

The Actuality of Spinoza's Pantheism

by [Friedrich Hansen](#) (September 2024)



Benedict Spinoza. From the series Great Ideas of Western Man (Richard Lindner, 1956)

Spinoza is the predecessor of the bunch of green holistic fanatics who secularized his Renaissance pantheism. It was Jonathan Israel who has undertaken to rewrite the history of the enlightenment specifically in light of the philosophy of Spinoza, claiming that it was the heart and soul of the thing. That is why we need not bother to undertake a separate take on the enlightenment. The two Enlightenments, Israel suggests, were divided on the question of whether reason reigned supreme in human affairs, as the radicals insisted, or whether reason had to be limited by faith and tradition—the view of the mainstream. The mainstream’s intellectual timidity constrained its critique of old social forms and beliefs.

By contrast, the Radical Enlightenment “rejected all compromise with the past and sought to sweep away existing structures entirely.” However as was to be expected, the seeming “obsession with Spinoza, the supposed lack of nuance in both philosophical understanding and historical account—all have drawn criticism from many historians and philosophers.” One of the secrets behind his work is that Spinoza has been ignored or underestimated in the English-speaking world “less so in France, Italy or Germany where Spinoza was much more central to the development of intellectual life.” (“Seeing reason: Jonathan Israel’s radical vision,” in: *New Humanist*, by Kenan Malik, 21.6.2013).

Israel goes on to explain this Anglophone negligence: “Spinoza’s importance,” Israel states, “is not just that he helped unpick medieval scholasticism, but that through his work he imparted order, cohesion and formal logic to what was in effect a fundamentally new view of Man, God and the universe.” No other figure became remotely as notorious as Spinoza in the 17th century for challenging revealed religion and Christian morality. Even more important seems to have been the “semi-clandestine Spinozist network of writers and

scholars through which his influence spread across the Continent and through the precincts of Enlightenment." So it is interesting that Israel's new approach and success is entirely based on language enhanced by an emphasis on particularism.

Trouble is however that this had been previously discovered by Isaiah Berlin. However importantly Israel claims he went beyond Locke's rhetoric of freedom, tied as it has been to freedom of conscience rather than freedom of thought, which is why he would not extend tolerance to other religions. Hence Spinoza aimed at freedom of expression like Leibniz meaning that both did not even aim at redeeming the human soul. Both also insisted on one substance monism: *Deus Sive Natura* rendering both terms as synonyms. Yet for Menasse ben Israel the metaphysical concept of monism and the political concept of freedom were inextricably linked. Israel says: "My premise is that one-substance philosophy is the only way you could eliminate religious authority from politics. It is not so much the attack on religions in the early clandestine philosophical literature which seems so crucial as the attack on religious authority as a political and philosophical procedure. Our moral order is not something that is divinely revealed to us, it's something that is relative to society only."

Well I would add the loss of divine medieval authority in the Renaissance necessitated this sort of Spinozist carapaces rendering monism as a cover for "bad conscience" which the majority of people tends to find indispensable. In this reading freedom is only possible under the guidance of transcendent authority and in permanent tension with it. All other freedom is bound to degrade to animal freedom. Spinoza's freedom comes only in a double pack with determinism attached to it. We all know what that means: freedom is tied to money and property. So Israel is quick to disagree with this dismal link telling us: "Where I disagree is that the two are inextricably linked, and that there is a causal relationship

between metaphysical ideas of monism and political ideas of freedom.”

One reason for my scepticism is that many materialist philosophers were inimical to freedom. Thomas Hobbes is the classic example: for he is authoritarian, atheist and materialist and until today has overshadowed Spinoza. “In his most famous work, Leviathan, Hobbes presented a picture of humans as innately egotistical beings, driven solely by self-interest. In the state of nature, before the creation of society, humans were constantly at war. To find peace and protection, individuals established a social contract, handing over their liberty to a central power that had absolute authority to maintain social order. The only liberty a subject possessed was the liberty to do anything not regulated by the sovereign.”

Israel criticises that Hobbes did not invest sovereignty in the individual, but in the king. In addition, people, he claims want more than being free of fear, they want many more things. Well this kind of radicalism surfaced as a result of Protestantism. He says: “The Reformation, like the Enlightenment, had its radical and moderate wings. The Reformation of which we know, the Reformation of Luther and Calvin, was in fact an intensely conservative religious reaction against the spirit of reason that Thomas Aquinas had introduced into Christianity in the twelfth century by marrying theology to Aristotelian philosophy. The reformers insisted on the absolute sovereignty of God over His creation and saw the human race as a ‘teeming horde of infamies’, as Calvin put it, whose innate sinfulness degraded any autonomy except for the autonomy to be wicked.”

While Luther challenged only the power of the pope, more radical protestants like the German Anabaptists and the English Levellers challenged the worldly authority of the kings as well. For Jonathan Israel the radical Reformers are important for bringing the project of egalitarianism to its

logical conclusion, which is also at the centre of his own project. The other important take away message is that the crucial forces pushing human equality, were religious radicals that emerged with the Reformation. Yet Israel's idea of a consistent philosophy, needed for pushing the universal concept of equality, has been equally refuted by Tocqueville and by Isaiah Berlin.

Now we ask: "Why did Hobbes and Hume and Voltaire row back on ideas of equality and democracy, freedom and liberty, while Spinoza, Diderot and Condorcet embraced more radical beliefs?" The former were afraid of the revolutionary upheavals and sought their refuge in traditional religion. My answer is that Spinoza, because of his pantheist monism, is hopelessly mechanistic and not fit to answer tough questions about human society. To sum it all up: It is this kind of rational monism, assuming that there is only one truth, accessible to anyone, is the fatal deceit of Spinoza and Jonathan Israel too; it is dangerous and inevitably leads to intolerance and persecution of dissent. Man is internally split in an inner and outer person and is also torn between his evil animal nature and his good reason, an inner dualism that is reflected in metaphysics as well as in Judaism.

Egalitarian Panpsychism

Egalitarianism emerged as a derivative of monotheism albeit lowering the auditive-transcendent realm toward the visual-metaphysical realm, which means that the active mode of "imitatio dei" is being confused with the passive mode of automatic fulfilment. Or cognitive Adam I is being equalized with ethical Adam II which means that the moral tension between ought and is collapsed. The reason for this is that this tension emerges from the inner self or Adam II and not from the outer self of Adam I. In other words: the ought-is tension reflects the evolutionary gap between the immanent

visual and the transcendent auditive paradigm. Becoming human means to liberate ourselves from the fetters and automatism of the visual paradigm. The progress this involves is historically reflected in the difference between Hellenism and Judaism or the shift from guidance and cultural supremacy of Gnostic vision towards divine revelation by the voice of God. While in classical Greek society aristocrats ruled over slaves it was Davidic Jerusalem which six centuries earlier granted humanity nothing more and nothing less than "being created equal in the likeness of God," the auditive-transcendent being.

Yet here a confusion is likely to happen between metaphysics, i.e. thinking in terms representing the lower visual paradigm, and transcendence, i.e. thinking in terms of the elevated and sublime auditive paradigm. The lower visual paradigm represents the notion of man entrapped in his animal nature. It is ever exemplified by a Hobbesian horde of wolves cannibalising each other alive. By contrast through language humankind can rise above its animal nature and develop peaceful relations by building a virtually egalitarian society based on a framework of mutually agreed rights and duties. Since the rights are intrinsically wedded to the cravings of the visual paradigm the views of the neighbour and our duties towards him or her are easily overshadowed. The opposite is true for the auditive paradigm which has always the cry of the other on his mind. We can look the other way but we cannot hear the other way because the orientation of the eye is centrifugal and that of the ear as centripetal. This is the reason why sexual identity politics being arrested in the visual paradigm minimise the faculty of disinterested neighbourliness or the concern for others. This is why Hellenism ultimately ended as a failed state.

By contrast, in Judaism men and women are thought in marriage to be representing one unified person with regard to the likeness of their maker. Only both together constitute the

biblical dyad and can muster the resilience and continuity through generations. Thus only marriage grants longterm survival by way of the family name and through offspring.

With the Catholic belief in God's incarnation, however, represented by Jesus Christ and his continuing in monastic celibacy, the biblical dyad has literally been compromised except for eastern Orthodoxy, Islam and Judaism. Jesus Christ is the source of all the troubles involved in the encounter of two incomplete individuals by generating alienated gender relations, followed by two millennia of Western struggles with Christian personhood. Gender alienation has occasioned a secular Reformation, which began in the decadent fin de siècle. It triggered two World Wars and since then has issued in a second inward turn, this time under the narrow augurs of the haptic paradigm, sponsoring sexual identity politics and resulting in same sex attraction and transgenderism. The end of religion in Europe is firmly rooted in this narrowing of the human perspective which created emotions as the sustenance of firmly this-worldly personhood.

That identity as a proxy for personhood should arise from the body rather than from the head spells the end of sublimation and since the latter has served as the main source of spiritual energy since the formation of the West it is not surprising that Western innovation and creativity have abated. Only few Western thinkers to my knowledge have foreseen this identity drama as a consequence of the bachelor Jesus Christ. One was Philip Rieff with his concept of "death works." From there all the inwardly authentic feminist and gay fallacies make sense as spurious identity quarrels and vain searches for completeness by singles. They can only disappoint because identity politics cannot but narrow or reduce the comprehensive and complex Judaeo-Christian person. In addition they inevitably collapse the vertical in authority between the generations which has carried Western civilisation through the millennia.

The result is the flat person of liberal egalitarianism. As Alexis de Tocqueville astutely predicted, this would finally usher in a reactionary backlash: the flat egalitarian, the nihilist solipsists and the racist existentialists who in a nationalist setting would eventually turn their aggression against the weak lower stratum in society as has happened with racial suprematism of the Nazis. They would also turn inside in search of difference, driven by the desire to make their mark, which is why the Nazis embraced racism in order to bury genderism. In the aftermath of this we have, according to facebook, a smorgasbord of over fifty artificial gender identities available to chose from. However the result of this secular chase for authenticity, wholeness or completeness ends up with the old canard of groupism with all its ugly side effects. So much so that even big companies took the trouble to rebrand themselves as "groups" globally. This is certainly counterintuitive and leaves us with a triumph of heteronomy over autonomy—the complete undoing of the aspirations of the rational enlightenment. No doubt, however, it suits the decadent forces of narrowing the threshold for debasement and promiscuity under the auspices of instinctual bodily expressionism. Thus the new artificial "groupism" serves as cover or protection against the bitings of our inner conscience. For the outward turned merely cognitive group self is about to be used as the latest "carapace" replacing the inner moral compass for human decency. Groupism eventually will be taking the place formerly held by the protective traditional family.

Which brings us back to the actuality of the normative mechanics of Renaissance "monads" triggered by the desperate longing for civilisational models after the collapse of medieval religion. The search for models to replace the biblical person continued until the enlightenment. This restless chase is also a consequence of the dehumanising fascism evident in the Nazi concentration camps and the attempted annihilation of the Jewish people. For like no other

people the Jews were the light of the nations in terms of "lovingkindness" –a term untranslatable into German. This divinely ordained faculty of lovingkindness, being quintessentially Jewish, depends upon and reaches well beyond biblical marriage with all its Jewish underpinnings. The Jewish family as conceptualized in Talmud-Torah remains the bedrock of biblical civilisation as it re-emerged through the establishment of Israel.

By contrast Europe has descended to a disappointing secularism with its avant-garde of postmodern identity politics draining incessantly what remains of coherence from Western societies. For what in the late 19th century started as female emancipation with suffragettes has meanwhile descended into matters of group diversity and plastic surgery. It has also burdened us with obsessing about the body, antagonistic culture wars and Western decline. The gender revolution epitomizes the twin cardinal motives of the postmodern West namely serialisation and bestialisation. Both were preformed and premeditated by two mechanistic Renaissance concepts or philosophies: Leibniz' "monads" and Spinozan "connatus," both reflecting profane and crude survival instincts.

We therefore have to turn to the meaning of connatus or "born like this" and note its unique fondness of bestialisation. For the latter was to become the mark of all three fascist Axis powers: Japan, Italy and Germany. The former imitated and brutalized the ancient Chinese reign and the latter two drew heavily on Hellenist or Greek-Roman shame culture in antiquity. Already Renaissance-paintings had issued in sort of disembodied Hellenism rendering its three-dimensional plastic art output in a constrained fashion with two-dimensional paintings, performed by Renaissance artists with the rare exception of Michelangelo. These artists injected a measure of Judaeo-Christian narrative into the static and proud Greek iconography by flattening out of the Greek heritage and specifically diminishing the deed of Greek crafts into

expressive visual arts. The same might be said of the ways in which the Lutheran Reformation resulted in the disembodiment of Christ's revelation as it was rendered for instance as Bach's manneristic or mechanistic musical performance. In what could be called the "handicapped" Epoch, both Renaissance and Reformation emerged by imitating antiquity under the visual paradigm and therefore de-Judaizing it. Both were distancing themselves from the Jewish deed by severing it from the auditive paradigm.

As a result the Renaissance was engineering the arts as a proxy deed by that reflecting the reality of the permanent submission of the human deed toward the industrial necessities thereby occasioning human alienation. It was only with the anarchism in the late 19th century followed by female and gay emancipation, that this disembodiment of the deed would be compensated by enforcement of sexual symbolism. The replacement of religious meaning with a surrogate cult of sex would inevitably suck out most of creativity from the human soul resulting in the fading away of the Western innovatory drive with the end of Victorianism. The latter represented a bout of human genius upon returning to the Judaeo-Christian sources which gave an unprecedented boost to industry and productivity. It was nevertheless limited by the proxy character of Christian incarnation and was destined to collapse into a profane incarnation, viz sexual identity.

Surely the Renaissance shame culture had influenced Leibniz' concept of "windowless" monads which were unable to communicate with each other reflected the atavistic ways of shame culture. It is in this sense that during industrialisation and alienation in the 19th century sexual identity could advance as a surrogate for work work gratifications. This had been envisioned early on by Spinoza's thriving "little things." It also occurred with Mandeville's "fable of the bees" the founding myth for Adam Smith's "division of labour." The monads would make a return at the

end of the Belle Epoch with one distinctive feature of fin-de-siecle decadence: the popular Egyptian scarab.

Also in the 1930s, following in the throes of supremacist racism, we see the emergence in Japan of a Leibniz-Renaissance which was initiated by Tetsuaki Kurusu. Having studied in Germany he submitted his dissertation at the university of Munich in 2004, titled "Influence of Monadology by Gottfried W Leibniz on the philosophy of Kitaro Nishida" who lived from 1870 till 1945. Nishida was a famous Japanese philosopher and founder of the Kyoto-School. But his link to the Nazis does not end with cultural correspondence of the axis but extends to warfare, ie. the exclusive use of biological and chemical weapons by the axis powers in two world wars. This affinity coincides with inhuman racist ideologies that dominated the axis powers and shows in the crudeness of biological warfare. It has been followed up with the return of bestiality in the bouts of terrorism in the former totalitarian precincts of the West including the German Baader-Meinhof group and the Japanese AUN sect which was prone to beheadings of their victims.

This brings us back to Leibniz' and Spinoza's Renaissance monads which were also conceived as "headless" machines which might be read as an early example of the dehumanizing aspects of enlightenment rationalism. For it carries the motive of hellenistic individualism well beyond family-phobia and the total loss of monotheist lovingkindness that survived in Adam Smith's human empathy. In denial this Western tradition antihuman motives have taken hold in terrorist groups of the Baader Meinhof and Brigade Rosse persuasion that would later spread to the Muslim world. This kind of unmitigated terror reveals the Darwinistic bent of the Green naturalist ideology which loathes monotheist ethics. Frank terrorism is just the other side of fanatic naturalism which know no grace betraying authentic shame culture.

After all the Nazis as nature worshippers were wedded to shame

culture too embracing mass revenge on the basis of their visual and racial ideology. By avoiding individual accountability and responsibility as is common to racist shame cultures they would prefer Spinoza-style pantheist serial mass weapons like germs and chemicals to annihilate the Jews in concentration camps. By contrast in the context of monotheist guilt culture the enemy would be confronted in direct military encounters with fighting man against man. Only after the American leaders learned about the genocidal warfare of the axis powers they chose to protect their troops from annihilation through weapons of mass extinction by turning to the use of big atomic strikes—such as the Americans eventually would employ against Japan in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is no coincidence that the United States remained a predominantly religious country before WW II, wedded to guilt culture, which alone could provide the vertical authority to justify the use of an atomic bomb. Hitler's anti-nuclear twist exposed his pantheist and hideous shame-cultural mindset, shy of true military leadership. Racism deflects the Spinozist spread of guilt for mass killings away from leaders towards decentralized masses. The spread or splitting of individual guilt and deflecting of revenge has long been the logic of death squadrons in military history.

This also goes some way to explaining German postwar hypocrisy of shying away from individual guilt toward mass shame-cultural pacifism. This was mainly driven by the persisting racist family links between father and son or fascist and hippy culture including the continuity of gay-pedophile abuses which would later be camouflaged by the founding of the green-naturalist "youth party". This founding was famously scarred by a spate of sexual child abuses by the Green augurs. This guilt would be deflected in the Spinozist fashion by Green group ideologues which dominated the early communes sharing bed and hearth.

The persistent biologism between Nazis and Greens is stunning

and served the Spinozist dilution of guilt. A good example would be the naturalistic anti-nuclear bias which like Nazism was exported beyond Germany into the whole Western Hemisphere serving as it did as an exculpatory all purpose vehicle. Originating in post-Nazi-Germany it continued in the Christian-Green alliances against civil nuclear power, signalling the persistence of the Hitlerian biologist and techno-phobic bias. Most of all however it naturalised the culmination of Evil which Hitler represented. Atomic power was the Green incarnation and continuation of Evil for the Greens and thus served perfectly for the displacement and denial of the persistence of German guilt. It took the form of fully embracing the shame culture of same sex which incarnated the Nazi mass biologism in gender terms. Yet this why the Hitlerian anti-nuclear bias survived WW II and even spread well beyond Germany towards the West under liberal-leftwing auspices.

Green transformation of Nazi guilt in sexual shame culture was soon to transcend all party splittings between right and left factions in Western politics. It represents a victorious train of thought reminiscent of the continuity of typical shame-cultural naturalism and was normalizing the Nazi excesses, all of which remain shy of accountability while bursting with relativism and gender or racial authenticity and invalidating the enlightened sanity of science exemplified by civil nuclear power. This biologicistic and unenlightened turn is also present in the naturalist ideology of anthropogenic global warming. Just like the antinuclear bias it is driven by pagan or, if you wish, Spinozist biologicistic sentiments. Now the Green abandonment of nuclear power went mainstream under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel and continues until today which does not bode well for Germany retaining a leading role among Western economies. And yet frankly speaking: once the price for this atavistic ideology becomes known to the German public, it will hopefully collapse the Green folly.

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