

Freedom, the One- and-All: Spinozism from von Stein to Schmitt

JASON M. YONOVER

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www.jmyonover.com

ABSTRACT: In this chapter I explore, in some cases for the first time, the significance of the ethical, liberatory dimension of Spinoza's thought among a number of women philosophers across the long nineteenth century's German tradition. I begin with brief discussions of Elise Reimarus and Charlotte von Stein. I then proceed to more in-depth treatments of Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and Karoline von Günderrode, stressing not only that we may learn about both in drawing out a link to Spinoza or Spinozism, but likewise that we can deepen our understanding of Spinoza in bringing him into dialogue with each (in particular regarding, respectively, the importance of others for self-expression, as well as the metaphysical and ethical status of death, especially suicide). I conclude with a discussion of the turn-of-the-century thinkers Lou Salomé as well as then Resa von Schirnhöfer, Anna Tumarkin, and especially Elisabeth Schmitt—some of the first academic women philosophers in the German-language context, all closely engaged with Spinoza's writings—before presenting final remarks concerning the status of Spinoza's thought in the present context generally.

UNLIKE HIS CANONICAL BEDFELLOWS René Descartes or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz,¹ Benedict Spinoza had no major women correspondents; and in related contrast to Thomas Hobbes, we are not likely to find any obviously proto-feminist tendencies in Spinoza's thought itself.² To the contrary: in the last lines of his unfinished *Political Treatise*, Spinoza

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1. ELISABETH OF BOHEMIA (1618-1680), for instance, carried out an important exchange with Descartes. On several dimensions of her ethical thought, see Ariane C. Schneck, "Elisabeth of Bohemia's Neo-Peripatetic account of the emotions," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2019): 753-70. SOPHIE OF HANOVER (1630-1714), for example, corresponded with Leibniz. Regarding her metaphysical and epistemological tendencies, see Christian Leduc, "Sophie of Hanover on the Soul-Body Relationship," in *Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Corey W. Dyck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 11-28.
 2. For a possible exception in Spinoza's account of the Genesis narrative of the fall, see Hasana Sharp, "Eve's Perfection: Spinoza on Sexual (In)equality," *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 50, no. 4 (Oct. 2012): 559-80. On Hobbes's limited defense of natural maternal right and more, see Susanne Sreedhar, "Hobbes on 'The Woman Question,'" *Philosophy*

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goes so far as to argue that “women do not, by nature, have equal right with men, but [...] they necessarily submit to men, and so that it cannot happen that each sex rules equally” (TP XI 4).³ Some readers may wish Spinoza would have quit composing this final work a day earlier—but even if he had done so, Spinoza’s earlier reference to “the inconstancy and frivolity of women and all the other much-decried vices of that sex” (E5p10s) would still stand out, along with his pejorative use of “womanish” and more.⁴ On the basis of these data, at least, it might at first seem implausible that historical women philosophers, in the German-speaking context or otherwise, would have found inspiration in Spinoza’s thought.

And yet here we are. Indeed despite the above, Spinoza’s thought and its legacy have proven to be a crucial intellectual resource for a wide range of women philosophers in the modern German tradition.⁵ These figures have meanwhile

Compass 7, no. 11 (2012): 772-781.

3. I cite Spinoza according to common abbreviations. TP=*Political Treatise*, TTP=*Theological-Political Treatise*, and TIE=*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Each is referenced by chapter and/or section number. I then utilize the following standard system of reference in citing the E=*Ethics*: app(-endix), c(-orollary), pref(-ace), p(-roposition), and s(-cholium). Additionally, “d” stands either for “definition” (when it appears immediately to the right of the part number), or “demonstration” (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of Part One and E1p16d is the demonstration of the sixteenth proposition of Part One. I primarily utilize translations of Spinoza’s *Ethics* by GEORGE ELIOT (1819-1880), who was deeply engaged with both Spinoza and the modern German tradition. Translations of any other works of Spinoza are by Edwin Curley. I have amended translations in order to utilize gender-neutral pronouns when Spinoza’s relevant claims bear on everyone or everything. Finally, I occasionally cite terms in the original Latin on the basis of Carl Gebhardt’s edition of Spinoza’s writings.
4. For this use of “womanish” (*muliebris*)—or, per Curley’s translation, “unmanly”—in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, see E2p49s [IV.C.] or E4p37s1. See also TTP Pref 4 and compare Spinoza’s use of “emasculate” (translation altered; *effoeminare*) at TTP III 55.
5. Note that I draw no distinction here between “philosophers,” “thinkers,” and so on. In brief, all of the figures I consider in this chapter are clearly philosophically-minded—not just because of their links to Spinoza or Spinozism, but also beyond—and so warrant sustained attention on the part of historians of philosophy for this straightforward reason. Note also that I utilize the category “woman” somewhat naively in this context. Although all of the “women figures” I discuss in this chapter were largely regarded as such in their time

built upon and challenged doctrines central to Spinozism in ways that anyone interested in its history—and indeed the history of modern European thought more generally—ought to contemplate. My focus in the present chapter is on the German late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I aim to show here that philosophical dialogues between Spinoza and women philosophers engaging with his thought around 1800, even if indirectly,⁶ are especially exciting and understudied. Despite referencing a number of figures throughout the chapter in order to give a sense of just how much work there is to be done in this connection, I dedicate the most attention to Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and Karoline von Günderrode. In furthering our grasp of these two thinkers so far as the legacy of Spinozism is concerned, I primarily try to sort out their development of ideals of freedom and suggest that these ideals may productively be understood in relation to Spinoza's, but also in relation to one another, such that a kind of conversation around the subject of freedom takes place. In reconstructing a possible discussion and following a thematic thread, I aim to discover something about both the liberatory thought of the women philosophers in question as well as that of Spinoza.

Throughout my engagement with these figures, I show that each belongs in discussions of the history of Spinozism in modern German thought—discussions which have developed immensely in the past years,⁷ though not far enough. My focus on the early nineteenth century should not be taken to indicate, however, that there is nothing to say about Spinoza and women philosophers

and so undoubtedly demand engagement in the present volume, these thinkers were also sometimes considered masculine in various respects, and may have identified on their own terms in any number of more complicated ways (though I will not have space to discuss such matters here).

6. Because this chapter is concerned with Spinozism generally, connections to Spinoza's writings themselves may be looser or also tighter in various cases. For instance, even a figure like Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, who most probably had only indirect exposure to Spinoza via direct exposure to figures who engage with his writings in detail, requires consideration as regards the legacy of Spinozism.
7. Regarding themes in metaphysics and epistemology, see Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On Spinoza and more practical matters, see Jason M. Yonover and Kristin Gjesdal (eds.), *Spinoza in Germany: Political and Religious Thought across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

in the German context prior to or following this period. Indeed I begin by discussing two particularly fascinating thinkers who must be mentioned in this context: Elise Reimarus and Charlotte von Stein. Additionally, in gradually concluding, I point to some of the most notable engagements with Spinoza's thought towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, through discussions of Lou Salomé, Resa von Schirnhofer, Anna Tumarkin, and Elisabeth Schmitt. While the jump some decades ahead from the previous sections to this final one will leave out significant mid-century thinkers—e.g., FANNY LEWALD (1811-1889), who would otherwise be important to cover given my thematic focus here on freedom⁸—it will at the same time enable the chapter to consider a wide range of philosophers and their relation to Spinoza's legacy at the long nineteenth century's opening and then its close. This should offer a sense of the bigger picture.

§1. Predecessors: Reimarus and von Stein

ELISE REIMARUS (1735-1805) is involved in two of the eighteenth century's most consequential affairs that also bear on Spinoza or Spinozism, namely the so-called Fragments and Pantheism Controversies. In the former case, Reimarus and her brother permitted Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to publish, starting in 1774, their late father's rationalist critique of the Bible that was in harmony with Spinoza's thought in several respects; and in the latter case, Reimarus informed Moses Mendelssohn in 1783 of the fateful news that Lessing had, not long before his death, apparently revealed a strong affinity for Spinoza's thought in discussions with Friedrich Jacobi. Jacobi now had the fuel he needed to start an anti-rationalist and counter-Enlightenment fire, for while Lessing was a respected Enlightenment thinker, Spinoza was an 'atheist' pariah. Following

8. Lewald was a feminist thinker whose writings, literary and otherwise, engaged with a wide range of political issues. She was also highly sympathetic to Spinoza over an extended period of time, and for instance writes that early exposure to the pantheistic principle according to which "everything that exists is God!" had provided her "all at once [with] the supporting premise for the rest of my future life; the regulator for my thought, my love, my actions," etc. See *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, Vol. 3,1 (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1862), 243f. For the translation I cite as well as a brief discussion, see Margaret Ward, *Fanny Lewald: Between Rebellion and Renunciation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 127.

correspondence between Reimarus, Jacobi, and Mendelssohn, Jacobi sparked a public controversy such that Lessing's comments reverberated throughout Europe in the 1780s and beyond: "The orthodox concepts of the divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. *Hen kai pan* [one-and-all]! [...] There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza."⁹ Finally, in addition to playing a role in these major disputes, Reimarus is likewise a critic of orthodox religion, an apologist for free thought, and yet also a prudent strategist, possibly sympathetic to Spinoza's motto "caution" (*caute*).¹⁰

CHARLOTTE VON STEIN (1742-1827), once called a "student [*Schülerin*] of Spinoza,"¹¹ is likewise linked to the Pantheism Controversy, if from a greater distance. She reads Spinoza intensively with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,

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9. I try to cite widely available English-language editions of German-language texts throughout the chapter, but in any other case, translations from the German are my own. See the account of Lessing's statements in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 187. For a classic treatment, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter Two.
 10. On Reimarus's writings, and on her role in the two affairs I reference, see Corey W. Dyck, "Towards a More Inclusive Enlightenment: German Women on Culture, Education, and Prejudice in the late Eighteenth Century," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), ** as well as important new work by Reed Winegar, "Elise Reimarus: Reason, Religion, and Enlightenment," in *Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, 110-33 and "Elise Reimarus on Freedom and Rebellion," in *Practical Philosophy from Kant to Hegel: Freedom, Right, and Revolution*, ed. James Clarke and Gabriel Gottlieb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 99-117.
 11. This characterization of von Stein appears in a short poetic text by Johann Gottfried von Herder. It was included with a gift of Spinoza's *Opera posthuma* to von Stein and also Goethe in 1784, on the occasion of both von Stein's birthday and Christmas. For a careful reading of Herder's four couplets and an insightful account of the broader context, see Jutta Eckle, "Und Spinoza sei Euch immer ein heiliger Christ': Charlotte von Steins Beschäftigung mit Philosophie und Naturforschung im Austausch mit Johann Gottfried Herder und Johann Wolfgang von Goethe," in *Charlotte von Stein: Schriftstellerin, Freundin und Mentorin*, ed. Elke Richter and Alexander Rosenbaum (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018), 339-55. On Herder, Spinoza, and German thought around 1800, see also Michael Forster, "The German Romantic Tradition and Spinoza's *Tractatus*," in *Spinoza in Germany*, forthcoming.

whose work was prominently referenced in Jacobi's conversations with Lessing wherein the latter declared his attraction to Spinoza's thought. Goethe develops some of his most important Spinozistic ideas in exchange with von Stein, and they collaborate, perhaps partially with Karl Phillip Moritz,¹² on an untitled text referred to in the literature as the "Spinoza Study."¹³ While authorship has often been attributed to Goethe, the manuscript is in von Stein's hand, and it's undoubtedly a product of their mutual exchange in the mid-1780s. Goethe seemingly wanted to downplay the importance of von Stein in this context, however; despite letters attesting to their sustained discussions of "our saint" Spinoza,¹⁴ Goethe will later fail to mention von Stein in his autobiography as he reconstructs his engagement with Spinoza. Finally, and most urgently, von Stein's literary writings, including dramatic works like *Dido* (1794) or the *New System of Freedom* (1798), may have been influenced by her engagement with Spinoza, though they have been rather neglected by scholars in this respect and otherwise.

More work is needed on Reimarus, von Stein, and the relation of their thought to Spinoza and Spinozism. Indeed, Spinoza had become a central reference in German-language thought by 1800,¹⁵ and as a result one may consider a number of thinkers of this era from such an angle. But over the

12. See Alessandro Costazza, "Ein Aufsatz aus der Zeit von Moritz' Weimarer Aufenthalt. Eine Revision der Datierung und der Zuschreibung von Goethes *Aus der Zeit der Spinoza-Studien*," *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 112 (1995): 259-74.

13. This title "Studie nach Spinoza" is chosen by Rudolf Steiner, although the text is first published within Bernard Suphan, "Aus der Zeit der Spinoza-Studien Goethes. 1784-85," *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 12 (1891): 3-12.

14. See Eckle, "Und Spinoza sei Euch immer ein heiliger Christ," 345 for discussion. For indications of the intensity of their readings focused on the *Ethics*, see also Goethe's 1784 letter to von Stein clarifying, in advance of a visit, that on this occasion he will bring with him "a Latin Spinoza," as "everything [there] is much clearer and more elegant." In *Goethe's Letters to Frau von Stein*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Browning (Columbia: Camden House), 232. Von Stein and Goethe had initially studied Spinoza in German translation.

15. On Spinoza and German romanticism generally, for example, see Martin Bollacher, "Der Philosoph und die Dichter. Spiegelungen Spinozas in der deutschen Romantik," in *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, ed. Hanna Delf, Julius H. Schoeps, and Manfred Walther (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994), 275-88.

next two sections, I focus on two figures whose thought may be understood in especially productive and complex relation to Spinoza, namely Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and Günderrode.

§2. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and the Intellectual-Ethical

CAROLINE MICHAELIS-BÖHMER-SCHLEGEL-SCHELLING (1763-1809) lived an eventful life; she experienced the French Revolution, imprisonment, an especially tragic loss of a child, and more. Among many other things, this life is documented in her correspondence, which is her primary textual legacy and the focus of my treatment here. I emphasize that Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's letter writing exhibits her deep interest in grasping especially these events, her intellectual milieu, and her relation to both. The form of the letter was often selected by (or also for) women writers in the period, given extensive gender censorship. But correspondence is well-suited to the project Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling pursues, namely understanding her age and herself, to the end of living more freely—a project that, I argue, can productively be understood in Spinozistic terms. Additionally, I suggest on this example that the letter itself deserves further attention in accounts of Spinoza's thought, if not also beyond.

While Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling surely doesn't develop detailed metaphysical positions—and while she repeatedly presents herself in modest or even self-deprecating terms so far as intellectual matters are concerned (Eps. 219, 240, 317, etc.),¹⁶ as is common among women thinkers in the period—she has a wide range of philosophical or literary tendencies, and indeed seems to have been attracted to the legacy of Spinoza's thought from early on. Consider the following two expressions of interest in Spinoza or Spinozism. First, already in 1786, she asks her sister to send a copy of Jacobi's controversial account of Spinoza published the prior year (Ep. 69). We have no direct evidence

16. I cite Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's correspondence by letter number, and according to the extraordinary online edition *Caroline: Letters from Early Romanticism*, ed. and trans. Douglas W. Stott, <www.carolineschelling.com>, accessed May 2021. For the German original, see *Caroline. Briefe an ihre Geschwister, ihre Tochter Auguste, die Familie Gotter, F.L.W. Meyer, A.W. und Fr. Schlegel, F. Schelling u.a., nebst Briefen von A.W. und Fr. Schlegel u.a.*, 2 vols., ed. Georg Waitz (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1871).

that Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, who felt geographically isolated throughout this period, in fact received this text she requested. However, she will some years later discuss Jacobi's "*salto mortale*" or leap of faith from a critical perspective (Ep. 240). Second, and relatedly, Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling writes to her sister the next year: "I would worship you if you could come up with Herder's *God* for me" (Ep. 74). Of course, she is in this passage promising gratitude; but she may also be playing with the result of pantheism, i.e., the metaphysical view according to which everything is God. Versions of pantheism had been defended by Spinoza and now by Herder in his then-new, partially Spinozistic text *God: Some Conversations* (1787). Again, we can't be sure Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling studied this latter work. But she would grow very fond of Herder (Ep. 175), and on one reading of the pantheistic stance, if God is to be worshipped, and if God is all there is, then everything is potentially deserving of worship. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling could then mean in her letter that if pantheism is true, she may worship her sister, insofar as her sister is in a sense divine.

Such early reading requests prefigure exchanges Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling will have about Spinoza's thought and its legacy with German romantics like Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known as Novalis, who for instance writes to her about Spinoza's "divine spark of the understanding of nature" (Ep. 216). Although it remains unknown whether Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling ever engages Spinoza's writings themselves, she is most explicit in an 1801 letter referencing in-depth discussions with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling on his recent work.¹⁷ She begins by observing that "there is something truly blissful about learning to understand, when an obscure concept is illuminated and one finally beholds the serenity of the concept itself." Here Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling already seems to point to at least one dimension of Spinoza's ethical project that we must consider in greater detail momentarily. But meanwhile, let us gather further momentum to this end in noting that she continues unequivocally:

17. Given this context that bears on the passage I explore momentarily, a fuller account of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's relation to Spinoza and Spinozism would profit from a close look at Schelling's *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801), which they read together "line by line." On Schelling's text and Spinoza, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "*Deus sive Vernunft*: Schelling's Transformation of Spinoza's God," *Schelling's Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 93-115.

And how calm does it render one's disposition. Indeed, I do believe in the heaven in Spinoza's soul, whose one-and-all is doubtless that old primordial feeling [*das alte Urgefühl*] that is now also pushing toward the light in Schelling as well (translation altered; Ep. 317).¹⁸

Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling now invokes Spinoza by name alongside the shorthand for pantheism, i.e., the “one-and-all” that Lessing had referenced when he supposedly expressed his sympathy for Spinoza to Jacobi. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's assertion of “belief” within this passage therefore draws her directly into the legacy of Spinozism. And in addition to pointing at a Spinozistic pantheism here, Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling highlights the link between the intellectual and ethical dimensions of Spinoza's liberatory thought—“calm,” “heaven,” “soul”—if also in partly Christianized terms, not uncommon in the German romantic context.

It's now clear enough that a careful look at Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's letters shows she was attracted to Spinoza's ethical undertaking in some form—whether because of a direct encounter with Spinoza's writings or, more likely, following engagement with contemporary debates around Spinoza. But, first: what does this Spinozistic project, with which she was at least indirectly familiar, really comprise? And, second: how exactly might her stated interest in it manifest itself within her correspondence? I answer these two questions in turn.

First, according to Spinoza, our highest ethical achievement is *freedom*; but freedom isn't anything like producing decisions in an ordinary manner. In tension with, for instance, traditional Cartesian accounts in the European philosophical tradition (at least on Spinoza's reading), Spinoza entirely rejects free will. Freedom for Spinoza is rather existing according to the necessity of one's nature or essence (E1d7).¹⁹ Put more colloquially, we may say that for Spinoza freedom is being oneself—and we may at least conjecture that Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling would have known this, given her

18. Compare two passages in Schelling that reference, respectively, the “primordial” as well as “peacefulness and calm” highlighted by Melamed, “*Deus sive Vernunft*,” 96f.

19. For more detail on Spinoza's notion of freedom, see Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 187-92.

apparent sense of Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (orig. 1785) at the center of the Pantheism Controversy. In relevant passages of this work—passages another woman thinker in early German romanticism, RAHEL VON LEVIN-VARNHAGEN (1771-1833), explicitly emphasized with enthusiasm²⁰—Jacobi initially clarifies the negative dimension of Spinoza's stance on freedom, i.e., Spinoza's rejection of free will or the capacity to produce originary decisions. Jacobi rightly reports that Spinoza is “far from denying all freedom [...] but this freedom doesn't consist in a chimerical faculty of being able to will.” Jacobi then helpfully glosses the positive dimension of Spinoza's stance on freedom as well: “The human being's freedom is [...] the degree of their actual power or the force with which a human being is who they are.”²¹ This latter ideal of freedom that Spinoza thinks we can actually achieve—though it may initially seem obscure—is simply contrasted with choosing this or that, thrown out in the prior passage. True freedom instead consists in expressing oneself. According to Spinoza, the reason we generally don't exist according to the necessity of our nature is that we rather exist according to the necessity of external influence, which estranges us from ourselves.

Spinoza's most relevant rationalist move on this basis is to argue something like the following: if we better understand the mechanisms that leave us in what he calls “bondage” (*servitus*) to harmful affects, then we can dampen their power as well as this alienation, and so live in a more suitable manner. This more suitable manner of living, characterized as free, is directly aligned with affirmative affects and power, as the more power we have, the less we are subject to the power of other things that prevent us from expressing ourselves. Spinoza therefore considers knowledge the highest good (*summum bonum*) because, at least according to the *Ethics*, it's most empowering; it allows us to position

20. For Levin-Varnhagen's citation of these passages in Jacobi on Spinoza, which she was “extraordinarily glad” to have found, see *Rahel. Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833), 150. Work remains to be done on Levin-Varnhagen and Spinoza, given this and other references; but on Levin-Varnhagen and her status as a Jew in the period, see Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, ed. Liliane Weissberg, trans. R. and C. Winston (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Liliane Weissberg, “Stepping Out: The Writing of Difference in Rahel Varnhagen's Letters,” in *New German Critique* 53 (Spring 1991): 149-62.

21. For Jacobi's text in the translation I utilize—and alter slightly—see *Main Philosophical Writings*, 212.

ourselves appropriately as we recognize how we are externally determined. This way, we can become internally determined in a manner suitable to ourselves. Doing so puts us in the position to reach the ethical summit, namely what Spinoza calls “liberty or blessedness of the soul” (E5pref)—perhaps the “freedom in Spinoza’s soul” that Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling references.

To this end, and with his alignment of knowledge, the affects, and power, Spinoza takes up a tranquil stance that resonates with the one evident in the correspondence of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling. In a striking passage, Spinoza proposes to “consider human actions and appetites as if the subject were lines, surfaces, and solids” (E3pref). The comparably composed perspective Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling develops in her correspondence becomes explicit as early as 1778, in a letter to a friend. She states in clear terms that “I am not some dreamer or rapturous enthusiast, my thoughts are always the result of reflections that I undertake with—if at all possible—a completely cool disposition” (Ep. 4). In this context, she appears to be hinting at an alleged and in any case scandalous sexual encounter while dismissing chatter around herself concerning it. Her move seems to be to take some distance from a histrionic context in order to stand above it. Such an image of an incisive, resolute analyst then persists from this early letter over the next decades. In 1783, Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling criticizes the diaristic writing of a contemporary in the following terms: “She has managed to lift herself into a wonderfully lilting, poetic disposition, and nothing is more pardonable given that she is still so young;²² but it does need to be moderated; her heart needs to be made more secure and her understanding sharper.” The point is that affective reform and a deeper kind of peace is needed in order to grasp one’s life and context, namely a serenity that would enable understanding or, she clarifies, “the ability to judge people and things according to their true (unpoetic) nature” (Ep. 35). Margaretmary Daley captures this inclination when she writes of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling’s correspondence that, unlike the course of her life, “the letters are not filled with high drama and passion.” Indeed, “on the contrary, [her] dominant emotion is restraint. Her letters portray an ongoing effort to bring order and tranquility to a life that often lacked those qualities.”²³

22. FRIEDERIKE SOPHIE MÜNTER-BRUN (1765-1835) is less than two years younger than Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, who is nineteen at the time of writing!

23. Margaretmary Daley, *Women of Letters: A Study of Self and Genre in the Personal*

Although in this evaluation Daley may understate the importance of affirmative affective expressions in the correspondence, for instance of expressions of joy, she is right that we only rarely encounter various forms of sadness we might expect to appear more frequently. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling thinks only a specific affective perspective will open up the world to successful understanding—and her pursuing this end as she does may be understood in Spinozistic terms, given the historical circumstances I outlined above.

Of course, Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling wasn't the only thinker in the modern German-language tradition engaged with the legacy of Spinoza from this practical perspective.²⁴ For instance, as far as the late eighteenth century is concerned, the radical Jewish philosopher Salomon Maimon arguably pursued an aim related to that of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling in his likewise highly original *Autobiography* of 1792-93, and a gloss on one dimension of his ambitions can illuminate the discussion I have initiated above. In short: Maimon was explicit about his provocative philosophical tendencies, including commitments to aspects of Spinozism, throughout his lifetime. For this reason and others, he too led a turbulent life. He was for instance rejected by leaders in the Jewish community in Berlin after his first arrival to the city—and this despite his thorough rabbinic training in, as he put it, “understanding God and his works.” Maimon, a rationalist who developed a significantly intellectualist ethics, documents such struggles throughout the *Autobiography*. But most significantly, in overcoming some of the obstacles to his philosophical training, he finds that he ends up with a deeper “understanding of humanity,” playing on the previous formulation.²⁵ Notably, while a philosophical-anthropological impulse inspired Maimon to take up autobiographical writing, which enabled him to develop and share his social knowledge with an eager reading public, it may be said to have led Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling to epistolary

Correspondence of Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim (Columbia: Camden House, 1998), 21.

24. Nor was she the first to question the geometric order that characterizes Spinoza's *Ethics* as well as Schelling's *Presentation*, which takes the former as a model; but see her Eps. 294 and 317 for interesting remarks on these matters.
25. Emphasis mine. Salomon Maimon, *The Autobiography of Salomon Maimon*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Abraham P. Socher, trans. Paul Reitter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 108.

pursuits that put her in the position to cultivate her comprehension of the present—albeit with a far greater degree of collaboration (i.e., with the help of her correspondents). Although Maimon may then be compared with Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling in that he too pursues an understanding of his milieu to intellectual-ethical ends,²⁶ her dedication to correspondence specifically with the aim of developing a grasp of their era then breaks genre barriers that Maimon had likewise explored.

Recognizing this can help us to see the fascinating project developed throughout Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's letters. In them, she certainly keeps up-to-date with friends and family or resolves practical matters. But she additionally interrogates her time with uncommon force, attempting to understand it and live more freely throughout it via this understanding. The distinguished historian of philosophy Kuno Fischer may have grasped this most distinctly at the turn of the twentieth century in explaining that “she is not merely a master, but genuinely a genius in letter writing; her letters are *completely herself* [...] and, should the moment or subject matter so dictate, also just as substantial and profound.”²⁷ Fischer formulates this perceptive claim in an extended treatment of Schelling and not primarily Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, then quickly leaves it behind. Yet his insight that an outstanding form of self-expression—and so in Spinozistic terms: freedom—obtains by way of her correspondence seems exactly right.²⁸

Finally, exploring the possibility that one may pursue Spinoza's intellectual-

26. For some further discussion of this Spinozistic dimension of Maimon's autobiographical writing, see my “Salomon Maimon's ‘History in Dialogues,’” *Nexus: Essays in German-Jewish Studies* (forthcoming).

27. Emphasis mine. Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, Vol. 6 (Heidelberg: Bassermann, 1872), 89. Cited according to the translation by Stott (2021). Although I can't investigate Fischer's own philosophical sympathies here, it's worth noting—given Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's interest in pantheism, discussed above—that he was accused of pantheism in 1853 and lost his permission to teach for some time. See Martin Bollacher, “Pantheismus,” *Online Lexikon Naturphilosophie* (2020), 7.

28. See Sara Friedrichsmeyer, “Caroline Schlegel-Schelling: ‘A Good Woman, and No Heroine,’” in *In the Shadow of Olympus: German Women Writers around 1800*, ed. Katherine R. Goodman and Edith Waldstein (Albany: SUNY Press 1992), 115-136 for further and especially insightful discussion of the status of correspondence in Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling.

ethical project in epistolary form can also help us learn more about Spinoza. While he explicitly undertakes self-reflection only on rare occasions,²⁹ one might wonder to what degree Spinoza implicitly develops a grasp on his thinking and his context throughout his own letter writing. Spinoza's correspondence is a major part of his (relatively thin) textual legacy, and he maintains an emphasis on the value of society. Though sometimes caricatured as a lone thinker grinding away at lenses, in fact he profited immensely from his exchanges with members of an intimate circle as well as additional interlocutors. Spinoza is unambiguous in arguing that "there is nothing more useful to a human being than another human being" (translation altered; E4p18s)—stressing the significance of others to what may nonetheless still be considered self-expression, or as some commentators would have it: even superseding orthodox notions of individuality in favor of a deeply relational perspective. Although Spinoza's systematic ambitions are well-known and stand in obvious contrast to the approach of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, we do have straightforward evidence that Spinoza works out technical philosophical matters in letters. Such exchanges then help Spinoza to settle his stances on fundamental issues, like how to define substance and attribute.³⁰ Additional discussion of these phenomena is in order, as is more extensive analysis of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling's letter writing and her broader, at least partially Spinozistic aims—perhaps with reference to her work in literary criticism and beyond, too.

§3. **Günderrode and the Practical-Liberatory**

As with Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling above, in moving on to KAROLINE VON GÜNDERRODE (1780-1806) in this section I start off by securing a link to Spinozism. I then begin to discuss the possible significance of this—also for Spinoza. Ultimately, I draw on several of Günderrode's philosophical and

29. See my note 53 below.

30. There exist relatively few recent studies on Spinoza's early geometric formulations of his thought, e.g., Ep. 2, where Spinoza's definitions of substance and attribute are the reverse of what will eventually appear in E1d3-4. See also Ep. 4 and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "A Glimpse into Spinoza's Metaphysical Laboratory: The Development of the Concepts of Substance and Attribute," in *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Melamed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 274-76.

literary texts to the end of arguing that she may again be understood as engaged with the liberatory dimension of Spinozism, even if in an interestingly different way that poses a challenge to aspects of Spinoza's account of death in particular.

Although again we can't speak of direct exposure to Spinoza's works with any certainty,³¹ several important parallels are worth noting to begin. They have received little scholarly attention,³² but these affinities between Spinoza's thought and G nderrode's may already have been evident during her brief life. An intimate partner once writes to her, for instance, remarking upon the "gravity of your interest in philosophy" and encouraging her to "proceed in letting yourself be seized by the great spirit that blows through [...] Spinoza,"³³ which could possibly indicate that G nderrode had undertaken studies of Spinoza's writings (alongside works we know she read closely by figures like Johann Gottlieb Fichte or Frans Hemsterhuis). Regardless, G nderrode was at least indirectly familiar with and partial to key features of Spinozism, as is evident from texts such as her "Apocalyptical Fragment." Generally, she develops here several brief metaphysical reflections concerning a range of themes. But more specifically, the conclusion of this text features what appear to be especially strong echoes of Spinoza's metaphysics:

Therefore, who has ears to hear, let them hear! It is not two, nor three, nor a thousand, but one-and-all; it is not body and spirit separately, one belonging to time, the other to eternity, but one, belonging to itself [...].³⁴

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31. G nderrode did once copy down a passage from Spinoza's Ep. 43 ("[T]he reward of virtue is virtue itself, whereas the punishment of folly and weakness is folly itself"), but she found this in a volume presenting quotations from the works of major thinkers. See Max Preitz and Doris Hopp (eds.), "Karoline von G nderrode in ihrer Umwelt. III. Karoline von G nderrodes Studienbuch," *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* (1975), 266.
32. On a broader range of issues concerning G nderrode and Spinoza than I can consider here, see Joanna Raisbeck, *Karoline von G nderrode: Philosophical Romantic* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2022), arguing that G nderrode is "the most consistent thinker of Spinozist pantheism."
33. In the elided text, Friedrich Creuzer references also first "the works of Schelling" and then "some of the ancient philosophers." Karoline von G nderrode, *S mtliche Werke und ausgew hlte Studien*, Vol. III, ed. Walter Morgenthaler et al. (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1991), 344.
34. Translation altered. "Apocalyptical Fragment," in *Correspondence of Fr ulein G nderrode* [sic]

First, we have in this text reference again to the “one-and-all,” which I have emphasized was frequently employed as shorthand for Spinoza’s pantheism around 1800, following Lessing’s well-known use of the locution. Hence, although G nderrode was attracted to several forms of pantheism—and more work is needed on her engagement with Indian philosophy in particular—this reference very likely speaks for an at least indirect familiarity with Spinoza. Second, we have here not just vague mention of a monism according to which all that is is God, namely pantheism broadly speaking, but something more precise. According to Spinoza’s pantheistic monism, there is one substance (compare G nderrode’s “not two, nor three”). That substance, God, is eternal despite its expression also in the transitory (consider G nderrode’s “one [...] at once, time and eternity”). And it has two known attributes, namely thought and extension (note, finally, G nderrode’s analogous “spirit” and “body”). In other words, we have in the case of these passages possible evidence of several shared commitments. The historical fact of the letter, referenced above, along with this gloss of G nderrode’s metaphysical tendencies expressed in the “Apocalyptical Fragment,” should already suffice to raise the following question: what consequence might her attraction to a monism that shares several things with Spinoza’s have for G nderrode as she develops accounts of, for example, being oneself, and so freedom (the guiding thread of this chapter)?

In order to answer this question, I turn to G nderrode’s *Hildgund* (1805), a dramatic fragment featuring an eponymous female protagonist at odds with and initially held captive by Attila the Hun. Following Hildgund’s escape and return to her homeland Burgundy, he threatens war. Hildgund’s betrothed, Walter, vows to fight as Hildgund exclaims and poses the following ‘decisive’ question:

Woman’s destiny, ah! does not rest in her own hand!
 Now she follows need, now strict custom’s will,
 Can one revoke what superior power commands?³⁵

and Bettine von Arnim, trans. Margaret Fuller and Minna Wesselhoeft (Boston: Burnham, 1861), 13.

35. Karoline von G nderrode, *Poetic Fragments*, ed. and trans. Anna C. Ezekiel (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016), 76. Following this note, I provide in-text citations of *Hildgund*.

In the following brief account of the dramatic fragment, I propose that the text answers negatively this question posed in the last verse above. Accordingly, G nderrode denies or at least deemphasizes here the prospects of the kind of libertarian free will that I have associated (following Spinoza) with Descartes and contrasted with Spinoza’s freedom of self-expression. Furthermore, I suggest that through *Hildgund* G nderrode positively presents her reader with the idea that they can be subject to “what superior power commands” according to the necessity of their nature—or in G nderrode’s more literary terms: their ‘fate’—and find liberation in that. This secures a link to Spinoza not just regarding what G nderrode may see as unviable (namely free will, or the capacity to produce originary decisions), but also regarding what she then seems more attracted to (namely freedom understood as being oneself).

Upon hearing the threat of invasion, Hildgund quickly grants that she must obey Attila’s ‘command’ and rejects Walter’s proposition of war. Hildgund’s father has already left the stage, apparently having expected no other result. But we soon find out that Hildgund plans to murder Attila the night she returns to his camp, amid celebrations of her ‘choice’ to ‘accept’ his marriage proposal. Hildgund affirms that “the people’s destiny rests in [her] breast,” and that she “will free them, free me” precisely by accepting her lot—by returning to Attila, though to assassinate him (translation altered; 68). In contrast to, say, Antigone, Hildgund harmonizes in this tragedy the various ethical demands at hand; but very much like Antigone, Hildgund pursues her ethical mission to her end that is arguably suicide.³⁶ Hildgund thereby emphasizes her self-determination throughout, even given prominent external influence, but in an unexpected manner.

Recall that, for Spinoza, freedom is existing in the one substance there is, and specifically according to the necessity of one’s nature—i.e., existing in a manner that expresses one’s self, despite, or perhaps rather with, the causal forces that be. G nderrode’s highest norms likewise bear on self-realization, and not just of the individual, but also of some greater unity. In her “Idea of the Earth” she defines beauty, for instance, as “being the same as oneself and

36. For further discussion of Antigone and the drama of politics, see my “Hegel on Tragedy and the World-Historical Individual’s Right of Revolutionary Action,” in *Hegel on Tragedy and Comedy: New Essays*, ed. Mark Alznauer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2021), 241-64.

harmonious”; truth, justice, and love then each bear on “the All” as it tries to achieve self-identity, with “the particular” playing various roles to this end, not least because the particular then also “survives immortally” within the whole.³⁷ Hildgund’s achievement in this connection may be seen as her fitting into the world such that it also fits her, where this world or her kingdom is able to flourish—which is to say: improve as regards metrics like beauty and justice. Keeping in mind G nderrode’s sympathy with several metaphysical commitments essential to Spinozism, we can understand her to be exploring this notion of self-expression within the All through the figure of Hildgund, who recognizes what must happen and finds her power and liberation in this. Although Hildgund can’t quite choose freely, as both she and her father promptly seem to sense she must concede to Attila, she can still act as is necessary in her own way. Arguably, G nderrode’s heroine thereby secures a Spinozistic freedom and contributes to the development of the self-identity that G nderrode sees us tasked to accomplish, not just for one’s own sake—Hildgund’s individuality is after all highly relational, minimally as she is a member of the community that is Burgundy—but for the sake of the whole or “All.”

In pointing to the potential importance of this Spinozistic intellectual context, we may help satisfy an important demand that has arisen in the literature on G nderrode. Of course, we certainly go beyond any simplistic biographical reading of Hildgund as an imagined revenge G nderrode would wish to take on some of her historical contemporaries; as Joanna Raisbeck emphasizes following Susanne Kord, biographism has long been an issue with respect to G nderrode.³⁸ But more importantly, we also assist in filling a lacuna identified by recent scholarly work on G nderrode. Christine Battersby has noted G nderrode’s “longing to re-join the earth and simultaneously dissolve her identity into fluidity” such that she can be understood as seeking “an individuality that is in harmony with, and permeated by, the opposing forces that together constitute Nature.”³⁹ Anna C. Ezekiel has followed up on

37. G nderrode, “Idea of the Earth,” 83.

38. See Susanne Kord, *Sich einen Namen machen. Anonymit t und weibliche Autorschaft. 1700-1900* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1996), 147, cited in Joanna Raisbeck, “Von Mythen umrankt,” *Litlog. G ttinger eMagazin f r Literatur – Kultur – Wissenschaft*, <<https://www.litlog.de/von-mythen-umrankt>>, accessed May 2021.

39. Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (London: Routledge, 2007),

this latter dimension of Günderrode's thought in particular, again without reference to Spinoza, albeit perceptively noting that for Günderrode "freedom, if it exists, must in some way include the influence of external forces on one's actions."⁴⁰ However, it isn't immediately clear how one might meet these sundry philosophical demands, especially given Günderrode's apparent deemphasis of free will, or the capacity to produce originary decisions, in *Hildgund* and other works. This leaves at least some distance between Günderrode and several of her philosophical interlocutors.⁴¹ But while we should by no means then simply assimilate Günderrode's ideals of self-expression to Spinoza's, I have suggested that freedom and necessity are compatible for both, and in related ways. Freedom arguably even demands necessity, insofar as the former means accepting the latter and yet also remaining or becoming oneself in it. Meanwhile, freedom of will remains impossible, at least for Spinoza (if not also Günderrode), or certainly out of the question given social conditions, at least for Günderrode (as well as her woman protagonist).⁴²

In taking a marked interest in such circumstances, Günderrode could be more interested in the directly practical potential of a Spinozistic liberatory quest than Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling. There can be no doubt that Günderrode thoroughly enjoyed her intellectual work and found meaning or even freedom in it, possibly in what could again be considered a Spinozistic spirit. But Günderrode's captivating concern in *Hildgund* and related texts isn't chiefly intellectual development. It's rather the acquisition of agency by more worldly

120f.

40. Anna C. Ezekiel, "Metamorphosis, Personhood, and Power in Karoline von Günderrode," *European Romantic Review* 25, no. 6: 782.

41. For Günderrode's critique of one important contemporary in this connection, see her "On Fichte's *The Vocation of Humankind*," in *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 73, note 21: "My best will does not work in the world if I do not have the opportunity to show it in acts [and] if I do not have this opportunity, what is it worth [...]?" Dalia Nassar, "The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode's Philosophy of Nature," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (forthcoming) discusses this passage and Günderrode's notion of "opportunity" in a similar spirit, albeit in context and in greater detail.

42. One of Günderrode's most crucial interlocutors will go so far as to write, addressing Günderrode: "No earth-destiny [*Erdenschicksal*] interests me, because I have yet no freedom to guide it." *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderrode [sic] and Bettine von Arnim*, 37.

means,⁴³ which Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling at least eventually sets aside in some sense.⁴⁴ This practical impulse in *Hildgund* is likewise evident in Günderrode's *Muhammad, the Prophet of Mecca* (1805), which investigates the force of religion, among other things exploring the idea that “where no deed is, there is no power.”⁴⁵ Such a realist political interest may or may not be a result of necessitarian leanings that could exclude mere potentiality for Günderrode, who repeatedly has her protagonist deny any capacity to produce ordinary decisions.⁴⁶ But her political perspective is in any case in harmony with one compelling dimension of Spinoza's thought that also emphasized the importance not of potentiality but of actuality, without which power can't obtain.

Having pointed to these parallels, we must additionally note that Günderrode can definitively be seen as standing in direct tension with Spinoza in at least one major respect, indeed still regarding her the notion of power—insofar as she positively reevaluates the metaphysical status of death. I have clarified that, strictly speaking, it remains unclear in *Hildgund* whether Günderrode's heroine survives the assassination she has contentedly planned. Does she then try to escape, and if so, does she succeed? Günderrode leaves the narrative open at a crucial juncture, encouraging her reader to define its conclusion as they must, on the basis of their own circumstances—arguably itself the perfect nudge towards freedom as self-expression. Still, although there

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43. On a number of issues pertaining to the practical dimension of Günderrode's thought, see Anna C. Ezekiel, “Revolution and revitalization: Karoline von Günderrode's political philosophy and its metaphysical foundations,” in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).
44. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling had explicit political interests earlier on, which would for instance encourage her exchange with THERESE HEYNE-FORSTER-HUBER (1764-1829) and Georg Forster, a prominent supporter of revolutionary France in Mainz. This affiliation then led to her imprisonment, and she will later write to a friend in 1793 that she is now “deaf and uninterested with regard to anything political” (Ep. 129). Nonetheless, this isn't to say that she abandoned her earlier political tendencies to swing in the other direction, like various Jena romantics on whom she once had a progressive influence.
45. Günderrode, *Poetic Fragments*, 160. Compare “The Idea of the Earth,” in *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 82: “a force without some sort of effect, is not comprehensible.”
46. See, for instance, Muhammad's stress on “the providence of God.” *Poetic Fragments*, 216.

can be no certainty here, it at least remains very probable that Hildgund's tactic is to be understood as a fatal and nevertheless empowering one. Among other things, Hildgund has initially stressed Attila's military might in conversation with her father (60). And more generally, Günderrode carries out a robust reconsideration of death in her "Apocalyptical Fragment" as well as numerous other writings. Note that Günderrode affirms in the former text a "release from being" whereby she would be "feeling myself in all, enjoying all in myself."⁴⁷ As Amy Jones puts it, "living fully, in her understanding, can include dying."⁴⁸

This possibility of a transition from life into death through joy and ultimately freedom, if properly identified, creates a major tension in Spinoza's thought. Spinoza would have an extraordinarily hard time conceiving of suicide as empowering; he can't even make sense of it at all, strictly speaking. For Spinoza, who must be considered an eliminativist in this respect, suicide per se is impossible—let alone allegedly self-affirming, liberatory suicide. According to his conatus principle, "every thing [...] strives to persevere in its existence" (E3p6), and perhaps still more pressing, "nothing can be destroyed but by an external cause" (E3p4). Spinoza draws from such commitments the conclusion that "no one therefore, unless they are overcome by external causes contrary to their nature, neglects to seek what is useful to themselves or to preserve their being" (translation altered; E4p20s). In other words, for Spinoza, cases of so-called suicide are really just cases of someone yielding. And yet Günderrode, who herself committed suicide at the age of twenty-six and was outspoken about it for years prior, suggests in *Hildgund* and other writings that suicide may be not only possible, but also perfectly in line with one's essence and self-determined. In her "Story of a Brahmin" too, for instance, the protagonist enters into dialogue with an interlocutor who criticizes in ethical terms taking leave of society, considering it a kind of suicide, and the former responds as follows: "as much as the outer development of human beings differs, their inner natures differ just as much."⁴⁹ One possible inference suggested by this text is then that

47. Günderrode, *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderrode [sic] and Bettine von Arnim*, 13.

48. Amy Jones, "Vampirism Inverted: Pathology, Gender, and Authorship in Karoline von Günderrode's 'Die Bande der Liebe,'" in *Writing the Self, Creating Community: German Women Authors and the Literary Sphere 1750-1850*, ed. Elisabeth Krimmer and Lauren Nosselt (Columbia: Camden House, 2020), 143.

49. Günderrode, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. I, 307.

suicide itself could be the true fulfillment of someone's nature.

Günderrode's reconceptualization of death, and on the basis of a comparable but in the end clearly also divergent monist metaphysics, puts significant pressure on Spinoza. Most urgent is that for Günderrode (and some of her Spinozistic interlocutors like Herder),⁵⁰ death isn't strictly speaking an end; one's "elements" and influence can form other beings, resulting in a kind of posthumous life.⁵¹ Spinoza made no room for any notion of reincarnation, even along the lines of a more naturalistic "ecosystem theory" on which life and death are intimately intertwined.⁵² But Günderrode's views are arguably warranted in a strictly monistic and indeed pantheistic context wherein also degrees of existence play a major role.

Spinoza may in fact have been aware of such tensions in his thought, even regarding the possibility of self-expressing sacrifice. As we have seen, what might be called Spinoza's 'bias to existence' is on full display in his *Ethics*, where he goes so far as to claim that "a free person thinks of nothing less than of death" (translation altered; E4p67). Yet, elsewhere he notes that "people who know themselves [*se norunt*] to be honorable [...] think it honorable, not a punishment, to die for a good cause, and glorious to die for freedom" (TTP XX 36). While in the former passage Spinoza seems to indicate that death can have no positive value with respect to his ideals, the latter passage hints that one could self-consciously, perhaps even self-knowingly, "die [...] for freedom." Following Günderrode, further work ought to pursue the significance of this prospect in Spinoza in more detail, perhaps with additional consideration of his own early self-identified rejection of the sensual.⁵³ Nevertheless, it's clear that Spinoza will not go so far as Günderrode, whose "The Pilgrims" (1805) has

50. See Gabriel Trop, "Karoline von Günderrode's Aesthetics of *Naturphilosophie*" (manuscript) for further discussion.

51. Günderrode, "The Idea of the Earth," 82f.

52. I borrow this helpful terminology from Karen Ng, "The Idea of the Earth in Günderrode, Schelling, and Hegel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), **.

53. Spinoza begins an important autobiographical reflection, describing his intellectual path: "After experience taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile [...]" (TIE 1).

a lyrical I probe with great intensity, “What is the magnificence of the world/ And all, that pleases the senses?” before continuing: “I will *gladly* renounce it.”⁵⁴

§4. Successors and Conclusion

These treatments of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and Günderröde should encourage further work on the relevance of Spinoza or Spinozism to each. But they should also motivate more general discussion of the direct or indirect engagement with Spinoza’s thought consistent among modern women philosophers in the German tradition. Before concluding with some final and summary remarks regarding that general tendency, I open this ultimate section by pointing ahead into the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

LOU SALOMÉ (1861-1937) may not have been familiar with Günderröde, but the following affirmative claims made from her deathbed, having just been read passages from her own work, might lead us to wonder: “Yes, I would still say it that way today,” and “everything was good, every part of it”—but “the best is indeed death.”⁵⁵ These comments were made in Göttingen, where she lived out the last years of her life, and so one might likewise grow curious whether she could have been aware of Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, a relatedly controversial since ‘free-spirited’ woman thinker who was born and raised in the city. But in any case, there can be no doubt that Salomé was heavily impacted by an early encounter with Spinoza, and that this led to a long-term interest in his thought. Let us first clarify Salomé’s own testimony as well as several historical circumstances. Salomé writes in 1912 that Spinoza was “the one thinker” she approached in her childhood, claiming: “Think far enough, correctly enough on any point at all and you hit upon him; you meet him

54. Emphasis mine; Günderröde, *Poetic Fragments*, 116f.

55. Cited by Brigid Haines, “‘Ja, so würde ich es auch heute noch sagen’: Reading Lou Andreas-Salomé in the 1990s,” *Publications of the Goethe Society* 62 (1991): 77-95. Salomé had developed interests in the negative side to desire already some decades prior, and carried out important work within the psychoanalytic context on narcissism in connection with then-new theories of the death drive. On this and more, see the wide-ranging clarificatory discussion in Tracie Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), Chapter 7.

waiting for you, standing ready at the side of the road.”⁵⁶ It seems Salomé first encountered Spinoza via her early tutor Henrik Gillot, alongside whom she developed a strong interest in philosophy. Gillot had around this time worked on translating Otto Pflleiderer’s *Philosophy of Religion on the Basis of Its History* (1878), which was then an important object of study for Salomé, and which begins with an extensive discussion of Spinoza (Pfleiderer considers him the first philosopher of religion). Spinoza then continues to attract Salomé’s interest throughout various periods of her thinking. It’s possible—indeed very likely—that she would have discussed Spinoza with Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée, who were also both engaged with his thought, if perhaps less directly;⁵⁷ the three formed a tight trio for some time, and Salomé later lived with Rée. When she eventually moves to Vienna to pursue her work alongside Sigmund Freud, she again reads Spinoza and proposes that he is the “philosopher of psychoanalysis.”⁵⁸ Since Salomé’s interest in Spinoza extends over such a long period, it should come as no surprise that her engagement with his thought varies widely. But a link to Spinoza’s notion of freedom is certainly possible once again, with reference to Salomé’s account of liberation that responds to the feminisms of her time. Although Salomé is no anti-feminist, she does develop a significant critique of contemporary “so-called women’s emancipation movements.” She proposes, in tension with some contemporaries, that women “look for themselves in their uniqueness with respect to men, and initially entirely in this,” for as long as they don’t, “they also will not realize just how extensively and how powerfully they can unfold in the development of their nature.” In short: “women are still

56. Lou Andreas-Salomé, *The Freud Journal of Lou Andreas-Salomé*, trans. Stanley A. Leavy (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 77f.

57. On Nietzsche and Spinoza, see my “Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Etiology (On the Example of Free Will),” *European Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (2021): 459-74 as well as my “Nietzsche and Spinoza,” in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 527-37. Rée’s deterministic views presented in *The Illusion of Free Will* (1885) coincide with Spinoza’s on many fronts, and Rée knew this; for instance, he references Spinoza several times in his earlier work on *The Origin of Moral Sensations* (1877), available in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Robin Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). On Rée and Spinoza, see my “Spinoza and Jewish Philosophy,” in *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Paul Franks (Oxford: OUP, 2024).

58. Salomé, *Freud Journal*, 77.

insufficiently themselves, insufficiently women.”⁵⁹ This line is complicated by Salomé’s thinking in other texts, which demand further attention,⁶⁰ but it should certainly also remind us of Spinoza’s theory of freedom as self-expression.

Like Salomé, RESA VON SCHIRNHOFER (1855-1948) studied at Zürich, the first university in the German-speaking context to officially accept women students, and would end up leaving academia. She seems to have ultimately sustained herself teaching language and piano.⁶¹ But prior to this, and unlike Salomé, von Schirnhofer was able to complete the doctoral degree. Her dissertation was published under the title *A Comparison of the Thought of Schelling and Spinoza* (1889). The study carefully works out the relation between the two thinkers, with a general emphasis on issues in metaphysics and epistemology, and particular focus on Schelling’s “identity philosophy.”

Von Schirnhofer anticipates especially two academic philosophers who must be mentioned. ANNA TUMARKIN (1875-1951) completed her doctorate at Bern, and was then the first woman professor of philosophy in Switzerland or perhaps even Europe to secure an academic appointment that involved taking part in defenses and more. Although this is occasionally acknowledged,⁶² Tumarkin’s wide-ranging work on Spinoza and many themes in the history of philosophy, aesthetics, and beyond is rarely if ever appreciated. Her *Spinoza: Eight Lectures Held at the University of Bern* (1908) stands out, given its attempt to reconstruct Spinoza on his own terms, against marked neo-Kantian tendencies in this period.

Finally, although she wasn’t in the position to pursue an extensive academic

59. Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Aufsätze und Essays*, Vol. 2, ed. Hans-Rüdiger Schwab (Taching: MedienEdition Welsch, 2014), 35f.

60. See Raleigh Whiting, introduction to *The Human Family* by Lou Andreas-Salomé, ed. and trans. Whiting (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), ix for some discussion.

61. Hans Lohberger, “Friedrich Nietzsche und Resa von Schirnhofer,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 22, no. 2 (1968): 28.

62. Tumarkin’s status here is also sometimes neglected. Despite the fact that she advanced to a nearly full appointment as professor of philosophy at the University of Bern already in 1909, sitting on the University Senate and more, JEANNE HERSCH (1910-2000) is often referred to as the first woman professor of philosophy in Switzerland, as Ursula Pia Jauch has clarified to me in correspondence. For an example of this confusion see, e.g., resources published by the Karl Jaspers Foundation, “Jeanne Hersch,” <www.jaspers-stiftung.ch/de/die-karl-jaspers-stiftung-1/biographie-jeanne-hersch>, accessed May 2021.

career like Tumarkin, ELISABETH SCHMITT (1877-?) wrote a remarkable dissertation at Heidelberg, on one of the thorniest issues in Spinoza's thought, again despite then-prominent philosophical pressures that would have cast suspicion on such metaphysical investigations. Her study *Spinoza's Infinite Modes* (1910) has been neglected but remains relevant to discussions in the literature, given both its extensive exploration of the development of the so-called infinite modes across Spinoza's works as well as its treatment of their systematic importance as regards a range of issues in Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and beyond. Schmitt's dissertation was well-received by her primary evaluator; Wilhelm Windelband writes, concluding a detailed assessment available in Heidelberg at the university library archives, that her dissertation establishes "a highly notable contribution to the interpretation of Spinoza's system," and recommends "most warmly" that she be awarded the doctorate.⁶³ Windelband likewise notes that Schmitt's studies were unfortunately interrupted by "sickliness" and "domestic circumstances," each of which may help explain her exit from university life.⁶⁴ But of course, Schmitt's presence as an academic woman philosopher would also have been tremendously unusual given structural barriers. Certain institutions proved more progressive than others, but it was only starting in 1909—the year Schmitt completes her PhD—that women could initiate studies at all German universities. (The effects of such structural barriers are felt up until this day.) It should then come as no surprise that surviving documents concerning her enrollment regularly utilize the masculine honorific in print (e.g., "Mr. ____" to list surname); in such cases, this is then generally corrected by hand as the form is filled out (e.g.,

63. I am deeply grateful to Luce deLire and Florian Ehrensperger for their help in gaining access to and transcribing these documents in H-IV-757/4. Schmitt's work was also praised by an important early academic woman philosopher in the United States; see the discussion by ELLEN BLISS TALBOT (1867-1968) in *The Philosophical Review* 20, no. 6 (1911): 666-68.

64. In a short biography attached to her dissertation, Schmitt also notes the interruptions of her studies in philosophy, systematic theology, and German literature, which took place in Heidelberg, Freiburg, and Berlin between around 1901 and 1909. See Elisabeth Schmitt, *Die unendlichen Modi bei Spinoza* (Leipzig: Barth, 1910), 136 and a manuscript version of this text in the university library archives at Heidelberg, which diverges from the print version in minor but potentially interesting ways. Schmitt singles out both the theologian Ernst Troeltsch and Windelband for their support in the unpublished materials, but only references Windelband by name in the printed text, for instance.

“Mr. Ms. Schmitt”). Not much is known of Schmitt’s path following the degree at Heidelberg, but she remained connected to the city for at least some years. She gave weekly lectures at the Institute for Women’s Education and Study (*Verein Frauenbildung-Frauenstudium*) in Heidelberg, introducing the history of modern philosophy to listeners—alongside courses on how to care for an infant, for example, offered by a male medical doctor.⁶⁵

It should now be evident that the engagement with Spinozism among modern women thinkers in the German tradition considered here is at least as strong as the pronounced interest in Spinoza among more canonical figures—though the literature has yet to explore such a phenomenon. Furthermore, although this hasn’t been my focus on the present occasion, the interest in Spinoza among commonly discussed male German thinkers is in many cases mediated through, and possibly anticipated by, women philosophers. Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, for instance, arguably prefigures Goethe when he writes of the “peaceful effect [Spinoza] had produced in me” in his autobiography begun after 1810;⁶⁶ and in any case, Goethe’s reading of Spinoza is of course itself developed in conjunction with von Stein.

In this chapter, I have pursued plausible engagements with Spinoza or Spinozism among several of the most notable women philosophers in the modern German tradition, in some cases for the first time. I have highlighted the apparent significance of the ethical, liberatory dimension of Spinoza’s thought: the centrality of his notion of freedom as the expression of one’s nature through self-understanding and other forms of power—all of which can be achieved under variable circumstances and allow for a particular kind of self-determination. In pointing to the viable appeal of Spinoza’s account of a relatively flexible freedom under limitation, whereby freedom is distinguished from doing as one pleases (which one very much couldn’t as a woman thinker around the nineteenth century), I have entirely avoided questioning this line

65. J. Metzger, *Chronik der Stadt Heidelberg für das Jahr 1910* (Heidelberg: Verlag von J. Hörning, 1913), 222 and Ferdinand Rösiger, *Chronik der Stadt Heidelberg für das Jahr 1911* (Heidelberg: Verlag von J. Hörning, 1914), 174. Schmitt also published again on Spinoza’s infinite modes. See Elisabeth Schmitt, “Zur Problematik der Unendlichen Modi,” *Chronicon Spinozanum* 2 (1922): 155-73.

66. J.W. Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth*, trans. Robert R. Heitner, in *The Collected Works*, vol. 5, ed. Thomas P. Saine and Jeffrey L. Sammons (New York: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), 523.

of thinking. I haven't, for instance, attempted to evaluate how productive it may have been, or may still be. Some philosophers today might well suspect that notions of freedom like the ones I have discussed, lacking a prominent libertarian dimension, could be counterproductive; at the very least, there is good precedent in the German tradition for a critical perspective on uniting freedom with strict necessity.⁶⁷ I have also refrained from pursuing a more intellectual-historical hypothesis, for instance that Spinoza or Spinozism are attractive to women philosophers in the modern German tradition because of Spinoza's outsider status as a Jew. There is certainly evidence that women thinkers sometimes did see parallels with others who were excluded—the novelized account by BETTINA BRENTANO-VON ARNIM (1785-1859) of her relation to Günderröde brings together the woman and the Jew as outsiders, for example⁶⁸—and there could be much to learn from taking such a perspective in a sufficiently subtle manner. But I have instead tried to show what might be attractive about the more explicitly philosophical content of Spinoza's thought and its legacy. I hope this will encourage further work along both these and other lines.

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67. To be sure, it's unclear how many figures considered in this chapter would go this far, to a fully deterministic metaphysical view and beyond. In any case—although it isn't a feminist critique—see my discussion of Fichte's eventual social concern about rejecting any libertarian dimension to freedom as aristocratic in "Fichte's First First Principles, in the *Aphorisms on Religion and Deism* (1790) and Prior," within "The Enigma of Fichte's First Principles," ed. David W. Wood, special issue, *Fichte-Studien* 49 (2021), 21.
68. See, for some discussion, Kari E. Lokke, *Tracing Women's Romanticism: Gender, History, and Transcendence* (Routledge: London, 2004), 94-101. On Brentano-von Arnim more generally, see Anne Pollok, "Bettina Brentano-von Arnim," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), **. Finally, for a translation of Brentano-von Arnim's text itself, see my note 34.

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