numbers. References to the *Opus Postumum* also include page numbers in the Cambridge University Press English translation.

Texts by Baruch Spinoza

- E *Ethics*, in Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
- TIE *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*
- PPC *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*
- CW *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002)

References to the *Ethics* follow Edwin Curley's system of abbreviation: part number in roman numerals, followed by proposition (P), corollary (C), scholium (S) or definition (D) number. (For example, E IP29S = *Ethics* Part I, Proposition 29, Scholium.) Other works are cited by section number followed by page numbers in the *Complete Works*.

Other texts

- DR Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994)
- G Johann Gottfried Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, trans. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940)
- Ideas Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, in Herder, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, ed. and trans. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)
- MPW Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994)
- VT Solomon Maimon, *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie*, in Maimon, *Gessamelte Werke*, Vol. II (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965)

References are to these editions unless otherwise stated.

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Introduction

This book is about the developing relation between Kant and Spinozism from 1785 to around 1800. It is not about Kant's relation to Spinoza, for the simple reason that Kant probably never read or considered Spinoza directly. Instead, his response to Spinoza is always mediated through the various interpretations of Spinozism that arose in the late eighteenth century. Kant's understanding of, and subsequent response to, Spinozism was shaped by three key texts: F. H. Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1785), J. G. Herder's *God: Some Conversations* (1787) and Solomon Maimon's *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* (1790). These three books defined Spinoza's philosophy for late eighteenth-century German thought, representing it respectively as dogmatic rationalism, naturalism, and idealism, and presenting it as a compelling alternative to Kant's transcendental idealism.

At the same time, in different ways, Jacobi, Herder, and Maimon all attempted to show that transcendental idealism ought to become Spinozistic if it was to overcome certain problems internal to it. Kant's understanding of Spinoza is, from 1785 onwards, refracted through these responses to his own philosophical position, meaning that his engagement with Spinozism is always also an engagement with the limits and problems of transcendental philosophy. Examining Kant's relation to Spinozism reveals not only the development of his understanding of these Spinozistic variants, but also a line of critical self-reflection concerning transcendental philosophy itself.

The inclusion of twentieth-century French philosopher Gilles Deleuze may appear incongruent in this context, yet I hope to show that he is continuous with the other thinkers considered here. Without reducing Deleuze to rationalism, naturalism or idealism, I think we can and should read him as a post-Kantian Spinozist, at least in some strands of his

enormously complex *Difference and Repetition*. I will argue that Deleuze, no less than Jacobi, Herder, or Maimon, uses Spinozism to develop a position that reacts against Kant's transcendental idealism while also indicating their point of convergence. And despite the obvious anachronism, I will suggest that Kant does, in a sense, reflect on and develop his thought in response to the problems of transcendental idealism that Deleuze identifies. That is because these problems had already largely been formulated by Solomon Maimon, a thinker who until recently has been considered marginal to Kant studies and to philosophy generally. I will argue that Kant takes Maimon's criticism of transcendental idealism far more seriously than commentators have previously imagined, and that the influence of Maimon can be seen both in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and in his *Opus Postumum*. It is in responding to Maimon that Kant can be said to respond to Deleuze. The interrelations of Kant, Maimon, and Deleuze are the subject of Chapters 5–7.

The focus on Maimon, and on Kant's and Deleuze's Maimonism, is what marks this study out in a crowded field. The development and role of Spinozism in late eighteenth-century German philosophy have been covered expertly in a number of recent books (though without being the exclusive focus of any of them). Paul Franks provides exhaustive discussion of Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* and its influence on Kant and others as part of his impressive study of the origins of German Idealism.¹ Both Frederick C. Beiser and John H. Zammito demonstrate the importance of Herder's Spinozistic naturalism to the development of Kant's thinking in the 1780s, and Zammito in particular draws attention to the instrumental role Herder's texts played in the ideas, arguments and structure of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.² Inevitably I cover some of the same ground as these studies, though making, I hope, original contributions to their debates. Where the present book enters new territory is in its sustained attention to Maimon and Deleuze as Spinozistic readers of Kant. While Franks, Beiser, and Zammito discuss Maimon, no one has yet recognized his importance to the development of Kant's thinking, nor investigated the influence Maimon's Spinozism had on Kant's transformation of transcendental idealism in his *Opus Postumum*. Similarly, though Maimon's significance for Deleuze is widely recognized, little has been said about his role in shaping Deleuze's mediation of Spinoza and Kant. Interpreting Maimon and Deleuze as Spinozistic critics of Kant continuous with Jacobi and Herder is one of this book's aims in constructing a story about Kant and Spinozism.

What emerges from this study is that Kant's rejection of Spinozism is the consistent rejection of a doctrine of immanence. Kant sees his

own system to be 'immanent' in the sense that his claims about reality remain within the bounds of possible knowledge (CPR A295-6/B352, A643/B671). His commitment to this principle of epistemic immanence means he must reject all dogmatic claims about ontological immanence: the doctrine that the metaphysical ground of reality is within and causally connected to its empirical instances. For the same reason, Kant opposes the doctrine of naturalistic immanence which states categorically that there is nothing external or transcendent to the natural world. Kant objects to Spinozism on both counts: Spinoza's claim that 'God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things' (E IP18) dogmatically asserts that a supersensible substrate really exists and immanently causes empirical objects, and that it does not transcend nature. Kant is opposed to the equation of this immanent metaphysical substrate with God, for reasons that have less to do with theology than with assuring a place for morality in nature. As we will see, for Kant the idea of God can only be thought as separate from the world.

What is interesting is that all four of our thinkers attempt to import immanence into Kant's system in their attempts to resolve its internal problems. Jacobi argues that Kant tacitly relies on a doctrine of ontological immanence in distinguishing between appearances and things in themselves. Herder suggests that naturalistic immanence should be adopted to explain the role of teleology in nature. These arguments, and Kant's responses to them, are the subject of the first four chapters of this book. Chapters 5 and 6 centre on Maimon's and Deleuze's attempts to deepen the immanence that already characterizes transcendental idealism. Maimon asserts that Kant's own epistemic immanence is incomplete without an account of the immanent genesis of the content of knowledge. Deleuze, building on this view, argues that there is already a principle of immanent genesis in Kant's system, in the form of the pure difference of being and thought that is also found in Spinoza. Kant's own attempt to incorporate a principle of immanent genesis into transcendental idealism in the *Opus Postumum* is treated in Chapter 7.

This study of the development of Kant's relation to Spinozism is thus also a study of Kant's changing response to the question of immanence. Kant consistently resists ontological and naturalistic immanence, even at the point where his own philosophy of nature appears to demand it. Yet as I hope to show over the chapters that follow, this does not necessarily entail a theistic or philosophically conservative insistence on transcendence. In rejecting Spinozistic immanence, Kant rejects the ontological unity of substance, and the conflation of God, man and nature in an indifferent unity. It is this rejection of a grounding metaphysical unity that