

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Dundee</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 32 Philosophy</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Spinoza Research Network</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Spinoza Research Network (SRN) contributed to public discourse through online presence, public lectures and radio interviews, with impact through increased understanding and awareness, and changes in behaviour. The project had impact on cultural life through engagement with artists and impact on their practice. The SRN was a 2-year AHRC-funded project for researchers in multiple disciplines working on Spinoza with non-academics. In 2008-10 SRN gained 200 members from over 16 countries. Membership is currently around 250. The outputs were an interactive website, two conferences, and an edited book, public speaking, a Facebook group, a reading group, and two radio interviews.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Based on research from 2006-2010, Beth Lord (Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer, until December 2012) published two books: <i>Spinoza's Ethics: an Edinburgh Philosophical Guide</i>, an original interpretation of Spinoza's major work emphasising it as a programme of 'how to live well' and as accessible to those beyond philosophy proper; and <i>Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze</i>, a monograph advancing an original argument about the influence of Spinoza on the development of Kantian philosophy and on recent and contemporary thinking. She published articles and delivered papers on this subject in the UK, US, Europe, and Australia. She collaborated with researchers at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) on a Spinoza and Narrative project supported by a UWS IRIS grant of AUS\$11K. Throughout this research the guiding impact-oriented questions were 'How are Spinoza's ideas of living well based on his <i>Ethics</i>?' and 'How to make Spinoza's philosophy accessible and culturally relevant?'</p> <p>This research underpinned Lord's development, funding and organisation of the Spinoza Research Network through its arguments about Spinoza's relevance beyond philosophy, in politics, law, neuroscience, history and literature. Funding stemmed from the research through an AHRC grant (Networks and Workshops Scheme, £25K, 2008 – 2010). Lord's research explained why Spinoza's philosophy should attract interest through its theory of human relationships and as a guide to "living well". This conception of living well extends to fields and interests beyond philosophy by showing the ethical and practical imperatives at work in them. In the same way as Kant's philosophy has a wide influence on current ideas about right and justice, Spinoza's work, and its influence and critical contrasts to Kant, offer a set of directions for connecting the idea of a life lived well with practices in fields such as politics, law and literature. The aim of the network was to bring together philosophical researchers with academics and non-academics, in order to exchange and advance new interdisciplinary research, and bring it to a wider academic and non-academic audience. The objectives were to draw Lord's research into the following: improving understanding of Spinoza's relevance in different disciplines; creating a network and resources to support new research and activities around his ideas; and building a stronger public culture of the relevance of the history of philosophy.</p> <p>The guiding idea of the research network, following on from Lord's new interpretation of the meaning and place of Spinoza's work in relation to other subjects and to the Kantian legacy, was that Spinoza's significance is not restricted to academic philosophy. His programme for living a life well is relevant in numerous fields. Thus Network members come from over 15 different subject areas, and 15% of members are non-academics. For instance, there are artists, writers, and filmmakers who use Spinoza's ideas to inform their practice. The creation of the Network enabled them to communicate their work to relevant audiences and collaborators. These links between philosophy and non-academic readers and users were revealed by the project, which brought researchers and practitioners together, making them aware of one another's work.</p>

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Book: Beth Lord, Spinoza's Ethics: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide (Edinburgh UP, 2010: (ISBN: 9780748634507)). There are two 5\* non-academic reviews on Amazon.co.uk. An academic review appears in Philosophy in Review 31:4 (2011).
2. Book: Beth Lord, Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Academic reviews in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (online publication) and Kantian Review 16 (2011). (ISBN: 9780230552975).
3. Book: Beth Lord (ed.), Spinoza Beyond Philosophy (Edinburgh University Press, 2012). (ISBN: 9780748644803).
4. Journal article: Beth Lord, "Disempowered by nature": Spinoza on the Political Capabilities of Women', British Journal for the History of Philosophy 19:6 (2011), 1085-1106. (DOI: 10.1080/09608788.2011.624704).
5. Journal article: Beth Lord, 'Against the Fanaticism of Forces: Kant's Critique of Herder's Spinozism', Parallax 51 (2009), 53-68. (DOI: 10.1080/13534640902793042).

**Principal Funding**

Lord, B. Spinoza Research Network. AHRC (2008-10): £24,751.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

15% of the Network's members are non-academics.(1) Its online presence has enabled the research to reach this audience. The network has over 250 members (around 40 non-academics), and over 130 "followers" of the SRN website get an email when items are posted to the site. There were 31,163 hits on the website during the assessment period (June 2009 – July 2013) and there are nearly 190 members of the Facebook SRN group. (1, 3, 4).

According to the end-of-project survey, the impact on non-academic Network members ranges from general interest to inspiring artistic practice to informing business relations. The Network provides a "home" and reference point for these people. It has had impact through increased creativity and understanding: 40% of survey respondents agreed that the Network "is useful for stimulating and/or supporting activities outside academia". When asked "what have you gained from the Network?" many answered that it had increased their understanding of Spinoza and the literature on him. Some noted they enjoyed the conference podcasts and one said the Network had given him/her "motivation to better myself". (1)

Respondents were asked what direct and indirect impacts the Network had on their work and activities outside academia. Responses included: attending a conference; buying a book; building contacts; increasing awareness of resources; reviewing an article; thinking about film projects; attending reading groups. Two members who work in nursing and mental health commented that they use Spinoza's thinking to inform their practice. Three survey responses are worth quoting: "The Spinoza Research Network has helped my work with consulting with business clients and some public speaking I do"; "Spinoza's thinking is a catalyst for my creativity"; "The Network has introduced me to potential reviewers of my work." The last comment is from a writer who used the Network to circulate a draft novel (inspired by Spinoza) for feedback in 2010. (1, 5)

An artist (Tim Long) and a filmmaker posted work to the Facebook page for members' comments; three artists (who are not academics) were subsequently invited to publish their work in Spinoza Beyond Philosophy. Artist Patrick Fontana has used the Network to find participants for a collaborative multimedia artwork based on Spinoza's Ethics. The artwork will be a sound and image manual for the Ethics. It will bring the work to a wide audience in a novel form which aims to allow for an additional visual experience of the work. In these ways, the Network has created a space for new cultural works to emerge, provided an audience for existing artworks, and contributed to the public understanding of philosophy through creative and imaginative works.(1, 5)

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To achieve these impacts, the website ([www.spinozaresearchnetwork.wordpress.com](http://www.spinozaresearchnetwork.wordpress.com)) offers podcasts of conference papers, event listings and resources. The website is in blog format and is “followed” by 7 other blogs, 3 of which are non-academic:

- Rizoma Zine, a Mexican online magazine of cultural criticism
- The blog of Tony Linde, an Australian artist and writer based in the UK
- A blog promoting understanding of Islam.

Items from the website have been re-posted on other sites and tweeted, e.g. by Nigel Warburton, a public-oriented philosophy writer with 26,000 Twitter followers. A Facebook group enables members to speak to one another and share links and content. This has been a success with non-academic Network members. (1, 3, 6)

To support and develop this impact and SRN Beth Lord has given public talks: Spinoza Today, London 2010 (attendance approx. 100); Philosophy of Education seminar, Dundee 2009 (attendance approx. 12); Student Philosophy Society, Dundee 2010 (attendance approx. 25); Sydney Seminar at the State Library of New South Wales, Australia, 2011 (attendance approx. 100). Each was attended largely by non-academics and attracted new members to the Network. Lord also spoke on two radio interviews. The first, “An Atheist God: the Paradox of Spinoza” was broadcast on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) programme “The Philosophers’ Zone” on 4 June 2011 (8). It contributed to public discourse about atheism, faith and science. The broadcast generated a spike of visitors to the Network website, with 185 people visiting the site on 6 June 2011 alone (as opposed to 20-30 hits on a normal day), 31 were directed to it from the ABC website. There were a total of 1,479 website visits in June 2011 (600 the previous month). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation interviewed Lord about Spinoza’s life and thought for its “Ideas” programme (broadcast 21 November 2012). This led to around 1000 website visits in the following four weeks. (3, 7, 8, 9, 10)

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. End of project survey of network non-academic and academic users report (available on request).
2. End of project final report to AHRC with section on outside users (available on request).
3. Website usage data (available on request).
4. Spinoza Research Network Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/237344820760/> (login required; pdf of front page available on request).
5. Testimony from member of the public on the space created for new cultural works (available on request).
6. Website: Spinoza Research Network, <http://spinozaresearchnetwork.wordpress.com>
7. Website for CBC ‘Ideas’ broadcast, showing that the programme has been “shared” over 250 times: <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/2012/11/21/spinoza/>.
8. Website for ABC ‘Philosophers’ Zone’ broadcast, including transcript of interview with Beth Lord and over 50 comments by listeners: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/an-atheists-god-the-paradox-of-spinoza/2953446>.
9. Beth Lord (ed.), *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 108-16: publication of the work of three artists. Reviewed in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews 2013.04.02 <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/38755-spinoza-beyond-philosophy/>.
10. Associated event: Sydney Seminar at State Library of New South Wales (Beth Lord, Moira Gatens, Dimitris Vardoulakis), June 2011 – live event recorded for broadcast on 12 June 2011 on “Big Ideas” on Australia’s Radio National: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/the-atheist-god-spinozas-laws-of-religion-and/2916064>.