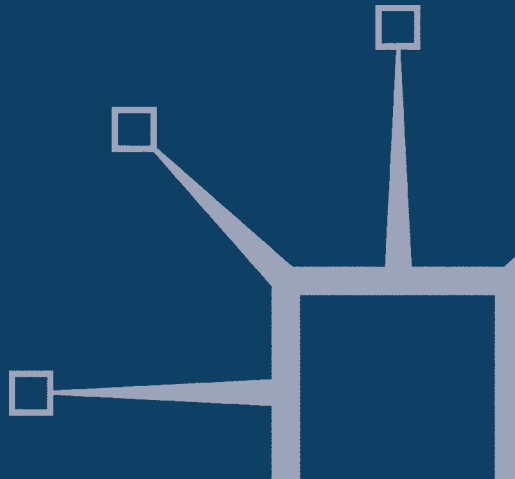


Palgrave advances in continental political thought

Terrell carver and James martin



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palgrave advances in continental political thought

edited by

terrell carver

professor of political theory
university of bristol

and

james martin

senior lecturer in politics
goldsmiths college
university of london

palgrave
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introduction

terrell carver and james martin

What is Continental Political Thought? What relevance does it have for us today? The term 'Continental' has something of a bad reputation. In a very descriptive sense, it refers us, geographically speaking, to Continental Europe; but in so doing, it brings with it a number of meanings that might prejudice us against it and our understanding of its value and relevance.

Think, for a moment, of European history and culture. Two major wars in the last century, a recent history of revolutions and authoritarian dictatorships, imperial domination and genocide. Hardly a recommendation for sober political dialogue! Or consider European cinema: movies commonly believed to be self-consciously 'arty', sometimes disturbingly erotic, intellectually profound and, as a consequence of all this, rather difficult to comprehend. Unlike Hollywood movies – think of the annual 'blockbuster' – which typically leave us in no doubt who the good guys are and why they should win, we often leave a European film uncertain as to whether we really got the message at all.

Political theories, of course, are not movies. But they occupy some of the same classifications we employ to divide up our tastes in popular culture. As with the movies, we tend to come to theories with a number of expectations and presumptions. More often than not, we find these confirmed when we enter into the world of the theoretical text. Thus 'Continental Political Thought' may well conjure up a number of characters making profound and complex statements in beautiful yet fraught European contexts. We might, if we follow the subtitles or the commentaries, 'get the story' these texts are telling ... up to a point. All too soon, however, we find ourselves unsettled by their strange use of language, elliptical style and, frankly, odd attitude towards the world. It is highly likely that we will emerge wondering whether perhaps the oddness of the ideas presented to us isn't in some way a masquerade or

fraud, a deliberate and pretentious overstatement to make what in the end is only a small point.

Like European cinema, Continental political ideas have been accused of precisely these crimes. Unlike the Anglo-American tradition of thought, with which they are commonly contrasted, Continental ideas are routinely derided for being too 'poetic', needlessly convoluted and hence dangerously removed from 'common sense' and the needs of everyday life. Or, at least, that is what we often hear. But, like any good movie, if we are prepared to set aside for a moment our initial prejudices and spend some more time considering what is being said, we will find there is more there than our initial reactions lead us to believe. If we enter into their spirit and consider their enduring value or contemporary resonances, we may find ourselves transformed, or at very least *informed*, in a way we hadn't expected.

The purpose of this book is to serve as an accessible guide to the political thought of key thinkers in the Continental tradition and, in particular, to make clear the continuing relevance of his or her ideas. Each chapter focuses on an individual thinker, sketches the major elements of their ideas and indicates why and how they remain relevant to theorising politics today. But what *is* the Continental tradition? By way of an introduction to the collection, we shall dwell for the moment on answering precisely that question.

political theory ... the continental way?

In gathering together under one name a number of individuals who thought and wrote within the geographical boundaries of Continental Europe, are we implying there is a distinctive *way* of theorising politics that can be called 'Continental'? In a (perhaps very Continental) sense yes but, also, no. Use of the term 'Continental' only began in the twentieth century, long after many of the thinkers listed under that category lived and died. Nor is it the only term we might use to distinguish these thinkers. Other terms might be 'European' or perhaps more technical descriptors such as 'idealist' or 'anti-empiricist'. However, these alternatives cover either too many or only some of the thinkers and schools of thought examined here. 'Continental' is an inclusive term but also suggests a broad tradition, extending beyond the characteristic features of any one set of thinkers or indeed any specific geographical setting. In so doing, however, it loses the precision it would have if it referred merely to one school of thought and becomes instead a generic, if sometimes very vague, marker of commonality. Let us consider the central strands of that commonality.

An original theme of Continental thought is widely agreed to be a critical reaction against the Enlightenment, the movement of ideas which first emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century and reached its height in the eighteenth, driven by the belief that reason – rational thought untainted by blind prejudice and tradition – enables us to grasp the material and social world objectively. Such a view, expounded in scientific 'discoveries' and

statements such as those of Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon, and in the philosophy of René Descartes, underscored a belief in the progress of human society that could be brought by human knowledge. Only rational thought, it was believed, permitted us to grasp the principles that govern material and social life with any certainty, whether this be through empirical observation or by methodical, reasoned enquiry. Truths could not be accepted simply on the basis of assertion or 'revelation'. The political implications of this radical mode of thinking are obvious: religious and traditional forms of authority were placed in doubt, their intrinsic veracity questioned and the obligation to obey them without question was undermined. Thus the Enlightenment set in motion a new cultural expectation that truth and moral value be accountable to reason. These ideas played no small part in preparing the way for the democratic revolutions in America (1776) and France (1789) which renounced the authority of monarchy and demanded that government be founded on the rights of individuals to liberty, free from the burden of hereditary hierarchy.

For a variety of reasons, however, many Continental thinkers found this aspiration to be hugely overstated. Few rejected outright the possibilities opened up by the use of reason critically to evaluate the human condition independently of religious dogma or interference, nor did they entirely dispute the advantages of political systems that sustained the individual freedom and the rights of citizens to hold their rulers to account. But whilst the advantages of rational knowledge and rational political organisation were not in themselves disputed, nor were they uncritically embraced. For Continental thinkers – because they were following in the wake of David Hume's scepticism about the ability of reason to grasp the world fully, and because they were living through the profound disruptions brought by political and economic change – the epistemological claims of modern scientific understanding and the political demands for individual freedom were themselves open to doubt and critical reflection, such that neither could be assumed to command automatic assent. For many thinkers, then, the claims of reason and the case for free political orders had yet to be properly made. It is precisely this critical, but not dismissive, philosophical and political attitude that sits at the basis of the Continental tradition as we know it today.

The reaction to Enlightenment rationalism and to the dangers of social and political systems premised on the freedom of citizens marks a central point of difference with the other dominant strand of thought in the West (one also defined by its geographical location), Anglo-American thought. In crude terms, Anglo-American thought is believed to have inherited a much more positive view of the possibilities engendered by reason and the virtuous character of liberal institutions. By contrast with the Continentals, this tradition has underscored the ability of rational subjects to grasp the world through the use of scientific techniques and empirical analysis, uncovering its law-like nature and enabling science to further the cause of human progress through

the elimination of obstacles to knowledge and freedom. The 'analytical' style of philosophical reasoning, with its careful attention to logic, the pitfalls of contradiction and the coherence of ordinary language exemplifies well this approach. It is perhaps no surprise that this tradition owes its name to the two countries – the US and the UK – where the parliamentary democratic form of government and liberal-capitalist societies have been most stable and enduring.

But this crude distinction between Continental and Anglo-American traditions hides a much more complex reality. Like the distinction between Hollywood and European cinema, it certainly tells us something about *some* of the preoccupations of its proponents, but that only really scratches the surface. First of all, it would be wrong simply to bundle together all the thinkers in this volume (and the wider Continental tradition) and separate them off from another, sweeping category of Anglo-Americans, as if these were both homogeneous groups who all agreed that they were part of a common tradition, especially one opposed to the other. What are now called Continental and Anglo-American thinkers have been as much associated with each other as they have differed. Ideas and theories from one camp have often been, and still are, appropriated by the other. Thus Continental ideas and political theories are easily found in America and Britain (for example, the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida), and Anglo-American theories are widely disseminated and taken up in Continental Europe (for example, the work of J.L. Austin and John Rawls).

Second, even where the philosophical orientation has differed, similar political themes have often prevailed amongst both traditions. Continental thinkers have been concerned with the nature of freedom and justice, the role and function of the state and power, the place of morality in a secular political system, and so forth. In this they do not always differ radically from the Anglo-American tradition. Like thinkers in Britain and America, Continentals have themselves adopted political positions that range from the deeply reactionary and conservative to liberal, socialist and revolutionary. Sharing similar forms of the modern economy and political institutions, it will come as no surprise that similar political attitudes have dominated.

If we take these reservations into account, can we say there is *any* kind of tradition of Continental political theory? Despite the blurred boundaries between the traditions, it *is* possible to indicate a number of preoccupations that delineate it. In doing so, however, it might be best to understand 'tradition' not like some kind of fixed, ritualistic form of repetition but more like a genre of cinema, that is, an ensemble of different but thematically related texts and practices, sometimes dealing in issues encountered in other genres but in a novel way, sometimes developing new themes entirely but from a common starting point. Just as we shouldn't expect each film in a genre of cinema to share exactly the same preoccupations and styles, neither do the varieties of political thought. And yet there will be family resemblances,

reactions to shared experiences and phases of history, common tropes and ways of establishing the audience's perspective. It is these, frequently subtle, commonalities that permit us to talk of a 'tradition' of political thought without reducing it simply to a shared geographical origin. These common themes and styles allow the Continental tradition to be taken up outside of the Continent itself and modified in light of different experiences and national traditions, and yet remain broadly within a Continental camp.

What are the themes and styles common to the Continental tradition of political thought? As we have suggested, a critical reaction to Enlightenment rationalism is at the root of this tradition. As a consequence, Continental thinkers have tended to dispute the idea of the rational subject as the foundation of knowledge and the source of social and political order. Instead, the individual subject has been understood to be bound up with the world rather than radically autonomous from it. This has led to a strong sense of the historicity of reason. In some instances, the individual subject has been seen as secondary to a higher order of subjectivity – such as 'World Spirit' or social class – rather than as a freely independent and sovereign individual. Continental thinkers, therefore, have been more sceptical about the possibility of developing a knowledge of politics based exclusively on the point of view of the individual and so have sought to conceptualise politics as a process that attends to society in a more inclusive sense.

Often, in fact, Continental thought has spurned the common sense of the individual and demanded a more philosophically challenging approach to politics, one that looks beyond the ordinary understanding of individuals and seeks to grasp the 'totality' or uncomfortable 'truth' of society in a more profound way. This has frequently led to the charge of philosophical obscurity and metaphysical confusion. There is certainly something in this charge, but it also misses the point: namely, that to grasp the world of politics it is necessary to climb out of the perspective of the isolated, rationally calculating individual and to think through the connections between different subjects across time and space. Inevitably, this takes us out of the comfortable position of the reasoning subject and demands that we occupy a view that makes that individual subject seem only part of the story.

It follows from this critical view of the rational subject that, whilst the objects and themes of Continental Political Thought have been similar to other traditions, it has viewed these without the assumption that political institutions should be entirely premised on satisfying the needs of 'the individual' or even individuals. If rational subjectivity is not the starting point for thought, then supporting individual freedom cannot be the sole concern in theorising political life. For subjects to be brought together under common institutions, other *preconditions* must be met. Thus Continental thinkers have been preoccupied with delineating the wider preconditions for institutions to work, such as economic equality, common cultural dispositions and attitudes, conceptions of politics, power and self-hood, and so on. Very often this has

involved a polemical approach to other theories and beliefs which are viewed as distorting our picture of how we might live together. Whether in support of liberal, socialist or any other kind of society, Continental thinkers have explored their political preferences by interrogating the limitations of other theories. In particular, the Continental tradition has pointed to the limitations of liberal forms of government and society, not always in order to reject them but, rather, to highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the nature of, for example, order, community or freedom which is thought to be lacking in the outlook of liberalism's less critical defenders. Without greater theoretical understanding of these aspects of politics, it is argued, political life will be undermined.

In summary, we might say that Continental Political Thought has self-consciously asserted the importance of *theorising* itself as part of the construction of a satisfactory public life. Unless we think differently about how we live together and what the preconditions are for this shared life, politics will always remain in some sense alien to us. In suggesting that political order is incomplete without this theoretical comprehension, however, Continental thinkers have been accused not only of being too literary (or too metaphysical) but also of failing to adopt a neutral, 'scientific' stance towards their object of enquiry. If the political world requires theory to complete its formation, then isn't the theorist him or herself assuming a superior, perhaps elitist position akin to Plato's philosopher kings? Undoubtedly this is one danger of the Continental approach, which is routinely accused of being intellectualistic and self-glorifying for those who adopt its vocabulary. But it is not a necessary consequence, nor is it entirely exclusive to the Continental tradition. As this book seeks to demonstrate, the insights of Continental Political Thought – even those at its most metaphysical and 'dangerous' – have been utilised in a more democratic age for a plurality of purposes without succumbing to the (purported) self-aggrandising qualities of its originators.

More justly, we might say that the Continental tradition reminds us that not only does politics need its thinkers, but that, in many if not all respects, politics *is* a form of thinking. This demands that we rise to the challenge and subject ourselves and our preferences to the most rigorous and, sometimes, abstract form of critical theoretical enquiry. The implication here – and it is an implication that remains constantly open to debate – is that critical theoretical reflection yields a politics – and a citizenry – that is equal to the challenges of the age.

doing the continental ...

While the structure of this book may appear roughly chronological, there is really no intention here of presuming that a tradition has 'unfolded' or developed through a chain of thinkers, each in dialogue with the previous one(s) in some special way, and in turn rather mysteriously passing 'the torch'

to the (generally unknown, or often unexpected) next one in line. Rather, and in keeping with the Continental genre of doing political philosophy, as outlined above, each chapter contains other thinkers already present in the other chapters. This is because each chapter is written, not from the historical point of view, because from that point of view, successive thinkers in the book do not yet exist, in most cases, and so could not then feature in the discussion, except through the 'magic' of the metempsychosis that intellectual historians so often deploy. Instead these chapters represent a synchronic set of conversations and debates crafted by our 20 distinguished contributors. Each chapter delivers 'the basics' in terms of biography and context through which the author, featured in the chapter, is made known to the reader. After that, however, and working through his or her concerns and thoughts, each author then develops an ideas- and issues-based discussion. This allows elaboration, say, of Spinoza's views on religion in conjunction with the later views of Marx and Nietzsche (though neither had a reputation as a Spinoza scholar or commentator), and also with those of Althusser and Deleuze (who did). Thus each contributor's task was not to lay out his or her author in relation to a presumed tradition, nor to stick strictly to the author's thought in his or her own conception and context, but rather to show how political thought *can be done* from the author's major texts. While brief summaries (below) do little justice to the quality of this work in political philosophy, they are a guide to the contributor's philosophical interests and an invitation for readers to tackle what intrigues them, and then work from there to other chapters, as the contributor's citations, and the reader's interests, suggest. In addition to a reading list of references, each chapter also concludes with a short guide to further reading, as does this introduction.

Any selection of 'Continental' thinkers in an ascribed tradition in political philosophy will be both defective and selective. Rather than limit our contributors to short formulaic entries, and rather than create a spurious encyclopaedic impression of 'coverage', we have instead aligned the volume from the poststructuralist and postmodern perspective taking in the very latest theoretical engagements in political philosophy (that is, the seven chapters comprising the 'postmoderns'), and worked through their major interlocutors, inspirations and foils in the twentieth century (the 'moderns'). The same principle then applied to selecting the 'classics' as necessary precursors, though of course this rough scheme of periodisation in no way excludes the 'Postmoderns' engaging the 'Classics' directly (as noted above, in their engagement with Spinoza). The choice of thinker throughout the book was also somewhat driven by the editors' determination to secure contributions from some of the liveliest and most challenging minds in political philosophy today, offering neither obeisance to seniority nor worship of youth (nor, indeed, national or geographical preference). We have encouraged our contributors to put their own ideas and predilections to the fore in organising,

composing and arguing through the problems that make political philosophy the stimulating and topical study that it is.

In Chapter 1 Caroline Williams outlines Spinoza's radical monism and attack on religion, and discusses their anti-Cartesian appeal for structuralists and poststructuralists, comparing his critique of anthropomorphism in conceptions of God with the work of Marx and Nietzsche. Spinoza's refusal to countenance a break between nature and culture puts him outside the social contract theorisations of Enlightenment thinkers. This Continental philosophical position has made him a major interlocutor for Althusser in constructing an anti-humanist account of ideology, and for post-Althusserian reflections on liberation, mass politics and democracy.

Chapter 2 on Kant, by Howard Williams, aligns Kant's transcendental (rather than empiricist) philosophical system with the contemporary work of John Rawls, in which reason is deployed independently of experience to solve fundamental problems in politics, and the contemporary thesis in international relations of the 'democratic peace', initiated by Michael Doyle and extended by Francis Fukuyama. As a rationalist Kant was seeking to encompass the knowing subject and the known world in one totality, making him an important reference point in Continental attempts to think through commonplace philosophical dualisms and to expose an uncritical linkage between science, knowledge and sensory experience.

Kant's most thoroughly Continental critic was Hegel, Anthony Burns' subject in Chapter 3. Burns draws out Hegel's alignment with Spinoza's monism and pantheism, albeit reinterpreted within a dynamic and historical scheme. French poststructuralists came to Hegel via Marx, and took the former severely to task for his (alleged) reliance on binary oppositions and his metaphysical essentialism. Burns looks ahead to a reappropriation of Hegel as a mediator between extreme social constructionism, in which individuals have no generative or moral 'essence' constraining them, and an 'essentialist realism', in which 'humanity' derives from something natural or conceptual that can be known.

Marx, in Chapter 4, emerges in Bradley J. Macdonald's account as a powerful force in reconceptualising the terms of engagement between philosophical thinking and the political, social and economic world as a global phenomenon. Critique, praxis and emancipation are a crucial trilogy through which a trio of 'moderns' have articulated their philosophical and political concerns: Gramsci, Lukács and Althusser. However abstruse the postmodern 'turn' in political philosophy may seem to be, Marx is very much a 'presence', or in Derrida's words, 'there is no future without Marx'.

Gordon A. Babst presents Nietzsche in Chapter 5 as the gleeful and irreverent philosopher whose exuberance in rejecting all previous philosophical traditions has aligned him at least emotionally with postmodern thinkers, and stylistically with their aphorisms and abhorrence of systems. Nietzsche's thought is thus balanced between an overwhelming scepticism and relativism

(to the individual perspective) and an affirmation of life that ran quite counter to conventional understandings of both religion and democracy. Arguably he and Marx represent an important twin commonality in terms of critique and challenge through which 'Postmoderns' have self-consciously articulated their political and philosophical concerns.

As Edward Wingenbach indicates in Chapter 6, Heidegger is the central 'modern' philosopher in the Continental tradition. His explicatory and hermeneutic approach to meaning, and to the larger issues of 'being', present a stark contrast with the spare propositions and (supposed) analytical clarity espoused by the empiricist, positivist and logical schools cultivated more readily in the English-speaking philosophical world. Heidegger's meditations on the complexities of human consciousness and self-reflective experience raise highly political issues of truth, knowledge, subjectivity and method that set the terms for all succeeding philosophers in this volume. Even if the thinkers themselves do not engage with Heidegger directly, the debates surrounding the thinkers and the issues that they raise proceed on terrain that Heidegger established.

Chapter 7 on Gadamer, by Keith Spence, continues the Heideggerian theme of self-consciously philosophical interrogation of classic philosophers with respect to meaning, interpretation and understanding. This is pursued through a method and style that embraces complexity in a way that came to centre language, as well as meaning, within 'postmodern' conceptions of subjectivity, identity and agency. Contrary to reductive and analytical philosophical approaches that bracket off important areas of experience, both individual and collective, Gadamer's work highlights a tension between truth and any method, such as philosophies of science (especially positivism), that claimed to establish and exhaust truth in any definitive sense. From this the 'postmodern' concept of the 'excess' (in meaning, and in life) is but a very small step.

Chapter 8, by Renato Cristi, takes up Schmitt, whose work has been revived as a major influence in certain areas of 'postmodern' political thought. Along with Heidegger he was identified with the Nazi Party, and this biographical circumstance has delayed and coloured his reception as a philosopher. While in some ways Schmitt argued for a reassertion of Hegel's political scheme and values, calling for a strong state to preserve order, and a framework of supportive civil and ethical associations within this sovereign structure, his major theme was 'the concept of the political', pursued in contradistinction to what he perceived to be liberal individualist (and anti-state) principles that posed a constant, corrosive threat to order and stability. His quasi-theological and emotionally dichotomising 'friend and enemy' distinction plays a role in deep-seated 'postmodern' explorations and critiques of mechanistic, economistic and optimistic conceptions of human subjectivity deployed within twentieth-century liberalisms.

Gramsci, in James Martin's Chapter 9, represents a curious nexus in political thought, working and writing as an activist, moving Marxism away from an 'orthodox' philosophical purity, opening the way to a 'postmodern' examination of ideas, culture, mythology, experience and subjectivity within a view that was nonetheless focused on class, exploitation, inequality and democracy. His concept of 'hegemony', or ideological leadership (of one group, class or state over another), opened the way to complex considerations of history, tradition and culture in political change, including tactics, frustrations, coalitions and calculations. How far Marxism can be stretched to accommodate this perspective, and indeed, the extent to which Marx's writings themselves can be separated from Marxism, have opened up post-Marxism as a 'Postmodern' preoccupation.

Chapter 10 takes up a similarly problematic figure, Lukács. Timothy Hall argues that he has suffered unwarranted critical neglect. Unlike Gramsci, Lukács wrote his major works for publication, and has therefore left a hermeneutic problem for his readers, in that he revised 'orthodox' Marxism within what appears to be Marxist terminology. Lukács' reworking of classic themes, such as 'historical materialism', now emerges in a post-Marxist (if not postmodern) perspective as a critique of ahistorical theories of development that have persisted within 'orthodox' Marxism (and its mirroring commentaries, both critical and sympathetic) within the anti-Continental, 'analytical' tradition. As the author of an anti-reductive, anti-representational and anti-transcendental social theory, rooted in concepts of shared meaning and political activism, Lukács will be revisited and revitalised within 'postmodern' philosophical enquiries into the exigencies of contemporary politics.

Arendt, as discussed in Chapter 11 by Roy T. Tsao, was a student and disciple of Heidegger whose writings mark a significant mid-century 'Continental' engagement with 'classics' of the tradition (Kant, Hegel, Marx), intertwined with lengthy philosophical engagements with current political issues, such as imperialism, nationalism, revolution and (famously) totalitarianism. Having fled the Nazis to the US in 1941, Arendt represents an important link between the 'Continental' tradition, particularly in linking politics with philosophical analyses of human subjectivity (see her discussions of 'alienation', 'natality' and the 'work/labour' distinction), and the new global struggle between American power and the communist regimes through which Cold War politics was framed. Arendt prefigures current 'postmodern' political concerns with terror, 'fundamentalisms' and acute ethical dilemmas in war and its aftermath, where philosophical views on truth and justice cannot be prised apart from questions of power.

Althusser, the subject of Benjamin Arditi's Chapter 12, is an idiosyncratic commentator on Marx and associate in a French structuralist philosophical school from which crucial thinkers, such as Lacan and Derrida, eventually did the most to create 'postmodernism' as a contemporary intellectual phenomenon. Althusser's quest to produce a structuralist, 'scientific' Marx

by establishing an 'epistemological break' (in text and thought) was widely followed in global Marxist circles, as was his work to link philosophy with action via the concept of 'ideological state apparatuses'. Remarkably Althusser drew on Freudian concepts to criticise Hegel's dialectic, as it was understood within the Marxist tradition, and he linked his structuralist philosophical presumptions with the work of Spinoza. In this framework the relationship between ideology, as a feature of society (linked to, but not reducible to, the economy), and the human subject (via the concept of 'interpellation') became problematic in a way that engaged the 'Continental' tradition in developing a poststructuralist political theory.

In the final chapter on the 'moderns' Lasse Thomassen engages with the living philosopher Jürgen Habermas, presenting him as a powerful successor to Kant in terms of his rationalism and transcendental methods, and in terms of his preoccupations with morality, ethics and international peace. Yet with his position as chief successor to the influential latter-day Marxism of the Frankfurt School, and his attention to plural perspectives on truth within the 'linguistic turn', Habermas thus straddles the Continental and analytical traditions in a unique way. Against 'postmodern' thinkers he argues the case for rationality derived from deliberative consensus, and thus links his thought very powerfully with contemporary theories of deliberative democracy.

The opening 'postmoderns' essay is Chapter 14 on Lacan, by Kirsten Campbell. Lacan's revision of Freudian psychoanalysis reflects the 'linguistic turn' so important since the 1960s and 1970s. In this development language plays a crucial role in constituting the human subject, and in that way its properties constrain and empower us. Lacan's conceptualisation of language as a symbolic structure has been extremely influential, and his work was an acknowledged influence on Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault and Žižek. It helped to further postmodern scepticism concerning stable structures of meaning, understanding and identity that were formerly said 'to secure' the political subject and indeed politics as a field of human activity.

Chapter 15, by Dimitrios E. Akrivoulis, presents a contrasting figure in French intellectual life, Ricoeur, who worked within the Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition rather than within structuralism derived from Lévi-Strauss. While his philosophical anthropology had little to do with psychoanalysis, the centrality of language in his work, and the links with Marx (rather than with Marxism), have made him an important figure in the strand of current political philosophy that focuses on discourse and the power of symbolic schemes. Through these conceptual schemes past/present/future are constructed as shared 'imaginaries'. Time itself is not a structuring feature of the political world in this conception, but rather a feature of the narratives through which politics is enacted.

Foucault is the subject of Andrew Barry's Chapter 16. While his interests were in history and sociology, and in particular in the way that the social and physical sciences have transformed life, culture and politics since the

late seventeenth century (rather than in philosophy, psychoanalysis or politics), Foucault has nonetheless had a huge influence on 'postmodern' thinking about the human subject, the political regime and fundamental philosophical conceptions of truth and knowledge. This is all the more surprising, given the apparently causal empiricism and historicism of the historical explorations and reflections that constitute his work on sexuality, the body and social institutions and practices, for example, prisons, madness and 'governmentality'.

The philosopher Derrida is evoked in Michael Dillon's Chapter 17, in which he recounts how he came to read Derrida and how this process affected his own intellect and life. Dillon's text mirrors Derrida's fascination with the linguistic surface of written communication, and this makes reading an active process through which meaning and political import are constructed, rather than received. Deconstruction is thus a close or heightened engagement with a text where the limits of the sayable and knowable are tested. Derrida's exploration of the 'metaphysics of presence' shows how what is said 'to be', through language, is always haunted by what is to-come, and is thus necessarily unstable. So also is the subjectivity through which this language is constructed, a conception reflected in his theorisation of democracy as a politics of friendship and hospitality.

In Chapter 18 Nathan Widder presents the political philosophy of Deleuze as an analysis and critique of the centrality of identity in political thought and practice. Drawing on both Lacan and Foucault, and following in the Hegelian tradition of disarticulating identity into history, culture and discourse (rather than naturalising it as human 'individual' needs and interests), Deleuze challenges the very logical structure of oppositions through which all meaning, including that of any terms of identity, has been constructed through a determinate instance and its 'other' or opposite. Deleuze follows a Lacanian logic through which otherness can never be adequate to securing a determinate identity, and he performs a Nietzschean reversal of Platonism that makes logical categories into ghostly simulacra (rather than 'realities'). Deleuzian politics is thus fine grained, oriented to acts of will in 'segments' of resistance at a 'molecular' level.

Chapter 19, by Timothy W. Luke, re-evaluates the work of Baudrillard, the French 'postmodernist', arguing that his aphoristic style and nihilistic tone have prejudiced his critical reception. While drawing on the 'classics' of the Continental tradition, Baudrillard was a pioneer of a new philosophical anthropology through which he challenged conventional accounts of culture, history, taste, production, value and method. His world of simulation and hyperreality stakes out the importance of science fiction in any political imaginary that challenges the power-driven 'realities' of contemporary politics. Arguing that in a capitalist global 'present' where information and entertainment merge in commercial simulations of 'the real', Baudrillard undermined conventional notions of representation and truth, reality and

fantasy, production and exploitation. Rather than understanding the internet in conventional analytical and political terms, Baudrillard reversed this in a quintessentially 'postmodern' way.

Glyn Daly, in Chapter 20, explains how, starting from a background in psychoanalysis, Žižek has engaged such 'postmodern' preoccupations as cyberspace, film and fiction. In doing so he constructs challenging critiques of liberal theories, yet politically he argues for transcendentalism and universalism that thinkers in the Foucaultian tradition have decisively rejected. He also validates the human subject as a concept within psychoanalytic discourse. Žižek's thought emphasises the way that human thought and action are situated in realities that are delusional consistencies (and of course always inconsistent with each other). Thus politics does not comprise stable individuals and determinate events within some given 'real' that constitutes their context. Contrary to conventional politics, in which substantial change is constantly and neurotically avoided, Žižek presents a politics of miraculous disruption, risk and passion that gives the lie to the charge that all 'postmodern' thought is cynical.

In conclusion these 20 chapters showcase current work in political philosophy that draws on a 'Continental' tradition, itself a complex palimpsest of conversational texts through which the authors featured in each chapter have encountered one another's ideas. While the list could certainly be extended, this introduction has demonstrated, we hope, a coherence in inspiration, focus and method that is distinctively 'Continental'. English-speaking readers in particular will find evident and useful contrasts when they look over the corresponding 'classics' and 'moderns' of the liberal empiricist tradition. We hope, in presenting this book, that the challenges will be productive ones.

further reading

Critchley, S. (2002). *Continental Philosophy: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simons, J. (2005) *Critical Political Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

West, D. (1996) *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

part i
'classics'

1

baruch de spinoza

caroline williams

The writings of Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677) have occupied a somewhat marginal position in the history of political thought. His political works have rarely been included in contemporary anthologies of the subject, although this has been less the case in the earlier part of the twentieth century. It is almost as if the name of Spinoza has been erased from the canon, or remains concealed between the twin figures of Machiavelli and Hobbes. Yet Spinoza was one of the key harbingers of political modernity. His *Tractatus Theologico Politicus (TTP)*, the only work to be published during his own lifetime, and considered by many of his contemporaries to be a subversive political tract, presented the freedom and power of the individual as the most important political goal. In the view of many political philosophers, it is the first statement of liberal democracy. Studied closely by Marx in his early years and a significant influence upon Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the clandestinely published *TTP* was read far and wide throughout Europe (see Israel, 2001). The silence surrounding Spinoza's position and recognition in modern political thought is thus an uncomfortable one, given this history, but it is slowly finding a new voice. In recent years Spinoza scholars have begun to weave together the political writings with the much more widely read *Ethics*. They have come to see the essential inter-relation between the two and the resources and challenges held there for a radical political theory. Spinoza's rejection of a conception of the individual subject as a sovereign being *imperium in imperio*, his account of the affective ties that always influence the form of the social bond between subjects, and his emphasis upon the nurturing of joyful affects for a life of freedom and action, each contribute to his vision of politics. This kind of reading shows how Spinoza's account of the physics of bodies and

the figure of the multitude prevents any straightforward incorporation of his thought into liberal political philosophy. This chapter will first situate Spinoza and his writings in his own time and introduce the central elements of his philosophy. Only then may the radical potentiality of Spinoza's thought and its challenge to politics and philosophy be posed.

the heresy of spinoza

Spinoza's name was tainted from the very beginning. His parents were Sephardic Jews from Portugal who settled in the more liberal Netherlands, where Spinoza was born in 1632. Such Jews were known as Marranos, and were so called because they had forcibly converted to Christianity after the Spanish Inquisition. As a result they maintained a curious mixture of the two religions and lived a largely secretive religious life. Spinoza grew up within a relatively orthodox Jewish community in Amsterdam. He soon became associated with the more progressive circle within its members who debated the two central issues of the day, namely whether philosophy should remain the handmaiden of theology, forever subordinated to the claims of divine reason, and whether the new sciences (represented in radical form at the time by Cartesianism) could be brought to bear upon theological explanations of the world. The distinct claims of science, theology and philosophy would later be synthesised in the secular Enlightenment philosophy of Kant and Hegel, but it is to Spinoza's philosophy that one must turn to find some of its first articulations and its most radical formulation.

Spinoza paid for his commitment to free thinking at the age of 23 (and before the publication of any of his philosophical and political works) with a *cherem*, an official excommunication from the Jewish community. Such a curse required that the community no longer converse with, read the works of, nor trade with the 'Godless' philosopher. Thus Spinoza was forced into a solitary life of thinking, taking up the profession of lens grinder to make a living and assisted by a small stipend provided by his friend, Van Enden. It would be a mistake however to assume that the excommunication was enforced absolutely. Spinoza and his circle still met regularly, and parts of the unpublished *Ethics* were read and distributed among them. Spinoza was also visited by some of the leading thinkers of his time, including Leibniz and Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society of London, who was responsible for publishing the works of Robert Boyle. Spinoza's letters are also a richly informative source of the discussions surrounding his work as well as providing us with some of the deepest criticisms of Spinoza's ethico-political perspective made by his contemporaries. The picture they give us is of a man immersed in the life and issues of his time rather than living in isolation from them, writing a philosophy that would be marked as a 'savage anomaly', to use Antonio Negri's enigmatic phrase, for centuries to come. It is a philosophy that perhaps finds some of its most sensitive readers in our time.

Spinoza published only one work during his life: the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* in 1670. Spinoza's other major works, the unfinished *Tractatus Politicus* (TP) and the *Ethics*, were published posthumously, along with his early *Short Treatise on God and Man*, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, and a largely expository work (conceived from a series of lessons on Descartes given by Spinoza) entitled *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, to which was appended Spinoza's own *Metaphysical Thoughts*. For Spinoza scholars, the latter three works form part of the pre-*Ethics* writings where Spinoza experimented with some of the key ideas that were to form the basis of the *Ethics*. This work, described by Jonathan Bennett (1984) as Spinoza's 'one indisputable masterpiece', has sometimes been viewed as a self-contained text without the trails leading to and from the political works of his lifetime.

The *Ethics*, however, has a complex history. Written over a 15-year period, the genesis of this work was broken up by Spinoza's writing of the *TTP* and his turn towards a more explicit theorisation of the space of politics. Some writers have suggested that it is precisely here that Spinoza sought to present, in a more popular and accessible form, the geometric arguments of the *Ethics* (for example, Curley, 1990) and any reader of both texts will notice how the *TTP* brings many of the formulations of the *Ethics* to bear upon the political world. It would be a rather narrow approach to view the *Ethics* simply as an ethical work, because the novelty of Spinoza's approach is in bringing together previously differentiated spheres of knowledge. It contains a theory of nature and man's virtue in relation to it, a psychology of the passions and their relation to human action and freedom, as well as a sketch of Spinoza's political theory and an indication of its place within his system as a whole. The *Ethics* is a work on many different levels, and in its maturation and distinct rhythms of development we find the course of man's collective liberation, as well as his understanding of the world and the causes that underlie it. What then are the central principles of Spinoza's philosophy that proved so exceptional to his time and generated the *cherem* against him?

from god to world

By far the most daring aspect of Spinoza's philosophy is his radical monism. Spinoza rejects the idea that there exists in the world a plurality of substances, of which God is only one, a divine substance distinct from, and beyond the human world of relations accidental to their nature. Unlike Descartes, for example, Spinoza refuses to countenance any dualism between human and celestial orders of being, as well as any dualism between mind and body. There is only one substance, God, with an infinite power of existence. This substance is perpetually expressed through an infinity of attributes, of which thought and extension are but two. Each attribute expresses the eternal and infinite essence that is God, which is the cause of itself, as well as the cause of all being and expressions of reality. Since everything in reality expresses

and is a part of this infinite essence, Spinoza writes of God as identical with nature itself. Hence the equation of *Deus, sive Natura* ('God, or Nature') that was to result in so much ambiguity and discussion regarding the theological ground of Spinoza's thought and his apparent atheism. It is the richness and metaphysical novelty of this knot between God and world, existence and power, that has produced such huge diversity within interpretations of Spinoza over the centuries (for a summary, see Moreau, 1996).

The implications of this radical association of God and Nature are far reaching. Spinoza sweeps away the idea of a transcendent God who creates the world, as well as that of a hierarchical chain of being from God to human existence. The passage from God to the realm of concrete life can involve no degradation or loss of power for the latter, because Spinoza's substance (that is, God, or Nature) *lives through* what happens in nature and is its constitutive, productive power. When Spinoza writes about God or Nature being self-caused, as well as the cause of all things, he qualifies this in an important sense by distinguishing between an *immanent* and a *transitive* cause (*Ethics*, Part I, Proposition 18). Since God is not prior to what he creates, he can no longer be designated as its transitive cause distinct from his effects. Instead we must understand Spinoza's use of the term 'immanent cause' as indicating a kind of indwelling cause, a perpetual generation and production of life that cannot be viewed simply as an effect of God's actions or motives. God is not the Creator; rather, as nature itself, God is the principle of creation and becoming in the world.

This idea of substance and its attributes opens the first part of the *Ethics*, which then proceeds to develop an account of the mind and its possible freedom from servitude and superstition, together with a theory of truth and a human understanding of eternity. The opening definitions of the work concerning God could have only outraged the ecclesiastics and religious thinkers amongst Spinoza's contemporaries, by whom he would be branded an atheist. The *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, through which much of this perspective was initially received, directly challenged the legitimacy of the revelatory power of the scriptures. The bible became, in Spinoza's hands, just like any other literary work, and it was to be interpreted as the adventures of the imagination. In this way, the *TTP* could be seen as an exploration of imagination as the 'theologico-political figure of reality' (Negri, 1991, p. 89), and it is through what we will call here the 'analytic of the imaginary' that contemporary political thinkers such as Étienne Balibar and Louis Althusser would later read Spinoza.

The central message of the *TTP* asserted the power of reason above superstition and religious ritual. Spinoza's aim was to dispel the mists of superstition that through the imagination also shrouds man's reason. Like Epicurus and Machiavelli before, and Marx and Nietzsche after, Spinoza argued that religion invests us with irrational hopes and fears, grounding these fluctuating emotions in religious rites and beliefs governed solely by

superstition. At the same time, individuals invest God with anthropomorphic characteristics, so that he may become vengeful or benign, cruel or virtuous. Irrational belief in God's will and actions comes to take the place of a more rational understanding of our place in nature. We tend to mistake reality for the way our imagination is affected (*Ethics*, Part I, Appendix). This attack on religion is arguably far more damaging than the demystifying strategies of Marx or Nietzsche, as Spinoza takes his argument right to the heart of biblical exegesis, claiming that Moses could not have written the Torah in its entirety since it relates the latter's death, as well as describing places that bore a different name in his time. Religious prophets, he argued, had no supernatural powers; this horizon of prophecy was nothing more than the horizon of human imagination. It was the way in which the passions tied individuals together as a collectivity, in other words the *imaginary* basis of human sociability and community, that Spinoza sought to understand in the *Ethics*. What were its causes and how could knowledge of it transform such a condition of servitude and superstition?

body and mind, passion and action

For a fuller account of the philosophical underpinnings of the movements of mind, body and imagination we must return to the *Ethics*, as it is here that Spinoza continues his challenge to the emerging Cartesianism that became paradigmatic of modern philosophy. It is this aspect of his thought that was also later appropriated in the anti-humanist arguments of some structuralists and poststructuralists. Spinoza develops his position in direct contrast to Descartes. Mind and body are not distinct substances with their own realities, and the body and passions are not subservient to the rationality of mind. Instead both must be conceived as two intricately interwoven expressions or configurations of the *same* human form. Mind, for Spinoza, is only an *idea of the body* perceived under the attribute of thought rather than extension. Thus, Spinoza writes that 'the mind does not know itself except insofar as it perceives ideas and affections of the body' (*Ethics*, Part II, Proposition 23). In other words, mind cannot be severed from its relation to the body, as it can for Descartes. It should rather be conceived as 'thinking body', because each of its ideas has its source in images regarding the affective state of the body.

Part III of the *Ethics*, entitled '*De Affectibus*' or 'Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Affects', forms the basis for an investigation into the physics of bodies and the various intensities of emotions or passions that accompany them. When in the Preface to Part III Spinoza writes of considering 'human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation of lines, planes, or bodies', his objective is not just to treat the passions in geometric style, but also to consider them according to the causes that shape and determine them. Like the Stoics before him, Spinoza viewed the passions as natural things that follow the common laws of nature (see James, 1993), and like every

other part of nature, individuals strive to persevere in being, to maintain and affirm their existence and power. Spinoza calls this primary, active mobility at the heart of what it means to exist, *conatus*. The *conatus* involves both the body and the mind; in relation to the former we may speak of appetite, and to the latter, will. What we understand by consciousness is not the act of thinking *per se* but a mind conscious of its own desire or *conatus* (*Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 9, Scholium).

There are three primary primitive affects that appear to mobilise and dispose the individual to act: desire, joy and sadness. However, Spinoza shows that it is the precise density and strength with which desire or *cupiditas* combines with the other primary affects that determines the shape and intensity of the resulting passion. Thus he presents a full medley of passions or affections that are derived from these three, from hatred, anger and despair, to love, hope and gratitude (see *Ethics*, Part III, Definitions of the Emotions). The primary affects, then, are *transitive states* through which bodies pass, and they may involve increases or decreases in our power to act, depending upon the kind of affection or passion they engender. The more the body's power is hindered and diminished by passions deriving from sadness, the more our very existence is consumed by external things for which we have no understanding. How can we come to experience joyful affects? Or to put this in other words, how can we arrive at an understanding of the natural causes underlying our actions? For Spinoza, it is this understanding that signifies our rational grasp of the laws of necessity and brings us closest to what he calls in Part V of the *Ethics* an 'intellectual love of God'.

These are not just the questions of the sage or the philosopher as so many commentators have implied – Spinoza cannot easily be characterised as elitist. This entire economy of the passions, which anticipates psychoanalysis by more than 200 years, rests on a relational ontology. It is this profoundly social ontology that has been developed by contemporary readers, for whom Spinoza's analysis of human sociability is an important aspect, tied as it is to the form and movement of the political. Spinoza's perspective is far from psychological egoism and philosophical atomism (see, for example, Balibar, 1997; Collier, 1999; Ravven, 1998). The body can never be distinct and self-contained; it is always made up of the traces and residues of many memories, interactions and events. The body is 'worked up' not through solitary experiences but as part of an interactive, trans-individual process. This, of course, makes the kind of social relation between individuals, and the ethico-political arrangements that help shape our experience, of great importance. 'Citizens are not born but made', Spinoza writes in the unfinished *Tractatus Politicus* (ch. V, para. 2), and they may be manipulated to fear the sovereign power of the state or monarch (as Hobbes also understood), just as they may also learn to coexist in friendship and mutuality, to live according to the common will and to be guided as if by one mind (as Rousseau likewise articulated). Might we not situate Spinoza's politics, the detail and complexity

of which we have yet to examine, as it appears to stand, that is, between the social contract theory of Hobbes and Rousseau?

It will be argued here that to interpret Spinoza within the bounds of social contract theory is to restrict the openings presented by his political philosophy. Whilst Spinoza discusses the human condition within the state of nature as one of man's natural right, which always extends as far as his power, the natural human condition is not one marked by terror and fear of others giving rise, as it does in Hobbes, to the constant threat of war. Spinoza's refusal to contaminate natural right with ideas of juridical or moral right certainly appears Hobbesian, but for the former thinker the identity of right and power transcends mere individual right to embrace the whole of nature. For Spinoza, the equation of right and power is, as C.E. Vaughan writes, 'a speculative principle which unravels the secret of the whole universe' (Vaughan, 1925, p. 68). It is derived not from any state of nature doctrine but from the primary principle of his philosophy: *Deus, sive Natura*. Since, as we noted above, the power of nature is identical with the power of God, every thing in nature acts according to its natural determinations, whatever its individual disposition and moral implication (see *TTP*, ch. XVI; Spinoza, 1985, Letters 19 and 21 to Blyenbergh; Negri, 1991, pp. 108–13).

Ultimately for Vaughan, this leaves Spinoza without a theory of obligation or moral duty and hence vulnerable to precisely those charges levelled toward Hobbes, namely that his system leads straight to despotism and tyranny (Vaughan, 1925, p. 122). In relation to Rousseau, the parallel, for some commentators, seems more immediate (Eckstein, 1944; Smith, 1997, ch. 5). Just as Rousseau proposes the total alienation of each in the community (1993, bk. 1, ch. 6), so Spinoza suggests that when 'each transfers the whole of his power to society, ... [it] is called a democracy, which can be defined as the universal union of all men that has the supreme power to do all that it can' (*TTP*, ch. XVI).

The very terms of discussion here appear to cast Spinoza within the mould of social contract theory, oscillating between Hobbes and Rousseau. His political philosophy does not belong here, however, because it subverts so many of the key concepts of social contract theory. Given the elaboration of Spinoza's naturalism above, it is clear that there can be no absolute break between nature and culture, just as there is no original essence or capacity to be associated with the human being, beyond that of the *conatus*, the power to persevere, to become (a perspective that appears to bring Spinoza closer to Nietzsche than to Hobbes). By the time Spinoza, in his last years, embarked upon the *Tractatus Politicus*, reference to a state of nature concept had disappeared (Balibar, 1998, p. 62). If we understand Spinoza's metaphysics as inseparable from his politics, then the absolute transfer of right to the state is inconceivable. The power of nature and its expression through the *conatus* in the finite mode of human existence is inalienable. It is not a power that can be domesticated absolutely as law (*potesta*). It is a power of becoming

and constitution (*potentia*), one that subverts the transcendence of nature by society and culture, and is disruptive of every claim to contain the power of individuals. It is for this reason that Spinoza is often regarded as a political realist, concerned not with the conditions of legitimacy of the emerging modern state, but with the complex production and reproduction of power that ceaselessly modifies the political terrain. His interest is in the *formation* of individuality (as the people, community, individuals, nation), specifically with 'how it is constituted, how it tries to preserve its own form, how it is composed according to relations of agreement and disagreement or of activity and passivity' (Balibar, 1997, p. 227). To consider the resources for politics presented by Spinoza's philosophy, our attention will return once again to his philosophical anthropology: to the analytics of the passions, the constitution of imagination in political life and to the kind of politics best suited to Spinoza's metaphysics. It is precisely these aspects of Spinoza's thought that have engendered the contemporary interest in his radical politics and its relevance today.

thinking the political in the shadow of spinoza

In a letter to Hugh Boxel regarding the existence of spectres and ghosts, Spinoza indicates three of the thinkers who remain close to him: Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius (Spinoza, 1985, Letter 56). Spinoza finds in these thinkers the first elements of a materialist account of the universe, and, in particular, a search for the natural causes of celestial events (see also Strauss, 1965). It is with Democritus and Epicurus (thinkers who were also read closely by Nietzsche) that Spinoza begins to think about the power of the imagination and the way in which superstitious belief stems from fear and a lack of knowledge of natural causes. When Louis Althusser in his final writings returned to reflect upon Spinoza's conception of imagination and its relation to the affective experience of subjectivity, he writes of finding there not only 'the matrix of every possible theory of ideology' but also resources to think 'the materiality of its very existence' (Althusser, 1998, pp. 7, 10).

Althusser had already claimed, in his *Essays in Self-Criticism* of 1973, that his project to establish a Marxist science that rejected all subjectivist, historicist and empiricist modes of thinking had been misunderstood. He was not a structural Marxist engaged in an analysis of the formal, law-like properties of a society. His Marxism had been supplemented in an important way by his 'detour via Spinoza' (Althusser, 1973, p. 134). It was to Spinoza rather than Marx that Althusser turned in order to theorise the function of ideology. Thus: 'Spinoza refused to treat ideology as a simple error, or as naked ignorance, because it based the system of this imaginary phenomenon on the relation of men to the world "expressed" by the state of their bodies' (Althusser, 1973, p. 136). In his influential 1972 essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser presented ideology as the mechanism that, through

material practices and symbolic rituals, as well as a belief system, interpellates individuals as particular kinds of social subjects. These practices and rituals work to tame and discipline subjects, normalising and subjecting the body to certain regimes of thought and action, as Foucault would later explore with great effect. However, they also work on an affective level via specific modes of identification and imitation.

In the *Ethics* (Part IV, Proposition 27), itself composed after the *TTP* was written, Spinoza analyses this mechanism through what he calls the *affectum imitatio* (the imitation of the affects). Every individual is constituted by a process of imaginary identifications, or *affectum imitatio*, which communicate affects via the images each individual has of others with whom they agree or disagree in temperament and outlook. These images may be shared ones, but they can also be profoundly *ambivalent* ones, generating vacillating emotions of love and hate in individuals dependent on their own specific projections regarding similarity and difference. The imagination has a critical relation to the affects; it is the vehicle that activates ideas and images in the mind regarding the state of the body. The discussion above regarding the relation between body and mind has already presented the latter as an *idea* of the body. It is only through imagination that the mind can have the body as its object. Since the body is part of a relational ontology and always already socialised, the imagination is the result of the intermingling, binding of many bodies with a multiplicity of affects and passions. In short, it is collective and somewhat anonymous in structure.

Spinoza's account of the imagination and its affective relations clearly presages Marxist account of ideology's unconscious operations and effects. It was this dimension of Spinoza's thought, in theoretical alliance with Lacan's notion of the imaginary, that was to prove so productive to Althusser's explorations of the concept. Since we are composed of imaginative communications of image and affect, every human community, as Freud also knew so well, must rely upon such mechanisms of identification and recognition. In Althusser's own presentation however, the creative power of imagination appeared foreclosed. Many of Althusser's strongest critics were to find an absence of agency and a heavy weight of determinancy within his account of ideology. Through readings of Althusser in particular, the anti-humanist perspective that we can associate with Spinoza's rejection of individual sovereignty and free will came to represent falsely the death of the subject (see Williams, 2001, Introduction and ch. 2).

Such a conclusion to the Althusserian *corpus* remains rather one-sided. Althusser continued to think in the shadow of Spinoza, even if he did not fully develop the implications of this thinking for his account of ideology. In his posthumously published autobiography, Althusser, like Deleuze (1990), thinks through Spinoza's speculation that 'nobody yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody has yet learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being determined by the mind,