

Spinoza in Paris - The French Evaluation Machine

Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavailles to Deleuze* (Stanford, 2014)

Alison Ross

There are a remarkable variety of functions exercised by the name ‘Spinoza’ in modern intellectual history. Each of them has their own effect on the meaning carried by the name. A sizeable portion of the effort expended on the name Spinoza propagates the image of a phantom; its invocation in intellectual history is often only loosely connected to the ideas of the seventeenth century philosopher. The effects of this name are no less potent for that fact. Perhaps the most famous instance of the energy that illuminates this name is the pantheist dispute that raged between Jacobi and Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century regarding Lessing’s alleged confession to Jacobi of his ‘Spinozism’. The dispute is as well known for the colour of the biographical events around it, as it is for the precise content of the allegation. Mendelssohn was so concerned to expedite the publication of his defence of Lessing that he went on foot with his manuscript to the publisher’s in the New Year’s Eve’s snow. He died of the cold he caught four days later. His friends blamed Jacobi for Mendelssohn’s death; on their account, Jacobi had published, without permission or warning, the correspondence he had had with Mendelssohn on Lessing: *On the Teaching of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn*. Mendelssohn had felt the need to rush to his friend’s defence as a consequence and publish: *To the Friends of Lessing: an Appendix to Mr. Jacobi’s Correspondence on the Teaching of Spinoza*. It was Jacobi who, on the other hand, felt he had cause to publish the correspondence. On hearing second hand that Mendelssohn was planning to publish against the allegation of Spinozism

in his *Morning Hours* Jacobi had felt slighted and had rushed to publish the correspondence in retaliation.

Leaving the dramatic scene of Mendelssohn's urgent visit to the publisher to one side, the content of the dispute also had an intensely biographical colour to it. In Jacobi's version, if Lessing had confessed his Spinozism to him, then he was likely to have confided his views to others. He sought therefore some constraint from those around Lessing of posthumous public attributions to him of metaphysical theism, in part to avoid the spectacle of dissenting versions of Lessing's late views circulating. The warning he sent to Mendelssohn's circle through Elise Reimarus was rebuffed. His subsequent relating of Lessing's confession that 'There is no philosophy but the philosophy of Spinoza', provoked the ire of Mendelssohn and others who held that the circumstances of the 'confession' only showed that Jacobi was the unwitting butt of Lessing's irony. Other, substantive issues were aired in the ensuing dispute: such as, whether there is any significant distinction to be made between refined pantheism and theism, and whether it is possible to obtain a consistent thesis from Spinoza's writing on the topic of God. The issues of particular sensitivity, however, all related to the status of pantheism vis-à-vis German Idealism: the main question here was the authority of reason in relation to faith, did Spinozist pantheist theses ultimately flow from consistent reflection on the conception of nature in German Idealism? Jacobi's position had been that Spinoza's rationalist philosophy drew out the atheistic implications of German Idealism; thus Spinozism was the underpinning as well as the consequence of Enlightenment thinking. Mendelssohn's defence of Lessing attempted to show that the distinction between refined pantheism and theism was moot and, by extension, the conclusions Jacobi attached to Spinozist 'rationalist' inspired reasoning had no monopoly on the conclusions or issues at stake. The positive reputation of Spinozism as the unsparing pursuit of the conclusions able to be deduced from initial premises is a recurring spur for proclaimed affiliation to Spinoza; it is also the basis for its association with an enthusiasm for reason akin to fanaticism.¹

The very fact that 'Spinozism' was shorthand not just for God-less pantheism, but also for the undeveloped or unacknowledged implications of German Idealism leads us to the inevitable conclusion that 'Spinoza' is not just a name, it also has a history as an instrument that is used in intellectual disputes; a way of signalling intellectual affinities and banishing opponents and pretenders. In the case of the pantheist controversy the allegation of Spinozism reached far into the politically charged atmosphere of the German enlightenment and well beyond philosophy.

In Jacobi's account, Lessing's confession was precipitated by Goethe's poem 'Prometheus'; Goethe later called the poem that instigated these events 'priming powder for an explosion'.² As Hans Blumenberg has argued, the words were carefully chosen, since the controversy uncovered beliefs that were publically disavowed and needed forced disclosure. The role of the poem and even the context of its attribution to Goethe were all highly sensitive matters – hence the poem was not, in Goethe's re-telling, the match that set off the explosion that uncovered heterodox views, but its 'priming powder'.

The history of this controversy, including the scholarship that redraws its contours and engages in disputes over the line dividing its villains and heroes, shows that the breadth of what the name can signal is as indeterminate as the stakes of the various internecine struggles over ideas it gets deployed in. But the fact that it does signal, and that what it signals often draws on non-philosophical registers, including the historical associations it gathers with the fate of particular people and causes, is what is important here.

Some of the functions and effects of the name Spinoza are treated in Knox Peden's masterful history of twentieth century French rationalism.³ Peden is well aware of the cipher like functions of this particular name. But it is also the case that the book stands as an example of the energy that collects around Spinoza's name. In Peden's hands the name 'Spinoza' describes nothing less than the ideal of a meta-philosophical position on philosophy. Two remarks taken respectively from the beginning and the end of the book can be cited in support of this thesis. Early in the book, Peden claims that it is Spinoza who teaches us to scrutinise affective investments (6). To be accurate, the compliment is given to those affiliated to the name: he argues that 'a Spinozist' adheres to the 'principle' that the forces and processes that constitute a subject are 'amenable to a rationalist elucidation' (6). Later, Peden remarks that there is an 'historical effect' in Deleuze's position that "Spinoza teaches the philosopher how to become a non-philosopher": 'It corrodes philosophical efforts to ground morality or justification in principles that philosophy would deem a priori and thus unimpeachable. The result is a healthy scepticism toward the rights philosophy often arrogates for itself' (263). Spinoza thus becomes in the hands of intellectual history a highly specific instrument: the one able to provide critical distance on philosophy. And one might be forgiven for asking whether this means that affective investment in the name Spinoza is uniquely justified and exempt from scrutiny?

The book has seven chapters, each dealing with major figures in twentieth century French philosophy. There is a chapter devoted to the Spinozism of Jean Cavaillès, followed by a chapter that stages the dispute between Martial Gueroult and Ferdinand Alquié in terms of the differences between Spinozist and Cartesian rationalism. A chapter on Jean-Toussaint Desanti subtitled 'between Spinoza and Husserl' precedes two chapters each on the Spinozism of Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's Spinozism is qualified in the title of the final chapter of the book as 'strange'.

Peden's history of French rationalism falls squarely in the field of intellectual history. It is philosophical subtle and literate intellectual history. Its erudition and attention to detail are impressive. The figures he treats are presented in the full regalia of their substantial engagement with important topics in mathematics, science and philosophy. With the critical assessment of philosophical pretension the field of intellectual history licenses, I think one thing that could be drawn from the book is the encouragement of some healthy scepticism about the types of postures unhelpfully taken up in the practice 'philosophy'. Some of the figures and positions treated in the book may be taken as case studies for this thesis.

There have been a number of influential characterisations of the period of twentieth century French thought: each of which positions different figures or trajectories from German philosophy as pivotal. It is true to say that twentieth century French philosophy wrestles with the shadow cast by the colossal figures of modern German philosophy. We can mention Vincent Descombes' classic text *Modern French Philosophy*, which identifies Nietzsche as the key figure for post-war luminaries like Deleuze and Foucault; or Descombes' mention of the significance of Kojève's lectures of the 1930's for the anti-Hegelian impetus that structures the itinerary of many French thinkers and which also go some way to explain the intransigence of the metaphysical reading of Hegel on the continent.⁴ Similarly, the selection of the major figures of German phenomenology as precursors and interlocutors for their French progeny has a wide purchase.⁵ German phenomenology is obviously an unsurpassable point of reference for French phenomenologists, such as Marion, but several important French thinkers, including Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida and Nancy, are also all but unintelligible in the absence of this phenomenological frame.

One of the striking features of all of these intellectual histories is the promiscuous relation to the master German thinkers of many of the French: after all, the study of the history of modern philosophy is enshrined in the French education

system and since the requirements for the publication of theses in philosophy inevitably includes material studied from the curriculum it becomes plausible, but not very helpful, to find forms of ‘influence’ (either positive or negative) that can connect almost any well known French thinker to almost any German philosophy of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It seems fitting therefore that the new map drawn in Peden’s book shakes up the complacent tone in which the requirements of participation in the ‘educational system’ morphs into ‘influence’. Although the texts of Spinoza are included in the French exams and lazy claims to ‘influence’ in this case too are unavoidable, Peden’s choice of Spinoza is not merely one more addition to the pantheon of sprawling historical ‘influences’. It is a deliberate selection of a figure able to divide the landscape of 20th C. French thought. The division it marks is not between the self-conscious affiliation to competing giant historical figures, since in this study Spinoza has no specific counter-figure, and the use of the name is itself, as I will argue below, semantically porous, but between the *movements* of ‘rationalism’ and ‘phenomenology’. Following Canguilhem, Spinoza’s name is the instrument Peden uses to conjure this division between movements. In many respects, the division between movements proposed is by turns more subtle and comprehensive than Descombes’ Hegel-Nietzsche opposition. Although it is precisely on account of its comprehensiveness, that the division is also systematically and frequently breached.

At a basic level we seem to be dealing with *ideas* of ‘phenomenology’ and ‘rationalism’, which over the history of the opposition that Peden charts have become so fixed that it almost counts as an objection against Deleuze that he manages to combine aspects of these movements (248): ‘reading Spinoza “after” Heidegger has meant subjecting Spinoza to Heidegger as a condition, whether Deleuze is cognizant of this fact or not’ (252). With the notable exceptions of Althusser and Deleuze the thinkers who populate Knox’s study of the French ‘rationalist’ landscape are lesser known outside of philosophy than those that feature in the competing histories of the period. Indeed one of the best features of the book is that it restores the complex ecology of French philosophy, not just in the diverse names it covers, but just as importantly in the explanation of how argument and debate play a role in the formation of their positions. This gives the reader an engaging account of the process involved in philosophy that can be obscured by the dominance of celebrated names. Moreover, the nature of the rationalist dispute with phenomenology heightens the central place that grappling with the consequences of scientific research and especially the revolutions in twentieth century science has for twentieth century rationalist French

thought. The twentieth century history of rationalism is at the antipodes of the phenomenological quest for the 'return to the things themselves': it participates in the revolutions in twentieth century physics and mathematics.

Foucault had earlier considered that the sensitivity to the profound changes occurring in science and mathematics in the twentieth century lent to the figures of French rationalism the status of an intellectual parallel to the Frankfurt School's inquiry into the history of forms of modern reason and their potentially despotic effects.⁶ The comparison is suggestive: after all, they each share some antipathy to aspects of phenomenological doctrine and each grapple with the modern sensitivity to the paradox of the historical contingencies of reason. But the French tradition shelters a more diverse set of inquiries into practices of reason than the critique of instrumental rationality on offer in the Frankfurt School and it is also more scientifically literate. In both of these respects it follows an idiosyncratic itinerary that needs to be understood locally. Hence the real core of Peden's study is this peculiar French context. One of the peculiarities of this French context is that as well as its own concerns, histories and figures - it has its own slogan.

Early in the book Peden invokes the oft-cited opposition coined by Foucault between philosophies of 'the concept' and those of 'the subject' (20). It is worth returning to Foucault's initial formulation of this opposition: There is, he wrote, a 'dividing line' that cuts through the cleavages that 'were able to oppose Marxists and non-Marxists, Freudians and non-Freudians, specialists in a single discipline and philosophers, academics and non-academics, theorists and politicians'. This 'other' 'dividing line which cuts through all these oppositions ... is the line that separates a philosophy of experience, of sense and of subject and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality and of concept'.⁷ The opposition, in its telling received abbreviation to the words 'concept' and 'subject' as well as to a noticeably narrowed intra-philosophical dispute is in danger, I think, of becoming something of an empty slogan, a rallying cry for those who identify with the side of 'the concept', which is the positive pole of the opposition in Foucault's telling. Peden puts the philosophical issue at the core of this slogan in bold terms early in the book: 'Spinozist rationalism [can be distinguished from the Cartesian variety because] it refused the notion of a "subject"' (6). Later in the same paragraph this 'refusal' is qualified as a 'demotion' in which 'anterior processes or forces' that are more fundamental than the subject are brought into view. If such demotion could be said to link such irreconcilable projects as Althusser's Marxism and Levinas' ethics then the issue that divides them is 'whether [the]... anterior processes or forces' that are more fundamental than the subject 'are in principle amenable

to a rationalist elucidation, however abstract or incomplete. A Spinozist thinks they are.' (6). This might be a case of what Freud called the narcissism of minor differences: since amongst philosophers tasks of elucidation are willingly if not always competently assumed – indeed, if we remove the words 'rationalist' and 'Spinozist' we are left with 'abstract' 'incomplete' 'elucidation', which almost perfectly describes Levinas's writing. The work of identification provided by the name 'Spinoza' and the movement of 'rationalism' is itself in need of 'elucidation'.

For instance, the reference to 'the concept', in its use as a slogan, is not just reducible to a philosophical allegiance, it is supposed to convey the ascetic regard for rational elucidation that ends in self-sacrifice. This muscular outline, which is filled out in Peden's Introduction and opening chapter, to my mind credits philosophical elucidation with a status and significance it doesn't always deserve; neither can this position be fully insulated from the tenets of the philosophy of 'the subject' it supposedly opposes, not least because the way it is used by some of the stars of this book and the frequency of its invocation is a way of building up the dense and positive layers of meaning carried by a 'word'. The reference to the 'concept' is one way of establishing an authenticating reference that a speaker might claim. Foucault's initial account of this dividing line, which he specifies is not intra-philosophical and also, as he emphasises, merely one amongst many possible networks of affiliation pertinent in this period of French intellectual history, may be cited in support of this position. I'll return to this point. More crudely, the opposition has evolved in a way that ignores the fact that in the original formulation of this opposition Foucault identifies the phenomenological heritage of both sides. He writes, 'On the one hand, one network is that of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty; and then another is that of Cavailles, Bachelard and Canguilhem. In other words, we are dealing with two modalities according to which phenomenology was taken up in France, when quite late – around 1930 – it finally began to be, if not known, at least recognized'.⁸ A similar problem occurs, as Peden shows, with affiliation to the name 'Spinoza', which evidently supports projects at cross-purposes to one another and occasionally those in dissent from what is now understood as Spinozism. 'Grounded as much of it is in Deleuze's thought, Spinozism today contains elements of the very Heideggerianism that was targeted by the Spinozists of a previous generation.' (10). In this way, the role that Peden gives to Spinoza in his history of French rationalism turns the name 'Spinoza' into an extraordinary machine of evaluation. The book could be described as a study of the meaning functions of Spinozist-filiation. These functions are contradictory. What are the reasons driving the positive meaning that self-describing references to 'the concept', 'rationalism' or 'Spinoza' come to

convey? Can the significance these abbreviated nests of meaning affirm sustain the polemical relation to phenomenology they intend, given the unruly elements they shelter? Does Peden's *historical* treatment of the rationalist current in France shed any light on this issue?

EVALUATION

Near the end of the book when Peden turns to the political implications of Spinozism it becomes clear that the train of positive associations built up from the example of Cavailles' wartime heroism and death set out in the first chapter is also a way of exploring the contention of the French rationalists that phenomenology's attachment to the subjective conditions of meaning *entails* spineless conservatism. Many examples in the book refer to this founding personal event of modern, rationalist significance: Canguilhem portrays Cavailles' fate as the heroic attempt 'to overcome History with Reason' (22). And indeed Peden's account of what can only be described in psychoanalytic terms as Canguilhem's cathexis onto these events show what a powerful generator of meaningful experience this example is. Peden cites Canguilhem: "Jean Cavailles, this is the logic of Resistance lived until death. Let the philosophers of existence and the person do as well next time if they can' (21). What drives Canguilhem's hagiographic attention here: is it rationalism, Spinozism, the concept, or unbridled admiration for the rare heroism of this particular individual?

The historical dimension of Peden's study, rather than its own attachment to Spinozism, is the perspective able to air this over-determined context. In doing so the book raises the need for a critical evaluation of the political value invested in 'philosophical movements' and 'philosophy' per se. The sympathetic treatment of Althusser in the book is intriguing in this context. There is a detailed recounting of self-sacrifice in the personal story of Cavailles. And the meaning attached to such stories is treated with a critical eye. Peden alerts us to the way such stories are used to traffic philosophical positions and to give them political significance. However, less flattering personal stories are seemingly less relevant for philosophy in the case of others. In reference to the 'psychotic episode' that culminated in Althusser's murder of his wife, Peden writes: 'no amount of hand wringing or schadenfreude would suffice to establish a relationship between this event and Althusser's philosophy' (11). The background against which rationalism is praised as the movement that critically assesses the antecedent forces for any 'subject' position, raised the question for this reader as to whether the comforting thought that courage somehow follows from the precepts of allegiance to a philosophical

movement or style of thought should not receive a more consistently critical evaluation. It is not specifically Althusser's 'psychotic episode' that I have in mind, the question could instead be asked about Althusser's conception of knowledge, which as Jacques Rancière has shown posed a block on his capacity to see what was happening around him, premised as it was on the absolute disqualification of certain forms of experience.⁹ My general point is simply the following: wartime acts of heroism and courageous acts of disregard for authority were performed irrespective of whether the agents of such acts brought the founding figure of the subject into question. The flattering association of personal virtue with specific philosophical ideas or schools is not warranted. Foucault's initial way of formulating the concept/subject distinction does mark this more diverse ecology of practices than the use of the name Spinoza or the invocation of the rationalist movement can.

Peden only briefly refers to Jacques Rancière in this book: but to my mind Rancière's scepticism about the pernicious practices that shelter under the discipline of philosophy and the scathing critique he gives in this vein of Althusser's self-aggrandising conception of the privileges of Theory, is relevant for assessing Althusser's comportment towards the events of 1968, which Peden thinks follow rather from 'the deductive logic of its initial premises', hence its Spinozism (127). On the contrary, Althusser was out of step with what was going on: and the reason for this is not easy to disentangle from the posture of how he thought. Let me be more pointed: occasionally there is an assumption in Peden's treatment of rationalism that this movement follows where reason leads and it does so precisely by eschewing the pitfalls of subjective conditions of meaning. Railing against the false limits on reason of the procedures of Kantian critique Spinoza's resurrection is touted as a rejection of Kant's wariness about the way such enthusiasm for reason generates groundless fanaticism.¹⁰ In the way this position is developed in Peden's book the view that philosophical choices are important is apparent, but it is necessary to keep in mind the ways that the attachment to such positions also leads into error. This is because these philosophical views are constellations of meaning that orientate and organise fields for intervention. The stakes of such choices are not merely politically erroneous, as in the case of Althusser. Other figures from this period, such as Gaston Bachelard thought that following the radical innovations of twentieth century mathematical physics required removing the 'epistemological obstacles' that were inevitably brought along by philosophy. He is more assiduous in this task than Canguilhem whose field of science required the use of tactics of 'thick' evaluation such as the language of 'norms'. Crucially, Bachelard saw that the hard sciences opened up regional rationalities; these were

practices whose innovations were not discovered in attention to pre-existing things, but whose knowledge produced new objects in the practices of the laboratory. The idea of ‘regional rationality’ is crucial here, since the critical force of Spinozism is tied to the universal model of ‘reasoning from initial premises’. Bachelard is cited as an epigraph for one chapter and referred to, as is his daughter Suzanne herself a well-known figure in twentieth century French epistemology, in passing in others. It is churlish to harp on about a figure omitted from this impressive and detailed treatment of French rationalism, but I would like to mention Bachelard since his perspective on philosophy is relevant to the clash of movements Peden describes, in part because he absorbs it: he divides his work on the history of science from his poetic phenomenology of experience - and thus cannot be cited as a partisan of either side.¹¹ Furthermore, Foucault - who, as I mentioned, is the source for the slogan of concept versus subject - was following Bachelard’s warning about epistemological obstacles when he excised established philosophical terminology - or ‘concepts’ - like ‘legitimacy’ from his mid 1970’s study of power thus opening up to scrutiny in an entirely new way the features of disciplinary power. Here too the attempt to avoid the error that follows from the attachment to philosophical positions is salutary: we are dealing Foucault said with ‘a population of dispersed events’, a claim at the antipodes of any ‘rationalism’ in the way that it emphasises ‘chance’ over ‘reason’.¹²

EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLES

In the examples he treats Peden’s book builds up an alliance between mathematics, science and rationalism, which is tacitly and occasionally explicitly opposed to phenomenology. It is perhaps true that some aspects of the grammar of phenomenology and especially its attention to the ‘things themselves’ through the transcendental faculties of the subject is less promising as a partner for the revolutions that occurred in twentieth century science, than Spinoza’s account of Thought and Extension as attributes of Substance.

However, the reasons that led Bachelard to divide his poetic and phenomenological writings from his treatment of the twentieth century revolutions in mathematics and physics were not limited to the conceptual obstacles posed by phenomenology. It was his view that philosophical ideas per se were a hindrance to what occurred in science and that philosophy brings with it a history of ways of thinking about problems to which its practitioners are attached and which need to be vigilantly guarded against in order to allow the comprehension of the non-phenomenological core of contemporary science.¹³ In this respect Bachelard anticipates by several

decades some of the ideas of the contemporary ‘experimental movement’ in analytic philosophy.¹⁴ It is one of the hallmarks of philosophy that it argues for and defends particular ideas; precisely this needs to be guarded against in the regional practices of new sciences. If we take Bachelard’s view seriously, it is not clear that the commitments of any philosophical movement could be sufficiently neutral in relation to the demands of scientific experimentation. One of the features of modern science that he highlights is that its techniques bring new things into existence; these are ‘constructed’ in laboratories governed by regional rationalities whose procedures do not adhere to a generic practice of reason. Normative ideals of reason are less relevant than the pragmatic consideration of whether something like a transuranian element ‘works’. Obviously, this is not a model that is particularly close to recognisable features of phenomenological doctrine, such as the ‘reduction’. Nonetheless, this problem of rigid attachment to philosophical ideas is also pertinent for the ideas attached to the French rationalist movement. We might mention here the very idea of ‘science’ as a practice for ‘politics’ in Althusser’s thought.

My point here is just that philosophical ideas don’t always deserve the positive meaning they attract by virtue of their association with mathematics or formalisation, or rationalism or Spinoza, or wartime heroism. In this sense, maybe the slogan of the concept versus the subject is unhelpful since the received meanings now attached to it seem to bring along an extensive list of attributes and entrench a division, which is evidently often question begging.

If Peden’s study occasionally implies and sometimes argues that the affiliation with the name Spinoza entails a positive relation to scientific research that distinguishes the French rationalists from phenomenology, the study cannot divide the relation between these movements and the study of different forms of technical knowledge evenly. This is because neither movement has a monopoly on critical inquiry related to technical knowledge, even if the reduction of these respective philosophical movements to slogans

might give the contrary impression. I have in mind here the abbreviated reference to the phenomenological call for the ‘return to the things themselves’, which might be invoked against the importance of conceptualisations of practices of rationality in Canguilhem in which neither the givenness of things nor the continuity between scientific knowledge and the ‘common understanding’ can be assumed. When either of these is assumed they are treated as obstacles, resistances or

prejudices.¹⁵

The impression communicated by such ‘names’ and ‘ideas’ can be quickly corrected by referring to some of the signal works of twentieth century phenomenologists – Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*, for instance, which is the object of study by a diverse field of French thinkers – not least, Derrida. Merleau-Ponty’s significance as a precursor for topics in contemporary science is also worth mentioning. At the same time that the appealing myth of an intimate relation between rationalism and science on one side, and phenomenology and the effete experience of the ‘things themselves’, on the other, is abbreviated in the strategic ways the name ‘Spinoza’ is mentioned, the actual importance of Spinoza for some of the figures discussed in this book as ‘Spinozist’ is contentious.

Often, Spinoza is the name used to convey simple hostility to features of the phenomenological tradition. The intensity of this hostility is partly bred from the institutional dominance of phenomenology, which by contrast today appears largely indifferent to the rationalist current. It can afford to be. The reasons driving the hostility are therefore not only intra-philosophical, but also sociological and institutional. But one of the interesting features of the use of the name Spinoza as shorthand for the affiliation with French rationalism is the ‘local’ colouring of Spinoza with the formalist tendencies of French philosophy, which frequently turns this figure into the unrecognisable consort for doctrinal assertions entirely foreign to Spinozism and possibly anything resembling ‘rationalism’. Peden very carefully shows all the shades of Spinozism that shelter under the name: and how with Deleuze aspects of the phenomenological tradition crept back in. Still, I think the flexibility that is won by the use of the more malleable category of ‘rationalism’ is key to tracking the loose affiliations between Peden’s cast of characters and the name ‘Spinoza’.

PHILOSOPHY AS A PRACTICE OF MEANING

If we stand back from the import of the opposition between philosophies of the concept and those of the subject, with all the subsidiary oppositions it conjures – rationalism versus phenomenology; truth versus meaning; science and revolution versus feeling and the primacy of the things themselves; Spinoza’s substance versus Husserlian solipsism – it can be considered in functional terms as the mode for the expression of meaning. Viewed this way, the opposition can be understood as a way of stamping a complex field of philosophical ideas and practices with meaning. Sometimes the meaning that is conveyed is erroneous: such as the idea that

rationalism may effectively be contrasted with the irreducibly subjective element of phenomenology. The dualism of the latter is not avoided in every formulation of the former, just described differently. Similarly, the competent treatment of technical questions is not the exclusive province of the non-phenomenological thinkers, as the examples of Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty and Husserl each testify. When I mentioned that the opposition between ‘the concept’ and ‘the subject’ had become a slogan, able to be cited as an abbreviated narrative of the way that heroic practices of self-sacrifice are allied to philosophical positions: it is to be understood precisely as a ‘slogan’ that shapes and directs our affective investment in ideas and historical figures. It lets us overlook problems such as the irrational investment it is possible to have in a figure or a style of thought. Some of the rhetorical excesses of Canguilhem’s attachment to Cavallès, show that some ‘rational’ clarity is needed in unpacking the affective investments in this moment of French philosophy. Whether one takes the deflationary attitude of Rancière towards the aggrandised image of philosophy amongst its practitioners – even Spinoza in Deleuze’s telling has some role in stimulating the non-philosopher in the philosopher – or the historical perspective of Peden, the point is that the noble idea of rationalism should be viewed with some scepticism.

The ‘intellectual history’ of French rationalism in Peden’s hands is a practice of teasing out what stands as ‘implicit’ affiliation, airing its reasons and exploring its cogency. This is a practice that conducted rigorously refuses the solipsistic dangers of the phenomenological conception of intentional meaning, but that also calls for caution in the use of the complacent opposition of ‘the subject’ versus ‘the concept’ as well as its affiliation to ‘rationalism’. After all, it is not as if the dominant role given to antecedent forces in subjectivity is somehow ‘in principle’ more reassuring than the pitfalls of a founding subject. At a minimum, philosophy requires a reflective distance to be taken towards an idiom or the authority of a ‘figure’, which might endorse it. Peden shows that history is one way to force such a distance when it cannot fall back – as no philosophy ever could reliably do – on the culture, history or good will of its practitioners. Peden is occasionally ambivalent about the role Spinoza plays in French rationalism. However, he draws on the historical reputation of Spinozism as the fearless practice of the rational deduction of consequences from initial premises. This is not truly a metaphysical position. The history of Spinozism in Germany and France tells us that even a seemingly convincing rational elucidation of a position, might lead to an erroneous view prevailing. This is why Kant, in the immediate aftermath of the pantheist dispute, linked Spinoza with fanaticism. It is why Bachelard defended the regional practices of the sciences against the epistemological obstacles of

traditional philosophy; and why Foucault's innovative conception of power eschewed the concept of 'legitimate' power. Whatever else it is, Spinozism and its ideal of rational intelligibility stands for a particular practice of philosophy, one that champions reason over chance. Even those practices that after Spinoza pursue an unflagging commitment to 'reason' may occasionally bundle together with this commitment a flattering self-identification with muscular precursors from the history of philosophy. Sensitivity to the complex registers that drive philosophical positions gives air and movement to what might otherwise be calcified in a name. Peden's superb study shows the benefits that intellectual history can bring to attaining some clarity about what goes on under the name 'philosophy'.

NOTES

1. See John Zammito's historical account of the dispute in *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 11.
2. See Hans Blumenberg's discussion of the Goethe-Jacobi relationship and the role of Goethe's poem 'Prometheus' in the controversy in his *Work on Myth*, trans., Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 1985), chapter 1, part IV: "Priming Powder for an Explosion", 402-429.
3. All references to this book are given in parentheses in the text.
4. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
5. Representative versions of this history packaged for the Anglophone audience are Richard Kearney's *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987) and his *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers – The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984).
6. Michel Foucault, "Introduction", Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, transl. Carolyn R. Fawcett in collaboration with Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 7-25, 11. The extraordinary diversity of the French context, which Peden's book sets out, perhaps explains the greater recognition the internal coherence the German tradition of critical theory enjoys.
7. Foucault, "Introduction", 8.
8. Foucault, "Introduction", 8.
9. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, transl. Emiliano Battista (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2011) see especially the Preface and chapter one; see also Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
10. Immanuel Kant, 'What is Orientation in Thinking' in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237-250. And see Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Teleological Judgment', *Critique of Judgment*, transl., Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) for the allegation that Spinozism is fatalistic 272 and that it is unable to explain the unity of even ideal purposiveness in nature, 275. For a recent treatment of the Kant-Spinoza relationship, see Omri Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).
11. There is a chronological division between Bachelard's major early publications on the philosophy of science and his later work on the phenomenology and poetics of space. The telling conceptual difference is that modern science is defined as the procedures and techniques under which the 'immediate' must give way to the 'constructed'. Science is not a phenomenology; it is a 'phenomeno-technics'. Gaston Bachelard, *The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind*, transl. G.C. Waterson (New York: Orion Press, 1968) 122-3. The works dealing with the poetic imagination like *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) are the basis for his reputation in the English-speaking world. He is better known in France, however, for his work in the history and philosophy of science.
12. Michel Foucault, 'On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle' in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol.2, ed James D. Faubion, transl. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1998) 297-333, 301.
13. The establishment of determinate scientific facts is the work of the application of a coherent technique. Gaston Bachelard, *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1934, 176.
14. Jesse Prinz describes experimental philosophy as the 'revolution' able to solve traditional philosophical problems regarding the mind. This movement overturns the credibility of philosophical 'intuitions' established in ordinary language philosophy because it subjects them to the scrutiny of experimental science. The model of a revolution that sees in philosophical practices obstacles to understanding how things really work is one whose rhetorical pivots had been articulated and defended using the reference point of the twentieth century revolutions in science

in France in the 1930's, most notably by Gaston Bachelard. The issues are inflected differently in the problems treated in experimental philosophy, but the precursor of requiring philosophy to respond to science, rather than assuming the compatibility of its frameworks with science was already set in the history of philosophy in France. See Jesse Prinz, 'Experimental Philosophy': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS4DdLkfPk>, accessed February 16, 2015.

15. Foucault, "Introduction", 14.