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THE RUSSIAN SPINOZISTS

ABSTRACT. The article deals with the history of Russian Spinozism in the 20th century, focusing attention on three interpretations of Spinoza's philosophy – by Varvara Polovtsova, Lev Vygotsky, and Evald Ilyenkov. Polovtsova profoundly explored Spinoza's logical method and contributed an excellent translation of his treatise *De intellectus emendatione*. Later Vygotsky and Ilyenkov applied Spinoza's method to create activity theory, an explanation of the laws and genesis of the human mind.

KEY WORDS: philosophy of Spinoza, Spinozism, Polovtsova, Vygotsky, Ilyenkov, Russian Marxism, activity theory, logical method

When looking over the legion of interpretations which have escorted Spinoza's philosophy in the course of the past three centuries, one immediately recalls an ironic phrase of the scholastics: *auctoritas nasum cereum habet*. It seems that Spinoza's teaching has been interpreted in all possible ways. It was already Hegel who had sufficient reason to complain that Spinoza's doctrine had been too often judged in a rough and ready manner.¹ In Russia of XIX century this ordinary state of affairs was complicated by a generally hostile attitude towards the philosophy of Spinoza. Though his doctrine appeared at the epicenter of impassioned polemics with the participation of leading Russian philosophers – Vladimir Solov'ëv, Alexander Vvedenskij, Lev Shestov, Semën Frank, – not one of them declared his devotion to Spinoza's teaching. Only somewhat later would V. Polovtsova, L. Vygotskij and E. Il'enkov devote themselves to continue his *inquisitio veri*. They had to go against the general current of Russian philosophy, although at times the latter was becoming more sympathetic to Spinoza's (or rather to alleged Spinozistic) ideas. I do not intend here to survey the various Spinozistic tendencies in Russian philosophy; I would like to explore somewhat of its Spinozistic "mainstream."



I

Varvara Nikolaevna Polovtsova was born in Moscow, in 1877. On graduating from the St.-Petersburg female gymnasium she continued her education in Germany, at the philosophy faculties of Heidelberg, Tübingen and, finally, of Bonn. There on the 20th of January 1909, she received her Doctor's degree. Her dissertation, entitled *Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der Reizerscheinungen bei den Pflanzen*, was awarded the highest mark, *eximium*, and in part was soon published in Jena.² The original was lost during World War II, when the Rhein University was destroyed.³

At that time Spinoza became the most widely discussed philosopher in Russia, with the exception, perhaps, of Hegel. Translations of his works were published in St.-Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, Kazan' and Odessa. Extensive volumes about Spinoza's philosophy, including translations from German and French, appeared one after another. However, Russian philosophers perceived Spinoza's doctrine rather critically: religious thinkers were displeased with it because of the identification of God and Nature; Kantians rejected it for "reducing all real relations to logical ones"; some commentators reproached him with fatalism, with using a geometrical method inappropriate for philosophy, and so on.

It was Vladimir Solov'ev alone who dared to defend Spinoza, admitting that "Spinoza had been my first love in philosophy" and expressing a wish to "pay back at least a part of the old debt."⁴ But Solov'ev's apologia of Spinoza was restricted, in deed, to the assertion that he had "set up his whole philosophical system" on the notion of an absolute Deity, common to all mature religious doctrines.⁵ In conclusion Solov'ev added his voice to the chorus of critics, stating that it is the subject of cognition, missed by Spinoza, that stands between the world of phenomena and substance; and, what is even more important, "in Spinoza's system there is as little space for the god of history as in the Eleatic system."⁶

Quite typical are also the accusations that Spinoza borrowed key ideas from ancient philosophers, scholastics, Hobbes, Descartes and so forth. Herewith Spinoza's philosophy begins to look like a strange collection of other people's opinions (it seems even more strange if one should recall his own censorious words concerning perception *ex auditu*). The classic exemplar of this interpretation is the book

of the Jesuit priest S. von Dunin-Borkowski *Der junge de Spinoza*. With two notes on this work Polovtsova opens her career in Spinoza studies in 1910.⁷ Her final verdict reads as follow:

To those who do not know Spinoza's philosophy in detail, the book of Dunin-Borkowski will give a garbled image of Spinoza as a person and as a philosopher.⁸

Three years later, in 1913, her next, very long article appears: "Towards the Methodology of Studying Spinoza's Philosophy."⁹ Here Polovtsova, with her characteristic scrutiny, clears up the meaning of terms and the inner logical conditions of a correct understanding of Spinoza's writings. Disregard of these conditions leads to various misunderstandings already in the translation of Spinoza's works. For example, German Spinoza scholars translated his Latin terms while being guided, as a rule, by the tradition going back to Christian Wolff. Meanwhile

the terms of the narrow-minded Wolff are able to reproduce the richness of Spinoza's thought as little as the vocabulary of a moderately developed man could reproduce the contents of great poems.¹⁰

In particular, when translating *perceptio* and *idea* as *Vorstellung* Wolff *eo ipso* cuts off any possibility of understanding Spinoza's theory of cognition adequately.

Then, when speaking about Spinoza's "geometrical method" commentators openly ignore the fact that Spinoza himself never, not once, used this expression. In *De intellectus emendatione* and in correspondence where Spinoza examines what is *methodus*, he does not even mention the mode (*mos*) or the order (*ordo*) of geometrical proof. The harmful habit of confusing these notions resulted in the circumstance that the Spinoza's *real* method of cognising simply escaped attention. Polovtsova argues that the method of *Ethics* has nothing in common with *ordo geometricus*. The distinction of *methodus* and *ordo* was clearly pointed out by Descartes and even earlier, by the scholastics.

First and foremost Spinoza's method requires one to distinguish between the "areas of knowledge", namely *imaginatio* and *intellectus* (the latter further breaks up into *ratio* and *intuitio*). This distinction goes so far that the same word may have different senses, depending on the logical "area"¹¹ concerned. Polovtsova demonstrates this thesis by using the example of the terms *existentia* and

communis. What “area” is implied in any particular case can be determined with the help of Spinoza’s repeated parenthetical clauses, commencing quite often with the word *quatenus*.

Polovtsova is convinced that probably all the contradictions attributed to Spinoza are founded on “inattention to his clauses,” and that the cases of “borrowing” ideas from other philosophers “on closer examination turn out to be quite simply verbal coincidence.”¹² Furthermore Polovtsova shows the inadequacy of Hegel’s interpretation of the method and categories of substance and attribute in *Ethics*,¹³ as well as the illegitimacy of criticism by Schopenhauer (and also by his Russian followers A. Vvedenskij and S. Frank) of Spinoza’s concept of causality.

Bearing in mind that Polovtsova considers Spinoza’s epistemology as the core of his entire philosophical doctrine, it is quite logical that she now set out to translate *De intellectus emendatione*. This unfinished treatise serves as prolegomena to Spinoza’s philosophy. The word *emendatio* Polovtsova treats here as an analogy to the term *katharsis* in Plotinus, as an act of refining of human mind from all imaginative ideas (though not from images of external things, as Plotinus proposed).

Polovtsova tries to follow as closely to the terminology of the original text as possible, using a number of Spinoza’s terms in direct Russian transcription (*imaginatio*, *ratio*, *perceptio*, *ideatum*, *conceptus*, etc.). She indicates almost all typical Latin expressions in parentheses or footnotes and takes into consideration conjectures and alternative readings in many other editions of the treatise. The translation is supplied with a detailed commentary, which greatly exceeds the very text of the treatise in extent. It is not an overstatement to say that it was one of the best Spinoza translations of that time. And it is by far a more accurate and well-reasoned translation than any other Russian translation of Spinoza’s works, including the latest ones.

Polovtsova worked on the translation in Bonn, in 1913. In the Foreword she mentioned a large manuscript about Spinoza’s philosophy and said that it had been already prepared for print. I do not know anything about the further life of Varvara Polovtsova after 1914. Apparently she continued to work on her projects in Bonn when the world war commenced, and the fact that none of her writ-

ings were to be published later leads one to fear the worst about her subsequent fate.

Polovtsova did not find adherents among professional Spinoza scholars, though her writings obtained certain recognition. The noted “transcendental skeptic” B.V. Jakovenko mentioned Polovtsova’s article on the methodology of studying of Spinoza’s philosophy among three or four “outstanding works [by Russian authors] in the history of philosophy that could not be passed over in silence.”¹⁴

After 1917, Spinoza’s philosophy unexpectedly met with approval from Russian Marxists. The history goes back to 1889, when Georgij Plekhanov, conversing with Engels in London, arrived at the conclusion that “Marxism is a kind of Spinozism.” It meant that the basic philosophical principles in Spinoza and Marx were perfectly identical. And some of Plekhanov’s disciples, headed by A. Deborin, even defined Marxism as “neospinozism,” inciting thereby a vehement debate.¹⁵

However, why did Spinoza regularly call Substance by the term “God”? – another of Plekhanov’s disciples, L. Axelrod, asked. She argued that this concept was “religious-tinted,” whereas Deborin objected that Spinoza was a pure atheist. Deborin stressed the dialectical character of Spinoza’s concept of self-caused Nature, whereas Axelrod interpreted it as a mechanical reality similar to Cartesian “extended substance.”¹⁶ Subsequent lengthy discussions of Spinoza’s philosophy pursued, for the most part, ideological purposes. The main contents were accusations of revisionism, idealism, Zionism and so on.¹⁷ The quotations from the philosopher’s own writings were very rare, but Engels, Feuerbach and Plekhanov, as the supreme experts in Spinoza studies, were cited everywhere instead.

Of course, the image of Spinoza, painted by Deborin and his confederates in a crude and naïve manner, scarcely resembles the original, but rather looks like “Marx without a beard,” according to their opponents’ ironical remark. Only sometime later could Vygotskij and Il’enkov undertake really serious “neospinozist” research.

II

The famous Russian psychologist Lev Semënovich Vygotskij (1896-1934) was carried away with Spinoza's philosophy when studying it at the historian-philosophical faculty of the Shanjavskij Moscow University. He was attracted first by Spinoza's strict causal explanation of mind by the principle of action of the human body. Being guided by this principle, Vygotskij established that the cultural mental functions originate as forms of human activity, which is directed to the outer (social) world. The distinctive feature of cultural mental functions in comparison with the natural ones is that the former are mediated by artificially created stimuli, signs. Using signs, a "thinking being" actively regulates its own behaviour. This idea, as Vygotskij believes, allows us "to demonstrate empirically the origin of human free will."¹⁸

The traditional model of free will is a "Buridan's ass" situation, where an ass is forced to act by two different stimuli in equal extent. Its soul cannot perceive anything except the states of body, caused by these stimuli, thus the ass turns out to be unable to act in this or that way and dies.

According to Spinoza, a man does not merely perceive the states of his own body, which are caused by external stimuli. The human body is able to "move and dispose" external things,¹⁹ thereby imparting to itself various states, which are adequate to (or conform with) the nature of other bodies. Perceptions of such states of the body constitute the contents of human intellect. The power of causes, which are perceived adequately by a "thinking thing" (*res cogitans*), infinitely exceeds the power of any external stimuli immediately affecting the human body. Therefore, the better one knows the nature of things, the smaller is the danger of dying like Buridan's ass because of external causes. Herein lies the real freedom. It is directly proportional to our knowledge of causes of the things we come across or, more precisely, to our capacity for acting reasonably on external things and, by means of these things, on our own body and mind.

Spinoza, however, gives only a general solution to the problem of free will. Admitting his complete agreement with this solution,²⁰ Vygotskij makes a series of experiments with children to verify it.

He creates a state of the equilibrium of motives and comes to the following conclusion:

A man placed in the situation of Buridan's ass throws lots . . . Here is an operation impossible for an animal, the operation in which the whole problem of free will manifests itself with experimental distinctness.²¹

What is the nature of lot? It is a neutral stimulus, to which man transfers the function of choice between two equally possible actions. By means of the neutral stimuli, signs, he acts upon his own behaviour making it reasonable, precisely like he acts with material tools upon an external nature. Whence, however, does man receive this amazing ability to direct his own actions reasonably, i.e. by means of signs? Here occurs a decisive turn of Vygotskij's thought: signs originally appeared as instruments by means of which one man acted upon another; and human behaviour becomes reasonable when someone begins to apply towards himself the same instruments by which formerly other people directed his actions. Signs are ideal 'clots' of social relations, so the individual internalizes the human mind in the course of communication. Therefore, all human forms of mental activity are of social origin; the individual absorbs them from outside, viz. from his cultural surroundings.

Vygotskij strictly adheres to a key thesis of the psychological theory of *Ethics*:

The object of an idea constituting the human mind is a body . . . and nothing else.²²

Meanwhile, there is a distinction in the human mind between the idea of an individual organic body and the idea of its collective, social "quasi-body" (*quasi corpus, nempe societatis*, as Spinoza expressed once²³). The organic body is the substance of natural forms of mental activity, and the social "quasi-body" is the substance of cultural mental forms. Further, Vygotskij undertakes an inquiry of the "natural history of signs" or, in other words, of the development of cultural psychical functions from natural ones.

Spinoza solved this problem on a purely logical plane, as the problem of correlating imagination (vague ideas of the states of the organic body) with intellect (clear and distinct ideas about the nature of things). Spinoza considers these two forms of thinking as

essential instances of the universal “method of interpreting Nature” (*methodus interpretandi Naturam*). The imagination delivers to human mind some data about the external existence of singular things; then the intellect prepares these data, i.e. images, by means of reason (*ratio*), revealing the essence of things, and finally, at the supreme level of intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*), it forms an adequate idea of the actual existence of this or that thing.

It is the subject of thinking alone which endures changes in the described process of theoretical thinking. Logical forms of imagination by no means turn into the forms of intellect or even somehow commingle with them.

“Those operations, whereby the imaginative acts are produced, take place according to other laws, quite different from the laws of the intellect,” Spinoza warned.²⁴

Vygotskij’s “natural history of signs” solves the problem of the genesis of thought in the psychological perspective, which differs from the logical angle of vision predominating in Spinoza’s works. Here the natural (imaginative) *mental form itself* is to be transformed into the cultural (intellectual) form. Vygotskij called this act “*vrasshivanije*” (enrooting) and explored its general features experimenting with memory, sense perception and conceptual thinking. A sign is the instrument that converts the natural mental form into the cultural one. The question arises then, what makes an indifferent exterior of a sign to be significant for the individual? What induces him to take part in the symbolic activity of social “quasi-body”? At this point Vygotskij appeals to Spinoza for aid once again.

As the proximate cause of human activity Spinoza considers the natural organic need, *appetitus*. The ‘appetite’

is in fact nothing else but man’s very essence, from the nature of which necessarily follow that, which serves to his preservation, and so man is determined to act in that way.²⁵

The state of body or mind caused by this *appetitus* Spinoza denotes by the term *affectus*. Thus, society forms mental activity of an individual by means of signs from outside, and *appetitus* determines it from inside via affects, Vygotskij decides. Now he concentrates his attention on the ‘internal’, affective determinant of mind. He writes:

An idea is born not from another idea, but from the motivating sphere of our mind. This sphere covers our inclination and needs. Behind an idea the affective and willing tendency is hiding. It alone can give an answer to the last 'why' in the analysis of thinking.²⁶

Thus was defined the plan of Vygotskij's last major work, *A Study of Emotions* (1933).

In the early 1930s the state of problem was constituted by the opposition of W. James – K. Lange visceral theory of emotions and intensional theory of emotions, descended from W. Dilthey and F. Brentano. According to the first theory, emotion is an ordinary epiphenomenon of physiological processes; the other one rests on the assumption that human emotion is a manifestation of the ego's inward activity. Vygotskij carries out a thorough historical analysis of the opposing doctrines and comes to conclusion that the principal statements of both parties are variations on the theme of Descartes' treatise *Les passions de l'âme*. They conceal in the long run the idea of psychophysical parallelism.

Descartes seems to be present on every page of psychological works about emotions, which have been published for the last 60 years.²⁷

On the other hand, Vygotskij points out that the new conception of emotions is emerging in modern science and its main idea goes back to *Ethics*.

"The tenor of Spinoza's thinking finds some historical sequel in Lange and in Dilthey also," but at the same time "Spinoza's teaching holds something that forms its deepest inherent core and what is lacking in the both two detached branches of modern psychology of emotions, namely the unity of causal explanation with problems of the vital significance of human passions . . . Spinoza's problems are waiting to be solved, and tomorrow of our psychology is impossible without their solution."²⁸

Unfortunately Vygotskij did not have time enough to answer these questions himself. His manuscript remained unfinished. Being only 37 years old, Vygotskij died, like Spinoza, because of chronic lung disease. Nevertheless he managed to outline some aspects of his theory of emotions.

First of all he discovered that the physiological theory of homeostasis, created by Walter Cannon, had paved the way for

the new psychology of emotions. The experiments on sympathoectomized animals in Cannon's laboratory proved that peripheral neural processes could not be considered as the proper cause of emotions. The American scientist suggested that physiological and psychological processes, forming an emotional behavior, were caused by a need of a living being to preserve the existing mode of internal life, contrary to external impacts disturbing this mode of life. Is it not very close to Spinoza's definition of affect as a state of thing that "promotes or constrains" its acting for preservation of its own being?²⁹ Having noticed this resemblance, Vygotskij regards Cannon's experiments as "an empirical proof of Spinoza's idea."³⁰

Cannon's investigations, although very important, do not touch upon the difficult problem of distinguishing simple organic emotions from higher, rational ones. For Spinoza, as a philosopher, this problem was central. Rational emotions (especially the "intellectual love to God," caused by the *scientia intuitiva*) aid people in preservation of their existence, joining them to the eternal being of Nature.

Descartes considers the problem of passions as a physiological problem and a problem of mind with body interaction, whereas in Spinoza this problem appears as a problem of relating of thought with affect, concept with passion. It is really the other side of the moon . . .³¹

Vygotskij was engrossed mainly in the analysis of specific conditions of the transformation of organic emotions into rational ones. Most likely, he intended to deal with this matter in the rest of the manuscript. He wished also to elaborate a new classification of emotions, since he found inconvenient the nomenclature of the *Ethics*. Vygotskij bequeathed these works to the Spinozist psychology of tomorrow.

III

Evald Vasilevich Il'enkov (1924–1979) was a recognized leader in Soviet epistemology. His most significant works, *Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Theoretical Thinking* (1956)³² and *Dialectical Logic* (1974), both published in many languages, comprise, for the most part, interpretations of the philosophical

classics. It would not be an exaggeration to call Il'enkov a genius of philosophical exegesis. With a remarkable clarity he could display thin logical threads hidden in the massive texture of Marx's economic theory, he found his bearings with ease in the tangled labyrinths of Hegel's texts, and his variations on Spinoza's themes bewitch with their originality and depth.

"Spinoza was his main philosophical passion," his disciple and friend S.N. Mareev witnesses. "And if someone who doubts this were to make even a cursory reading of the beginning of a large book about Spinoza (which Il'enkov intended to write throughout his life, but never completed), these doubts would immediately dissipate."³³

A Spinozistic temper distinctly emerges already in Il'enkov's early essay "Cosmology of Mind," written in the 50s. Here he expounds the proposition that thought is an attribute, that is, an essential form of being of Nature, and hazards a witty conjecture that thinking beings are fated to realize a return of dying universes to their initial state.

Further Spinoza's doctrine of thinking inspires Il'enkov to write the fine article "Idealnoe" ("The Ideal," in the adjectival form of the word) for the Philosophical Encyclopaedia. Il'enkov asserts that he fully shares Spinoza's understanding of the relation of ideal to real. The ideal is an attribute, i.e. a pure universal form of expressing the real (Nature). The laws of Nature may be expressed or realized not only over the infinite series of things mutually determining each other to motion, as happens in the extended Nature. In thinking Nature these laws are realising by one particular finite thing, which acts according to the nature of all other things, *ex analogia universi*, to use Spinoza's language.³⁴ This is a characteristic feature of the "thinking thing." The pure forms of universal activity all together set up the association of adequate ideas, *intellectus infinitus* or, in terms of Il'enkov, the area of the "ideal."

Spinoza had rightly defined the relation of the ideal to the real in general, but he could not solve the riddle of the birth of the finite form of the ideal, viz. of human intellect, argues Il'enkov. Spinoza shared an old belief that the elementary *instrumenta intellectualia* are innate to the human being in the same way as a hand or brain. Practical action refines, improves and nourishes the human intellect, but does not create it. For his part, Il'enkov holds that the ideal

arises, originates from real action, as its universal form. Then the ideal stiffens in the form of some external thing, and only afterwards it settles down in mind. The ideal ‘light’ of the intellect, seeming like something inborn to a thinking being, was sparked in fact by the co-action of a hand with an external thing. Right at the point of their touch the universal law of being, *Logos*, begins to ‘shine out’. And only afterwards this ‘light’ is reflected by the individual psyche and by its ‘innate tool’, the brain, as well as by all other bodies and minds, which were involved into an orbit of activity of the thinking being.

For over fifteen years Il’enkov improved and refined this solution of the problem of the ideal. Meanwhile, he attended to some other aspects of Spinoza’s philosophy. In *De intellectus emendatione* he finds an idea distinctly anticipating the dialectical method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete. And he treats Spinoza’s *notiones communes* as a direct analogue with concrete common notions of the dialectical logic.³⁵ Like Polovtsova, Il’enkov objected to the Hegelian ‘eleatization’ of Spinoza’s concept of substance, contesting the interpretation of that substance as “Absolute Indifference.” The distinctions within substance are real no less than its unity.

Spinoza does not deny the actual divisibility of nature as a whole (substance) into separate bodies. According to Spinoza, the separate bodies and boundaries between them exist by no means in imagination only, they simply are recognized with the help of the imagination.³⁶

In 1965 Il’enkov worked on a chapter about Spinoza’s dialectics for the next volume of *The History of Dialectics*. And in September he gave a talk at the meeting of the authors of that volume with officials from the section of dialectical materialism within the precincts of the Institute of Philosophy. Il’enkov considered Spinoza’s method of thinking to be the best alternative to the Newtonian positivistic “logic of science.” Every theoretical discourse takes place within a general concept about this or that concrete whole (substance), which constitutes the ultimate subject of research. This general concept is prior logically to any sensible data or empirical abstractions and, therefore, it is to be cleared up at the very beginning of scientific research. Il’enkov opposed this Spinozistic idea to Russell’s principle of formally synthesizing a whole from particular

facts and against Carnap's *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* as well. Il'enkov's interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy met an extremely hostile reception³⁷ and, in the upshot, that chapter of *The History of Dialectics* was written by his influential opponent V.V. Sokolov.

In the same year Il'enkov delivered a series of lectures about Spinoza at the Academy of Sciences and several years later started to write a book, in draft entitled simply *Spinoza*. However, he postponed the work for uncertain reasons. The manuscript of his unfinished book would be published only now.³⁸

Special attention should be paid to Il'enkov's use of Spinoza's concepts in psychology and typhlo-surdo-pedagogics, but it is too complicated a matter to touch upon here. Within the framework of experimental research, at the end of 1975, Il'enkov wrote the outlines concerning the problem of free will. He compared solutions of the problem in Spinoza and Fichte. And he takes side with Spinoza once again:

So, what is it – the freedom of will? It is the mode of acting *contrary to the declining influence of proximate circumstances*, that is 'freely' with respect to them; to conform actions with the *universal* necessity, which is expressed in the ideal form of an *aim* . . . This is Spinoza, pure and simple.³⁹

Spinoza is frequently reproached with disrespect of historical method, since he appealed for thinking all things *sub specie aeternitatis*. Il'enkov disagrees:

Spinoza's deduction "is the logical form of an essentially historical view . . . It is orientated towards a real genesis of thing . . . Here is the superiority of Spinoza's deduction over Fichte's. And here is the advantage of Vygotskij's teaching over any other scheme of the explanation of mind."⁴⁰

So, before one would judge Spinoza's attitude to the "god of history," it is necessary to examine more thoroughly the relation of the categories of the logical and historical, eternal and temporal. His claim to conceive all things *sub specie aeternitatis* does not at all mean to ignore their history; this formula implies only that one cannot fairly understand a particular thing's essence, nor its history, if the eternal laws of Nature have not been distinctly realized at first.

Il'enkov wrote his last articles on Spinoza in 1977 for the tercentenary of Spinoza's death (two years later Il'enkov committed suicide). It is enough to read the titles of these articles – "Three

Centuries of Immortality” (by pen-name I. Vasilev and together with L.K. Naumenko as a co-author) and “One Who Outstripped His Time,”⁴¹ – to understand their leitmotif: the past centuries have not a bit weakened the urgency of Spinoza’s philosophy. All its heuristic potential remains to be exposed. It will probably not occur soon, only if people

agree in all respects so, that the minds and bodies of all should form one single quasi-mind and one single body, and . . . that all together, they should seek what is useful to them.⁴²

The necessity of establishing of such a social order follows from the sameness of our human nature. And Spinoza managed to understand and express this necessity better than any of his contemporaries.

IV

It is not so difficult to notice the affinity between these three interpretations, despite the fact that their authors were working at different times and did not know each other personally. First and foremost, it is to be noted the strongly marked ‘methodological’ bias of these Spinoza readings. Polovtsova, Vygotskij and Il’enkov regarded Spinoza’s logical method as an *arteria carotis* of his entire philosophy. They believed that this method is highly effective, although it remains unclaimed in modern science and scholarship.

Of course, Polovtsova did not evolve Spinoza’s principles so far as Vygotskij and Il’enkov did, nevertheless her studies prepared the appropriate interpretative ground for them. Polovtsova and Il’enkov both violently criticized Kantian and positivistic interpretations of Spinoza’s method and concepts. It was no accident that Il’enkov preferred to make use of the old Polovtsova translation of *De intellectus emendatione*, and not the recent editions by V. Sokolov or J. Borovsky. And his understanding of Spinoza’s *notiones communes* leans directly on Polovtsova’s commentary.

One more major point of their concurrence is the assertion that the activity of every thing constitutes its real essence. They unanimously noticed the active, dynamic character of categories that framed Spinoza’s philosophical doctrine. Polovtsova points out that Spinoza denoted the genuine, substantial being of things by the

expression *actu existere* to distinguish it from the imaginative existence ‘here-and-now’, *duratio*. The word *actu* has two meanings: “actually” and “actively,” and so it is appropriate perfectly well to designate the genuine reality of things. In order to accentuate that thing’s activity is sole authentic measure of its reality, Polovtsova preferred to translate *actu existere* as “active existence” (though in Russian it sounds rather awkward).⁴³

And Vygotskij is reputed to be a founder of the activity theory in modern psychology. Following him, Il’enkov regarded human objective activity as an ultimate substance of all psychical phenomena, from the simplest sensation of one’s own body to the categories of ‘pure reason’. It was Spinoza who found this principle, and by accepting it we thereby enter the territory of Spinozism, writes Il’enkov.

Spinozism . . . ties the phenomenon of *thinking in general* together with *the real action of the thinking body* (but not with the concept of a bodiless soul) and considers the thinking body to be *active* . . .⁴⁴

The history of Russian Spinozism is still very short, and has not turned out too happily. For various reasons neither Polovtsova, nor Vygotskij, nor Il’enkov could complete their books about the philosophy of Spinoza. So, “will the ethereal thought return to the dale of shadows?” I would like to believe that things are going otherwise, that owing to their efforts Spinozism has taken root in Russian philosophy and we shall yet see important truths with the help of the logical “lenses” ground by Spinoza.

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NOTES

¹ See Hegel’s *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse. Wissenschaft der Logik*, §151.

² See Warwara fon Polowzow, *Experimentelle Untersuchungen über den Reizvorgang bei den Pflanzen auf Grund der Reizbarkeit gegen Gase*, Jena, 1909.

³ These data were received from *Archiv der Rheinischen Universität* (Bonn). I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Paul Schmidt who took the trouble to search for it.

⁴ Vladimir S. Solov'ëv, "Ponjatie o Boge (v zashchitu filosofii Spinozy) [The Notion of God (in Defence of Spinoza's Philosophy)]," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* 38 (1897), s. 383, 414.

⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 407–408.

⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 408–409.

⁷ See Polovtsova, "Zametki na knigu: Dunin-Borkowski S. von. Der junge de Spinoza. Leben und Werdegang im Lichte der Weltphilosophie (Münster, 1910) [Notes on the Book: Dunin-Borkowski . . .]," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* 105 (1910), s. 325–332. Another her note on Dunin-Borkowski's book was published in *Historische Zeitschrift* 108 (1911).

⁸ "Zametki," s. 332.

⁹ Polovtsova, "K metodologii issledovaniya filosofii Spinozy," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* 118 (1913), s. 317–398.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, s. 322.

¹¹ Abigail Rosenthal notes the similar case with Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*: "The same term may be used in different senses, according to the stages of the knowing consciousness wherein it appears" (A.L. Rosenthal, "A Hegelian Key to Hegel's Method," *Journal of the history of philosophy* 9, (1971), p. 206 n.).

¹² "K metodologii issledovaniya filosofii Spinozy," s. 331.

¹³ Polovtsova earlier than others opposed the 'eleatization' of Spinoza's philosophy, initiated by Hegel. Nowadays, the wrong of interpreting of Spinoza's substance by analogy with the concept of being in Parmenides is recognized widely enough. See, e.g., E. Harris, "The Concept of Substance in Spinoza and Hegel," in *Spinoza nel 350 anniversario della nascita*, Napoli, 1985, pp. 51–70; A. Gilead, "Spinoza's *principium individuationis* and Personal Identity," *International Studies in Philosophy* 15 (1983), pp. 41–44.

¹⁴ B. Jakovenko, *Ocherk istorii russkoj filosofii* [Essay on the History of Russian Philosophy], Berlin, 1922, s. 125.

¹⁵ See the solid critical survey of the notorious debate in George L. Kline's Introduction to *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1952.

¹⁶ Speaking generally, it is beyond my comprehension how could someone regard Spinoza's Nature as a mechanism. What a marvellous mechanism, every "screw" of which endeavours to persist in its being (*in suo esse perseverare conatur*) and moves by its own nature, everything is animated (*omnia . . . animata sunt*) and forms a part of a "thinking thing"!

¹⁷ And Stalin did not fail to use this occasion to dispatch most of the debaters to concentration camps.

¹⁸ L.S. Vygotskij, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works], t. 1–6, Pedagogika, Moskva, 1982–1984, t. 3, s. 291.

¹⁹ See Spinoza, *Ethica*, II, pst. 6.

²⁰ “We cannot but note that we have arrived at the same understanding of freedom and domination over self as that evolved by Spinoza in his ‘Ethics’” (*Sobranie sochinenii*, loc. cit.).

²¹ *Ibid.*, s. 277.

²² “*Objectum ideae humanam Mentem constituentis est Corpus . . . et nihil aliud*” (*Ethica*, II, pr. 13).

²³ In *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, III.

²⁴ “*Operationes illas, a quibus imaginationes producuntur, feri secundum alias leges prorsus diversas a legibus intellectus*” (Spinoza, *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, §86).

²⁵ “. . . *Appetitus, qui proinde nihil aliud est quam ipsa hominis essentia, ex cujus natura ea quae ipsius conservationi inserviunt, necessario sequuntur atque adeo homo ad eadem agendum determinatus est*” (Spinoza, *Ethica*, III, pr. 9, sch.).

²⁶ Vygotskij, *Sobranie sochinenii*, t. 2, s. 357.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 6, s. 213.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 300–301.

²⁹ See *Ethica*, III, def. 3.

³⁰ *Sobranie sochinenii*, t. 6, s. 101–102.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

³² In corpore that first Il’enkov’s book was published in a series: “Philosophers of Russia of the XX Century” (Russian Political Encyclopaedia, Moskva, 1997).

³³ S.N. Mareev, “Neskol’ko slov ob Il’enkove [Some Words on Il’enkov],” *Vestnik MGU*, series “Philosophy” 1 (1990), s. 58.

³⁴ See his *Epistolae*, 2 (to H. Oldenburg).

³⁵ See Il’enkov, “Ponimanie abstraktnogo i konkretnogo v dialektike i formal’noi logike [Understanding of the Abstract and Concrete in Dialectics and Formal Logic],” in *Dialektika i logika. Formy myshlenija*, Akademia nauk, Moskva, 1962, s. 182–188.

³⁶ Il’enkov, “Kolichestvo [Quantity],” in *Filosofskaja enciklopedija*. Sovetskaja enciklopedija, Moskva, 1962, t. 2, s. 555.

³⁷ His chronic conflict with the Soviet philosophical establishment periodically attained acute forms. As early as in 1954, at the very beginning of his career, Il’enkov was driven out of Moscow University for his theses on the nature of philosophy.

³⁸ See it in *Il’enkov: lichnost’ i tvorcestvo* [Il’enkov, *His Personality and Works*], Jazyki russkoi kultury, Moskva, 1999, s. 199–244.

³⁹ Il’enkov, “Svoboda voli [Freedom of Will],” *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1990), s. 73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, s. 74.

⁴¹ Il’enkov, “Operedivshij svoë vremja,” in *Kurer UNESCO*, Ijul, 1977; I. Vasilev and L. Naumenko, “Tri veka bessmertija (k 300-letiju so dnja smerti B. Spinozy),” *Kommunist* 5 (1977).

⁴² “. . . *Quod omnes in omnibus ita convenient ut omnium mentes et corpora unam quasi mentem unumque corpus componant . . . omnesque simul omnium commune utile sibi quaerant*” (*Ethica*, IV, pr. 18, sch.).

⁴³ See “K metodologii issledovanija filosofii Spinozy,” s. 369–370. It should be remarked that there is a somewhat similar trend in Spinoza studies in the West. I mean, first of all, the fine British philosopher Harold Foster Hallett (1886–1966), who wrote that for Spinoza “to ‘be’ is to ‘act’ . . . The reality of a being is its agency, and not its objective thinghood” (H.F. Hallett, *Benedict de Spinoza. The Elements of his Philosophy*, Athlone Press, London, 1957, p. 6). *Ago, ergo sum* (I’m acting, therefore I exist), – this could be the first axiom of Spinoza’s philosophy of mind.

⁴⁴ Il’enkov, “Svoboda voli,” p. 70.

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