

Improper Names for God

Religious Language and the “Spinoza-Effect”

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“Equality gives rise to challenging questions which are not altogether easy to answer.” —First words of Frege’s “On Sense and Meaning”¹

THIS PAPER PRACTISES A *NATURPHILOSOPHIE* of language. I treat texts as rocks to examine the linguistic forces that constitute them. In other words, this paper is born out of a hyper-realist attitude to sense that asserts: what goes on in texts should be subject to a “linguistic physics.”² In order to bring out this linguistic physics as fully as possible, what follows is devoted to the logic of sense (or, even better, the physics of sense³) in *monist* philosophies. As I shall argue, monism forces the philosopher to treat words as one more class of body colliding on a surface. This is because the monist assertion that there is ultimately one thing in existence ultimately leads to the materialisation of language (at the same time as the linguistification of matter). A lacuna from the opening to Badiou’s *Logic of Worlds* clarifies this point:

¹ Gottlieb Frege, “On Sense and Meaning” in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic and Philosophy*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 157.

² François Zourabichvili, *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 240.

³ See Joshua Ramey and Daniel Whistler, “The Physics of Sense: Bruno, Schelling, Deleuze” in Alain Beaulieu, Edward Kazarian and Julia Sushytska (eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and Metaphysics* (Lexington, MA: Lexington, 2012 forthcoming).

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Today, natural belief [or democratic materialism] is condensed in a single statement: *There are only bodies and languages*. This statement is the axiom of contemporary conviction...It is then legitimate to counter [it] with a materialist dialectic, if by “materialist dialectic” we understand the following statement...*There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths*.⁴

There is of course a third option: “there are only bodies.”⁵ According to such “monist materialism,” the linguistic is reduced to the corporeal; yet, this is a radical materialism that Badiou seems loath to mention. In this paper, however, I explore the implications of such a corporeal reduction of language by focusing on two monisms—Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Schelling’s *Identitätsphilosophie*.

Such a *naturphilosophische* approach to monism emerges out of previous work in which I began to think through the consequences of the speculative turn for the study of language and concluded that a physics of divine names may well be a helpful way forward.⁶ That is, my contention is that the speculative turn that has recently engulfed continental philosophy needs to be thought through in the realm of philosophy of language. For while this speculative turn is also an anti-linguistic turn,⁷ it does not thereby foreclose philosophical investigation of language altogether. Rather,

⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2010), 2-4.

⁵ As well as the variant: “there is only language.” However, as we shall discover by the end of the paper, “there are only bodies” and “there is only language” turn out to be synonymous.

⁶ Daniel Whistler, “Language after Philosophy of Nature” in Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler (eds.), *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 335-59.

⁷ Harman speaks of “this ghetto of human discourse and language and power” to which philosophy has confined itself “for the past two hundred and twenty years” (in Brassier *et al*, “Speculative Realism,” *Collapse III* [2007], 381) and Meillassoux is likewise concerned with the aporia to which language leads (*After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier [London: Continuum, 2008], 6); see further, Whistler, “Language after Philosophy of Nature,” 336-9.

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language must pass through the speculative epoché to be transformed from a medium that problematizes the very possibility of philosophy to a regional object of inquiry.⁸ The task is to examine language not as it exists for us, but as it exists *in itself*. The route I take in the present paper—thinking through the consequences of monism for a logic of sense—is one way of attaining this end. In particular, I delineate a monist logic of sense as a means of intervening in debates over religious language. Religious language has become a paradigmatic site for anxiety over the slippage of signs. Much ink has been spilled over theorising the complex ways in which language fails to refer in religious discourse: obsessions with the metaphorical, analogic and apophatic character of such language merely name this anxiety. The present paper pursues an alternative path, teasing out a speculative philosophy of religious language by means of an analysis of the fate of names for God in monist logics of sense.⁹

My construction of a *Naturphilosophie* of monist language is organised as follows. I begin by considering precedents in the critical literature for such an enterprise in the work of Warren Montag and François Zourabichvili. Turning to Spinoza's *Ethics*, in the second section, I approach the linguistic physics it exhibits through, what I dub, the problem of improper names. That is, in dialogue with Daniel Barber's recent work on Spinoza, immanence and religion, I argue that linguistic practice in the *Ethics* is illustrated by the identification of the names "God," "substance" and "Nature." In order to make sense of this process of identification, in the third section, I take a detour through F.W.J. Schelling's philosophy of language as presented in his *Identitätssystem*, before returning to Spinoza once again to apply my Schellingian results. Spinoza's identification of names for God is, I suggest, a "Spinoza-effect" to rival the "Carroll-effect" Deleuze identifies in *The Logic of Sense*.

⁸ See Whistler, "Language after Philosophy of Nature," 344-5.

⁹ And to this extent this paper is, very literally, a working out of the project for a physics of *divine names*.

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Part One: Spinoza's Linguistic Physics

One need not look far in either Spinoza's works or those of his circle in Amsterdam to find evidence of sustained interest in language. Balling begins *The Light Upon the Candlestick* with the following remark, "Things are not for words, but words for things"¹⁰ and goes on to present a damning critique of language as impeding knowledge and so plunging mankind into "a sea of confusion."¹¹ Indeed, he remarks, "If we would better express things unto another by words and speeches, we had need find new words and consequently a whole new language: but that would be toil and labour indeed."¹² In the end, though, no such replacement language could ever be satisfactory, since language is *by nature* epistemically deficient. Spinoza shares this critical attitude. He writes, for example, "Words...can be the cause of many and great errors, unless we are wary of them...They are only signs of things as they are in the imagination, but not as they are in the intellect."¹³ This is why in the *TTP* Spinoza is so critical of "superstitious veneration of the letter...adoring images and pictures, i.e. paper and ink, as the word of God."¹⁴ Words, insofar as they attempt to designate truths, fall short.

However, this is not the aspect of Spinoza's philosophy of language on which I concentrate in this paper. My focus is not on language insofar as it represents or makes reference to truths, but language considered *in itself*—as an object existing in its own right with its representative function bracketed. This is one of the implications of a *Naturphilosophie* of

¹⁰ Peter Balling, *The Light upon the Candlestick*; English translation in W. Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (London, 1800), 626.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Benedict Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* in *Collected Works* vol. 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 38.

¹⁴ Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Israel and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164.

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language: words are considered as objects. In the Scholastic terminology that Spinoza appropriates, I am here honing in on the *formal*, not *objective*, reality of language.

That Spinoza himself makes this distinction between the formal and objective reality of language is clear from a remark he makes to Jarig Jelles:

If I see a book containing excellent thoughts and beautifully written in the hands of a common man and I ask him whence he has such a book, and he replies that he has copied it from another book belonging to another common man who could also write beautifully, and so on to infinity, he does not satisfy me. For I am asking him not only about the form and arrangement of the letters with which alone his answer is concerned, but also the thoughts and meaning expressed in their arrangement.¹⁵

The point is that language exists both as a vehicle which expresses “thoughts and meanings,” but also as an object of study in its own right in terms of its “form and arrangement.” The former constitutes the objective existence of language (language as reference); the latter the formal existence of language (its materiality).¹⁶ Each of these types of existence have their own causal chain: hence, “the common man” is perfectly correct to identify the cause of the book in terms of its material production; however, there is also a causal chain of *intentions*, according to which the author tries to refer to concepts or perceptions. Language exists both formally and objectively and there is a separate science (a separate causal account) for each aspect.

It could be argued that Spinoza’s deployment of the image of “the common man” here is polemical: the science of the formal existence of language is trivial and hence not worth pursuing. Moreover, Spinoza’s works do give the impression

¹⁵ Benedict Spinoza, “Letter 40” in *Collected Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 865-6.

¹⁶ The editors in the Shirley edition flag up the difference between “the objective reality of a representation” and “its formal reality” in explaining the above remark. (*Ibid.*, 866)

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that he never pursues the science of the formal reality of language either in an explicit or sustained manner. However, two recent commentators (Warren Montag and François Zourabichvili) have argued that this impression is misleading and that Spinoza does indeed engage in the science of the formal reality of language or “linguistic physics,” as Zourabichvili dubs it.

Montag’s reading of the *TTP* in *Bodies, Masses, Power* involves Spinoza in precisely such an endeavour. As he insists, for Spinoza texts are part of nature: “*Scriptura, sive Natura*.”¹⁷ In other words, writing is a physical body and needs to be treated as such. *Scriptura, sive Natura* illustrates “what makes Spinoza... the first philosopher explicitly to consider Scripture, that is, writing, as a part of nature in its materiality.”¹⁸ It is primarily for this reason, according to Montag, that Spinoza intervenes in the debate over the interpretation of Scripture in the *TTP*: to persuade readers that texts are not merely vehicles for conceptual referents, but should be read as entities in their own right. Spinoza “rejects the quest for the supertextual”¹⁹ or, as Montag puts it more fully, “Writing, whether sacred or not, is fundamentally corporeal... Writing is part of nature, a body among other bodies, and, if it is effective, ‘moves’ other bodies to act or to refrain from action.”²⁰ In short, the *TTP* examines the formal reality of Scripture, ignoring for the most part its objective reality. It contributes to the Spinozist science of the formal reality of language.

Zourabichvili’s *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* explicitly takes up the distinction between formal and objective reality as the guiding thread to Spinoza’s philosophy. In particular,

¹⁷ Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999), 5. It is important to note that Montag conceives such *sive* statements as a form of dialectical identity, where the first term gives way to the second. I offer an alternative, non-dialectical reading below (*ibid.*, 4-5).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21. Montag defines superstition as sole concern for the objective reality of language: “The superstitious person forsakes the surface (of nature, of Scripture) in favour of the depth.” (*Ibid.*, 8)

Zourabichvili attempts to reconstruct a physics of ideas (the laws and structures of thought running parallel to a physics of bodies). His book therefore revolves around “the question of the formal being of ideas.”²¹ Indeed, such a “physics *cogitative*” is noticeably absent in the *Ethics* itself: the precedence Spinoza gives to the attribute of extension in Part II ensures that knowledge is discussed only in its objective existence—insofar as ideas relate to bodies. Curley, for example, takes this as a symptom of Spinoza’s Hobbesian temptation to reductive materialism.²² Ideas seem to exist to the extent that they represent bodies—and Spinoza neglects to sketch in any detail how ideas relate to each other: “The *Spinozan physics of thought* is absent.”²³ This is the lack Zourabichvili addresses. He asks, “What would it be to consider the idea in its formal being and thus to relate it to an autonomous field of production analogous to that of physics, what would it be to conceive a *physics cogitative* with its own laws (not ones merely transposed from the physics of bodies)?”²⁴

For our purposes, the most significant part of his answer to this question concerns the incomplete *Hebrew Grammar*. For Zourabichvili, the very idea of a grammar is a transposition of this quest for a physics of thought onto the linguistic plane: “‘Grammar’ is the name of a *linguistic physics*, for there is no reason not to treat a text as a natural object obeying certain laws.”²⁵ The *Hebrew Grammar* consists in a science of the formal reality of language. It is the linguistic complement of a physics of thought. Hence, just as in a physics of extension bodies are formed and in a physics of thought ideas are formed, in grammar a text is treated as “an individual formed itself from multiple individuals.”²⁶

²¹ Zourabichvili, *Spinoza*, 115.

²² Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 74-8; see Zourabichvili, *Spinoza*, 113-4.

²³ Zourabichvili, *Spinoza*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

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Montag and Zourabichvili's work provide, then, two precursors to my argument in this paper. For them as for me, Spinoza does indeed engage in a science of the formal reality of language, a linguistic physics or (in my anachronistic expression) a *Naturphilosophie* of language. In what follows, I want to pursue this idea in the *Ethics* itself. That is, I argue that the logic underlying much of Spinoza's rhetoric in the *Ethics* can be formulated in terms of just such a linguistic physics. Taking Montag and Zourabichvili's research as my jumping off point, I attempt to fill out in more details just what such a physics would look like in detail. In particular, it is the deployment of the terms "God," "substance" and "Nature" which orients my attempt to formulate a Spinozan "grammar." As I indicated in my introduction, such an enterprise has significant consequences for philosophy of religion (as well as for philosophy of language); hence, I begin by considering a powerful interpretation of Spinoza's use of these three terms from within contemporary, continental philosophy of religion.

Part Two: Naming Immanence with Barber

What follows revolves around two concepts: improper name and proper name. Spinoza defines a proper name as follows: "By means of a proper substantive noun it is possible to indicate only a single individual, for each and every individual has a proper noun for himself only."²⁷ It is a noun that is sufficient for successfully naming one concept and that concept alone (in certain contexts). An improper name can therefore be defined as one name that is insufficient for successfully naming one concept and that concept alone (in any context). These definitions are significant because Spinoza deploys more than one name for God; he speaks of "God," "substance" and "Nature" indifferently, giving none priority. If the name "God" were a proper name, this rhetorical practice would be redundant: there would be little reason to provide more

²⁷ Spinoza, *Hebrew Grammar* in *Complete Works*, 600.

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than one name. Therefore, “God” seems to be employed as an improper name: on its own, “God” is insufficient; it stands in need of supplementation. *Prima facie*, this is odd: “God” seems to be precisely one of the only names that successfully pick out a unique concept. My task therefore is to determine how and why “God” can be thought of as an improper name, despite all indications to the contrary.

Daniel Barber’s recent essay, “Secularism, Immanence and the Philosophy of Religion,” makes use of the impropriety of the Spinozan name “God” in order to reinterpret the notion of the secular. The secular has, of course, come under criticism in the last decade owing to the imperialist nature of its historical manifestations: everything particular in religious traditions has been forced, the argument goes, to be translated or mediated through the universal language of secularity. The secular is a transcendent plane that is imposed on the specificity of religions. Therefore, Barber echoes the call made by all postsecular thinkers:

What must be expelled is what has been installed [by imperial secularity]: a transcendent, universal plane...The capacity to think without a transcendent plane must be pursued. It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that philosophy of religion must become secular.²⁸

Yet, there is an obvious difference that emerges here between Barber and postsecular thinking: while the latter calls for the elimination of the secular *tout court*, Barber demands a *reinterpretation* of the secular as an immanent, and not transcendent, plane.²⁹ And he achieves this end of articulating an

²⁸ Daniel Barber, “Secularism, Immanence and the Philosophy of Religion” in Smith and Whistler (eds.), *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern*, 161-2. A fuller statement of Barber’s arguments can be found in *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion and Secularity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011). Here, his affirmation of the secular is less fulsome.

²⁹ That such a reinterpretation is possible and that postsecular thinkers have therefore foreclosed this alternative by moving too quickly is the wager of Barber’s essay: “I will argue for a secularity that is intrinsic to immanence. Only the rigour of immanence provides the possibility of a secularity that

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immanent secular via Spinoza. Barber argues that there are a number of “paradoxes” in Spinoza’s thought which shed light on how immanent secularity would function: they are “paradoxes that harbour the potentiality for the sort of immanent secularity and immanent affirmation of religion I am proposing.”³⁰ The first paradox takes up Spinoza’s claim: “*Deus sive Natura*.” In complete opposition to the philosophical tradition as well as common sense, Spinoza identifies God and nature—these two names refer henceforth to the same thing. In Barber’s words,

[God or Nature] is, of course, a notoriously enigmatic statement. Is it that these two terms are reversible, where they name the same thing but from different vantages? Is the distinction between these terms meant to preserve a real difference in signification, or is the distinction primarily strategic, in which only one terms designates the real (the other then being strategically preserved yet remaining ultimately derivative or epiphenomenal with respect to the real)?³¹

The problem is merely compounded when one adds “substance” to the mix, since substance is another name Spinoza employs synonymously with God and nature. Spinoza therefore has three names which each seem perfectly appropriate ways of referring to one thing (i.e. that thing which is referred to by the names “God,” “nature” or “substance;” I will henceforth call it, following Barber, immanence). Immanence has three equally good names; this, then, is Barber’s formulation of the problem of improper names.

2.1 *The Second Solution*

In the above quotation, Barber gives two unsuccessful solu-

has nothing to do with a transcendent plane. I will argue, furthermore, that an immanent secularity provides a new way of thinking about religion” (Barber, “Secularism, Immanence and the Philosophy of Religion,” 162).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

tions for justifying the impropriety of Spinozan names. These alternatives exhaust most traditional responses to the problem; however, as Barber rightly asserts, both of them ultimately fail. According to the second alternative, only one of the names is really adequate to immanence or “designates the real” (in Barber’s words). The other two names are inadequate, and employed merely for *strategic* reasons. For example, “God” might be taken as a merely strategic name which Spinoza thinks is inadequate to refer to immanence, but that is still used in the *Ethics* as a cover for his atheism. In short, Spinoza could think that only one of “substance” or “Nature” is an adequate name for immanence; if this is so, the problem of improper names would be dissolved, because actually Spinoza would be committed to the claim that esoterically “substance” (for example) is *the* proper name for immanence.

However, the problem is that there is no sufficient warrant for choosing any one of the three names: Spinoza never makes clear which name he prefers. There is no evidence nor even any criterion on which to make the choice; hence, any choice would ultimately be arbitrary—deciding the undecidable, even. For example, to write off “God” as a strategic cover for Spinoza’s genuine thought seems implausible considering Spinoza’s strident defence of his theism in his letters.³² At no point does Spinoza ever let his guard down to reveal himself an atheist; to call him one, then, is mere guesswork. Indeed, despite Leo Strauss’ fame for jettisoning the linguistic surface of Spinoza’s text in the name of a hidden meaning, even he is suspicious of writing off “God” in the *Ethics* as a strategic cover or “appeasive term.”³³ There is no way of discriminating between “God,” “Nature and “substance” as names for immanence. Hence, Barber speaks of “the inadequacy of a reductive interpretation of Spinoza’s act of naming.”³⁴

³² See, for example, Spinoza, “Letter 43” in *Complete Works*, 879-81.

³³ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 188-90. He insists that prior to any judgment on this matter, “one has to see whether there are not anywhere in Spinoza’s writings indications, however subtle, of a strictly atheist beginning or approach” (ibid., 189).

³⁴ Barber, *On Diaspora*, 3. He continues, “If God is ‘really’ meant to signify

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2.2 *The First Solution*

There is another option considered in the above quotation. On this alternative, each name refers to immanence, but the different connotations (or Fregean “senses”) of each name means that they all add something to our idea of immanence. “Substance,” “God” and “Nature,” that is, all give a different perspective or “vantage” on what immanence is, and so cumulatively such perspectives define it completely. On this view, each name refers successfully but incompletely (or inadequately)—and this is why they require supplementation by each other. This is a version of the claim that each name expresses an attribute of God—an argument that Spinoza himself employs when it comes to human names (specifically, “Jacob” and “Israel”).³⁵

Barber concludes that this alternative cannot be correct either. This is because, for Barber, no name can successfully refer to immanence, because ultimately immanence is “nameless immanence;” it is that which forever eludes signification. If “substance,” “God” and “Nature” fail to refer to immanence (which is inevitable, according to Barber), then they are unlikely to successfully connote aspects of it, however incompletely. Barber’s argument thus makes use of a central concept in his essay—nameless immanence.

Another way of problematizing this supposed solution is to be found in Spinoza’s definition of adequacy in Part II of the *Ethics*: “By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties or intrinsic denominations of a true idea. I say intrinsic to exclude what is extrinsic, namely, the agree-

Nature, what does it mean that God is nonetheless invoked as sign?” (ibid., 4).

³⁵ “You want me to explain by example—though it is not at all necessary—how one and the same thing can be signified by two names...By ‘Israel’ I mean the third patriarch; by ‘Jacob’ I mean that same person, the latter name being given to him because he seized his brother’s heel.” Spinoza, “Letter 9” in *Complete Works*, 783. On the relation of God’s attributes to names, see Gillian Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza: Aura of Expressionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 29-36.

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ment of the idea with its object.”³⁶ An adequate idea, Spinoza insists, has nothing to do with the success or failure of its reference;³⁷ rather, adequacy is the *intrinsic* aspect of truth—and this intrinsic aspect is synonymous with *completeness*.³⁸ An adequate idea is “absolute.”³⁹ This distinction between intrinsic and true maps precisely onto the distinction already made between formal and objective reality: “adequacy” therefore indicates an excellence of formal reality.⁴⁰ Two further premises are required for this argument to function. First, Spinoza’s presentation of his philosophy in the *Ethics* is adequate. This remains a controversial point considering Spinoza’s sometimes negative views on language (discussed earlier). For example, Savan argues, “Spinoza’s views on words and language make it impossible for him to hold that his writings (or anyone else’s) can be a direct or literal exposition of philosophical truth.” He continues, “So sharply does Spinoza separate words from adequate ideas that it is difficult to make out for language any useful philosophical function at all.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, I contend the above claim must be true to some extent for Spinoza to claim to be communicating the truth, and so for present purposes I will assume that Spinoza did think his philosophical writings (somehow) expressed the truth adequately. Second, a complete idea would contain every connotation or “sense” pertaining to its referent—that is, a complete or adequate idea would include every possible perspective on its subject-matter. From these three premises, it follows that each adequate name for immanence is complete

³⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics* in *Collected Works*, IIb4.

³⁷ Instead, a “true” idea “must agree with its object.” (Ibid., IA6)

³⁸ This is the presupposition behind the doctrine of *common* notions: concepts which are legitimately universal and all-encompassing. See *ibid.*, IIp40s1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, IIp34.

⁴⁰ Hence, in what follows, I use “adequacy” to denote the formal excellence of names and “success” to denote the objective excellence of names, i.e. names insofar as they do refer to a concept or percept are successful.

⁴¹ David Savan, “Spinoza and Language” in S.P. Kashap (ed), *Studies in Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 239.

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and there is no necessity for it to be further supplemented by the addition of further names. And to the extent that any one of the names used in the *Ethics* is adequate, additions are redundant: each name is absolute in itself. Therefore, the problem of improper names—the problem of the seeming redundancy of Spinoza’s proliferation of names for immanence—remains intact.

2.3 Barber’s Answer

Barber himself claims that all three names—“God,” “substance” and “Nature”—must be improper, because what they attempt to name (immanence) is ultimately unnameable. This unnameability does not, however, lead to mystic silence, but an endless proliferation of new but necessarily unsuccessful names.

At the heart of his argument stands the claim that immanence is nameless;⁴² in fact, it is unnameable. The reason for this is to be found in how Barber characterises the naming process itself: to name something is always necessarily to install a transcendent plane. Barber writes, if “God” or “Nature” are considered proper names, “in each case immanence has been subjected to a transcendent plane—but immanence remains irreducible to such subjection.”⁴³ To subject immanence to a transcendent plane is to falsify it; therefore, immanence—if it is to remain immanence—cannot be named.⁴⁴ Or, to be

⁴² Barber, “Secularism, Immanence,” 164.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *What is Philosophy?* is of course the source of this claim. Deleuze and Guattari write, “The plane of immanence is like a section of chaos and acts like a sieve...Chaos makes chaotic and undoes every consistency in the infinite. The problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which thought plunges” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson [London: Verso, 1994], 42). In other words, there are three types of thought: chaotic thought which is infinite but inconsistent, immanent thought which is both infinite and consistent and transcendent thought which is consistent but finite. To name immanence is to make it finite; it is to determine it and fix it in certain respects—converting an infinite plenitude into something

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more precise, it cannot be named outside of a fictive register in which naming acknowledges its own inadequacy.

Yet, Barber is no less insistent that, even though it is nameless, immanence still gives rise to an endless proliferation of inadequate names. “Signification is necessary”⁴⁵—it is part of the becoming of immanence that it is necessarily falsified by signification; or, as Barber himself puts it, “The ontological priority of immanence runs into the mediatic priority of signification.”⁴⁶ Hence, though no name ever successfully refers to immanence, with immanence comes an endless proliferation of names which attempt to do so. This proliferation is, dubbed by Barber, the excessiveness or surplus of immanence: immanence goes beyond itself by generating names which endlessly fail to capture it. So, while it is impossible to name immanence, it is also “impossible not to name immanence.”⁴⁷

This is therefore Barber’s solution to the problem of improper names. Spinoza employs improper names for God, because immanence always necessarily generates more and more improper names. Immanence gives rise to “the paradoxical necessity of signifying that which has no proper name.”⁴⁸

2.4 Barber and Apophaticism

At a number of points, Barber strongly distinguishes his position from apophaticism. His solution to the problem of proper names, he claims, “evade[s] the lure of apophaticism.”⁴⁹ This is because, for Barber, apophaticism negates names in favour of a nameless transcendent plane. Therefore, while it

finite and rigid. To name is therefore to install a transcendent plane. This is why to name immanence (non-fictively) is to falsify it, and so immanence is properly nameless.

⁴⁵ Barber, “Secularism, Immanence and the Philosophy of Religion,” 163.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

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may superficially appear that Barber's strategies in dealing with names are apophatic, the result of these strategies is profoundly non-apophatic: rather than indicating something beyond all immanence which cannot be named because it is so other, they indicate something so immanent it cannot be named. Thus, Barber continues, "Immanence exceeds signification not because it belongs to a plane beyond signification—this would turn immanence into yet another mode of transcendence."⁵⁰ Immanence does not exist *beyond* names, but logically *prior to* names (as their transcendental condition).

I am sceptical of this argument for a number of reasons. First, negative theologians would agree that their "God" exists prior to names, as an immanent condition productive of names. That is, Barber's characterisation of apophatic theology as installing a transcendent plane is unfair. Second, apophaticism denotes a practice, rather than a result—a practice of *apophasis* or negation: one can therefore practice apophaticism in the name of immanence, just as happily as one can practice apophaticism in the name of transcendence. Henri Bergson and Samuel Beckett, for example, are apophatic thinkers *of immanence*.⁵¹ Therefore, I characterise Barber's solution to the problem of improper names as apophatic, and this is because it shares the defining characteristic of all apophaticism: a dissatisfaction with language as such and so an overriding concern to negate or show up the inadequacy of that language in the name of the nameless. Barber's central claim that immanence is properly nameless and so therefore

⁵⁰ Barber, "Secularism, Immanence and the Philosophy of Religion," Barber continues in *On Diaspora*, "The operation I am tracing here is not identifiable with the logic of negative theology. While it is the case that negative theology also grapples with the difficulty of naming the nameless, it is equally the case that negative theology addresses this difficulty by signifying that the object of signification is unsignifiable. Immanence, however, cannot permit this strategy, for such a strategy makes the unsignifiable into something that transcends signification" (8).

⁵¹ On Beckett's non-theological apophaticism, see my comments on Sandra Wynands' *Iconic Spaces: The Dark Theology of Samuel Beckett's Drama* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) in *Literature and Theology* 22.4 (2008): 494-7.

all names are inadequate is the very claim repeated by all apophatic thinkers—theologians or otherwise.⁵²

It is here that I locate my fundamental disagreement with Barber's solution to the problem of improper names (at least as this problem is to be found in monistic philosophies). Barber claims that immanence is properly nameless because it exists prior to all naming: "Immanence is prior to signification," he claims—and this priority, he goes on to specify, is an "ontological priority."⁵³ As a reading of Spinoza's use of improper names, the disjunction between names and nameless immanence is misguided for two reasons. First, for a rigorous monist like Spinoza (and, we shall see, the same is true for Schelling), immanence is each name. There is no ontological priority here, but only ontological identity. In fact, the productive monisms of Spinoza and Schelling do away with the hierarchy of being altogether—and this hierarchy is of course the precondition of being able to claim that something is prior to something else.⁵⁴ For Spinoza, there is merely identity. Immanence does not exist before names, it only exists *as* names. In the second half of the paper, I am going to explore the metaphysical reasons why this is the case; for the moment, however, I merely want to claim that in asserting the priority of immanence to its names, Barber does not take Spinoza's monism seriously enough.

Second, if Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* adequately (see section 2.2), then the names he uses in the *Ethics*, like "God," "substance" and "Nature," cannot fail to refer to what they

⁵² For example, Barber stands in the apophatic tradition when he claims that the task for philosophy of religion is to recognise the names of the secular "as fictive" (Barber, "Secularism, Immanence," 169). He writes, "It is thus imperative to inhabit that difference between immanence itself and the fictions it intrinsically produces" (ibid., 169). Apophaticism is precisely the practice by which this difference is recognised and inhabited, for this difference represents the inadequacy of all language to capture what is properly nameless. See also Barber, *On Diaspora*, 8.

⁵³ Barber, "Secularism, Immanence," 163.

⁵⁴ Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza* vol. 1 (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1968), 299; Gilles Deleuze, *Expression in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1990), Chapter 11.

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intend to refer to. If they were to fail, the whole of the *Ethics* would collapse and become mere wordplay with no genuine reference to reality.⁵⁵ Therefore, for Spinoza's philosophy to function as philosophy (i.e. to make claims about the truth), Barber cannot be right—Spinoza's improper names for immanence must actually *succeed* in naming immanence.

These two reasons indicate that Barber's solution to the problem of improper names cannot be correct in Spinoza's case (although it might be a perfectly good solution more generally). Barber is wrong to claim that Spinoza employs improper names because they fail to refer. Moreover, just as Barber's solution to this problem fails, so too does every apophatic solution, because apophaticism necessarily claims that all names fail in some way, shape or form. It is here that I am intervening in debates in philosophy of religion: apophaticism is not the answer here, and this is a hard pill for continental philosophy of religion to swallow. The natural inclination of most continental philosophers of religion is to resort to apophatic solutions when there is any kind of conundrum concerning language. As soon as a difficulty concerning religious language is raised, the assumption is that language is a falsification, because God is other or because God transcends human discourse or because language is structured by *différance* and so on. This is one of the reasons I am focusing on Spinoza and Schelling here, for they are the philosophers most distanced from the apophatic worldview. Their uncompromising rationalism—their concern to know everything because everything is immanent—means one cannot explain away their philosophy of religious language apophatically. One of the defining characteristics of such kataphatic thought is the excess of names they deploy—one name is insufficient for their purposes. Hence, Spinoza uses "God," "substance" and "Nature" synonymously, while Hegel speaks almost synonymously of "God," "the absolute" and "Spirit." My contention is that every apophatic solution—every solution premised on the inadequacy of names—fails to ac-

⁵⁵ It will be seen later in the paper that I need to qualify these claims somewhat.

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count for this plurality of names. Spinoza therefore wakes us from our apophatic slumbers: he forces us to look elsewhere, re-evaluate the problem of religious language and do philosophy of religion differently. In other words, philosophers of religious language have been obsessed with the inadequacy of names to the point of ignoring kataphatic deployments of language. However, the speculative turn is kataphatic in orientation—and much work now needs to be done on analysing and unpacking the way kataphatic texts signify.

Part Three: Schelling's Metaphysics of Language

I thus need to approach anew the problem of improper names in order to work out what a metaphysics would look like in which what is referred to by “God” or “substance” or “Nature” is ontologically identical with those names. Through this metaphysical inquiry, I hope to show how monists solve the problem of improper names. To do this, I now turn to the *Identitätssystem* of F.W.J. Schelling.⁵⁶ In the *Identitätssystem*, Schelling demonstrates why, on the basis of a productive monism, God is the name “God” or reality is the name “reality.” The metaphysics of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* reveals how names can be improper.

3.1 Schelling's Productive Monism Presented in Six Propositions

Proposition One: Immanence has more than one name

Unsurprisingly enough, Schelling gives a plurality of names to immanence (or what fundamentally exists in reality). He

⁵⁶ For a fuller account of and further justification for the reading of Schelling which follows, see Daniel Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 forthcoming). In this paper, I assume that between 1801 and 1805 Schelling's work forms a self-sufficient whole and that the major works of this period can therefore be studied in isolation from the rest of his corpus. The philosophy of this period is called, following Schelling's lead, the *Identitätssystem* (the system of identity), and all of the claims I make about Schelling in what follows are meant to apply to the *Identitätssystem* alone.

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employs these names practically interchangeably throughout his *Identitätssystem*. The names include “the absolute,” “identity,” “indifference” and “God.” It is not the case that Schelling prefers one of these names (for example, “the absolute”) and uses the others derivatively or secondarily to describe certain properties or attributes of this absolute. Each name is an adequate name for what is. There is no necessity for Schelling to use more than one name, yet he does: “God,” “identity,” “indifference,” “reality” and “the absolute” are improper names. Why, to ask once again, is Schelling so insistent on employing them all?

Proposition Two: Immanence is one

The *Identitätssystem* effectively commences with Schelling’s claim, “Absolute identity is not the cause of the universe, but the universe itself.”⁵⁷ Combating philosophy’s “long and profound ignorance about this principle,” Schelling rediscovers the “true” nature of reality—monism.⁵⁸ He writes, “All that is is, to the extent that it is, One...*There is everywhere only One Being, only One true Essence.*”⁵⁹ This is, of course, why the *Identitätssystem* is called the *Identitätssystem*, because all of reality is self-identical. Immanence is identical with itself.

Proposition Three: Immanence consists in form and essence

Schelling sees immanence as comprised of two elements—essence and form. While these two elements are utterly identical, the philosopher is able to isolate them individually. So, reality is *in essence* indeterminate identity, but it is also necessary

⁵⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 4, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-61), 129; Schelling, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, trans. Michael G. Vater in *Philosophical Forum* 32.4 (2001), 359.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129, 359.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6:156; Schelling, *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular in Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 153.

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that essence cannot exist without form. Essence always exists formed—there are no exceptions. There is therefore no such thing as unformed immanence; there is no such thing as essential identity free from formal identity. Immanence is always already determinate. There is *no ineffable “behind” or “beyond”* to what is expressed that never manifests itself; there is no hidden transcendence.

Proposition Four: Form produces essence

Form neither represents nor emanates from essence; instead, Schelling conceives of a third model for the form/essence relation. The foundation on which Schelling’s alternative is built is the principle that formation is inescapable. For Schelling, this means that immanence exists by producing its own essence through a process of formation. Schellingian philosophy conceives essence as *excessive*: the produced essence is always *more than* it was prior to production. Determination is not a prison which stops us reaching what matters most; what matters most is in fact first *produced* in the very act of determination. Formation can never be a diminution, alienation, distortion or loss of essence. There is a perpetually excessive surplus of essence.

Proposition Five: Even though all forms express identity, there is more than one form

If everything is the same—if Schelling is a monist—how can formal *identity* give rise to the irreducible multiplicity of everyday life? Schelling insists that form is not singular; there is a plurality of formal identities in existence. In other words, reality is refracted into multiple instances of identity. This is how plurality arises in the Schellingian cosmos. Schelling designates these various manifestations of the law of identity *Darstellungen* (or presentations or exhibitions). Every thing and every idea is a *Darstellung*, much like it is a mode for Spinoza.

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Proposition Six: Differentiation is quantitative

What then differentiates these forms? Schelling's answer is classically monist: there is only one substance that comprises all there is; the only differentiating attribute is therefore the degree to which this substance is instantiated. This is what Schelling means when he speaks of "amounts of being"⁶⁰ or "degrees of the absolute,"⁶¹ or "different grades of identity."⁶² It is also what Grant means when he speaks of "the quantity of identity" each entity possesses for Schelling.⁶³ Two claims are therefore central to Schelling's doctrine of quantitative differentiation: first, differentiation is a matter of form, and, second, it is a matter of *the degree or the excess* to which each form produces essential identity.

3.2 Schelling's Theory of Language

Every *Darstellung* is a construction of reality to a certain intensity; there is therefore a hierarchy of *Darstellungen* proceeding from those which are maximally productive of identity to those which are minimally intense. Schelling once more has numerous names for the type of form that exists at the top of this hierarchy: "idea" is one name he uses, but for our purposes the most pertinent name is "symbol."

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, Schelling writes. "*Darstellung* of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular...is possible only symbolically."⁶⁴ The symbol represents the highest, most intense form—it stands at the top of the hierarchy: "The symbolic is the

⁶⁰ Schelling, *Werke*, 4:123; Schelling, *Presentation*, 355.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2:64; Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 48.

⁶² Schelling, *Werke*, 4:431.

⁶³ Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophy of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006), 174.

⁶⁴ Schelling, *Werke*, 5:406; Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989), 45.

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absolute in itself.”⁶⁵ Examples of symbols for Schelling are organisms, artworks, philosophy and theology—they are all examples of maximally intense productions of reality. Yet, Schelling is equally insistent that not all symbols are equally intense, because they do not all manifest the identity of *real and ideal* (or matter and idea) to the same extent. That is, Schelling conceives the possibility of predominantly real and predominantly ideal symbols. The extent to which symbols identify real and ideal thus becomes the criterion by which to differentiate and assess them. And, in fact, Schelling claims, there is *only one symbol* which identifies the real and the ideal fully, and this is symbolic *language*.

Language, Schelling writes, “is the most appropriate symbol of the absolute or infinite affirmation of God”⁶⁶: it is an absolute *Darstellung*, so exhibits identity to the maximum possible extent. Language is not just an ordinary *Darstellung* (or form of reality), it is not merely one instance of a symbol, it is the most intense possible symbol. Schelling argues that language is the only symbol which overcomes the real/ideal binary, and so it expresses identity to an even greater extent than any other symbol. It is the symbol of symbols—the “indifference of indifference...the identity of identity.”⁶⁷ In Wanning’s words, “Nothing more intense is possible within the *Identitätssystem*.”⁶⁸ The fact that language is the only symbolic form to fully indifferently real and ideal has the further consequence that *language manifests reality most*. To describe something in language is to produce it in the most intense possible manner. Entities exist most in words. Or

⁶⁵ Henry Crabb Robinson, “Schellings Aesthetik” in Ernst Behler, “Schellings Ästhetik in der Überlieferung von Henry Crabb Robinson,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 83.1 (1976), 161.

⁶⁶ Schelling, *Werke*, 5:483; Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 100.

⁶⁷ Jochen A. Bär, *Sprachreflexion der deutschen Frühromantik: Konzepte zwischen Universalpoesie und grammatischem Kosmopolitismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 165.

⁶⁸ Berbeli Wanning, *Konstruktion und Geschichte: Das Identitätsphilosophie als Grundlage der Kunstphilosophie bei F.W.J. Schelling* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1988), 166.

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put differently, the reality of an entity is its name. Discourse, names and propositions *are* more than anything else can possibly be.

Our next question is what does this mean for language—what is the structure of a Schellingian name? There is one fundamental element to Schellingian symbolic language: “Meaning is here simultaneous with being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it.”⁶⁹ Schelling is committed to an absolute identification of meaning and being in symbolic language. What a word means is nothing different from what it is. Language does not signify something outside itself. It is its own meaning. Words do not represent something in the world; in fact, there is no outside to words. In short, Schelling eliminates signification from symbolic language. Meaning does *not* (even partially) exist separate from being—and so no process or activity (including signification) is required to transfer from the latter to the former. Language remains completely immanent to itself: it is completely self-contained and self-sufficient. Signification and reference are no longer valid categories.

If reference is no longer a valid category for understanding language, what is? As we have seen, forms are characterised by the extent they produce essential identity—and the same is true for language. So, production of identity is the goal of Schellingian symbolic language; it is what remains after the elimination of reference. What matters is not the referent (for there is none), but the product. Symbolic language does not refer to reality; it *produces* reality. The rejection of reference frees language from correctly or incorrectly representing an already existing entity; what is rather at stake is how intensely entities are generated through language. *Description is replaced with production.*

There is a further important consequence: if words produce the absolute more or less intensely, then there should be ways of increasing the intensity of such production. These modes of intensification I dub *symbolic practices*. Through them, Schelling hopes to transform all language into symbolic

⁶⁹ Schelling, *Werke*, 5:411; Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, 49.

language. What we have here is a version of the Romantic process of *Bildung*—what Schelling dubs, “the gradual intensification of all forms,”⁷⁰ and the symbolic practice required to make language symbolic is *eclecticism*: it is only through the eclectic accumulation of names for reality that Schelling thinks language (and so discursive practices, like philosophy) can become fully symbolic.

Returning to Schelling’s metaphysics shows why: Schelling is a monist with regard to essence: there is one essence to reality, and this essence is identity. In consequence, all sciences have *essentially* the same subject matter—identity. All future scientific endeavour will repeat the same essence over and over. Scientific progress does not therefore consist in what is said, but *how* it is said. The *form of science* becomes the crucial issue. The Schellingian ideal is a form of philosophy (a language) which produces essential identity with the maximum possible intensity. This point can be turned reflexively back onto Schelling’s own practice: the *Identitätssystem* merely repeats the same essence as all other philosophies. It is when it comes to *form*, Schelling claims, that it is to be set above everything else. The *Identitätssystem* is self-consciously constructed around this insight into the centrality of form to the philosophical endeavour. This is ultimately the reason why Schelling experiments with dialogue (in *Bruno*) and with the *more geometrico* (most rigorously, in the 1804 *System*); it is the reason why he adopts Spinozist vocabulary, then Platonic vocabulary, then theological vocabulary. All these various experiments in form are variations on one fundamental practice which Schelling thinks will make his system *the most* intense. According to this symbolic practice, all previous scientific discourse is reduced to the status of *materials* that can be appropriated to aid the production of identity. I designate this practice, “absolute eclecticism”—that is, the magpie-like appropriation of individual concepts and styles from various scientific discourses for the sake of producing reality.

⁷⁰ Schelling, *Werke*, 5:147; Schelling, *On Construction in Philosophy*, trans. Andrew A. Davis and Alexi I. Kukuljevic in *Epoché* 12.2 (2008), 285.

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In other words, all forms produce identity, but some do it better than others; therefore, the task of the thinker is to locate the most productive aspects of each science and assemble them into a system; the result is a system of identity, an *Identitätssystem*. The thinker must choose anything and everything that will intensify her form of discourse and so intensify identity. In consequence, impropriety becomes the very ideal of science—and the *Identitätssystem* in particular is built on the virtue of impropriety. An improper science is one unconcerned with borders between fields, but which plunders every science (and every name) *equally* in order to intensify its productivity. It is the reason behind Schelling's appropriation of Platonic language and Spinozist method into his philosophy, and—most significantly for this paper—eclecticism is the reason behind Schelling's use of improper names. “God,” “the absolute,” “identity,” “indifference” are names taken from various different discourses and brought into the *Identitätssystem* for the purpose of intensifying the philosophical language in which Schelling writes. Improper names for God are eclectically appropriated and deployed for the sake of a higher level of intensity in the *Identitätssystem* itself. Because Schelling employs improper names, he produces reality better.⁷¹

This long detour into Schelling's philosophy of language therefore helps with the problem of improper names. Two conclusions are especially crucial. First, reality is most paradigmatically a name. What exists most intensely as a name. Second, Schelling demonstrates that a monist must do away with reference: referential relations assume some difference between word and meaning—and this cannot be the case for monists. Adding these claims together leads immediately to the conclusion: names for God are God or names for immanence are immanence. For monists, whether a name successfully refers is a redundant question: the adequacy or inadequacy of a name has nothing to do with reference. The *apophatic*

⁷¹ By which I mean intensively “better” or “better” in the sense of Spinozan adequacy, rather than “better” in reference to an external model or archetype.

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contention that names necessarily fail to refer to reality has no relevance to the problem of improper names as it occurs in Spinoza and Schelling's philosophy. Instead—leaving behind the way apophaticism usually frames the debate—I contend that absolute eclecticism provides the model to account for improper names: the more names given, the more intense scientific language becomes. These names are intensive productions of the absolute—and they become more intense, the more names are used. The success of the productive monism Schelling proposes in his *Identitätssystem* ultimately depends on the plurality of names he incorporates into this system. Improper names are, for Schelling, always an improvement over proper names, because plurality is an intensification. This, then, is Schelling's solution to the problem of improper names.

Part Four: Philosophy of Language for Monists

4.1 *Spinoza Revisited*

This Schellingian solution illuminates Spinoza's own employment of improper names. First, Spinoza's rigorous commitment to immanence means that there is no such thing as pure immanence. Any notion of immanence existing separately from its manifestations is false. Just as for Schelling there is no essence that is not formed, so too for Spinoza there is no substance outside of its modes.⁷² *Immanence does not in any way stand above or outside its expressions.* Substance is “exhausted” in its modes. There is nothing behind the manifestations, for they are reality. In consequence, names for God (or substance or Nature) do not name something distinct from these names, for there is no substance as such or God as such. Immanence is fully and completely expressed in its modes—and names are modes too. Therefore, immanence is nothing outside of these names. Immanence is fully contained in the very names

⁷² See Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 27; Genevieve Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 41.

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for immanence. Names are self-sufficient: they need refer to nothing outside themselves. So, just like Schelling, Spinoza—as a rigorous monist—must eliminate the referential relation from his philosophy. “God,” “substance” and “Nature” are not referential, so whether they *refer* to immanence or not is just not an issue. There is no such thing as apophaticism for Spinoza, since a name cannot fail to refer.

This suggests an answer to the overriding question: if each name is a self-sufficient expression of immanence, why the need for a plurality of names? For Schelling, while all names construct immanence, some do so better than others—and the intensity of this construction ultimately depends on the number of names appropriated into philosophy (for it is *through* this plurality names are intensified). I contend that something like this must be true for Spinoza: the adequacy of the names employed in the *Ethics* depends on their interrelations with other names. The more complex the network of names, the more adequate the philosophy. So, just like Schelling, adding names intensifies philosophical discourse.

Numerous scholars have acknowledged that the *Ethics* is a text in which the meaning of traditional, philosophical names are transformed. Rocco Gangle writes, Spinoza “uses old terms in new ways such that a new subversive notion is created,”⁷³ continuing,

Spinoza consistently employs philosophical terminology that has come to possess relatively precise and technical meanings across the sedimented histories of ancient philosophy and medieval Scholasticism, yet Spinoza uses these terms in ways that shift or distort their traditional senses, imposing unfamiliar meanings...[often] directly opposed to the traditional sense.⁷⁴

Spinoza’s use of “God” is a case in point: Spinoza begins with

⁷³ Rocco Gangle, “Theology of the Chimera: Spinoza, Immanence, Practice,” in Smith and Whistler (eds.), *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern*, 26.

⁷⁴ Ibid. See also Zourabichvili, *Spinoza*, 111-2; Aaron Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 6.

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a traditional-looking definition only to demonstrate over the first fourteen propositions that logical rigour necessitates a new, heterodox understanding of this name. Names are mutated by passing through the propositions.

Moreover, and this is the key claim, names are mutated by means of the relations they take up in respect to other names. Transformation occurs through the continual juxtaposition of different terms; their resulting new relations in Spinoza's philosophical system is what alters their meaning. In Gangle's words,

[A name is a term] whose relational context becomes altered. Its new sense is generated not internally or intensively, but externally or practically through syntactical and formally deductive connections with other terms.⁷⁵

This is what Gangle (following Zourachbivili) terms “a chimerical translation”⁷⁶: it is a form of alchemy by which names are transmuted by mixing, dissolving and colliding with other names, in the same way as all modes mix, dissolve and collide with each other. Names (as one specific type of mode) should not be excluded from this physics (as we have seen Zourachbivili and Montag argue). A *physics of names* is just as necessary as a physics of passions.

Hence, Gangle speaks of “a new textual practice of metaphysics”⁷⁷ in regard to the *Ethics*. The results of Spinoza's philosophy are generated on the textual surface: Spinoza's propositions chart the manner in which names collide—and this mapping process is named the geometrical method. Gangle thus speaks of the geometrical method in terms of topographical maps of “peaks and valley floors...or the hubs of a transportation

⁷⁵ Gangle, “Theology of the Chimera,” 27. Gangle's work brings out the close relation between the problem of improper names and the problem of individuation in Spinoza.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

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network.”⁷⁸ Names collide—and the record of these collisions is Spinoza’s philosophy.

In short, therefore, Spinoza employs improper names because only through putting to work a plurality of names can their mutation be guaranteed. “God” is an improper name because it needs other names (“substance” or “Nature”) in order to give rise to the philosophical transformations necessary for adequate philosophy. Spinoza puts a plurality of names to work in order to intensify his philosophy: the more relations that build up between these names over the course of the *Ethics* (i.e. the different combinations and relations envisioned in the propositions), the better the philosophy.

Moreover, the type of relation that holds between different names is always, I contend, *identity*—just as for Schelling. This is another consequence of monism: everything is ultimately one, therefore the only possible form of relation between names is equality. So, the adequacy of Spinoza’s system is in fact achieved by means of the successive *identifications* of a plurality of names. As these identifications proliferate, Spinozan philosophy intensifies. “God” is not only equal to “substance,” it is equal to “Nature” and so “Nature” must be equal to “substance.” It is implicitly in this manner that Spinoza’s philosophy proceeds over the course of hundreds of propositions. And, what is more, this mode of procedure is the Spinozist solution to the problem of improper names.⁷⁹

Armed with these resources, it is time to briefly return to Barber’s argument. In opposition to Barber, I maintain that immanence does not precede the name; immanence exists only as it is expressed in the name. In other words, immanence does not presuppose a nameless plane, but rather *a textual surface on which names collide*. Immanence is these names (such is the necessary implication of Spinoza’s monism) in their

⁷⁸ Gangle, “Theology of the Chimera,” 31.

⁷⁹ It needs to be kept in mind that I am not arguing that the Holocaust is the same as ice cream for a monist (as one critic has recently argued [Conor Cunningham, *Genealogies of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2002, 68)]), but that the *names* “Holocaust” and “ice cream” are ultimately identified in an *ideal* monist discourse (see Part Five). The ethical implications of this difference are substantial.

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constantly complexifying interrelations and identifications. The surplus which characterises immanence is generated as more and more names are identified (for these identifications are the very surplus of immanence). The more improper names, the more intensely immanence exists. A philosophy of the secular, therefore, must name immanence as much as possible: not because we are doomed to fail again and again, but because naming intensifies immanence. Names bring immanence into being.

4.2 *The Logic of Monist Sense*

Improper names are involved in a process of indefinite identification, where the making identical of one name to another gradually intensifies philosophical form, making the discourse more and more adequate. This is how names function once reference is eliminated (as it must be for monists). And this is the solution to the problem of improper names: the more names are made identical, the better the philosophy.

Let us take one more look at this from a different angle, beginning from the standard Fregean picture of language, in which all names have both sense and reference. Frege defines a name as a word or sign which *expresses* its sense and *designates* its reference. As well as referring, names express—and this is the key to unlocking the problem of improper names for monists. Once reference is eliminated, what remains is *expression* or sense.⁸⁰ What is particularly pertinent here is that Frege developed this theory precisely through an examination of the sorts of cases we have been considering. What is the difference, he famously asked, between saying “the morning star is the morning star” and “the morning star is the evening star?” That is, if “morning star” and “evening star” have the same reference, why use two names—what epistemic benefit is there in using two names for the same thing rather than one? In other words, when reference is redundant, what is left of language? As one commentator puts it,

⁸⁰ Or what Schelling calls “production.”

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If the names corefer, there is no difference in the references of the constituents of $a=a$ and $a=b$...So either they cannot express different propositions, or else—and this is the inference Frege drew—what determines the proposition...cannot just have to do with the structure of the [sentence] and the *references* of its constituent words and phrases.⁸¹

In other words, either improper names are useless, because they all mean the same thing (by picking out the same referent),⁸² or there is something other than reference at stake in language which gives rise to improper names. The irreducible remainder—what is left over when reference becomes redundant—is sense. As Deleuze emphasises in *The Logic of Sense*, sense is absolutely irreducible to reference, for they work according to very different logics. The logic of sense is not the logic of truth and falsity.⁸³ For monists (who have eliminated reference), names *cannot* be true or false because they can neither succeed nor fail to refer to something external. Sense works on a completely different model, a model of more or less intense expression.⁸⁴

Monist philosophical texts therefore become surfaces on which names intensify their sense. This is what is theorised

⁸¹ Graeme Forbes, “Proper Names” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol. 7, 752.

⁸² “If we were to regard equality as a relation between that which the names ‘a’ and ‘b’ designate, it would seem that $a=b$ could not differ from $a=a$ ” (Frege, “On Sense and Meaning,” 157).

⁸³ He writes, “This is the most general problem of the logic of sense: what would be the purpose of rising from the domain of truth to the domain of sense, if it were only to find between sense and nonsense a relation analogous to the true and the false?” Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 1990), 80.

⁸⁴ If, as Gabriel has argued, Frege establishes the distinction between sense and reference in order to show that “the semantic organisation of meaning, i.e. the order of words, is not identical with the ontological order of things” (Markus Gabriel, “The Mythological Being of Reflection” in Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* [London: Continuum, 2009], 65), then by eliminating one of the terms in this distinction (reference), Spinoza and Schelling reaffirm the identity of words and things. Significantly, Frege does consider the possibility of “a special term for signs intended to have only sense” (Frege, “On Sense and Meaning,” 163)—but his choice, “representation,” does not seem helpful for my purposes here.

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in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* and practiced in Spinoza's *Ethics*. The *Ethics* as a whole is, to quote Deleuze out of context, "a machine for the production of incorporeal sense."⁸⁵ It is a surface on which names connect with each other in order to generate more and more intense—so more and more adequate—series of propositions. This is the "surface effect" which donates philosophical sense. Names "frolic on the surface of being, and constitute an endless multiplicity of incorporeal beings."⁸⁶

Now, as Deleuze makes clear, different texts chart different surface effects: each philosophical singularity is generated from specific operations on the textual surface. Hence, in *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze describes a specific set of surface operations employed by certain philosophers which he dubs, the "Carroll effect":

Sense is always an *effect*...or, even better, a surface effect, a position effect and a language effect...It is a product which spreads out over, or extends itself the length of, the surface...Such effect, or such a product, have usually been designated by a proper and singular name...Thus physics speaks of the "Kelvin effect," of the "Seebeck effect," of the "Zeeman effect," etc.⁸⁷

This specific set of operations of the Carroll effect consists in paradoxes which give rise to heterogeneous series.

What I have been arguing in this paper is that there is a specific "Spinoza effect" which describes the set of operations employed by a rigorously monistic philosophy—and this "Spinoza effect" is irreducible to the "Carroll effect" described by Deleuze. There is ultimately only one operation performed on the surface of monistic philosophy—identification. Identifications proliferate indefinitely, devouring all that is different in the name of the same. There can be no contradiction, no absurdity, no excess or lack—only a continual and all-devouring

⁸⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 82.

⁸⁶ Bréhier, quoted in Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 8. In short, every name in Spinoza's philosophy falls foul of Meinong's paradox! See *ibid.*, 41-2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

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process of identification.⁸⁸ This is a “Spinoza effect”—a logic of sense without paradox, a proliferation of identifications on the textual surface of philosophy. The more names, the more identifications, the better the philosophy—this is not only true for Schellingian absolute eclecticism, it is true for all rigorous monists.

Part Five: An “Ideal” Spinoza

In the previous section, I outlined the rudiments of an “ideal” *Ethics* which would read as follows,

- Proposition 1 “Substance”
- Proposition 2 “Substance” = “God”
- Proposition 3 “Substance” = “God” = “Nature”
- Proposition 4 “Substance” = “God” = “Nature” = “Banana”
- Proposition 5 “Substance” = “God” = “Nature” = “Banana” = “Harry Lime”

This structure would proceed *ad infinitum*, rather in the manner of the paratacticism analysed in *Anti-Oedipus* (substance... and God...and Nature...).⁸⁹ It exemplifies the logic of monist sense and the deployment of improper names. In this “ideal” structure of the *Ethics*, name after name is identified for the sake of philosophical amelioration. However, what becomes striking at this point is the discrepancy between this “ideal” *Ethics* and the *Ethics* Spinoza actually wrote. The *Ethics* does not look like this—and this is because the above logic of monist sense is only a partial reconstruction of Spinoza’s philosophical rhetoric. There is more going on and there are more linguistic forces at play than just the identification of names. Spinoza exceeds “the Spinoza effect.”

⁸⁸ Even if Spinoza is read in terms of parallelism, there can in the end be only one series of sense, i.e. the series of propositions of the *Ethics* itself. This is one of the meanings of Spinoza’s claim that everything follows necessarily from God’s essence; there are no parallel series of sense.

⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al (London: Continuum, 1984), 6.

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Yet, the above rewriting of the *Ethics* is not only ideal to the extent that it differs from the real *Ethics*, it is also ideal in a second sense. It reconstructs the *Ethics* by means of one ideal, expansive linguistic force alone. In other words, what has been under discussion in this paper is merely one element of a Spinozist *Naturphilosophie* of language: the ideal force by which more and more names are appropriated into relations of identity.⁹⁰ It corresponds to Negri's delimitation of an "ideal phase" in Spinoza's thinking (an idealism that is not surprising considering the proximity of Spinoza to Schelling in this paper).⁹¹ Here, we can fully realise the extent to which the transformation of language into a body has reversed itself into a transformation of bodies into language. The materialistic reduction of language into a *Naturphilosophie* leads necessarily to the anti-realistic insistence that there is nothing outside the name, that names are most real. Perhaps Badiou failed to acknowledge the radical materialism in which there are just bodies because this turns out not to be materialism at all, but linguistic idealism.

It is no surprise that the above structure comes closest to being realised at the end of Part V of the *Ethics*—the fulfilment and culmination of Spinoza's construction of philosophy where he embraces monism most fully. Here, indeed, Spinoza's propositions are often little more than a series of equations. To take one example, the human subject loves God,⁹² God loves himself⁹³ and these two acts of love are identical: "The mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself."⁹⁴ Such a process of identification culminates

⁹⁰ As Žižek points out, expansion and the traversal of plurality are proper to monism: "Spinoza, the philosopher of the multitude, is, quite logically, also the ultimate monist, the philosopher of the one." *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003), 24.

⁹¹ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 33-9.

⁹² Spinoza, *Ethics*, VP15D.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, VP35.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, VP36.

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in VP36C: “Insofar as God loves himself, he loves men, and consequently God’s love of men and the mind’s intellectual love of God are one and the same.”⁹⁵ Here is how Matheron describes this climax to the *Ethics*:

Subject and object are utterly confused with one another. I love myself in God, I love God, God loves himself in me, God loves me. The four affirmations are equivalent...The terms of the relation are purely and simply identified...[in] the following quadruple equation: our love for God = our love for others = God’s love for men = others’ love for us = others’ love for God.⁹⁶

Part V ends in a single series of equations proliferating identities.

However, the question of how Spinoza gets to this point has not been broached in this paper. This has only been a fragment of a linguistic physics: contraction, the realist force that counteracts expansion and brings it down to earth is yet to be determined. This force resists the infinite process of identifications of the ideal *Ethics*. Exposition of this element of a *Naturphilosophie* of monist language must therefore await a future occasion.



Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Dan Barber for gracefully helping me articulate my worries with his work more precisely, as well as to Charlie Blake, Rocco Gangle, Philip Goodchild, Patrice Haynes, Joshua Ramey, Steve Shakespeare and Anthony Paul Smith for their discussions on this paper.

⁹⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, VP36D.

⁹⁶ Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 596-7.