I appreciate the engagement of my work that Daniel Whistler has provided. I do not think his reading is ultimately accurate, but that is to the side, because its point of approach allows me to develop a number of ideas that are central not only to the interpretation of Spinoza and the problematic of religious language (or the naming of the divine), but also—even moreso—to the future of thought in general after the speculative turn. In what follows I will argue, first, that Whistler fails to appreciate the way the concept of namelessness functions in my theoretical construction of Spinoza’s thought. I will then address the various difficulties raised by Whistler’s own account of identity, before proceeding to consider how my disagreement with Whistler runs right to the heart of arguments about the nature of the speculative turn. Indeed, my contention is that namelessness, as I articulate its immanent relation with the act of naming, is resonant with an essential tendency in the work of philosophers such as Eugene Thacker and Ray Brassier. Finally, I will look at how the concept of namelessness serves to indicate and oppose a still-effective Christian hegemony over philosophy.
The basic point of misrecognition in Whistler’s interpretation of my essay, I think, is found in the alliance he sets up between my work and apophaticism. He does, of course, note that I reject such an alliance, but he proceeds nonetheless to insist on it—and he does so by claiming that my argument “shares the defining characteristic of all apophaticism: a dissatisfaction with language as such and so an overriding concern to negate or show up the inadequacy of that language in the name of the nameless.”¹ It is true, of course, that I am concerned to bring attention to the impossibility of properly naming immanence. I claim, as Whistler rightly notes, that there is a surplus of immanence, that immanence necessarily exceeds its names. This is true. But what is also true is that immanence must be named, and more precisely that it must be named in virtue of this excess. What is at stake, in other words, is the relation between names and namelessness. To say, then, that immanence cannot be adequately named, or that every naming of immanence must still contend, after the act of naming, with an excessive namelessness, is to utter only a partial truth. It is to attend to one side of the relation (the side with which Whistler identifies my position). The other side of the relation (the side of my position that Whistler ignores) concerns the way this excessive namelessness loops back upon names. My point is not just that namelessness exceeds names, it is that this excess necessitates the creation of new names.

What this relationality should highlight is the processual nature of my proposal. To put it somewhat simplistically, the act of naming immanence must give rise to an awareness of the excess of immanence to the enacted names—this is what I have in mind when I speak of the namelessness of immanence. But the process does not stop there. On the contrary, this awareness of excessive namelessness must give rise to

the production of new names, i.e. to a further enactment of names, at which point the process I am outlining would repeat itself. What Whistler leaves to the side, I am claiming, is the moment whereby excessive namelessness loops back to necessitate the continued act of naming. By ignoring this moment he freezes the very relay about which I am speaking. Indeed, the essence of my position is not the failure of language before nameless immanence (as Whistler implies). Neither is it the inelidable identity between names and immanence (as Whistler seems to positively argue). It is rather the irreducible nature of the relay between the naming of immanence and the namelessness of immanence.

The upshot of my argument, then, is not that there is something called immanence that can never be named. It is rather that immanence is intrinsically relational, it is always immanent to itself, and therefore that the naming of immanence must be situated within this process of relation, or relay. Whistler appears to attribute to me the claim that immanence, because of its namelessness, is simply beyond all names. I do not make this claim, for to do so would be to turn immanence into something transcending signification; it would also be to make the nameless into its own kind of name. My position, more precisely, is that it is proper to immanence to be improper, to exceed itself, and to do so by doubling every name—a co-constitution of namelessness and names. Namelessness is the relay of names, and names are the relay of namelessness. Thus there is a basic temporality or diachronicity to my affirmation of relay, and Whistler’s oversight of this fact leads him to read me as talking about the objective inadequacy of improper names, when I would claim that what matters is the process of improperly naming.

In order to substantiate this interpretation of my argument, let me refer to and comment upon a passage from my essay: “signification betrays immanence when it makes immanence immanent to what is signified, but, at the same time, immanence must be signified. Only by insisting on this
double necessity do we evade the lure of apophaticism.” It should be noted that my dissatisfaction with signification here has nothing to do with its existence as such, but rather with the position that it could possibly assume with regard to immanence. If signification betrays immanence, this is due not to its nature as signification, but rather to its tendency to transcend immanence, to foreclose immanence under the banner of a name or names (and such a tendency toward foreclosure may be resisted or avoided). To affirm the namelessness of immanence, then, is not to oppose the naming of immanence, it is to oppose the reduction of immanence to signification. It is for this reason, in fact, that I join the affirmation of namelessness with the affirmation that “immanence must be signified.” This, once again, is to indicate that what is at issue here is not merely the excess of immanence to signification, but just as much the (necessary) looping back of this excess upon signification. Apophaticism focuses on the necessity of language exhausting itself in relation to the nameless, whereas my relay focuses on this necessity as well as the necessity of the nameless being constructively re-expressed through yet another act of naming.

It should be noted, furthermore, that my argument is for the productivity of this relay—I continue, in the same passage, by contending that immanence “exceeds signification because it produces signification, and because this signification is within immanence.” Whistler sees apophaticism as laboring in virtue of “the name of the nameless,” and this is to attribute to it a kind of telos of protecting the nameless from names. The direction in which I take the inadequacy of signification, however, is the production of signification. Quite importantly, this produced signification is within immanence. In other words, signification, even when it is

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3 Ibid., 167.

4 Whistler, “Improper Names for God,” 114.
addressed in relation to the namelessness of immanence, is never severed from immanence. It is not a matter of some opposition between nameless immanence in-itself and a multitude of inadequate names, it is rather one of the relay between them. In fact, **immanence just is this relay.** To belabor the point a bit more, but also hopefully to confirm my claim that I have no stake in any opposition between immanence and names, it should be observed that I assert that the aim is “to restore signification to immanence, to signify immanently,” and that my position is “less a matter of iconoclasm than a matter of polyiconicity.”\(^5\)

I want to stress this notion of polyiconicity because it is the point at which my argument becomes most difficult to reconcile with Whistler's portrayal of it as a kind of apophaticism. In fact, it is by way of polyiconicity that my position seems to advance some of the theses that Whistler sets forth in apparent contradiction to my supposed apophaticism. When he claims, for instance, that “immanence is each name,” or that immanence “only exists as names,” what is he affirming that I am not already affirming in terms of polyiconicity?\(^6\) To say that immanence is polyiconic, after all, is to say that immanence is multiply named, that immanence *really is named* in a variety of manners, or modes. Accordingly, it seems quite strange that Whistler would read my argument as an apophatically-motivated denial of the claim that immanence is expressed in its names.

**Interrelations Must Be External to Their Names**

The fact that Whistler would read me as apophatic and iconoclastic, when I explicitly call for polyiconicity, is one that needs to be explained, and I think it can be explained by observing the narrative of continental philosophy of religion that he proposes in his own essay. There he tells us that he is “intervening” in debates about philosophy of reli-

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6 Whistler, “Improper Names for God,” 115.
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gion precisely at the point where he opposes apophaticism. Indeed, “apophaticism is not the answer here, and this is a hard pill for continental philosophy of religion to swallow.”

He goes on to observe that “philosophers of religious language have been obsessed with the inadequacy of names to the point of ignoring kataphatic deployments of language.”

So Whistler’s intervention, the “hard pill” he’s distributing, is that continental philosophy of religion needs to end its affair with the apophatic, and that it needs to give attention to the kataphatic. I highlight this narrative because I believe it is what structures Whistler’s misreading of my argument. According to this narrative, the obstacle to be overcome is apophaticism, and the way beyond this obstacle is kataphaticism. So which side is my argument on? It should be clear that it’s not straightforwardly identifiable with one side or another. But if Whistler ignores the kataphatic, polyiconic tendency of my position, then it becomes much easier to ally me with the apophatic. I hope to have already demonstrated why such an alliance requires misrepresentation of my argument. Now I would like to turn, briefly, to the difficulty created by Whistler’s own kataphaticism.

The approach of “absolute eclecticism,” whereby it is asserted that “the more names given, the more intense scientific language becomes,” is compelling, and one that I agree with in part. The appeal of this approach is its ability to bring a multitude of names into relation with one another, and to affirm that such names are expressive of immanence. These, in fact, are points that my own position advances, such that my position’s difference stems not from its failure to advance the kataphatic but rather from its insistence on the irreducible relation between the kataphatic and the apophatic (to continue using Whistler’s terms). The necessary connection between affirmative naming and namelessness can be seen in the difficulty to which Whistler’s own, sheerly affirmative position gives rise.

8 Ibid., 117.
9 Ibid., 125.
This difficulty begins to emerge when we pose the question of how these various names relate to one another. There is nothing to protest in Whistler’s claim that all names may be equally expressive of immanence, or even that “immanence exists only as it is expressed in the name.” The difficulty arises, however, when we begin to ask about the relations between these names. The names must be in common, they are univocal, yet this does not change the fact that the names, considered individually, do not agree. So what we face here is a univocity of disagreement. Again, thus far there is nothing off the mark, but such an account remains incomplete, for this disagreement must operate. Whistler grasps this when he speaks of immanence as “a textual surface on which names collide” and identifies immanence with the “constantly complexifying interrelations and identifications” of these names. All of this is true. Yet it must be asked: if these names are not just in identification but also in interrelation, then must not such relationality be thought as such? The relations, in other words, must be in excess of the names, and so what is this excess? It will be necessary to conceive not just the names, but also the condition that enables them to relate to one another productively.

What I am here calling attention to, in Whistler, is the difficulty engendered by denying that there is anything conditioning names. Obviously that which conditions the naming of immanence cannot be something that transcends the names, but this condition (of the interrelation of names) must be otherwise conceived. Whistler does make some attempt to conceive it when he speaks of a “textual surface.” But what is this surface? Does it have a name? If it does have a name, then it cannot be that on which names collide, for it would be yet another one of the colliding names. Thus it does not have a name. But if it does not have a name, then would it not be the very namelessness that I have advanced, and that he has critiqued?

10 Whistler, “Improper Names for God,” 128.
11 Ibid., 128-129.
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Whistler appears to displace this difficulty by attributing to my position the invocation of “a nameless plane.” But there is no such thing in my argument: namelessness, once again, is not something beyond names but instead that which relays them with one another. Namelessness is interstitial, it is the condition that enables names to collide and to intensify one another. To speak, as Whistler does, of an identity of all names and immanence is not exactly incorrect, but it is incomplete, for it cannot conceive the interstitial relations of these names. To write off attempts to conceive such interstitial namelessness as apophaticism is, in fact, to remain within apophaticism’s frame by way of inversion. Instead of asserting the inadequacy of names, Whistler inverts the approach and asserts the adequacy of all names. My contention is that these approaches are equally flawed, and that what is exigent is an account of the relay between adequacy and inadequacy—a relay that is prior to their mutual exclusion.

The relay of namelessness and a multitude of names, in the end, has nothing to do either with an absolute failure of language or with an absolute identity of names and immanence. Its concern is the difference between a multitude of names, all of which express immanence, but each of which differs from the other. “Immanence,” Whistler remarks, “is fully and completely expressed in its modes—and names are modes too.” In these terms, the question becomes one of the relation between modes. Gilles Deleuze’s own attempt to improve Spinoza is here relevant. He transposed the relation between intensive and extensive modes into the relation, respectively, between the virtual singularities and actual individuals. In doing so, however, he broke with Spinoza’s one-to-one relation between intensive and extensive. The actual individual became a resolution of a virtual difference in-itself. What Deleuze grasped, in other words, was that virtual difference must be conceived as something akin to pure disagreement. The virtual, pre-individual field of singularities was univo-

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12 Whistler, “Improper Names for God,” 128.
13 Ibid., 125.
cal, but this univocity was irreducible to any identity. Only in this way, I would contend, is it possible to make sense of the sort of collision of which Whistler speaks. This, then, is the condition of interrelation of modes, or names—a condition that I speak of as excessive namelessness. Such excess is therefore not beyond or separate from names, but neither is it reducible to the names, or their simple identity; it is rather the differential, nameless colliding of names.

The difficulty resulting from Whistler’s failure to conceive this namelessness—the namelessness which conditions the interrelation of univocally expressive names—becomes especially evident in his statement that “Immanence is fully contained in the very names for immanence.”14 This cannot be the case, precisely because (as Whistler himself acknowledges) immanence is constituted not just by names but also by their interrelation. Immanence requires not just names, but also that which is produced by their collision—and that which is produced by the names must exceed the names, it must consist of their difference. Furthermore, it is not apt to think of immanence as something that is “contained in” something else. This would be to turn immanence into a name, one that is apparently both enclosed within in a multitude of other names and yet (confusingly) another one of these names. Once again, it is only by thinking of immanence not as simultaneously a name and the identity of all names, but instead as the relation of, or relay between, namelessness and names, that this difficulty can be avoided.

Namelessness and the Speculative Turn

I have already observed the presence, in Whistler’s argument, of a narrative according to which continental philosophy of religion is urged to leave behind its fetishization of negativity and to reclaim “kataphatic deployments of language.” His narrative adds, notably, that this demand concords with the

speculative turn, which is “kataphatic in orientation.”\textsuperscript{15} So, if the speculative turn is bound up with Whistler’s kataphatic turn, does my argument also stand against, or at least outside of, the host of philosophical developments associated with speculative realism? Not at all. In fact, what I would like to observe, as a way of troubling Whistler’s narrative, is the possibility of espying, within the speculative turn, a tendency that is not at all kataphatic. Of course, the tendency I have in mind is not exactly apophatic either—hence my dissatisfaction with the mutual exclusion inherent in Whistler’s narrative. What is compelling about the speculative turn, when viewed in relation to the question of how immanence is named, is its ability both to critique the human pretension to delimit access to the real and to affirm the capacity to name the real through an encounter with that which exceeds pre-existing articulations. It is this sort of tendency, rather than a more traditional apophaticism, and rather than Whistler’s emergent kataphaticism, that is indicated by the namelessness of immanence.

As an instance of the tendency I have in mind, we might refer to Thacker’s discussion of a “non-human” or “unhuman” mysticism, one which would no longer be theological in a traditional sense, but which would make use of this theological material in a radically ungrounded manner. As he puts it:

If the supernatural in a conventional sense is no longer possible, what remains after the “death of God” is an occulted, hidden world. Philosophically speaking, the enigma we face is how to confront this world, without immediately presuming that it is identical to the world-for-us (the world of science \textit{and} religion), and without simply disparaging it as an irretrievable and inaccessible world-in-itself.\textsuperscript{16}

The emphases that emerge in Thacker’s prescription are those of the enigmatic and the hidden, and—importantly

\textsuperscript{15} Whistler, “Improper Names for God,” 117.

for my purposes—they are positioned neither in terms of the kataphatic (which would repress the enigmatic character of the real) nor in terms of the apophatic (which would abandon the real to the simple beyond). Thacker’s interest, to translate it—surely with too much bluntness—into the terms of my debate with Whistler, is to focus on a real that is simultaneously non-manifest (at least in any direct manner) and non-inaccessible. We have to do, then, with something that is accessible yet hidden. If we take this as an instance of thought that emerges after the speculative turn, then we see that there is no need to adopt a narrative in which the kataphatic overcomes the apophatic. An awareness of the immanent relay of namelessness and names is much more to the point. Indeed, we see something precisely like a conception of this relay in Thacker’s remark that “mysticism today—and the death of God—would be about the impossibility of experience, it would be about that which in shadows withdraws from any possible experience, and yet still makes its presence felt, through the periodic upheavals of weather, land, and matter.”

While I agree with Whistler’s critique of continental philosophy’s overdependence on apophaticism, I do not accept that namelessness, as I develop it, falls under this critique. Nor do I accept that namelessness need be seen as mutually exclusive with the speculative turn. On the contrary, as I hope to have indicated with this brief mention of Thacker’s work, it is possible to see namelessness as a novel and speculatively-driven account of what it means to think under the condition of an encounter with the enigmatic real. There is no need to see this encounter in terms of Whistler’s definition of identity. In fact, even when identity plays a key role in speculative thought, such as it does for François Laruelle, it is encountered only through a radical displacement, through a bracketing of normative philosophical practice by way of the “non-.” Here, it could be said, namelessness functions as a condition for the performance of thought—of non-philosophy.

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17 Thacker, In the Dust of This Planet, 158.
I thus contend that namelessness, far from involving a defensive apophaticism that doubles-down on the limits of the human before an inaccessible beyond, bears an essential affinity with the speculative turn. It belongs to the attempt to conceive of negativity or unknowability in terms of active voiding or annihilating. Spinozist namelessness, as I have developed it, has a particularly strong resonance with the thesis of Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*, especially its concluding remarks. There Brassier puts his account of the inorganic's priority over organic life in terms of decontraction: “Although life diverges from the inorganic in ever more circuitous detours, these are no more than temporary extensions of the latter, which will eventually contract back to their original inorganic condition, understood as the zero-degree of contraction, or decontraction.” If we understand namelessness in terms of the inorganic, and names as so many divergent circuits of life, then we can find yet another resonance between the relay I am advancing and the possibilities of thought made available by the speculative turn.

In fact, Brassier’s logic of the relation between the inorganic and organic life, like that of the relation between excessive namelessness and the multitude of names, articulates an unthinkability that, without being traditionally apophatic, calls for the voiding or annihilation of every desire for full identity, or for a plentitudinous containment of immanence. The identity that is here advanced is not the one proposed by Whistler, whereby all names would be identical with immanence. It is instead the identity that is unthinkable by human life. It is the identity of namelessness and every name, an identity much like that found in decontraction’s

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18 Along these lines, another vector of thought with which my concept of namelessness of resonates is that of Nicola Masciandaro. See, for instance, his “Unknowing Animals,” *Speculations II*: 228-44, or “The Sorrow of Being,” Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences 19: 9-35.

“being-nothing,” where we find “the identity of entropic indifference and negentropic difference.”

Every name is made possible by an indifferent namelessness, and every name, in its construction of this indifference, differs from every other name, thus constructing namelessness collisionally and differentially. The identity that is ultimate, then, cannot finally be named—not even as identity—precisely because it is that of every name and namelessness; namelessness cannot be integrated (nor contained) within identity, for identity is ultimately that of namelessness and every act of naming.

The implications of all this are not just philosophical, they are also political—or, more precisely, theologico-political. The desire to remove every obstacle to identity...from whence does it arise? Or, what makes it so powerful, so difficult to resist? There are, of course, a number of ways one might answer this question, and without claiming to have found the only possible answer, I would like to call our attention to one possibility: Christianity. This is obviously not the only source motivating the tendency towards absolute identity, but it is certainly one of the major sources—historically and materially speaking—of this tendency’s support, maintenance, and normalization. For far too long we have treated philosophy as something clearly and distinctly differentiated from religion, when in fact these two domains (or concepts) have overlapped and interwoven everywhere, especially when their distinction is insisted upon. And this overlapping and intertwining of philosophy and religion has a history, a hegemonically Christian history.

There are several implications and lines of research that stem from an insistence on this point, but for the moment I want to observe a single consequence—and this is that the


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Christian desire for the identity of all is very much still in play as we interpret and respond to the speculative turn. I would propose that Brassier’s antagonism towards “life” should be simultaneously understood as an antagonism towards the history of Christianity. Indeed, the philosophical concept of life—especially when we highlight its connotations of integration into the one true life, of all life in one, beyond its differences—cannot be disentangled from the theological concept of life. As Gil Anidjar has perceptively argued, the contemporary problem of the biopolitical is really a problem of the biotheological. On the interpretation I am advancing, then, when Brassier poses the inorganic against organic life, his basic orientation is not eliminativist, not nihilist, and not even anti-correlationist. It is anti-Christian, and precisely because it exerts violence on the ultimately violent instinct to integrate everything, including nothingness, into life (or “Life”). Before life, after life, always haunting life...there is death. Nothingness, we might say, is the alpha and the omega—or, even better, it is before the alpha and after the omega.

Along these lines, I do not find it surprising that Nihil Unbound concludes with a discussion of two Jewish thinkers, i.e. Levinas and Freud, for Jewish thought has always defined itself in relation to (and more or less in opposition to) Christian thought. We should not presume that this Christian-Jewish difference passed away with the dawn of supposedly post-Christian, secular thought. Indeed, both Levinas and Freud paid essential attention to the way being Jewish affected thought, which is to say not only that they knew the pressures of integration and identification, but also that—understanding how normative accounts of the thinking subject depended on a denial of this subject’s conditionality—they directed thought at the pre-cognitive. They understood that thought should be given not to what the human is defined as able to think, not to the world as it correlates with the human subject, but instead to what affects the subject prior to its self-identification, to

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22 See Anidjar, “The Meaning of Life,” Critical Inquiry 37: 697-723. My argument in this section is significantly indebted to the work Anidjar does in this essay.
what the subject disavows in the name of its being-subject. Brassier, I am proposing, should be read as part of this anti-normative, anti-Life, anti-Christian tradition. What he has in common with Levinas and Freud is an awareness of the way that every attempt at integration disavows its identity with that which makes it impossible—in this sense, Brassier’s entropic indifference belongs to the same lineage as Levinas’ alterity and Freud’s unconscious.

And all of these, I might add, could be connected to the kabbalistic rendering of Genesis 1:1, which reads, “With Beginning, ______ created Elohim.”23 What this Jewish mystical text claims—against Christian orthodoxy’s belief that the life of God can be identified with the divine-human life of the Son of God, and that all human life can and/or should be identified with the concrete-universal of Jesus—is that even God (Elohim) is conditioned. Furthermore, the conditions of God cannot be correlated with God’s being. That which created God, or conditions God’s existence, is ________. It is nameless, and yet not beyond. Even God (or Nature) is haunted by this namelessness.

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