Revisiting a Marxist Encounter with Spinoza: Alexandre Matheron on Militant Reason and Intellectual Love of God

Ted Stolze

Abstract:
Anglophone Marxists have scarcely engaged with the work of the French philosopher Alexandre Matheron, whose 1969 book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* is widely regarded as a landmark of Spinoza scholarship. Yet Matheron's book is also a sustained Marxist intervention into the history of philosophy. As a result, this article addresses the theological-political value of Matheron's scholarship on Spinoza for contemporary Marxist theory and practice.

Keywords: Alexandre Matheron, Spinoza, Marxist reception of Spinoza, Theological-political implications of love

"The contemporary proletariat is Spinoza's only genuine heir."
—A.M. Deborin

In the introductory remarks to what he had intended in 1972 to be a course on "Spinoza's conception of right and politics," Louis Althusser apologized and announced that he would lecture instead on Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This was because, Althusser explained, Alexandre Matheron's book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* [Individual and Community in Spinoza] had been recently published (in 1969), and he could hardly add anything to what Matheron had already written.[1] Yet over forty years later, Anglophone Marxists have scarcely engaged with Matheron or his major work, which is widely regarded as one of the landmarks of Spinoza scholarship.

Such neglect has doubtless largely persisted because Matheron's massive book (647 pages in French) remains to be translated into English.[2] Although the book continues to be duly—but selectively—referenced by Spinoza scholars, it has yet to be studied carefully and fully appreciated as a sustained Marxist intervention into the history of philosophy. To be precise, Matheron was deeply influenced by the early Marx and sought to apply Marx's concepts of alienation and ideology in order to understand Spinoza. Moreover, he reconstructed Spinoza's political thought along lines that owed much to Jean-Paul Sartre's

1 Althusser 2012, p. 45.

2 An equally massive (741 pages) collection of his articles on Spinoza and seventeenth-century philosophy has subsequently appeared. See Matheron 2011.

account of collective action in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.[3] For example, he proposed an "analogy between the Sartrean problematic of the passage from series to group and the classical problematic of the passage from the state of nature to the civil state."[4]

But for Antonio Negri, such influences were highly problematic. In *The Savage Anomaly*, his own great book on Spinoza, Negri observed that Matheron had introduced into the study of Spinoza "dialectical or paradialectical schemes, characteristics of the existentialist Marxism of the 1960s" but then complained that Matheron had substituted for Spinoza's "constructive continuity" a "determinate dynamism fueled by a process of alienation and recomposition."[5] Let us take Negri's complaint as a provocation and point of departure for engaging in a close reading of *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* and reassessing the value of Matheron's project for contemporary Marxist theory and practice.

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Matheron's approach to the history of philosophy has not been narrowly historicist. For example, although Matheron has carefully considered the historical background to Spinoza's philosophy, he has chiefly reconstructed the development of Spinoza's philosophy in its own terms as a complex system of thought and has rarely quoted directly from Spinoza's writings or situated his own interpretation in relation to other commentators.[6] Ariel Suhamy offers a striking analogy: just as Lucretius sought to convey the essence of Epicurus' philosophy in poetic form, so too has Matheron sought to read Spinoza so meticulously that even if the latter's works "were to disappear from the Earth," his argumentative reconstruction could nonetheless replace them![7]

But what is the value for Marxists to encounter Matheron's reconstruction of Spinoza's philosophical system? It is not to envision

3 Sartre 2004.

4 Matheron 1988, p. 201n.385. See also Matheron 1971, p. 24-5 for a brief but intriguing application of Sartre's concept of "fraternity-terror" in order to characterize the affective dynamics of ancient Israelite theocracy. For more on the affinities between Spinoza and Sartre, see Rizk 1996.

5 Negri 1991.

6 In these respects, Matheron has made common cause with Martial Gueroult and Gilles Deleuze, whose own important books on Spinoza appeared at nearly the same time as Matheron's. See Suhamy 2011 and Vinciguerra 2009.

7 Suhamy 2011.

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Spinoza as a kind of "precursor" to Marx but to approach Marx himself as a "successor" to problems that were already raised by Spinoza.[8] Indeed, Pierre-François Moreau observes that Matheron has been interested less in formulating a "Marxist explanation of Spinozism" than in "posing to Spinoza the questions that Marx posed to himself," for example, "how do individuals enter into relations among themselves—and at what cost"? This latter question, Moreau observes, demanded in the seventeenth-century that a philosopher defend a "theory of the passions."[9] What I would like to do in this article is to contribute to a Marxist theory of the passions by exploring the question of the transindividual pursuit of collective action—but perhaps in an unexpected way for Marxists.

I shall focus on Matheron's warm embrace of Spinoza's conceptions of eternity and the "Intellectual Love of God" as laid out in part 5 of the *Ethics*, that part which especially Anglophone Spinoza commentators have ignored, ridiculed, or quickly passed over in embarrassment along the way to their own reconstructions or evaluations of Spinoza's political thought.[10] For his part, Matheron has admitted that he once had a tendency to think that "Spinozist eternity prefigured the life of a militant, which seemed . . . to be the best example of the adequation of our existence to our essence."[11] I share that tendency, even though obviously Spinoza himself never said anything explicitly along these lines.[12] Yet—as successors to Spinoza—Marxists today can and should consider part 5 of the *Ethics* to culminate the adventure of "militant reason"[13] recounted in the *Ethics*: from the very constitution and composition of individuals to their being estranged from their own mental powers to understand and physical powers to act through the impact of such reactive forces as superstition and sad passions, to the countervailing influence of active affects, to the precarious enlargement of reason; from the level of duration to the

8 Matheron 2000, p. 176.

9 Matheron 2011, p. 7.

10 See Jonathan Bennett's cavalier dismissal of what he calls Spinoza's "unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster" in his discussion of eternity (Bennett 1984, p. 357).

11 Matheron 2000, p. 175. Matheron suggests that his perspective was only a passing phase of youthful enthusiasm, whereas I take up the challenge to make good on an unfulfilled promise.

12 But, as Matheron frequently notes, "he could have." See Vinciguerra 2009, p. 435n. 32.

13 Pautrat 2013, p. 22.

level of eternity; from individual liberation to the prospect of collective emancipation.

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Part 5 of the *Ethics* consists of two main sections or argumentative "movements": propositions 1-20 and propositions 21-40.[14] The first movement concerns the attempt to discover "remedies for the affects" (*affectuum remedia*)[15] and culminates (in propositions 14-20) with a discussion of "love toward God" (*amor erga Deum*). The second movement concerns the pursuit of the highest human happiness and culminates (in propositions 32-37) with an account of the "intellectual love of God" (*amor intellectualis Dei*). Spinoza's distinction between these two kinds of love not only lies at the heart of part 5 but also serves as the highest expression of the emancipatory project detailed in the *Ethics* as a whole. However, before launching into a full investigation of the political stakes involved in this distinction, we should briefly consider the nature and dynamics of each kind of love.

This requires that we return for a moment to Spinoza's treatment of love in part 3, in which love is defined as "joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause."[16] Here, of course, Spinoza is concerned with love for a finite object or person. Such passional love has at least three distinctive features. First of all, it can become partially contaminated with hatred[17] or even fully replaced by hatred.[18] Secondly, it requires some degree of reciprocity by others;[19] in fact, too little reciprocity will typically unleash the pathology of jealousy and result in loathing for

14 Moreau 1994b, p. 55. Propositions 41-42 return to what Macherey 1994, pp. 192-204 has called "an ethics of everyday life" through which, in the face of actually existing non-perfected societies, one might nonetheless strive to lead an honest and generous life and thereby help to eradicate the causes of human servitude.

15 E5p20. All references to Spinoza's *Ethica* are based on Spinoza 1996. However, I have frequently retranslated passages from Spinoza's Latin text, the standard edition of which may be found in Spinoza 1925. I have also adopted the following conventional abbreviations: "p" indicates a proposition, "c" indicates a corollary, "d" indicates definition, "s" indicates a scholium, and "def aff" indicates the definitions of the affects to be found at the end of part 3 (e.g., E3p59s refers to *Ethics*, part 3, proposition 59, scholium.)

16 E3p13s, def aff 6.

17 E3p17.

18 E3p38.

19 E3p33.

what was previously loved.[20] Finally, love for a finite object or person can be destroyed by a contrary and more powerful affect.[21] Yet this does not mean that one's body itself will be destroyed, for the same individual can "successively pass through several contrary passions," and from one moment to the next "the most powerful or the most lively" passion will replace the previously dominant passion.[22] In summary, we can say that the love of finite objects is "precarious": it is both highly variable and inconstant.[23]

By way of contrast, love toward God manifests the highest degree of constancy possible under duration. Feature by feature, we can distinguish between love having a finite external cause and love having an (absolutely) infinite external cause. Firstly, love toward God cannot turn into hatred, since this would require that one both know something and be passive, and thus feel not joy but "sadness accompanied by the idea of God."[24] Secondly, there can be no question of reciprocity in such love, since God cannot be affected by anything human beings do.[25] For this reason, Spinoza argues, "neither envy nor jealousy can taint this love toward God; instead, the more human beings we imagine to be joined to God by the same bond of love, the more it is encouraged. Finally, love toward God cannot be destroyed by a contrary or more powerful affect but can only cease when the body dies. As Spinoza summarizes, "there is no affect that is directly contrary to this love and by which it can be destroyed. So we can conclude that this love is the most constant of all the affects, and insofar as it is related to the body (*quatenus ad corpus refertur*), cannot be destroyed, unless it is destroyed with the body itself.[26]

In the second half of part 5 Spinoza shifts direction to consider "those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation

20 One can see this process at work politically in Spinoza's analysis of the multitude's "indignation" against corrupt rulers (Matheron 2011, pp. 219-29 and Stolze 2009, pp. 151-56), the desire for private property (Matheron 2011, pp. 253-66, and the rationale for excluding servants and women from citizenship (Matheron 2011, pp. 267-304).

21 E4a1.

22 Moreau 1994b, 56.

23 Moreau 1994b, 56.

24 E5p18, c.

25 E5p17c.

26 E5p20s.

to the body (*sine relatione ad corporis*)."[27] He sets forth and defends a conception of the intellectual love of God that goes beyond the constancy evident in love toward God. This is because, as we have just seen, love toward God still occurs on the level of duration and involves conceiving of God as the causal principle of bodily affections of images or things.[28] The intellectual love of God, by contrast, requires that one develop the so-called "third kind of knowledge" (*tertium cognitionis genus*) and, through a process of abstraction, focus exclusively on what constitutes the "eternal part" of love toward God.[29] Consequently, God is no longer conceived as the causal principle of the images of things affecting one's body but has become the orienting principle of how one can come to know the body and mind "from the perspective of eternity" (*sub specie aeternitatis*).[30]

Two of the three chief features of love toward God are "extended" by the intellectual love of God.[31] As was true of love toward God, the intellectual love of God cannot be tainted or undermined by hatred. More strikingly, though, the intellectual love of God cannot even be destroyed by the death of one's body.

Yet there is a crucial difference between these two kinds of love. Whereas love toward God is not reciprocal, the intellectual love of God is indeed reciprocal—albeit in a way unlike love for finite things. That is to say, God is capable of an intellectual love of both human beings and himself.[32] As I shall argue below, it is precisely the return of such reciprocity of love—no longer at the level of duration but at the level of eternity—that allows for the possibility of collective life beyond the need for an *imperium* (Spinoza's term for "state" or "state apparatus").[33]

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Consider now a 1664 letter in which Spinoza consoled his distraught friend Pieter Balling on the recent illness and death of the latter's young son.[34] Spinoza's letter largely concerns the extent to which the imagination can in a confused way generate an omen of a future event—in this case Balling's premonition of his child's death. However, toward the end of the letter Spinoza also discusses the question of the extent to which one's love for another can bind two individuals:

> To take an example like yours, a father so loves his son that he and his beloved son are, as it were, one and the same. According to what I have demonstrated on another occasion, there must be in thought an idea of the son's essence, its affections, and its consequences. Because of this, and because the father, by the union he has with his son, is part of the said son, the father's mind must necessarily participate in the son's ideal essence, its affections, and consequences.

Spinoza contends that, as a result of his love for his son, a father can in some sense become part of his son, as his mind comes to "participate" in the latter's "ideal essence, its affections, and consequences." To say the least, it is not clear what Spinoza means by such "participation" of the father's mind in his son's essence. Balling or any other father could hardly have what Spinoza calls knowledge of the third kind of his son's essence. It would seem that at most one's love for another could be based on either knowledge of the first or second kind. But neither can Spinoza mean the affective imitation associated with love he discusses in part 3 of the *Ethics*,[35] since affective imitation allows separation between two persons to persist. On the level of duration, the father's mind only perceives his son through the ideas of the affections the latter has generated in his body. Spinoza possibly intends something intermediary between these two kinds of identification, which would permit an eventual transition from one to the other. This possibility cannot be ruled out, since Spinoza writes a few lines earlier in his letter that the mind "can confusedly be aware, beforehand, of something that is future."

For Spinoza passional joys have as their "eternal condition of possibility" an "unconscious" or "barely conscious," beatitude.[36]

27 E5p20s.

28 See E5pp14-15.

29 See Matheron 2011, pp. 707-25.

30 E5p30.

31 Moreau 1994b, 58.

32 E5pp35-36.

33 See Moreau 1985.

34 L17. See Matheron 1988, pp. 599-600. On Spinoza's relationship with Balling, and on this personal tragedy (the result of an outbreak of the plague in Amsterdam during the years 1663-64), see Nadler 1999, pp. 169, 212-13.

35 See E3pp19-26.

36 Matheron 1988, p. 600.

Likewise, one's passional identification with others has as its eternal condition of possibility an implicit intellectual communion among the eternal parts of all our minds. Thus, the intellectual communion established by the third kind of knowledge only makes explicit the eternal foundation already implicit in every form of interpersonal love.[37] We might say that access to eternal life realizes for human beings that toward which they have never ceased to strive. Throughout passional individual and collective life (whose travails Spinoza recounts in parts 3 and 4 of the *Ethics*) human beings endeavor as much as possible to agree with other human beings, not out of mere pursuit of self-interest but in order to rejoice in others' love and thereby to love themselves better. Next, at the level of reasonable individual and collective life, human beings come to desire to communicate their knowledge with other human beings in order to share their joy in knowing. But this is still only an abstract truth. They have to grasp that this activity leads them toward an interpenetration of individual minds through the mediation of God's love. Lastly, Matheron notes,

> after having moved from the level of duration to eternity itself, we assimilate ourselves to other human beings regarding what is singular in us: without ceasing to be ourselves, we coincide with them; their beatitude *is* ours. This would result in a complete transparency that, while suppressing alterity without abolishing ipseity, offers us at last, in its finished form, the glory to which we have always aspired."[38]

On the level of duration my love toward God will indeed cease when I die and my body decomposes.[39] However, not even death can destroy my intellectual love of God,[40] for it belongs to the nature of my mind insofar as the latter is the eternally true idea of the singular essence of my body. For Spinoza no true idea can ever become false; its truth persists within God's eternal and infinite Intellect.

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Finally, let us consider the nature of what Matheron has termed "collective eternal life." In a note to E5p40 Spinoza concludes his discussion of the intellectual love of God by alluding to the interpersonal relations that are now possible between a "wise person" and other human beings. He writes that

> These are the things I have decided to show concerning the mind, insofar as it is considered without relation to the body's existence. From then . . . it is clear that our mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity; so that together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite Intellect.[41]

As Matheron has argued, Spinoza makes three claims in this note.[42] First of all, he argues that the mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thought. This is another way of saying that to the extent that one has clear and distinct ideas, one's mind coincides with the eternal idea by which God, as manifested through the attribute of thought, conceives of the essence of one's body from the perspective of eternity.

Spinoza's second claim, however, is that this eternal mode cannot be actualized by itself. Its eternity follows from the fact that it exists simply because God exists, independent of every influence of fortune. But, as E1p21 shows, to which Spinoza refers here, the existence of this eternal mode does not derive from the absolute nature of God; otherwise, it would be infinite. If God—simply because of God's existence—forms the idea of the eternal essence of my body, it is because at the same time God forms eternal ideas of the essences of others' bodies. As a result, each finite eternal mode can exist only in relation to other finite modes.

Spinoza's third claim is that the horizontal order of causal interaction among modes is grounded in a vertical order of divine causal determination. Just as all corporeal essences are logically realizable combinations of motion and rest, so too are the ideas of these essences actually realized consequences of the eternal Idea by means of which God thinks himself.[43] This is why every idea can be said to incorporate

37 In this sense, too, as Deleuze (1998, p. 30) remarks, "Book V must be conceived as coextensive with all the others; we have the impression of arriving at it, but it was there all the time, for all time."

38 Matheron 1988, p. 601.

39 E5p20s.

40 E5p37.

41 E5p40s.

42 Matheron 1988, pp. 609-10.

43 E3p3.

all others, since they derive from the same principle that permits them to communicate with the eternal Idea of God.

The ontological interconnection of these ideas, then, does not exclude their logical independence but, on the contrary, presupposes it. God directly conceives of every singular essence without the mediation of other singular essences. But insofar as God's knowledge of each singular essence refers to the knowledge of their common foundation—which itself refers to the knowledge of all other singular essences—God cannot conceive of a given singular essence without immediately conceiving of all other singular essences. It is because God conceives of all singular essences collectively that at the same time God conceives of the horizontal order according to which they are mutually determined to exist and operate. Thus, the eternal finite modes of the attribute of thought interpenetrate but do not become identical. They mutually imply one another through the mediation of their unique source in God, mutually condition each other through the mediation of this mutual implication, and together wind up forming a single Idea: God's eternal and infinite Intellect. However, contrary to what Spinoza's detractors often assume, this does not mean that in part 5 he is advocating a kind of mysticism.[44] At most we should say that he engages in a non-mystical use of certain mystical intellectual influences.[45]

Essentially, Spinoza is arguing for an indefinite enlargement of collective beatitude or what we could call a "politics of the third kind." A wise person is able to form a "community of minds" not only with a small number of privileged individuals but potentially with all of humanity. Indeed, such a community of all minds has always already existed *in itself*; this community-to-come only needs to be revealed to each of its members and thereby to be realized *for itself*. This requires the recomposition of finite modes and the establishment enhanced communication among individuals.[46] It is worth noting that for Spinoza a community of wise persons would not be "simpler" than societies

44 Moreau 1994a, 287-93 offers a compelling argument that for Spinoza the experience of eternity is not mystical. For a contrary assessment, see Wetlesen 1977; 1979.

45 One might identify at least three such mystical influences: (a) the Kabbalistic school of Isaac Luria, to which Spinoza's Hebrew teacher Menasseh ben Israel belonged; (b) the esoteric writings of Giordano Bruno, with which Spinoza's Latin tutor Franciscus van den Enden was probably familiar; (c) the ideas of the radical collegiant communities with whose members Spinoza associated from the time of his banishment from the Amsterdam synagogue until the end of his life.

46 On the importance of communication in Spinoza's philosophy and political thought, see Balibar 1989, esp. pp. 18-19, 41-42; 2008, pp. 113-18; and Suhamy 2010.

with *imperia* but would embody complex social-political institutions and would promote robust democratic debate.

Perhaps such a community-to-come will never be fully realized, but for the wise person it nonetheless serves as an immanent norm or what Matheron has called "a regulative Idea in the Kantian sense."[47] To the extent that human minds know themselves to be identical to the ideas through which God conceives of their respective bodies, they can acquire at least a partial awareness of their union within the eternal and infinite Intellect. Consequently, as Matheron writes, a wise person strives as much as possible to enlighten other human beings; his or her objective is to insure that "as many minds as possible eternalize themselves as much as possible by enlightening themselves as much as possible."[48] Just as a wise person seeks to increase indefinitely the eternal part of his or her mind, so too should he or she seeks to increase indefinitely the eternal part of everyone else's mind. Of course, the success of this project requires that certain external conditions continue to be satisfied.[49] As Spinoza writes in E4p40, "things that are conducive to the common society of human beings, that is, bring it about that human beings live harmoniously, are useful; those, on the other hand, are evil that bring discord to the commonwealth."

Consequently, a wise person would extend around himself or herself a realm of social peace and friendship, in compliance with Spinoza's recommendations at the end of part 4 concerning the free human being's temperament and way of life: avoiding unnecessary

47 Matheron 1988, p. 612n.95. Here Negri's anti-Kantian emphasis on "constitution" in Spinoza's philosophy is well taken. As Negri puts it, "The world is clay in the hands of the potter. On the metaphysical terrain of surfaces the modality is constructive. The order of the construction is within constitution. Necessity is within freedom. Politics is the fabric on which constitutive human activity principally unfolds" (Negri 1991, p. 186). Since human bodies and minds are capable of acting and perceiving the world in "a great many ways" (E2p14,d), we must avoid speculating in advance about what a given "concatenation" (E5p10) of human bodies and minds could or could not do. Indeed, it remains an ontologically—and so politically—open question whether or not such a "multitude" could construct and preserve an egalitarian community of freely associated individuals.
Although he is an unlikely bedfellow of either Spinoza or Negri, on this point Slavoj Žižek would seem to agree. Reclaiming Marx and Engels' perspective in the *German Ideology*, Žižek insists that communism is not a Kantian "regulative Idea" establishing an a priori ideal, norm, or boundary; rather, communism signifies "a movement which reacts to actual social antagonisms" and then surpasses them (Žižek 2010, p. 211).

48 Matheron 1988, p. 611.

49 For example, famine, epidemic, war, technological collapse, or ecological disaster would, to varying degrees, obstruct the realization of Spinoza's political project and place it historically off the agenda.

dangers,[50] declining others' favors,[51] showing gratitude,[52] acting honestly,[53] and obeying (legitimate) civil laws.[54] In sum, a wise person would strive as much as possible "to act well and rejoice."[55]

Yet Spinoza does not claim that the power of militant reason to restrain and moderate the passions and convert them into active affects is unlimited. On the contrary, in his preface to part 5 he distances himself from Stoic and Cartesian exaggerated claims about the ability of the mind to "acquire an absolute command (*imperium absolutum*) over our passions" through force of will alone. At any rate, as Spinoza argues in E5p42s, a wise person is undoubtedly capable of doing more and is "much more powerful than one who is ignorant and is agitated only by lust (*qui sola libidine agitur*)." Indeed, an ignorant person is "agitated in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true serenity of spirit (*vera animi acquiescentia*)," whereas a wise person "insofar as [he or she] is considered as such (*quatenus ut talis consideratur*), [is] hardly troubled in spirit . . . but always possesses true serenity of spirit (*vera animi acquiescentia*)." It is worth highlighting Spinoza's qualifying phrase "insofar as [he or she is] considered as such" (*quatenus ut talis consideratur*), which reminds us that no human being can attain a condition of self-mastery in accordance with which he or she could establish a personal *imperium in imperio*, and permanently restrain the power of fortune from disrupting the stability of his or her life. All human beings remain a part of nature, and to a greater or lesser extent are acted on by forces beyond their control—forces that give rise, in turn, to the fluctuation of affections and affects. Wisdom only exists as a matter of degree.

Although a wise person would experience less mental agitation and greater calm than an ignorant person, Spinoza does not envision that he or she would or could pursue a quiet retreat "far from the madding crowd." Serenity has nothing to do with contemplation or isolation but instead implies a continued active engagement in the passionate life of human beings.[56] Although, as Roger-Pol Droit observes, to a certain extent Spinoza revives here an ancient figure of the "sage," his perspective is solidly grounded in modernity; for he envisioned "no renunciation of the world, no separation from life, the body, or matter." On the contrary: sages would live in "the fullness of the world."[57]

As a result, politics rooted in knowledge of the third kind would not be abstract and formal but would be qualitative, concrete, and concern the order of everyday existence. As a result, persons who had cultivated the affect of serenity would strive to extricate themselves from fear of failure and death and to understand that freedom is a constant struggle whose path is arduous: along the way victories are invariably mixed with defeats. A serene militant would not only persist in his or her desire for socio-political transformation over the long run but in the very midst of social upheaval would also seek to adopt, and sustain, a perspective of eternity.

However, as Matheron contends, a wise person is involved in a "much vaster meta-historical venture"[58] than even a free human being living under the external authority of an *imperium*. Beyond the various kinds and forms of *imperium*, beyond the transitional stage of an external collective life based on reason, a wise person does all that he or she can to establish an internal "communism of minds," to deepen and enrich the struggle for, and transition to, an egalitarian society of freely associated individuals.[59] Indeed, for Matheron Spinoza's ethical-political

50 E4p69.

51 E4p70.

52 E4P71.

53 E4P72.

54 E4P73. No doubt the legitimacy of specific civil laws has historically always been contested; but arguably there is a greater likelihood that laws fashioned by and within a well-ordered democratic republic are *more likely* to be obeyed. Oppressive regimes, by contrast, tend to generate what Spinoza calls the passion of "indignation" (on the logic of which see Matheron 2011, pp. 219-29; Stolze 2009, pp. 151-56).

55 E4P73s.

56 Del Lucchese 2009, p. 164.

57 Droit 2009, pp. 120-21.

58 Matheron 1988, p. 612.

59 "Freely associated" does not mean a fleeting convergence of individual interests or affective ties but instead a nexus of non-coercive relations among maximally reasoning individuals. For Spinoza every human being is free only insofar as he or she "has the power to exist and operate in accordance with the laws of human nature (*postestam habet existendi et operandi secundum humanae naturae leges*)." Moreover, to the extent that a human being "exists from the necessity of his or her own nature, so too he or she acts from the necessity of his or her own nature; that is, he or she acts absolutely freely (*libere absolute agit)*" (TP 2/7). Finally, if a multitude of human beings were indeed to exercise absolute political freedom, then each individual would no longer be subject to another's power and would be able to live "absolutely, insofar as one can live in accordance with his or her own complexion (*absolute quatenus ex suo ingenio vivere potest*)" (TP 2/9).
References above to Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* (TP) are based on Spinoza 2000. However, I have frequently retranslated passages from Spinoza's Latin text, the standard edition of which may be found in Spinoza 2005. I have adopted the following conventional abbreviation: "TP 2/13," for example, indicates chapter two, section 13.

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project has as its ultimate goal to enable all of Humanity to exist as a totality conscious of itself, a microcosm of the infinite Understanding, in the heart of which every soul, although remaining itself, would at the same time become all the others. This is an eschatological perspective, which would be somewhat analogous to certain Kabbalists, if the final outcome were not in Spinoza pushed back to infinity: this result will never actually be attained; but at least we can always approach it. Thus we shall wind up at a partial solution to the ontological drama at the origin of the human drama: infinite Understanding, separated from itself by the necessity in which it finds itself to think the modes of Extension in their existence *hic et nunc* [here and now], will all the better overcome this separation as Humanity more and more reconciles itself with itself.[60]

What is more, Matheron cites the Soviet philosopher A.M. Deborin, who insisted early in the twentieth century that a "communism of minds" implies a "communism of goods."[61] Indeed, Spinoza envisioned a "complete satisfaction to our individual and interhuman conatuses: surpassing all alienations and divergences; an actualization of the I in the most complete lucidity, an actualization of the We in the most complete of communions."[62] The result would be a "complete and definitive individual liberation in a community without restriction."[63] Moreover, such a community would have no need of juridical laws or institutional constraints based on violence; the *imperium* would "wither away" after having fulfilled the conditions of its own usefulness.[64]

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Let us conclude this estimation of the theological-political value of Matheron's scholarship on Spinoza for contemporary Marxist theory and practice. Laurent Bove has noted that between Matheron

60 Matheron 1988, pp. 612-13.

61 Deborin 1952, pp. 115-16.

62 Matheron 1988, p. 613.

63 Matheron 1988, p. 613.

64 Compare Spinoza's similar speculation in chapter five of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Spinoza 2007). Joseph Almog rightly characterizes Spinoza's position that human social-political organizations arise not by accident or through contracts "against Nature" but simply as a result of "Nature taking its course" (Almog 2014, pp. 63-87). However, he wrongly describes such organizations as so many variations on the "state." For Spinoza, it is possible to envision—but admittedly difficult to realize in practice—a "non-state" (or "post-state") that would require not the return to a simpler, pre-social "state of nature" but instead arduous political struggles and the construction of a more complex—and hence more powerful (E4pp35-37; TP 2/13)—form of social-political organization.

and Spinoza "something happens."[65] Not least of what happens, we have seen, is a revitalization of the ethical-political immanent norm of a classless society, a compelling exemplar[66] of the serene militant, and a stark reminder of the rare, difficult, but excellent path ahead.[67] Perhaps more than ever, that path beckons.

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65 Bove 2011.

66 See E4pref for Spinoza's conception of exemplars in general and human exemplars in specific.

67 As Spinoza concludes the *Ethics*, "If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare" (E5p42s).

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