

# INTERPRETATIONS OF SPINOZA'S ONTOLOGY IN SOVIET PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE 1950s-70s

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*Summary: Interpretations of Spinoza's ontology in Soviet philosophical historiography in the 1950-70s.* The aim of this article is to bring into focus the existence of two methodologically divergent tendencies in what George Kline denotes as «Soviet Spinoza scholarship» and to draw a line of differentiation between them. In particular, it aims to define on the one hand the instrumental interpretations of Spinozism, that is Spinoza's presence in Soviet philosophy properly speaking, and on the other its historiographical interpretations, that is Spinoza's presence in Soviet philosophical historiography. The author addresses specifically the readings of Spinoza's ontology and tries to trace the process of the «emancipation» of Soviet philosophical historiography on this subject from what may be called «Georgi Plekhanov's heritage». In addition, she analyses Vasilij V. Sokolov's reading of the doctrine of substance in Spinoza and outlines his contribution to the advance of high-standard historical-philosophical studies in the Soviet Union.

*Keywords:* philosophical historiography, Soviet philosophy, Spinoza, substance, ontology.

## 1. Introduction

Georgi Plekhanov's captivating definition of Marxism as a variety of Spinozism enjoyed considerable popularity over the years, most famously, though not exclusively, in the Soviet Union until the 1930s. Several studies – beginning with George Kline's extensive introduction to the volume containing his translation of essays on Spinoza by Soviet authors<sup>1</sup> – have contributed to revealing the importance of this definition for Soviet Marxism<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Kline 1952.

2. The proceedings of the recently held conference «Spinoza in Soviet Thought. An

Furthermore, such studies have confirmed that Kline rightly stated: «We may study with profit not only Spinoza in Soviet philosophy but also Soviet philosophy through Spinoza»<sup>3</sup>.

The aim of the present article is to bring into focus the existence of two methodologically divergent tendencies in what Kline denotes as «Soviet Spinoza scholarship» and to draw a line of differentiation between them. In particular, it aims to define on the one hand the instrumental interpretations of Spinozism, that is Spinoza's presence in Soviet *philosophy* properly speaking<sup>4</sup>, and, on the other hand, its historiographical interpretations, namely Spinoza's presence in Soviet *philosophical historiography*. The analysis addresses specifically the readings of Spinoza's ontology and tries to trace the process of the «emancipation» by Soviet philosophical historiography of this subject from what may be called «Plekhanov's heritage».

This process took place from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and its conclusion was marked, at least symbolically, by the following episode involving the well-known figure of the Soviet Marxist-Leninist philosopher Evald Vasilevič Ilyenkov (1924-1979), recounted by Andrej Majdanskij.

In 1965 Ilyenkov worked on a chapter about Spinoza's dialectics for the next volume of *(The) History of Dialectics*<sup>5</sup>. 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<sup>6</sup>. [...] Ilyenkov's interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy met with an extremely hostile reception and the upshot was that that chapter of *(The) History of Dialectics* was written by his influential opponent V[asilij] V[asilevič] Sokolov<sup>7</sup>.

Majdanskij explains this hostile reception of Ilyenkov's draft of the chapter in the *History of Dialectics* by his «chronic conflict with the Soviet philosophical establishment», which «periodically attained acute forms»<sup>8</sup>.

International Symposium at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki (18–19 May, 2012)» promise, when published, to divulge further interesting details and reflections on the subject of Soviet Spinoza scholarship.

3. Kline 1952, p. 47.

4. Cf. Vittorio Morfino's opinion that «*Spinoza è stato interpellato nella storia della tradizione marxista a più riprese ed in contesti storici, culturali e politici molto differenti come l'autore che avrebbe dovuto fornire una sorta di fondazione ontologica al marxismo*» (Morfino 2011, p. 97). Concerning the necessity to «*separare i livelli differenti [historiographical level, level of the «history of Marxism» and strictly theoretical level] della questione del rapporto Marx-Spinoza*», see Morfino 2011, p. 86; on the «function» of Spinoza's philosophy in the «history of Marxism», see therein pp. 97-108. On the Marx-Spinoza relation see also Salem 2007, Tosel 2007, Tosel 1994, Tosel 1993, while on the Engels-Spinoza relation, see Morfino 2002.

5. The series includes three books investigating the history of dialectics in ancient (Dybnik *et al.* 1992), early modern (Kamenskij, Narskij, Ojzerman 1974), and classical German philosophy (Ojzerman, Bogomolov 1987).

6. The text of this report was published posthumously as Ilyenkov 1997.

7. Maidansky 2003, pp. 210-211. Sokolov's contribution appeared as Sokolov 1974.

8. Maidansky 2003, p. 211.

However, although Ilyenkov's troubles with the «Soviet philosophical establishment» have been confirmed, the hypothesis here is that the main reason for his chapter on Spinoza being rejected was a different one. It seems that it was down to the kind of exposition the author wanted to use. Here is how he himself viewed the aim of his contribution:

The task that I have ventured to take on is to expound and elucidate Spinoza so that the economist, the psychologist, the researcher of the higher nervous activity, not to speak of the logician or the philosopher engaged in the study of so-called «epistemology» or «theory of knowledge», can all see in Spinoza a generalizing-algebraic, that is a universal-logical solution to today's difficulties [...]<sup>9</sup>.

This does not sound as if the author planned to give a historical-philosophical exposition of Spinoza's thought. Rather, he was trying to develop an original interpretation rich in possible theoretical implications<sup>10</sup>. Whatever the theoretical validity of this reading may have been, in my opinion the *History of Dialectics* was not the proper place for it to be published since this volume was designed as a *history of philosophy* textbook (leaving aside any discussion of the «history of dialectics» as a discipline).

It does not seem very likely that in the specific case of Ilyenkov's contribution to the *History of Dialectics* the point was to silence his creative interpretation of Spinozism, simply because other similar texts by Ilyenkov were published<sup>11</sup>. For example, his *Dialectical Logic* of 1974 containing a chapter dedicated to Spinoza appeared in English in 1977<sup>12</sup>, as well as in other European languages. Moreover, these foreign language editions were prepared – certainly with the approval of the political authorities by the very publishing house Progress, whose explicit mission was to present the best of Soviet scholarship to the world. It might be objected that *Dialectical Logic* was published some ten years after the episode at the Institute of Philosophy. However, in the mid-1960s, precisely at the time of the episode in question, Ilyenkov was one of the authors involved in the most significant post-Stalinist, Soviet philosophical project, namely the five-volume *Philosophical Encyclopedia*, in which he wrote about a dozen entries. Not only did these include his famous «The Ideal» but also an equally important entry –

9. «Zadača, ktoruju ja pered soboj risknul postaviti', – èto izložiti' i osvjetiti' Spinozu tak, čtoby v nem uvidel obobščennno-algebraičeskij, to est' obščje-logičeskij vyhod iz nynešnih trudnostej, i ekonomist, i psiholog, i issledovatel' fiziologii vysšej nervnoj dejatel'nosti ne govornja uže o logike, o filosofo, zanimajuščemsja tak nazyvajemoj «gnoseologijej», «teorijej poznanija» (Ilyenkov 1997, p. 171).

10. For an account of Ilyenkov's interpretation of Spinoza, see, for example, Majdanskij 2002, Oittinen 2005.

11. Majdanskij reports as follows: «In the same year [1965] Ilyenkov delivered a series of lectures on 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 unknown reasons. The manuscript of his unfinished book would be published only now» (Maidanskij 2003, p. 211). The draft of the book in question appeared as Ilyenkov 1999.

12. See Ilyenkov 1977.

particularly with regard to the issue dealt with here – called «Substance». The fact that the drafting of such a key entry in the *Philosophical Encyclopedia* (in which he expounded his version of a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of Spinoza's notion of substance) was assigned to Ilyenkov supports my hypothesis that the replacement in 1965 of his contribution to the *History of Dialectics* textbook with another one by Vasilij Vasilevič Sokolov marks the conclusion of the process of liberation of historical-philosophical studies on Spinoza from the «traditional» instrumental interpretations and use of Spinozism «or rather of alleged Spinozistic ideas»<sup>13</sup> for theoretical ends.

This was how the historical-philosophical level in Soviet philosophers' interpretation of Spinoza became separated from the theoretical one around the mid-1960s. The merging of the two levels, on the other hand, had been accomplished in the 1920s and had been preceded by a prehistory which is worth remembering here, though relatively well-known, in order to emphasize some key moments that would have a later impact.

## 2. Plekhanov's Spinoza

Following the example of Marx (*Die heilige Familie*) and especially Engels (*Ludwig Feuerbach*), the «father» of Russian Social Democracy Georgi Plekhanov distinguishes between two parallel traditions in the history of philosophy – a materialistic and an idealistic one. The possibility of referring to a long tradition is important to Marxism for it legitimizes it and provides it with greater prestige compared to modern teachings. Moreover, through the history of philosophy Marxism rediscovers its own philosophical grounds<sup>14</sup>.

A Marxist historian of philosophy distinguishes the materialists from the idealists on the basis of the answer that each of them gives to the so-called «basic question of philosophy» formulated by Engels as to what comes first, being (nature, matter) or consciousness (spirit, thought). It must be borne in mind that there are two sides to this question, an ontological side and an epistemological one. The epistemological approach to the basic question of philosophy enquires into the single philosopher's position regarding the possibility of either having or not having an adequate knowledge of the «world». Although by this criterion philosophers are divided not into materialists and idealists but into those who recognize that the world is cognizable and those who believe it is incognizable, or agnostics<sup>15</sup>, the official Marxist-Leninist theorists' view is that, as a rule, materialists acknowledge

13. Maidansky 2003, p. 199.

14. Cf. Steila 1991, p. 75. Cf. also what Ljubov Akselrod says: «[...] a correct appraisal of the predecessors of dialectical materialism determines to a significant extent the correctness of our understanding of dialectical materialism itself» (Akselrod 1952, p. 61).

15. Cf. Kedrov 1964, p. 344.

that the world is cognizable. «A consistent materialist», the author of the entry «Materialism» in the *Philosophical Encyclopedia* writes, «resolves not only the one, but also the other aspect of the basic question of philosophy from the standpoint of materialism»<sup>16</sup>.

Along such very generic historical-philosophical theoretical lines, Plekhanov considers Spinoza a materialist in as far as he resolved «materialistically» both the first and the second aspects of the basic question of philosophy. According to Plekhanov, Spinoza does not reduce matter to spirit or vice versa but unites them, whilst maintaining their differences, by placing them on one and the same foundation, that is substance, which is to be identified as nature<sup>17</sup>. In addition, Plekhanov states that Spinoza developed a mostly correct theory of knowledge<sup>18</sup>:

The doctrine of the unity of subject and object, thinking and being, which was shared in equal measure by Feuerbach and by Marx and Engels, was also held by the most outstanding materialists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Elsewhere<sup>19</sup> I have shown that La Mettrie and Diderot – each after his own fashion – arrived at a world-outlook that was a «brand of Spinozism», that is, a Spinozism without the theological appendage that distorted its true content. It would also be easy to show that, inasmuch as we are speaking of the unity of subject and object, Hobbes, too, stood very close to Spinoza<sup>20</sup>.

For Plekhanov, Spinoza's philosophy represents a milestone, a turning point in the history of the materialist tradition. He interprets the Dutch thinker as the first consistent monist in the history of philosophy and a predecessor of the French materialists of the eighteenth century. This is why any subsequent

16. «*Posledovatel'nyj materialist rešayet s pozicijej materializma ne tol'ko pervuju, no i vtoruju storonu osnovnogo voprosa filosofii*» (Kedrov 1964, p. 345). For an account of the relationship between the ontological and the epistemological sides of the basic philosophical question and the treatment it received by Soviet theoreticians of philosophical historiography, see Van der Zweerde 1997, pp. 150-153.

17. Cf. Steila 1991, p. 76.

18. As Daniela Steila puts it, from «his 'correct' ontology, Spinoza could draw a theory of knowledge which, in Plekhanov's opinion, made a fundamental contribution to the development of materialist thought. Plekhanov was especially interested in Spinoza's first kind of knowledge. [...] Judging from his marginalia and remarks, he was particularly concerned with the part that 'the affections of the body' play in Spinoza's thought» (Steila 1991, p. 80). See the entire analysis of Plekhanov's interpretation of Spinoza's theory of knowledge in Steila 1991, pp. 76-81.

19. In his article *Bernstein and Materialism* published in a volume entitled *A Critique of Our Critics*.

20. Plekhanov 1976, p. 129. Cf. Daniela Steila's comment: «According to Plekhanov materialistic theory of knowledge was no more than a sort of 'naturalistic' sensualism, which widely disregarded the complex dialectical mediation between subject and object that Marx had outlined in the idea of 'praxis'. Plekhanov was profoundly convinced that the main epistemological problems had already been solved by pre-Marxian materialism, and that the cognitive relation was to be sought at the 'natural' level of the biological relationship between the organism and its milieu» (Steila 1991, p. 76).

materialist would be recognized by Plekhanov as a «Spinozist»<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, Plekhanov's definition of Marxism as a «variety of Spinozism» can be understood in the sense of «belonging to the materialist tradition in philosophy», a tradition that was marked by Spinoza's consistent monism<sup>22</sup>.

Marxism is [...] *contemporary materialism*, at present the highest stage in the development of that *view upon the world* whose foundations were laid down in ancient Greece by Democritus, and in part by the Ionian thinkers who preceded that philosopher<sup>23</sup>.

It is important to remember that Soviet historians of philosophy appreciated Plekhanov's insistence on the unity and the continuity of the materialist tradition in history of philosophy. What they criticized him for, particularly from 1931, was that in his account Marx's materialism was put on the same «qualitative» level as previous materialistic teachings. For example, in his book on *Plekhanov and His Works on the History of Philosophy*, Mikhail Jovčuk writes:

...by emphasizing the common features connecting the various materialistic teachings, [he] failed to emphasize the deep qualitative difference between the world-view of the proletariat, i.e. dialectical and historical materialism, and the pre-Marxist materialistic teachings, Spinozism in particular<sup>24</sup>.

However, Soviet historians of philosophy, as a rule, pass over another key aspect of Plekhanov's reading of Spinozism, for Plekhanov's definition of Marxism as a variety of Spinozism can – and should – also be taken in a «strong» sense. The strong sense in which Plekhanov almost identifies Marx's and Spinoza's teachings is connected to his attempt to defend «the philosophy of Marxism» by proving that Marxism as a social and economic doctrine also has a «philosophical basis» consisting in a particular ontology and epistemology.

21. Cf. Steila 1991, p. 77.

22. Cf., for example Mikhail Jovčuk's reading: «While appreciating Spinoza's materialistic teaching, Plekhanov does not try to reduce the whole variety of materialisms to Spinoza's contemplative, metaphysical, abstractly geometrical system. When he speaks of 'Spinozism', this should be understood as a synonym of materialism. By the word 'Spinozism' he denotes the typical features, clearly defined in Spinoza's system, of any materialistic world-view [Vysoko po dostoinstvu ocenivaja materialističeskoe učenje Spinozy, Plekhanov vovse ne pytaetsja vse mnogoobrazie form materializma svodit' k sozercatel'noj, metafizičeskoj, abstraktno geometričeskoj sisteme Spinozy. I kogda on govorit o «spinozizme», što nado ponimat' kak sinonim materializma. Slovom «spinozizm» on oboznačae harakternye čerty vsjakogo materialističeskogo mirovozzrenija, jasno opredelivšiesja v sisteme Spinozy] (Jovčuk 1960, p. 122).

23. Plekhanov 1976, p. 117.

24. «[...] obščee, čto svjazyvaet meždu soboj različnye materialističeskie učenija, ne podčerkival glubokogo kačestvennogo različija meždu mirovozzreniem proletariata – dialektičeskim i istoričeskim materializmom – i domarksistkimi materialističeskimi učenijami, v častnosti spinozizmom» (Jovčuk 1960, pp. 113).

It is well known that Plekhanov undertook this defense of Marxist ontology and epistemology in response to the revisionists' project at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century to «supplement Marx» with «some philosopher or another, be it Kant, Mach, or Avenarius»<sup>25</sup>. Specifically, Plekhanov's «return to Spinoza» is the alternative, which the father of Russian Social Democracy provides to Eduard Bernstein's «return to Kant»<sup>26</sup>. Trying to defend «authentic» Marxism from the «attacks» of Bernstein and other revisionists, he develops his account of it as a «Spinozism brought up to date» and carries out the operation of «ontologization» of Marxism<sup>27</sup>.

Here are the main logical passages in this «operation». In the first place, Plekhanov's feeling is that the answer given by Marx to the basic question of philosophy is essentially the same as that of Feuerbach, «who was Marx's immediate precursor in the field of philosophy and in considerable measure worked out the philosophical foundation of what can be called the world-outlook of Marx and Engels»<sup>28</sup>. «Feuerbach's «humanism», Plekhanov continues, «proved to be nothing else but Spinozism disencumbered of its theological pendant», where «Spinozism» stands for «Spinozistic ontology», or, Spinoza's teaching on substance<sup>29</sup>. «And it was the standpoint of this kind of Spinozism, which Feuerbach had freed of its theological pendant», Plekhanov concludes, «that Marx and Engels adopted when they broke with idealism»<sup>30</sup>. Of course, he also acknowledges the importance of Hegel, who provides Marx and Engels' philosophy with a proper method, namely dialectics.

25. Cf. Plekhanov 1976, pp. 118.

26. Cf. Morfino 2011, p. 97; Salem 2007, pp. 159-160; Steila 1996, pp. 117-137, 171-200. Very useful in this context are Daniela Steila's findings. «During Plekhanov's fight against Bernstein and Stern, their understanding of Spinoza became an ideological battlefield, but he had surely known Spinoza's *Ethics* before that time, since, in one of his notebooks that dates back to the early 1890's, he had quoted a passage from this work. During his polemic with German revisionism, he probably felt compelled to carry out further studies into Spinoza's thought. His knowledge, however, was always limited to the *Ethics*: in the *Dom Plekhanova* Library there are other works by Spinoza but, while all three of the Library's copies of the *Ethics* show copious marginalia, the copies of Spinoza's other works present no trace of Plekhanov's reading. He did pay more attention to Spinoza's *Correspondence*, but mostly to the letters where Spinoza dwelled upon some central subjects of the *Ethics*» (Steila 1991, pp. 77-78).

27. Plekhanov 1976, p. 127. In his *Bernstein and Materialism* (1898), Plekhanov tries to «legitimize» his interpretation of Marx's materialism in a «Spinozistic» key by relating a conversation that he had had with Engels in London almost ten years earlier, in which Engels declared that Spinoza was right in retaining thought and extension as two different attributes of a single substance. Some references to Spinoza in *Anti-Dühring* and the *Dialectics of Nature*, suggest that the late Engels may have been very close to a similar interpretation. Yet, *Dialectics of Nature* was discovered only in the 1920s, and its first publication ever was effected in post-Revolutionary Soviet Russia in 1925, so it could have been of no use to Plekhanov.

28. Plekhanov 1976, p. 120.

29. Cf. Morfino 2011, p. 98.

30. Plekhanov 1976, p. 127. Cf. Morfino 2011, p. 98; Zapata 1993, p. 496.

After the 1917 Revolution, in the Soviet Union Plekhanov's ideas were initially carried on by his pupil Abram M. Deborin and the group of philosophers that gathered around him. They considered dialectical materialism «a synthesis of materialistically reworked Hegelian dialectics and Feuerbachian materialism. And since Feuerbach's materialism is a modification of Spinozism, the latter is an essential component in Marxist philosophy»<sup>31</sup>. Deborin's group was politically silenced in 1931 and, as a consequence, their interpretation of Spinoza was also criticized<sup>32</sup>.

Immediately after Stalin's death in 1953, the period of Soviet history called the «thaw» produced a generation of philosophers to which Evald Vasilevič Ilyenkov also belonged. In the account of some of the leading Western Sovietologists, this generation partly revived some of the themes typical of the pre-Stalinist period<sup>33</sup>. David Bakhurst, for instance, sees Ilyenkov as an «heir to the Deborinites' project»<sup>34</sup>. Convinced by Sergej Mareev's analysis<sup>35</sup>, Alex Levant holds that on the contrary Ilyenkov «does not appear to be taking up the Deborinite project» of elaborating a «theory of the relationship between thought and matter without reducing thought to the physiological properties of matter»<sup>36</sup>. However, the fact remains that Ilyenkov, whilst also accepting what he appraised as Lenin's original contribution to materialism, had tried, just like Plekhanov and Deborin, to develop a reading of Marx through both Hegel and Spinoza<sup>37</sup>.

From the point of view of Soviet materialism as it would later develop, Plekhanov's attempt to «ontologize» Marxism presents some problematic aspects. First, from a general perspective, the tendency towards an «ontologization» of Marxism (historical and dialectical materialism) followed by Plekhanov cannot easily be reconciled with the basic antimetaphysical tenor of Marxism<sup>38</sup>. More specifically, the ascription of a central role in

31. Kline 1952, p. 25.

32. On the defeat of the Deborinites, see Kline 1952, pp. 15-16, Bakhurst 1991, pp. 47-50 and Yakhot 2012.

33. Ilyenkov's «response to Stalinism,» Bakhurst writes, «re-creates themes from still earlier periods of Soviet philosophy, themes that had become lost or distorted during the 1930s and 1940s. For example, Ilyenkov's work reintroduces issues central to the debate between the 'Mechanists' and 'Deborinites' [...]» (Bakhurst 1991, p. 16). «Ilyenkov helped to preserve the continuity of the Soviet tradition by raising once again issues that had dominated Soviet debates of the 1920s and early 1930s. [...] This he may have done unconsciously, for Stalinism did much to destroy the Soviet tradition's memory of its own history» (Bakhurst 1991, p. 272). Cf. also Levant 2012, pp. 134-138.

34. Bakhurst 1991, pp. 26-27.

35. Cf. Mareev 2007.

36. Levant 2012, p. 135-136. See the entire discussion on the different historiographical accounts of the development of post-Stalinist Soviet philosophy, and of Ilyenkov's thought in particular, in Levant 2012, pp. 134-138.

37. Levant 2012, p. 132.

38. For this reason, for example, several decades later, in his historical-philosophical studies on Spinoza, Vasilij Sokolov would use the term «ontology» rather than «metaphysics»: «An interesting sidelight is Sokolov's systematic and unapologetic use of the terms 'ontologija' and 'ontologičeskij'. 'Metaphysics' still has negative, 'anti-



Marx's thought to the notion of matter was criticized as betraying authentic Marxism<sup>39</sup>. In the third place, both under Stalin and afterwards, in trying to conform to Lenin's «epistemological» conception of matter<sup>40</sup>, Soviet philosophers normally restrained themselves from making attempts to define matter «ontologically». Official Soviet philosophy had assigned this task to the natural sciences<sup>41</sup>.

In short, whatever contribution Plekhanov's interpretation of Spinoza and Spinozism may have made to Soviet materialism, it is certain that this interpretation conditioned every single subsequent approach to the Dutch philosopher's thought in Soviet circles. On the one hand, it was acknowledged that Plekhanov's views on Spinoza's philosophy «have to a certain extent served as a starting point for its materialistic interpretation on the part of the Soviet historians of philosophy»<sup>42</sup>, while on the other hand his formula of the «theological appendage» (*teologičeskij privesok*) in Spinoza was said to have «literally hypnotized many Soviet philosophers»<sup>43</sup>.

The rest of the present article is devoted to the process of emancipation from this «malign influence» as carried out mainly by Vasilij Vasilevič Sokolov.

dialectical', overtones for a Marxist-Leninist, but ontology' now seems quite acceptable» (Kline 1961, p. 349, note 11).

39. For example, see the discussion between Helmut Seidel and Rugard Otto Gropp, which took part in a series of issues of *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* during the 1960s and involved numerous other East German philosophers. The discussion concerned the place of the notions of matter and practice in «authentic» Marxism. «It should also be taken into account,» Seidel writes in one of the articles he published on that occasion «that some depictions of Marxist philosophy (especially those coming from Plekhanov) are influenced by Spinozism. The ontologization, connected with this influence, leads materialism back to a pre-Marxist level» (Seidel 1966, p. 1179). Seidel concludes that «a comprehensive assessment of the relation between Spinozism and Marxism, a critical analysis of Spinoza's influence on the history of Marxist philosophy, is still to be carried out. What is certain, nevertheless, is that Marx rejected the Spinozist substance, the *metaphysisch travestierte Natur in der Trennung vom Menschen (Die heilige Familie)* as a starting point for philosophy» (Seidel 1966, p. 1181). See also Gropp 1967.

40. Cf. Lenin's «epistemological» definition of matter: «Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them» (Lenin 1972, p. 130).

41. However, as testified by the following passage, such attempts were indeed made, especially in the post-Stalinist period: «Most of them [Soviet philosophers] actually give an ontological definition of matter (e.g. as *substantia unica*) and feel that the epistemological question can only be explained after a dialectical interpretation of matter and its development» (Ballestrem 1965, p. 326). For a discussion on matter as a basis of Soviet ontology, see, for example Planty-Bonjour 1967, pp. 78-98.

42. «[...] do izvestnoj stepeni poslužili ishodnym punktom v ee materialističeskij interpretaciji sovetскими filosofami» (Sokolov, 1964, p. 380).

43. «[...] èta plekhanovskaja formula bukval'no zagipnotizirovala mnogih sovetских filosofov» (Sokolov 1964, p. 383).

### 3. Spinoza in Soviet Philosophical Historiography: V.V. Sokolov

The period of de-Stalinization gave birth to Soviet historical-philosophical studies on Spinoza proper<sup>44</sup>. Attempts at such research had also been made previously but had remained isolated. In this respect, Ljubov Akselrod is probably the most representative example. Like Deborin, she considered herself a pupil, and had been a close collaborator, of Plekhanov; yet she and Deborin belonged to two opposing factions. Her defeat, and that of her fellow-mechanists, on the part of the Deborinites in the philosophical debates of the 1920s caused her to cease publishing, first on Spinoza and Spinozism and then completely. Thus the advent of historical-philosophical studies on Spinoza proper was signaled only in the mid-1950s by two events, both connected with the name of Vasilij Vasilevič Sokolov. They are the publication of a two-volume edition of Spinoza's *Selected Works*<sup>45</sup> in Russian supervised by Sokolov (1957) and of several essays on the Dutch philosopher's thought signed by the same author. The essays in question are Sokolov's introduction to Spinoza's *Selected Works*, an article in the journal *Voprosy filosofii* (1955) and the chapter dedicated to Spinoza in the general *History of Philosophy*<sup>46</sup>, published between 1957 and 1965. With regard to these publications, George L. Kline wrote in 1961:

V.V. Sokolov, though still in his thirties [born in 1919], is probably the leading Spinoza scholar in the Soviet Union today. The older Soviet Spinozists, who were active in the debates of the 1920s and 1930s, either are dead or have fallen silent. It was Sokolov, in 1955, who published an article on Spinoza's ethical and social theory<sup>47</sup>, breaking a Soviet silence of some fifteen years<sup>48</sup>.

44. «1955 can be regarded as the year in which *IFN* [that is: history of philosophy as a scholarly discipline] became recognized as a separate field in Soviet philosophy» (Van der Zweerde 1997, pp. 77). On the situation in the historical-philosophical studies in the USSR during the so-called «Standstill» period (1947-1955), see therein pp. 74-76.

45. «The two-volume edition of Spinoza's *Selected Works* [...] is a notable event in Soviet philosophy. No work of Spinoza's had been printed in the Soviet Union since 1935, when a Russian translation of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* appeared. The *Ethics*, last published in 1933, had long been out of print. The *Political Treatise* had never been published in the Soviet Union, the last Russian edition of this work having appeared in 1910! All of these, plus the *Short Treatise*, the *Improvement of the Understanding* and the *Correspondence*, are included here in revisions of earlier Russian translations. Sokolov himself has supervised fresh translations of the *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy* (of which an earlier translation had appeared in 1926) and of the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (which apparently had not previously been published in Russian)» (Kline 1961, p. 348).

46. With regard to the history of the accomplishment of this project and the reception it received, see Van der Zweerde 1997, pp. 78-84.

47. The article in question is Sokolov 1955. Kline adds that a German abstract of this article is included in Goerdts 1960, pp. 278-284. In a note to the passage quoted above, Kline writes as follows: «The last Soviet monograph on Spinoza, by Ya. A. Milner, had appeared in 1940. During the 1940s encyclopedia articles and brief sections in histories of philosophy were devoted to Spinoza; one or two Spinoza dissertations were defended, but remained unpublished. Sokolov's article was the first, to my knowledge, in the post-war period» (Kline 1961, p. 348, nt. 10).

48. Kline 1961, p. 348.

Sokolov was also the author, apart from the titles cited above, of two monographs on Spinoza (Sokolov 1964 and 1977), the respective entry in the five-volume *Philosophical Encyclopedia* published between 1960 and 1970 (Sokolov 1970)<sup>49</sup>, and the respective chapter in the *History of Dialectics* series (Sokolov 1974).

In his works, Sokolov engages in the study of all the aspects of Spinoza's philosophical legacy, including ontology, epistemology, psychology, ethics and political philosophy. However, the present analysis is confined mainly to Sokolov's reading of the doctrine of substance in Spinoza.

The earliest of Sokolov's publications on Spinoza that I take into consideration are his article published in the journal *Voprosy filosofii* (Sokolov 1955) and the relevant chapter in the first volume of the general *History of Philosophy* (Sokolov 1958).

In the chapter of the five-volume *History of Philosophy* Sokolov describes Spinoza as «an outstanding Dutch materialist thinker»<sup>50</sup> and indicates Descartes, Bruno, Bacon and Hobbes as the latter's sources<sup>51</sup>. He claims that Spinoza's thought on the one hand «originates from the principles of mechanical-mathematical science (Copernicus and Galilei)», whilst, on the other, it «continues the early modern philosophy's materialistic line (Bruno and Descartes)»<sup>52</sup>.

In his early works, Sokolov limits himself to stating that Spinoza's materialism is «mostly related to his doctrine of substance»<sup>53</sup>:

The concept of substance in Spinoza is synonymous with infinite nature, which he regards from the point of view of the new mechanical-mathematical science, as a universal, infinite, and all-embracing cosmos. Spinoza's materialism is most evident in his assertion that substance-nature is its own cause and that, by existing eternally, it has no need of any supernatural power, i.e. any God<sup>54</sup>.

Despite not failing to quote the «definition», found in the *Holy Family*, of Spinoza's substance as «metaphysically disguised nature», Sokolov takes into account above all Engels' high esteem of the Dutch philosopher. «The position according to which substance is its own cause is of a dialectical nature; it comes close to the idea of universal interaction, that is the idea of the

49. For a selection of entries from the *Philosophical Encyclopedia* in English translation, see Blakeley 1975.

50. Sokolov 1958, p. 397. See also Sokolov 1970, p. 112.

51. Sokolov 1958, p. 398.

52. Sokolov 1958, p. 399.

53. Sokolov 1958, p. 400.

54. «Ponjatie substancii služit u Spinozy sinonimom beskonečnoj prirody, kotoruju on rassmatrivaet v duhe novoj mehaniko-matematičeskoj nauki, kak universal'nyj, beskonečnyj, vseob'emljuščij kosmos. Materializm Spinozy naibolee jarko projavljaetsja v ego utverždenii, čto substancija-priroda est' pričina samoj sebja i čto ona, suščestvuja večno, ne nuždaetsja v sverh'estestvennoj sile, to est' v boge» (Sokolov 1955, p. 60).

interconnection and mutual determination of phenomena in nature», Sokolov writes referring to Engels' *Anti-Dühring*<sup>55</sup>.

It might be interesting to point out that, when read in chronological order, Sokolov's works reveal an evolution in his interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy. In his earlier works, Sokolov's indebtedness to past *auctoritates* is evident. When one reads, for example, that «the concept of 'substance' in Spinoza is an expression of his materialistic idea of nature's unity and conformity to law»<sup>56</sup>, one cannot help but think of Lyubov Axelrod's standpoint on the same matter<sup>57</sup>. When Sokolov refers to the theological elements in Spinoza's system, he actually evokes Plekhanov's idea of Spinozism as materialism in a «theological disguise». He makes no mention of Plekhanov's name, yet uses his famous formulas, his very same words (for instance, «theological trappings»), thereby making his indebtedness to the «father» of Russian Social Democracy more than evident.

The following passage is an eloquent example of the evolution in Sokolov's appraisal of Spinozism. It contains references both to a historiographical pattern which Sokolov used to begin with but would later abandon (the view of Spinoza's thought as a combination of a materialistic content with a theological form) and to a pattern which he initially rejects only to embrace it later (the appraisal of Spinozism as pantheism):

For it [Spinoza's doctrine of nature] one more feature is characteristic, consisting in the fact that substance is often called God and the modes' origin from it is explained simply with the «divine omnipotence». On this basis, already at the end of the eighteenth century idealist philosophers tried to proclaim Spinoza's teaching as a pantheism, or one of the forms of idealism. As a matter of fact, the combination of a materialistic content with a theological form is characteristic of numerous essential questions in Spinoza's philosophy. But this does not call into question the materialistic character of Spinoza's philosophy consisting, above all, in his conception of nature as independent of God and in the philosopher's constant striving to explain the world solely from the knowledge [one can have] of it<sup>58</sup>.

The above passage is proof that during the 1950s Sokolov still did not share the historiographical opinion portraying Spinozism as pantheism;

55. Sokolov 1958, pp. 402-403.

56. Sokolov 1958, p. 400.

57. Cf. Kline 1952, pp. 15-16, Akselrod 1952.

58. «Dlja nego specifična ešče odna čerta, sostojaščaja v tom, što substancija, osobenno kogda ona rassmatrivaetsja v kačestve pervopričiny, často imenuetsja bogom, a proišoždenie modusov iz substancii ob'jasnjaetsja «božestvennym vsemoguščestvom». Na ètom osnovanii filozofy-idealisti ešče v konce XVIII veka pytalis' ob'javit' filozofskoe učenie Spinozy panteizmom ili odnoj iz form idealizma. Dejstvitel'no, dlja filozofii Spinozy harakterno v rjade suščestvennyh voprosov sočetanie materialističeskogo soderžanija s teologičeskoj formoj, što ob'jasnjaetsja v osnovnom istoričeskimi uslovijami XVII veka. No èto ni v kakoj mere ne stavit pod somnenie materialističeskij harakter filozofii Spinozy, skazyvajuščijsja prežde vsego v ponimanii prirody kak nezavisimoj ot boga i v postojannom stremlenii filozofa ob'jasnit' mir, liš' ishodja iz poznanija ego samogo» (Sokolov 1955, pp. 60-61).

moreover, at this point he still considered pantheism to be an idealism. We shall see that Sokolov would later adopt the position that pantheism, or at least some of its variants, is not necessarily idealistic and that it bears a strong atheistic «charge».

As for the view of Spinoza's thought as a combination of a materialistic content with a theological form, Sokolov would later firmly rebut it. By 1964 he had matured an opinion according to which definitions of Spinozism as a «mixture of materialism and theology», popular in Soviet Spinoza scholarship even after the conclusion of the 1920-30s philosophical debates, were inappropriate<sup>59</sup>; one should instead promote the «correct» view of «the pantheistic form of Spinoza's materialism, which was not and could not be anything external to its contents» (*o panteističeskoj forme spinozovskogo materializma, kotoroya ne byla i ne mogla byt' čem-to vnešnim k svoemu sodržaniju*)<sup>60</sup>.

In time, Sokolov's approach to Spinoza's philosophical thought became less and less dependent on theoretical preconceptions and increasingly that of an historian of philosophy. He analyzed a great deal of secondary literature, even that in the West. Furthermore, he tried to seek out Spinoza's possible sources, to establish the influences that conditioned his thought, to outline the evolution of his ideas, and to establish his true place in the history of philosophy. In his later studies, Sokolov develops and defends his own historiographical thesis, unprecedented in Soviet Spinoza scholarship, namely the view that Spinoza was a materialist insofar as he was a pantheist<sup>61</sup>. He also extends this conception to other authors, such as Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno and others. Following Feuerbach, he interprets pantheism as the most developed forerunner of materialism and atheism.

Sokolov's interpretation of Spinoza's thought is most thoroughly expounded in his 1964 book *Filosofija Spinozy i sovremennost'* (*The Philosophy of Spinoza and the Present Day*)<sup>62</sup>. The exposition of the different aspects of Spinoza's philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, ethics, biblical criticism, etc.) takes up nearly one half of the comprehensive volume. It is preceded by an extensive investigation into Spinoza's sources and the traditions, be they ancient, medieval or modern, that had either inspired or

59. Sokolov 1964, p. 383 cites Mitin 1932, pp. 173. Cf. also George Kline's account of Mark Mitin's historiographical position in Kline 1952, p. 41.

60. Sokolov 1964, p. 383.

61. Both the identification of Spinoza's pantheism and materialism in Sokolov, and the alleged atheistic content of Spinoza's pantheism, were seen as problematic by some of Sokolov's colleagues. For example, Igor' Narskij writes that according to Sokolov «Spinoza was simultaneously a pantheist, as well as an atheist, i.e. not a pantheist» and evaluates this idea as «strange» (Narskij 1974, p. 203).

62. «The book under review is the first one on Spinoza since 1940 and at the same time the first Marxist study which deals with all aspects of the system» (Rapp 1965, p. 334). Cf. also Konikov 1965, p. 166. Actually, Moisej S. Belenkij's *Spinoza* appeared in the same year as Sokolov's monograph but it was a book intended for the general public, much poorer in content (Cf. Belenkij 1964).

interacted with his teaching. In this section of the book, besides the analysis of the state of seventeenth-century science and the ways in which Spinoza was influenced by the philosophical and scientific thought of his time, Sokolov offers an extensive account of the history of pantheistic teachings. He justifies the need for a detailed analysis of these teachings by saying that, in the first place, they are central to the historical-philosophical elucidation of Spinozism, and that, in the second place, «this question [of pantheism], more than any other, links Spinozism to the previous centuries-long philosophical tradition»<sup>63</sup>.

In *Filosofija Spinozy i sovremennost'*, the exposition of the historical development of pantheism runs parallel to the introduction of certain historiographical concepts. For example, Sokolov introduces a differentiation between religious-mystic (*religiozno-mističeskij*) and naturalistic pantheism (*naturalističeskij panteizm*). He explains how difficult it is to appraise pantheist teachings with respect to the basic question of philosophy and shows that it is possible to distribute the thinkers of the past, including Spinoza, in the two historical-philosophical trends of materialism and idealism solely by applying a sufficiently broad concept of «materialism»<sup>64</sup>.

Regarding the appraisal of pantheistic teachings with respect to the basic question of philosophy, Sokolov says:

An examination of the history of pantheistic ideas proves that it is not possible to unequivocally define pantheism from the point of view of the division of the philosophical doctrines into materialistic and idealistic. [...] The appraisal of whichever pantheistic conception as materialistic or idealistic must be based on a specific historical analysis, by taking into account the main line of the philosophical battle in a particular historical period<sup>65</sup>.

The history of pantheistic ideas, as reconstructed by Sokolov, begins with the Greek philosophers Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Democritus, who elaborated the earliest form of philosophical pantheism, namely a type of organic-hylozoistic outlook. Sokolov maintains that they are responsible for the formulation of «the most important idea in all ancient and medieval philosophy, that is the idea of the coincidence of the macro- and

63. «[...] èta problema [svjazannaja s panteizmom] bolee čem ljubaja drugaja soedinjaet spinozizm s predšestvujuščej mnogovekovnoj filosofskoj tradicijej» (Sokolov 1964, p. 25).

64. Cf. Friedrich Rapp's remark: «As the author holds the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint, his book shows in what sense a sufficiently broadened materialism can be found within the history of philosophy and especially in Spinoza» (Rapp 1965, p. 334).

65. «Rassmotrenije istorii panteističeskikh idej ubeždaet, čto panteizmu nel'zja dat' odnoznačnogo opredelenija s točki zrenija delenija vseh filosofskih učenij na materialističeskije i idealističeskije. [...] ocenka teh ili inyh panteističeskikh koncepcij v kacestve materialističeskikh ili idealističeskikh dolžna byt' obosnovana konkretno-istoričeskimi analizom, v processe kotorogo neobhodimo učityvat' glavnoe napravlenie filosofskoj bor'by v dannyj istoričeskij period» (Sokolov 1964, p. 26).

micro-cosmoses». In his view, this idea has a «materialistic content», and this with respect to the second, epistemological aspect of the basic question of philosophy. Human beings, Sokolov writes, «in as far as they are a small likeness of nature, are endowed with the capacity for knowing it»<sup>66</sup>.

According to Sokolov, two further ancient philosophical schools contributed to the progress of pantheism. They are the Stoics, with their physics<sup>67</sup>, and the Neoplatonists, particularly with their impersonal conception of God<sup>68</sup>. Sokolov holds that Neoplatonism is the source and basis of medieval pantheisms in Western Christian as well as in Arabic-Muslim philosophy<sup>69</sup>. He specifies, however, that pantheistic ideas were not very popular in Western medieval philosophy, particularly before the twelfth century<sup>70</sup>. During the early medieval period, almost the only spokesman for pantheism in Western Europe was Eriugena. Through his translations from Greek and his treatise *De divisione naturae*, he transmitted to the West the solid Neoplatonic learning of *Corpus areopagiticum*. Sokolov also includes short reports on Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides, in which he aims not so much to seek possible pantheistic imprints in their thinking but, rather, to disclose these philosophers' estrangement from the creationist viewpoint and their tendency towards naturalistic ideas<sup>71</sup>.

In his analysis of the pantheistic elements in the philosophical doctrines of the Middle Ages, Sokolov distinguishes between a religious-mystic and a naturalistic pantheism<sup>72</sup>. The former characterizes mainly heretical, or in some way oppositional, teachings with respect to official church ideology, whereas the latter characterizes authors interested in the exploration of nature. Although the religious-mystic type of pantheism is closer to the line of idealistic teachings in the universal history of philosophy, Sokolov believes its role in the history of thought is a positive one for it is critical of religious dogmatism and Church hierarchy. Its criticism consists, on the one hand, in denouncing «the pseudo-rationalism of Scholasticism, which tries to use Aristotelian logic to prove religious dogmas and to demonstrate irrational theological 'truths' amenable to no demonstration»<sup>73</sup>. On the other hand, mystic experience and written accounts of it, by associating God with man and with nature in an intimate unity, undermine the stability of the teaching of God's transcendence and unattainability. In Sokolov's account, in the Middle

66. Sokolov 1964, p. 28.

67. Sokolov 1964, p. 29.

68. Sokolov 1964, p. 34.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Sokolov 1964, p. 39.

71. Cf. Sokolov 1964, pp. 40-45.

72. Sokolov 1964, pp. 45-46, 53-61.

73. «Nemalovažnuju rol' mistika sygrala i svojim obličieniem psevdoracionalizma sholastiki, pytavšejsja ispol'zovat' aristotelevskuju logiku dlja obosnovanija religioznych dogmatov i dokazatel'stva irracional'nyh bogoslovskih «istin», nikakim dokazatel'stvom ne poddajuščihsja» (Sokolov 1964, pp. 46).

Agés the religious-mystic type of pantheism was more common than the naturalistic kind, which, by contrast, had almost no adherents<sup>74</sup>. Finally, the author calls attention to the dominant role played by this type of pantheism in the ideological struggle of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular in the Reformation movement and the religious wars<sup>75</sup>.

The other type of pantheism, that is the naturalistic one, was widespread and very important during the Renaissance<sup>76</sup>:

If we are to speak about the defining principles of Renaissance natural philosophy, then atomism did not play a leading part as it would do in the seventeenth century. The main current of sixteenth-century materialistic thought flowed along the course of the organicistic-pantheistic conception of the world<sup>77</sup>.

Among the multitude of Renaissance philosophers, Sokolov examines Nicholas of Cusa (as an early representative of naturalistic pantheism) and Giordano Bruno (as a primary inspiration for Spinoza's philosophy), and further lists the names of Paracelsus, Gerolamo Cardano, Bernardino Telesio, Francesco Patrizi and Tommaso Campanella<sup>78</sup>.

In his 1964 book, as well as in other later publications, Sokolov argues that naturalistic pantheism is very close to the materialistic perspective, although «it is not possible to identify it completely with materialism». «And yet», he goes on, «pantheism has become one of the main forms of world-view the materialistic tendency has adopted in the history of philosophy»<sup>79</sup>. In particular, Sokolov states that it is this very form that was adopted by Spinoza, whose «conception of substance as its own cause belongs principally to the tradition of naturalistic pantheism»<sup>80</sup>. The main argument by which Sokolov sustains his interpretation of Spinozistic ontology as pantheistic, is Spinoza's idea of God as an immanent cause of all things operating from within rather than from without. According to Sokolov this idea runs through the entire corpus of Spinoza's works<sup>81</sup>.

However, Sokolov is aware of the fact that such a reading of Spinoza's philosophy presents some problematic aspects. For example, he admits that the

74. Spinoza 1977, pp. 68.

75. Sokolov 1964, pp. 61-67. Sokolov provides an exposition of the ideas of Thomas Müntzer, Sebastian Franck and Jakob Böhme closely following the model of interpretation furnished in Engels's *The Peasant War in Germany*.

76. Sokolov 1964, p. 45.

77. «[...] esli govorit' ob opredeljajuščih principah renessanskoj naturfilosofii, to zdes' atomizm ne igral veduščeje roli, kakuju stal igrat' v XVII v. [...] Poètomu osnovnoj potok materialističeskoj mysli XVI v. šel v rusle organističesko-panteističeskogo osmyslenija mira» (Sokolov 1964, p. 55).

78. Sokolov 1964, pp. 53-60.

79. «I vse že panteizm stal odnoj iz pervostepennyh mirovozzrenčeskih form, v kotoruju obleklas' materialističeskaja tendencija v istorii filosofii» (Sokolov 1977, p. 69).

80. «Spinozovskaja koncepcija substancii kak pricinnoj samoj sebja, primykaet prežde vsego k panteističesko-naturalističeskoj tradicii» (Sokolov 1964, pp. 186).

81. *Ibid.*



second attribute of substance along with «extension», namely «thought», may – at least at first glance – subject the materialistic reading of Spinozism to questioning. Sokolov also bears in mind the possible criticisms on the part of historians of philosophy from non-Marxist or even anti-Marxist schools. «Bourgeois» historians of philosophy argue that Spinoza explicitly denies that his substance can be identified with matter as an extensional corporeal mass. On the basis of such and other similar arguments, most «bourgeois» historians agree on defining Spinozism as a type of naturalism but reject its materialistic interpretation<sup>82</sup>.

Here is Sokolov's reply to this objection, which may function as an outline of his entire materialistic interpretation of Spinoza's ontology and which he developed over several decades.

A similar view of materialism is a result of the typical prejudices of bourgeois philosophy concerning materialism. Bourgeois philosophers and historians of philosophy recognize as materialistic only doctrines which interpret reality merely as an aggregate of sense perceptible bodies, and they cannot give any satisfactory answer either to the question as to what the source of these bodies' movement is, or even less to the question as to what the source of reality's development giving rise to human consciousness is. [...] In opposition to this (mechanicist) view of materialism, drastically reducing its history, Marxism-Leninism, in its doctrine of the struggle of the two main trends in the history of philosophy, formulates a broader view of materialism, recognizing as materialistic any doctrine based on the idea of the priority of objective reality with respect to human consciousness and trying to explain this reality only from within itself. Spinoza's conception of nature completely satisfies this principle<sup>83</sup>.

While these lines may function as a summary of Sokolov's interpretation of Spinoza's ontology, in a similar way, his 1964 *Filosofija Spinozy i sovremennost'* can be seen as an accomplishment and conclusion to forty years of «Soviet Spinoza scholarship» which had preceded its appearance<sup>84</sup>. The last

82. Sokolov 1964, pp. 208.

83. «Podobnyj vzgljad na materializm – rezul'tat obyčnyh dlja buržuaznoj filosofii predrassudkov odnositel'no materializma. Kak izvestno, materialističeskimi učenijami buržuaznye filosofy i istoriki filosofii priznajut liš te učenija, kotorye istolkovyvajut realnost' tol'ko kak sovokupnost' tel, vosprinimaemyh čuvstvami, i ne mogut dat' skol'konibud' udovletvoritel'nyj otvet ni na vopros ob istočnike dviženija ètih tel, ni tem bolee na vopros ob istočnike razvitija dejstvitel'nosti, privodjaščego k pojavleniju soznanija čeloveka [...]. V protivopoložnost' ètomu (mehanističeskomu) istolkovaniju materializma, krajne obednjajuščemu ego istorju, marksizm-leninizm, v svoem učenii o bor'be dvuh glavnyh napravlenij v istorii filosofii formuliruet bolee širokiju točku zrenija na materializm, priznavaja materialističeskim ljuboe učenje, ishodjaščee iz pervičnosti po otnošeniju k čelovečeskomu soznaniju ob'ektivnoj real'nosti i stremjaščeesja istolkovat' ètu real'nost', ishodja liš iz nee samoj. Spinozovskoe ponimanie prirody vpolne udovletvorjaet ètomu principu» (Sokolov 1964, pp. 209).

84. Cf. Vladimir Metlov's appraisal «L'ouvrage qui, à mon avis, a résumé les recherches sur Spinoza en URSS est le livre du professeur de l'université Lomonossov de Moscou, V.V. Sokolov, Philosophie de Spinoza et contemporanéité (1964). [...] Dans un

chapter of this book, entitled «The fortune of Spinozism and its role in the contemporary ideal-philosophical struggle» (*Sud'by spinozizma i ego rol' v sovremennoj idejno-filosofskoj bor'be*), offers a full-scale concise history of the philosophical historiography on Spinoza from the seventeenth century to the 1960s – from Jakob Thomasius, through Toland, Diderot and the Enlightenment, to Hegel, the Romanticists, Feuerbach and so forth<sup>85</sup>.

Sokolov pays special attention to the historical attempts to present Spinozism as an essentially religious teaching. Examples of such attempts can already be found around the end of the eighteenth century in German philosophy, but the respective tendency becomes the principal one only towards the end of the nineteenth century. In Sokolov's account, a decisive impetus in this direction was given by the speech Ernest Renan delivered in 1877 in the Hague, on the occasion of the two-hundredth anniversary of Spinoza's death. In that speech, Renan portrayed the Dutch thinker as a precursor of liberal theologians and an ideologist of a «natural religion»<sup>86</sup>. Sokolov points to Victor Delbos<sup>87</sup>, Constantin Brunner, Carl Gebhardt, Siegfried Hessing as later representatives of this interpretative current<sup>88</sup>. A variant of this reading was to review Spinoza's philosophy as adhering primarily to the Hebraic tradition. Since the end of the debates between the mechanists and Deborinites in 1930, the latter appraisal was considered totally unacceptable from a Marxist-Leninist point of view, and Sokolov made no exception to this trend<sup>89</sup>.

Within «bourgeois» historiography, Sokolov also recognizes an alternative tendency in the depiction of Spinoza's thought. In contrast to the first, it renounces any «reconsideration» of Spinozism from a religious perspective. Among the advocates of this concept Sokolov mentions, for example, Luis Feuer with his *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (1958).

Sokolov dedicates several pages of the last chapter of his book to a critical analysis of the history of Soviet Spinoza scholarship (*spinozovedenie*). Not surprisingly, his analysis takes as a starting point Plekhanov's opinions on Spinoza. Sokolov acknowledges as Plekhanov's chief contribution his materialistic reading of Spinozist ontology and epistemology at a time when

*certain sens, on peut affirmer que le travail de V.V. Sokolov est l'accomplissement d'une période entière de l'histoire du développement des recherches sur Spinoza dans notre pays»* (Metlov 2007, p. 385).

85. Sokolov 1964, pp. 352-361. In Soviet philosophical culture, another interesting example of a study on the history of philosophical historiography is Lukanin 1974, which also contains a brief account of Soviet interpretations of Spinoza's thought.

86. Sokolov 1964, pp. 362-363.

87. In his book of 1893 *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du spinozisme*.

88. Sokolov 1964, pp. 362-366.

89. Sokolov 1964, pp. 368-371. In point of fact, Sokolov acknowledges that the medieval Hebraic tradition had a role in Spinoza's philosophical formation, but only in the philosopher's youth (see Sokolov 1964, pp. 137-173).

«its idealistic interpretation was strongly prevalent in bourgeois philosophy»<sup>90</sup>. On the other hand, Sokolov is adamant that Plekhanov's formulas concerning Marxism as a variety of Spinozism and the alleged presence of a theological appendage in Spinoza's philosophy bar «the way to a real historical assessment of Spinoza's materialism» (*put' k dejstvitel'no istoričeskoj ocenke spinozovskogo materializma*)<sup>91</sup>. This defect was subsequently inherited by Soviet historiography<sup>92</sup>. Sokolov, however, does not fail to stress that «by pointing out the faults in the elucidation of some aspects of Spinoza's philosophy, in no way do we, of course, ignore the positive content of these works»<sup>93</sup>. Publications by Bernard E. Byhovskij, Valentin F. Asmus, Vladimir K. Brušlinskij are regarded by Sokolov as most valuable and «free of oversimplification» (*lišennye uproščennčestva*)<sup>94</sup>.

Interestingly, in this account of Soviet Spinoza historiography, Sokolov never mentions the name of Ilyenkov; nor does he make any reference to his attempt to reinforce Marxism by his return to Hegel and Spinoza. However, the same is also true of Ilyenkov, who in turn does not seem to take into any consideration Sokolov's historical-philosophical studies of Spinoza. As far as Spinoza's ontology is concerned, in the 1950-70s, we are faced with a strange situation, in which two parallel, contemporary, and mutually impenetrable readings are to be found in what for some twenty-five years before 1955 had been reduced to a monolithic Soviet Spinoza scholarship<sup>95</sup>.

Both Ilyenkov and Sokolov, each in his own way, played a significant role in Soviet philosophical culture. Sokolov's, in particular, was an essential contribution to the progress of high-standard, historical-philosophical studies in the Soviet Union. Or, as Evert Van der Zweerde puts it with reference to his *European Philosophy of the 15-17th Centuries*<sup>96</sup>, Sokolov's account of the history of early modern philosophy

not only served to improve the historical competence of future Soviet philosophers, but

90. Sokolov 1964, p. 380.

91. Sokolov 1964, p. 381.

92. Sokolov 1964, pp. 381-383.

93. «[...] ukazyvaja na nedostatki v osveščennii nekotoryh storon filosofii Spinozy v sovjetskoj literature, my daleki, konečno, ot togo, čtoby polnostju ignorirovat' položitel'noe soderžanie etih rabot» (Sokolov 1964, p. 383).

94. Sokolov passes over Iosif Konikov's monograph (Konikov 1971), whose analysis of Spinoza's philosophy is in point of fact rather confused and not very convincing. It might be interesting to compare, for example, Vladimir Metlov's opinion of it: «*Le livre d'I.A. Konicov, Le matérialisme de Spinoza (Moscou, 1971), reprend les fautes propres à la position des déborinistes, qui représentent Spinoza comme un matérialiste sans failles*» (Metlov 2007, p. 386).

95. Concerning the interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy in the Soviet Union between 1932 and 1952, see Kline 1952, in particular, pp. 16, 27-34, 40-42.

96. Sokolov 1984.

97. Van der Zweerde specifies that «Sokolov employed general histories of philosophy

also made acceptable non-Soviet secondary literature. [...] <sup>97</sup> Sokolov's Work [*European Philosophy of the 15-17th Centuries*] is based on his «many years of lecturing at the philosophical faculty of Moscow University in the classes of students and post-graduates»<sup>98</sup>, and someone who – like the present author – has had the opportunity to attend those classes knows that they focused on knowing and understanding main philosophical positions, carefully separating presentation from interpretation<sup>99</sup>.

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by many «bourgeois» authors: Wilhelm Windelband, Gerog W.F. Hegel, Bertrand Russel, Roman Fakenberg (these existed in Russian translation [...]), Friedrich Überweg, Wilhelm Totok, Frederik C. Copleston, Jacques Chevalier, William Thomas Jones, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Wilhelm Weischedel, Anthony Kenny, and Émile Bréhier, and he made use of, among others, Martial Guérault's commentary on Spinoza, Richard Peters and Leo Strauss on Hobbes, works by Étienne Gilson, Alexandre Koyré, Kuno Fischer [there was also a Russian translation of his history of philosophy] and many others» (rVan der Zwerde 1997, p. 112).

98. Quotation from Sokolov 1984, p. 7.

99. Van der Zwerde 1997, p. 112.

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