Gilles Deleuze

SPINOZA

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spinoza: Practical Philosophy

by Gilles Deleuze

Translated by Robert Hurley

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Preface
by Robert Hurley

This work is provocative from the start: a book on Spinoza, subtitled *Practical Philosophy*, that starts with the name Nietzsche. As Deleuze will say, we always start from the middle of things; thought has no beginning, just an outside to which it is connected. The kinship of Spinoza and Nietzsche will be made quite clear in these pages, but there is also a historical line of connection between the two that Deleuze discusses elsewhere*; this line passes through the form that we call, all too familiarly, Man. Spinoza is prior to that form, and Nietzsche sees beyond it. What they share, on this line, is a philosophy of forces or powers that compose such forms. In Spinoza's case, the historical problem was what to make of limited composites such as human beings, in their involvement with perfect, i.e., infinite, forces that make up the form known as God. As we know, Nietzsche is associated with the death of the latter form, but Deleuze points out that, after Feuerbach, the death of God could be taken for granted, and Nietzsche was more concerned with the death of His successor, Man. This seems to be a useful perspective: one reads backward from Nietzsche through Man to Spinoza, and God is naturalized (One of the most fascinating parts of this book deals with Spinoza's criticism of theology. God the legislator and judge, the planner and protector, simply does not survive); one reads forward from Spinoza through Man to Nietzsche, and the Overman is naturalized (The forces that are composed need not have the human reference). In any case, it seems that, for us, the stronger term of Spinoza's famous equation *God or Nature* is Nature: the Ethics "merely" justifies the capital letter. Something happens to the term, however, when we join it to Man. There is an affect that weakens it, affecting us

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*In the last chapter of his recent study of Michel Foucault, *Foucault*, Editions de Minuit, 1986.

with sadness: Man and Nature, a tragedy, Man in Nature, a pious homily, Man against Nature, a hecatomb.

A new kind of attention, practical rather than contemplative, has been drawn to Spinoza by deep ecologists*. Arne Naess, the Norwegian ecophilosopher, has outlined the points of compatibility between Spinoza's thought and the basic intuitions of the (radical) environmental movement.** Among them is this one: "14. Interacting with things and understanding things cannot be separated. The units of understanding are not propositions but acts. To the content of ideas in the 'attribute of non-extension' there corresponds an act in the 'attribute' of extension.'" It is to the deep ecologists' credit that they read Spinoza as a philosophy of action. But perhaps it can be said, amicably, that they have not yet been able to describe any of the modalities of interaction except through cold science or passionate poetry. In scientific ecology, what passes between "things" is information (as in Bateson); in poetry, it is affects (as in Spinoza), but poetry tends naturally to form inadequate ideas of affections: through it we are acted upon. Deleuze offers a model in this regard: the unit of understanding is not the form or function or organism but the composition of affective relations between individuals, together with the "plane of consistency" on which they interact, that is, their "environment". In this conception, some rather neutral notions, such as environment and individual, are re-animated. The environment is not just a reservoir of information whose circuits await mapping, but also a field of forces whose actions await experiencing. In a human sense, it can be called the unconscious, or at least the ground on which the unconscious is constructed. Which of these actions are we capable of experiencing? What is a walk in the forest (where the tick is waiting to experience *us*)? And what new individual do we compose when we "think like a mountain?" For Deleuze (for Spinoza), Nature itself is an Individual, composed of all modes

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*See especially *Deep Ecology*, Bill Devall and George Sessions, Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1985.

**See his crystal clear enumeration in "Spinoza and ecology", *Speculum Spinozanum, 1677-1977*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

of interaction. Deleuze opens us to the idea (which I take as a contribution to ecological thought) that the elements of the different individuals we compose may be nonhuman *within* us. What we are capable of may partake of the wolf, the river, the stone in the river. One wonders, finally, whether Man is anything more than a territory, a set of boundaries, a limit on existence.

I am aware that I have said next to nothing about Spinoza. The fact is that Spinoza is difficult. And this book on Spinoza is difficult. But the situation is helped by the author's word to the wise: one doesn't have to follow every proposition, make every connection—the intuitive or affective reading may be more practical anyway. What if one accepted the invitation—come as you are—and read with a different attitude, which might be more like the way one attends to poetry? Then difficulty would not prevent the flashes of understanding that we anticipate in the poets we love, difficult though they may be. The truly extraordinary thing about Deleuze is precisely the quality of love that his philosophy expresses; it is active in everything he has written. I like very much a phrase in Arne Naess' article, referred to above. Speaking of Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei*, he says that it "implies acts of understanding performed with *the maximum perspective possible*" (my underline). As I see it, just such a performance awaits the reader here. Deleuze maximizes Spinoza.

"Let me ask you what brought you to Spinoza? Is it that he was a Jew?"

"No, your honor. I didn't know who or what he was when I first came across the book—they don't exactly love him in the synagogue, if you've read the story of his life. I found it in a junkyard in a nearby town, paid a kopek and left cursing myself for wasting money hard to come by. Later I read through a few pages and kept on going as though there were a whirlwind at my back. As I say, I didn't understand every word but when you're dealing with such ideas you feel as though you were taking a witch's ride. After that I wasn't the same man . . ."

"Would you mind explaining what you think Spinoza's work means? In other words if it's a philosophy what does it state?"

"That's not so easy to say . . . The book means different things according to the subject of the chapters, though it's all united underneath. But what I think it means is that he was out to make a free man of himself—as much as one can according to his philosophy, if you understand my meaning—by thinking things through and connecting everything up, if you'll go along with that, your honor."

"That isn't a bad approach, through the man rather than the work. But . . ."

Malamud, *The Fixer*

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Chapter One

LIFE OF SPINOZA

Nietzsche understood, having lived it himself, what constitutes the mystery of a philosopher's life. The philosopher appropriates the ascetic virtues—humility, poverty, chastity—and makes them serve ends completely his own, extraordinary ends that are not very ascetic at all, in fact.[1] He makes them the expression of his singularity. They are not moral ends in his case, or religious means to another life, but rather the "effects" of philosophy itself. For there is absolutely no *other* life for the philosopher. Humility, poverty, and chastity become the effects of an especially rich and superabundant life, sufficiently powerful to have conquered thought and subordinated every other instinct to itself. This is what Spinoza calls Nature: a life no longer lived on the basis of need, in terms of means and ends, but according to a production, a productivity, a potency, in terms of causes and effects. Humility, poverty, chastity are his (the philosopher's) way of being a *grand vivant,* of making a temple of his own body, for a cause that is all too proud, all too rich, all too sensual. So that by attacking the philosopher, people know the shame of attacking a modest, poor, and chaste appearance, which increases their impotent rage tenfold; and the philosopher offers no purchase, although he takes every blow.

Here the full meaning of the philosopher's solitude becomes apparent. For he cannot integrate into any milieu; he is not suited to any of them. Doubtless it is in democratic and liberal milieus that he finds the best living conditions, or rather the best

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* III.

conditions for survival. But for him these milieus only guarantee that the malicious will not be able to poison or mutilate life, that they will not be able to separate it from the power of thinking that goes a little beyond the ends of the state, of a society, beyond any milieu in general. In every society, Spinoza will show, it is a matter of obeying and of nothing else. This is why the notions of fault, of merit and demerit, of good and evil, are exclusively social, having to do with obedience and disobedience. The best society, then, will be one that exempts the power of thinking from the obligation to obey, and takes care, in its own interest, not to subject thought to the rule of the state, which only applies to actions. As long as thought is free, hence vital, nothing is compromised. When it ceases being so, all the other oppressions are also possible, and already realized, so that any action becomes culpable, every life threatened. It is certain that the philosopher finds the most favorable conditions in the democratic state and in liberal circles. But he never confuses his purposes with those of a state, or with the aims of a milieu, since he solicits forces in thought that elude obedience as well as blame, and fashions the image of a life beyond good and evil, a rigorous innocence without merit or culpability. The philosopher can reside in various states, he can frequent various milieus, but he does so in the manner of a hermit, a shadow, a traveler or boarding house lodger. That is why one should not imagine Spinoza breaking with a supposedly closed Jewish milieu in order to enter supposedly open liberal ones: liberal Christianity, Cartesianism, a bourgeoisie favorable to the De Witt brothers, and so on. For, wherever he goes he only asks, demands, with a greater or smaller chance of success, to be tolerated, himself and his uncommon aims, and from this tolerance he judges concerning the degree of democracy, the degree of truth, which a society can bear, or on the contrary, concerning the danger that threatens all men.

Baruch Spinoza is born in 1632 in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, into a family of well-to-do merchants of Spanish or Portuguese extraction. At the Jewish school he studies theology and commerce. From the age of thirteen he works in his father's

business firm while he pursues his studies (on the death of his father in 1654 he will manage the business with his brother, until 1656). How does the slow philosophical conversion come about that causes him to break with the Jewish community, with business, and brings him to the excommunication of 1656? We should not imagine that the Amsterdam community is homogeneous during this period; it has as much diversity, as many interests and ideologies as the Christian milieus. For the most part it is made up of former "marranos," that is, of Jews who outwardly practiced Catholicism in Spain and Portugal, and who were obliged to emigrate at the end of the sixteenth century. Even those sincerely attached to their Jewish faith are imbued with a philosophical, scientific, and medical culture that cannot easily be reconciled with the traditional rabbinical Judaism. Spinoza's father is apparently a skeptic himself, who nevertheless plays an important role in the synagogue and the Jewish community. In Amsterdam some go so far as to question, not merely the role of the rabbis and tradition, but the meaning of the Scripture itself: Uriel da Costa will be condemned in 1647 for denying the immortality of the soul and revealed law, recognizing natural law alone; and, more important, Juan de Prado will be made to repent in 1656, then excommunicated, accused of having held that the soul dies with the body, that God only exists philosophically speaking, and that faith is unavailing.[2] Recently published documents testify to Spinoza's close ties with Prado; one may suppose that the two cases were linked together. If Spinoza was judged more severely, excommunicated as early as 1656, this was because he refused to repent and sought the break himself. The rabbis, as in many other cases, seem to have hoped for an accommodation. But instead of repenting, Spinoza wrote an *Apology to Justify His Leaving the Synagogue*, or at least a rough draft of the future *Theological-Political Treatise*. The fact that Spinoza was born in Amsterdam itself, a child of the community, must have made his case worse.

Life becomes difficult for him in Amsterdam. Perhaps follow-

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2. Cf. I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, Mouton, 1959.

ing an assassination attempt by a fanatic, he goes to Leyden in order to continue his philosophical studies, and installs himself in the suburb of Rijnsburg. It is said that Spinoza kept his coat with a hole pierced by a knife thrust as a reminder that thought is not always loved by men. While it sometimes happens that a philosopher ends up on trial, rarely does a philosopher begin with an excommunication and an attempt on his life.

Hence one fails to consider the diversity of the Jewish community, and the destiny of a philosopher, when one believes that liberal Christian influences must be invoked to explain Spinoza's break, as if it were due to external causes. Already in Amsterdam no doubt, and while his father was alive, he had followed courses at the school of Van den Ende, which was attended by many young Jews who learned Latin in it, along with the rudiments of Cartesian philosophy and science, mathematics and physics. A former Jesuit, Francis Van den Ende quickly acquired the reputation of being not only a Cartesian but also a freethinker and an atheist, and even a political agitator (he was to be executed in France, in 1674, following the revolt of the chevalier de Rohan).[3] No doubt Spinoza also frequented liberal and anticlerical Christians, Collegiants and Mennonites, who were inspired by a certain pantheism and a pacifist communism. He would encounter them again at Rijnsburg, which was one of their centers: he becomes friends with Jarig Jelles, Pieter Balling, Simon de Vries, and the "progressive" bookseller and publisher Jan Rieuwertz (a letter from Spinoza to Oldenburg, in 1655, evokes the pacifism, and the communitarian theme appears in a letter to Jelles, in 1671). However, it seems that Van den Ende remained attached to a form of Catholicism, despite the difficulties of that religion in Holland. As for the philosophy of the Mennonites and Collegiants, it is completely surpassed by that of Spinoza, in religious criticism as well as ethical conception and political concerns. Instead of thinking of an influence by the Mennonites or even the Cartesians, one can think that Spinoza was naturally drawn to the most tolerant circles, those

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3. The novel by Eugène Sue, *Lautréamont,* depicts Van den Ende in his activities as a democratic conspirator.

most apt to welcome an excommunicated Jew who rejected Christianity no less than the Judaism into which he was born, and owed his break with the latter to himself alone.

Among its many meanings, Jewish excommunication had a meaning that was political and economic. It was a rather frequently applied, and often irreversible, measure. Deprived of the power of a state, the notables of the community had no other sanction for punishing those who refused financial contributions or even political orthodoxies. The Jewish notables, like those of the Calvinist party, had kept intact a hatred of Spain and Portugal, were politically attached to the House of Orange, and had interests in the India companies (Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel, one of Spinoza's professors, himself came close to being excommunicated in 1640 for criticizing the East India Company; and the members of the council that judged Spinoza were Orangist, pro-Calvinist, anti-Hispanic, and for the most part, shareholders in the Company). Spinoza's ties with the liberals, his sympathies for the republican party of Jan de Witt, which called for the dissolution of the great monopolies—all this made Spinoza a rebel. In any case, Spinoza broke not only with the religious milieu but with the economic milieu at the same time. Abandoning the family business, he learned lensmaking, he became a craftsman, a philosopher craftsman equipped with a manual trade, capable of grasping and working with the laws of optics. He also began to draw; his early biographer Colerus relates that he drew himself in the attitude and costume of the Neapolitan revolutionary Masaniello.[4]

At Rijnsburg, Spinoza gives his friends an exposition, in Latin, of the work that will become the *Short Treatise*. They take notes; Jelles translates into Dutch; perhaps Spinoza dictates certain texts that he has written previously. In about 1661, he composes the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, which opens with a kind of spiritual itinerary, in the Mennonite manner, centered on a denunciation of wealth. This treatise, a splendid exposition of Spinoza's method, will remain unfinished. Around 1663, for

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4. An engraving preserved in Amsterdam (Print Collection of the Rijksmuseum) is thought to be a reproduction of this portrait.

a young man who lived with him and who both gave him hopes and irritated him a good deal, he presents *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, supplemented by a critical examination of scholastic notions (*Metaphysical Thoughts*). Rieuwertz publishes the book; Jelles finances it; Balling will translate it into Dutch. Lewis Meyer, physician, poet, organizer of a new theater in Amsterdam, writes the preface. With the *Principles*, the "professorial" work of Spinoza comes to an end. Few thinkers avoid the brief temptation to become professors of their own discoveries, the seminar temptation of a private spiritual training. But Spinoza's planning and commencement of the *Ethics*, as early as 1661, transport him to another dimension, a different element which, as we shall see, no longer can be that of an "exposition," even a methodological one. Perhaps it is for this reason that Spinoza leaves the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* unfinished, and despite his later intentions does not manage to resume it.[5] One should not think that in his quasi-professorial period Spinoza was ever a Cartesian. The *Short Treatise* already exhibits a way of thinking that uses Cartesianism as a means, not to eliminate, but to purify all of scholasticism, Jewish thought, and Renaissance philosophy, in order to extract from them something profoundly new which belongs only to Spinoza. The complex relationship between the exposition of the *Principles* and the *Metaphysical Thoughts* gives evidence of this double game in which Cartesianism is handled like a sieve, but in such a way that a new and prodigious scholasticism emerges which no longer has anything to do with the old philosophy, nor with Cartesianism either. Cartesianism was never the thinking of Spinoza; it was more like his rhetoric; he uses it as the rhetoric he needs. But all this will receive its definitive form only in the *Ethics*.

In 1663, Spinoza moves to Voorsburg, a suburb of The Hague. He will later establish himself in the capital. What defines Spinoza as a traveler is not the distances he covers but rath-

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5. The most precise reason for the abandonment of this treatise is to be sought in the theory of the "common notions" as it appears in the *Ethics*, a theory that makes some arguments of the *Treatise* inoperative or unnecessary (cf. chap. V).

er his inclination to stay in boarding houses, his lack of attachment, of possessions and property, after his renunciation of the paternal inheritance. He continues to work on the *Ethics*. As early as 1661 the letters of Spinoza and his friends show that the latter are acquainted with the themes of the first book, and in 1663 Simon de Vries mentions a study group whose members read and discuss the texts sent by Spinoza. But at the same time that he confides in a group of friends, he asks them to keep his ideas secret, to be careful of strangers, as he himself will be, even with respect to Leibniz in 1675. The reason for his settling near The Hague is probably political: nearness to the capital is necessary if he is to draw close to the active liberal circles and escape the political indifference of the Collegiant group. As to the two major parties, Calvinist and republican, the situation is as follows: the first remains committed to the themes of the struggle for independence, to a politics of war, to the ambitions of the House of Orange, to the formation of a centralized state; and the second, to a politics of peace, a provincial organization, and the development of a liberal economy. To the impassioned and bellicose behavior of the monarchy, Jan de Witt opposes the rational behavior of a republic guided by a *natural and geometric* method. Now, the mystery seems to be this: the people remain faithful to Calvinism and the House of Orange, to intolerance and warmongering. Since 1653, Jan de Witt is the Grand Pensionary of Holland. But the republic nevertheless remains a republic by surprise and by accident, more for the lack of a king than by preference, and it is poorly accepted by the people. When Spinoza speaks of the harmfulness of revolutions, one must bear in mind that revolution is thought of in terms of the disappointments that Cromwell's revolution inspired, or the anxieties caused by a possible coup d'état by the House of Orange. During this period "revolutionary" ideology is permeated with theology and is often, as with the Calvinist party, in the service of a politics of reaction.

So it is not surprising that Spinoza, in 1665, temporarily suspends work on the *Ethics* and starts writing the *Theological-Political Treatise*, which will be concerned with the questions: Why are

the people so deeply irrational? Why are they proud of their own enslavement? Why do they fight "for" their bondage as if it were their freedom? Why is it so difficult not only to win but to bear freedom? Why does a religion that invokes love and joy inspire war, intolerance, hatred, malevolence, and remorse? In 1670 the *Theological-Political Treatise* appears, without an author's name and credited to a fictitious German publisher. But the author is soon identified; few books occasioned as many refutations, anathemas, insults, and maledictions: Jews, Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans—all the right-thinking circles, including the Cartesians themselves—competed with one another in denouncing it. It was then that the words "Spinozism" and "Spinozist" became insults and threats. And even the critics of Spinoza who were suspected of not being harsh enough were denounced. Doubtless among these critics there were some embarrassed liberals and Cartesians who nonetheless gave proof of their orthodoxy by participating in the attack. An explosive book always keeps its explosive charge: one still cannot read the *Treatise* without discovering in it philosophy's function as a radical enterprise of demystification, or as a science of "effects." A recent commentator is able to say that the true originality of the *Treatise* is in its considering religion as an *effect.*[6] Not only in the causal sense but also in an optical sense, an effect whose process of production will be sought by connecting it to its necessary rational causes as they affect men who do not understand them (for example, the way in which natural laws are necessarily perceived as "signs" by those who have a strong imagination and a weak understanding). Even when dealing with religion, Spinoza polishes glasses that reveal the effect produced and the laws of its production.

It is his ties with the republican party, and perhaps the protection of De Witt, that save Spinoza from a more specific kind of worry. (As early as 1669, Koerbagh, the author of a philosophical dictionary denounced for its Spinozist leanings, had been arrested and had died in prison.) But Spinoza has to leave the

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6. Cf. J.-P. Osier, preface to *L'Essence du christianisme* by Feuerbach, "Ou Spinoza ou Feuerbach," Maspero, Paris.

suburb, where his life is made difficult by the pastors, and take up residence in The Hague. And, above all, this is at the cost of silence. The Netherlands are at war. After the De Witt brothers are assassinated, in 1672, and the Orangist party has returned to power, there can no longer be any question for Spinoza of publishing the *Ethics*; a brief attempt in Amsterdam, in 1675, easily convinces him to give up the idea. "Certain theologians took the occasion to complain of me before the prince and magistrates; moreover, the stupid Cartesians, being suspected of favoring me, endeavored to remove the aspersion by abusing everywhere my opinions and writings, a course which they still pursue."[7] For Spinoza, there is no question of leaving the country. But he is more and more alone and ill. The only milieu in which he might have lived in peace fails him. Yet he receives visits by enlightened men who want to know the *Ethics*, even if this means joining with its critics subsequently, or even denying that these visits were paid to him (as in the case of Leibniz in 1676). The professorship of philosophy at Heidelberg, which the Elector Palatine offers him in 1673, does not tempt him: Spinoza belongs to that line of "private thinkers" who overturn values and construct their philosophy with hammer blows; he is not one of the "public professors" (who, according to Leibniz's approving words, do not disturb the established sentiments, the order of Morality and the Police). "Since it has never been my wish to teach in public, I have been unable to induce myself to accept this splendid opportunity, though I have long deliberated about it."[8] Spinoza's thinking is now taken up with the most recent problems: What are the chances for a commercial aristocracy? Why has the liberal republic foundered? Is it possible to change the multitude into a collectivity of free men instead of a gathering of slaves? All these questions animate the *Political Treatise*, which is left unfinished, symbolically, at the beginning of the chapter on democ-

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7. *Letter LXVIII*, to Oldenburg.

8. *Letter XLVIII*, to Fabritius. On the Spinozan conception of teaching, cf. the *Political Treatise*, chap. VIII, 49. "Everyone who asked permission would be allowed to teach openly, at his own expense, and at the risk of his reputation. . . ."

racy. In February of 1677, Spinoza dies, probably of a pulmonary disease, in the presence of his friend Meyer, who takes possession of the manuscripts. By the end of the year, the *Opera posthuma* are published at the expense of an anonymous donor.

This frugal, propertyless life, undermined by illness, this thin, frail body, this brown, oval face with its sparkling black eyes—how does one explain the impression they give of being suffused with Life itself, of having a power identical to Life? In his whole way of living and of thinking, Spinoza projects an image of the positive, affirmative life, which stands in opposition to the semblances that men are content with. Not only are they content with the latter, they feel a hatred of life, they are ashamed of it; a humanity bent on self-destruction, multiplying the cults of death, bringing about the union of the tyrant and the slave, the priest, the judge, and the soldier, always busy running life into the ground, mutilating it, killing it outright or by degrees, overlaying it or suffocating it with laws, properties, duties, empires—this is what Spinoza diagnoses in the world, this betrayal of the universe and of mankind. His biographer Colerus reports that he was fond of spider fights: "He looked for some spiders, and made them fight together, or he threw some flies into the cobweb, and was so well-pleased with that battle, that he would sometimes break into laughter."[9] Animals at least teach us the irreducibly external character of death. They do not carry it within, although they necessarily bring it to each other: an inevitable *bad encounter* in the order of natural existences. But they have not yet invented that internal death, the universal sado-

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9. This anecdote appears authentic because it has many Spinozan resonances. Spider fights, or spider-fly fights, could have fascinated Spinoza for several reasons: 1. from the standpoint of the exteriority of necessary death; 2. from the standpoint of the composition of relations in nature (how the web expresses a relationship of the spider with the world, one which appropriates, as such, relations peculiar to the fly); 3. from the standpoint of the relativity of perfections (how a state that marks an imperfection of man, e.g., warfare, can on the contrary testify to a perfection if it is related to a different essence such as that of insects: cf. *Letter XIX*, to Blyenbergh). We will encounter these problems again in a later chapter.

masochism of the tyrant-slave. In the reproach that Hegel will make to Spinoza, that he ignored the negative and its power, lies the glory and innocence of Spinoza, his own discovery. In a world consumed by the negative, he has enough confidence in life, in the power of life, to challenge death, the murderous appetite of men, the rules of good and evil, of the just and the unjust. Enough confidence in life to denounce all the phantoms of the negative. Excommunication, war, tyranny, reaction, men who fight for their enslavement as if it were their freedom—this forms the world in which Spinoza lives. The assassination of the De Witt brothers is exemplary for him. *Ultimi barbarorum*. In his view, all the ways of humiliating and breaking life, all the forms of the negative have two sources, one turned outward and the other inward, resentment and bad conscience, hatred and guilt. "The two archenemies of the human race, Hatred and Remorse."[10] He denounces these sources again and again as being linked to man's consciousness, as being inexhaustible until there is a new consciousness, a new vision, a new appetite for living. Spinoza feels, experiences, that he is eternal.

In Spinoza's thought, life is not an idea, a matter of theory. It is a way of being, one and the same eternal mode in all its attributes. And it is only from this perspective that the geometric method is fully comprehensible. In the *Ethics*, it is in opposition to what Spinoza calls satire; and satire is everything that takes pleasure in the powerlessness and distress of men, everything that feeds on accusations, on malice, on belittlement, on low interpretations, everything that breaks men's spirits (the tyrant needs broken spirits, just as broken spirits need a tyrant). The geometric method ceases to be a method of intellectual exposition; it is no longer a means of professorial presentation but rather a method of *invention*. It becomes a method of vital and optical rectification. If man is somehow distorted, this torsion effect will be rectified by connecting it to its causes *more geometrico*. This optical geometry traverses the entire *Ethics*. People have asked whether the *Ethics* should be read in terms of

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10. *Short Treatise*, first dialogue.

thought or in terms of power (for example, are the attributes powers or concepts?). Actually, there is only one term, Life, that encompasses thought, but conversely this term is encompassed only by thought. Not that life is *in* thinking, but only the thinker has a potent life, free of guilt and hatred; and only life explains the thinker. The geometric method, the profession of polishing lenses, and the life of Spinoza should be understood as constituting a whole. For Spinoza is one of the *vivants-voyants*. He expresses this precisely when he says that demonstrations are "the eyes of the mind."[11] He is referring to the third eye, which enables one to see life beyond all false appearances, passions, and deaths. The virtues— humility, poverty, chastity, frugality—are required for this kind of vision, no longer as virtues that mutilate life, but as powers that penetrate it and become one with it. Spinoza did not believe in hope or even in courage; he believed only in joy, and in vision. He let others live, provided that others let him live. He wanted only to inspire, to waken, to reveal. The purpose of demonstration functioning as the third eye is not to command or even to convince, but only to shape the glass or polish the lens for this inspired free vision. "You see, to me it seems as though the artists, the scientists, the philosophers were grinding lenses. It's all a grand preparation for something that never comes off. Someday the lens is going to be perfect and then we're all going to see clearly, see what a staggering, wonderful, beautiful world it is. . . . " (Henry Miller).

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11. *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 13; *Ethics*, V, 23, scholium.

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Spinoza published the following two books: *First and Second Parts of the Principles of the Philosophy of Rene Descartes, Demonstrated in the Manner of the Geometers, Followed by Metaphysical Thoughts* (1663, in Latin), and the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670, in Latin).

Spinoza also wrote, without managing to publish for various reasons:

1650–1660: *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*. This was originally an exposition in Latin, but we only know two Dutch manuscripts, resembling an author's notes, to which Spinoza himself may have contributed in certain parts. The whole seems to be made up of texts from different dates, the "First Dialogue" no doubt being the oldest.

1661: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in Latin. This is an unfinished book. Spinoza also begins writing the *Ethics*; it is probable that certain theses of the *Ethics*, in particular those concerning the "common notions," cause him to regard the *Treatise* as already superceded.

1661–1675: The *Ethics*. A completed book, in Latin, which Spinoza considers publishing in 1675. He gives up the idea for reasons of prudence and safety.

1675–1677: *Political Treatise*. An unfinished book, in Latin.

At uncertain dates, Spinoza wrote two brief treatises in Dutch, *Calculus of Probabilities* and *Treatise on the Rainbow*. And, in Latin, an *Outline of Hebrew Grammar*, unfinished.

In 1677 the *Opera posthuma* are published. They contain the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the *Ethics*, the *Political Treatise*, the *Outline of Hebrew Grammar*, and many of the letters.

The two major editions are that of Van Vloten and Land (1882–1884) and that of Gebhart (1925).

The principal French translations are: for the major part of the work, that of Appuhn (Garnier) and that of Caillois, Francès, and Misraki (Pléiade); for the *Ethics*, the fine translation by Guérinot (Pelletan); for the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, that of Koyré (Vrin). The *Outline of Hebrew Grammar*, which contains some extremely valuable remarks on the subject, the attribute, the mode, and true forms in Hebrew, has been translated by Joël and Jocelyne Askénazi, with a preface by Alquié (Vrin).

Martial Gueroult has published a systematic commentary on the *Ethics*, proposition by proposition. Two volumes have appeared to date, corresponding to the first two parts of the *Ethics* (Aubies-Montaigne).

The three basic texts on Spinoza's life are: the one by Lucas, a confused admirer who claims to have known Spinoza; the one by Colerus, who is reserved; the one by Pierre Bayle, who is hostile and caricatural. The two great scholarly biographies are by Freudenthal (1899) and by Dunin-Borkowski (1933–1936).

A description of the presumed portraits of Spinoza, along with biographical material and information concerning manuscripts and editions, can be found in a catalogue of the *Institut néerlandais de Paris* [Dutch Institute of Paris] (*Spinoza, troisiéme centenaire de la mort du philosophe*, 1977).

Note on the Translation

I have relied on the English translation of Spinoza by Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume I*, Princeton University Press, 1985. There is at least one other good translation of the *Ethics*, by Samuel Shirley, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, Hackett Publishing Co, 1982. The Hackett volume is inexpensive.

—R.H.

Chapter Two

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE *ETHICS* AND A MORALITY

No philosopher was ever more worthy, but neither was any philosopher more maligned and hated. To grasp the reason for this it is not enough to recall the great theoretical thesis of Spinozism: a single substance having an infinity of attributes, *Deus sive Natura,* all "creatures" being only modes of these attributes or modifications of this substance. It is not enough to show how pantheism and atheism are combined in this thesis, which denies the existence of a moral, transcendent, creator God. We must start rather from the practical theses that made Spinozism an object of scandal. These theses imply a triple denunciation: of "consciousness," of "values," and of "sad passions." These are the three major resemblances with Nietzsche. And already in Spinoza's lifetime, they are the reasons for his being accused of *materialism, immoralism,* and *atheism.*

I. *A devaluation of consciousness (in favor of thought): Spinoza the materialist.*

Spinoza offers philosophers a new model: the body. He proposes to establish the body as a model: "We do not know what the body can do . . . " This declaration of ignorance is a provocation. We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions—but *we do not even know what a*

body can do.[1] Lacking this knowledge, we engage in idle talk. As Nietzsche will say, we stand amazed before consciousness, but "the truly surprising thing is rather the body . . . "

Yet, one of the most famous theoretical theses of Spinoza is known by the name of *parallelism*; it does not consist merely in denying any real causality between the mind and the body, it disallows any primacy of the one over the other. If Spinoza rejects any superiority of the mind over the body, this is not in order to establish a superiority of the body over the mind, which would be no more intelligible than the converse. The practical significance of parallelism is manifested in the reversal of the traditional principle on which Morality was founded as an enterprise of domination of the passions by consciousness. It was said that when the body acted, the mind was acted upon, and the mind did not act without the body being acted upon in turn (the rule of the inverse relation, cf. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, articles 1 and 2). According to the *Ethics*, on the contrary, what is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind.[2] There is no primacy of one series over the other.

What does Spinoza mean when he invites us to take the body as a model? It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.* There are no fewer things in the mind that exceed our consciousness than there are things in the body that exceed our knowledge. So it is by one and the same movement that we shall manage, if possible, to capture the power of the body beyond the given conditions of our knowledge, and to capture the power of the mind beyond the given conditions of our consciousness. One seeks to acquire a knowledge of the powers of the body in order to discover, *in a parallel fashion*, the powers of the mind that elude consciousness, and thus to be able to *compare* the powers. In short, the model of the body, according to Spinoza, does not imply any devaluation of thought in relation to extension, but, much more important, a devalu-

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1. *Ethics,* III, 2, scholium.
2. *Ethics,* III, 2, schol. (and II, 13, schol.).

ation of consciousness in relation to thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as *the unknown of the body*.

The fact is that consciousness is by nature the locus of an illusion. Its nature is such that it registers effects, but it knows nothing of causes. The order of causes is defined by this: each body in extension, each idea or each mind in thought are constituted by the characteristic relations that subsume the parts of that body, the parts of that idea. When a body "encounters" another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts. And this is what is prodigious in the body and the mind alike, these sets of living parts that enter into composition with and decompose one another according to complex laws.[3] The order of causes is therefore an order of composition and decomposition of relations, which infinitely affects all of nature. But as conscious beings, we never apprehend anything but the *effects* of these compositions and decompositions: we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threaten our own coherence. We are in a condition such that we only take in "what happens" to our body, "what happens" to our mind, that is, the effect of a body on our body, the effect of an idea on our idea. But this is only our body in its own relation, and our mind in its own relation, and the other bodies and other minds or ideas in their respective relations, and the rules according to which all these relations compound with and decompose one another; we know nothing of all this in the given order of our knowledge and our consciousness. In short, the conditions under which we know things and are conscious of ourselves condemn us *to have only inadequate ideas*, ideas that are confused and mutilated, effects separated from their real causes.[4] That is why it is scarcely possible to think that little children are happy, or that the first man was perfect: ignorant of causes and natures,

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3. Even the mind has a very large number of parts: cf. *Ethics*, II, 15.
4. *Ethics*, II, 28, 29.

reduced to the consciousness of events, condemned to undergo effects, they are slaves of everything, anxious and unhappy, in proportion to their imperfection. (No one has been more forceful than Spinoza in opposing the theological tradition of a perfect and happy Adam.)

How does consciousness calm its anguish? How can Adam imagine himself happy and perfect? Through the operation of a triple illusion. Since it only takes in effects, consciousness will satisfy its ignorance by reversing the order of things, by taking effects for causes (*the illusion of final causes*): it will construe the effect of a body on our body as the final cause of its own actions. In this way it will take itself for the first cause, and will invoke its power over the body (*the illusion of free decrees*). And where consciousness can no longer imagine itself to be the first cause, nor the organizer of ends, it invokes a God endowed with understanding and volition, operating by means of final causes or free decrees in order to prepare for man a world commensurate with His glory and His punishments (*the theological illusion*).[5] Nor does it suffice to say that consciousness deludes itself: consciousness is inseparable from the triple illusion that *constitutes* it, the illusion of finality, the illusion of freedom, and the theological illusion. Consciousness is only a dream with one's eyes open: "The infant believes he freely wants the milk; the angry child that he freely wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. So the drunk believes that it is from a free decision of the mind that he speaks the things he later, when sober, wishes he had not said."[6]

It is still necessary for consciousness itself to have a cause. Spinoza sometimes defines desire as "appetite together with consciousness of the appetite." But he specifies that this is only a nominal definition of desire, and that consciousness adds nothing to appetite ("we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we

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5. *Ethics,* I, appendix.
6. *Ethics,* III, 2, schol.

strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it").[7] We need, then, to arrive at a real definition of desire, one that at the same time shows the "cause" by which consciousness is hollowed out, as it were, in the appetitive process. Now, the appetite is nothing else but the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being, each body in extension, each mind or each idea in thought (*conatus*). But because this effort prompts us to act differently according to the objects encountered, we should say that it is, at every moment, determined by the affections that come from the objects. *These determinative affections are necessarily the cause of the consciousness of the conatus.*[8] And since the affections are not separable from a movement by which they cause us to go to a greater or lesser perfection (joy and sadness), depending on whether the thing encountered enters into composition with us, or on the contrary tends to decompose us, consciousness appears as the continual awareness of this passage from greater to lesser, or from lesser to greater, as a witness of the variations and determinations of the *conatus* functioning in relation to other bodies or other ideas. The object that agrees with my nature determines me to form a superior totality that includes us, the object and myself. The object that does not agree with me jeopardizes my cohesion, and tends to divide me into subsets, which, in the extreme case, enter into relations that are incompatible with my constitutive relation (*death*). Consciousness is the passage, or rather the awareness of the passage from these less potent totalities to more potent ones, and vice versa. It is purely transitive. But it is not a property of the Whole or of any specific whole; it has only an informational value, and what is more, the information is necessarily confused and distorted. Here again, Nietzsche is strictly Spinozan when he writes: "The greater activity is unconscious; consciousness usually only appears when a whole wants to subordinate itself to a superior whole. It is primarily the consciousness of this superior whole, of reality external to the ego. Consciousness is born in relation to a being of which we

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7. *Ethics*, III, 9, schol.

8. *Ethics*, III, definition of Desire ("in order to involve the cause of this consciousness in my definition . . . ").

could be a function; it is the means by which we incorporate into that being."

II. *A devaluation of all values, and of good and evil in particular (in favor of "good" and "bad"): Spinoza the immoralist.*

"Thou shalt not eat of the fruit . . . ": the anxious, ignorant Adam understands these words as the expression of a prohibition. And yet, what do they refer to? To a fruit that, as such, will poison Adam if he eats it. This is an instance of an encounter between two bodies whose characteristic relations are not compatible: the fruit will act as a poison; that is, *it will determine the parts of Adam's body* (and paralleling this, the idea of the fruit will determine the parts of his mind) *to enter into new relations that no longer accord with his own essence*. But because Adam is ignorant of causes, he thinks that God morally forbids him something, whereas God only reveals the natural consequence of ingesting the fruit. Spinoza is categorical on this point: all the phenomena that we group under the heading of Evil, illness, and death, are of this type: bad encounters, poisoning, intoxication, relational decomposition.[9]

In any case, there are always relations that enter into composition in their particular order, according to the eternal laws of nature. There is no Good or Evil, but there is good and bad. "Beyond Good and Evil, at least this *does not* mean: beyond good and bad."[10] The good is when a body directly compounds its relation with ours, and, with all or part of its power, increases ours. A food, for example. For us, the bad is when a body decomposes our body's relation, although it still combines with our parts, but in ways that do not correspond to our essence, as when a poison breaks down the blood. Hence good and bad have a primary, objective meaning, but one that is relative and partial: that which agrees with our nature or does not agree with it. And consequently, good and bad have a secondary meaning, which is subjective and modal, qualifying two types, two modes of man's existence. That individual will be called *good* (or free, or ration-

9. *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 4. And *Letter XIX*, to Blyenbergh.

10. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, section 17.

al, or strong) who strives, insofar as he is capable, to organize his encounters, to join with whatever agrees with his nature, to combine his relation with relations that are compatible with his, and thereby to increase his power. For goodness is a matter of dynamism, power, and the composition of powers. That individual will be called *bad*, or servile, or weak, or foolish, who lives haphazardly, who is content to undergo the effects of his encounters, but wails and accuses every time the effect undergone does not agree with him and reveals his own impotence. For, by lending oneself in this way to whatever encounter in whatever circumstance, believing that with a lot of violence or a little guile, one will always extricate oneself, how can one fail to have more bad encounters than good? How can one keep from destroying oneself through guilt, and others through resentment, spreading one's own powerlessness and enslavement everywhere, one's own sickness, indigestions, and poisons? In the end, one is unable even to encounter oneself.[11]

In this way, Ethics, which is to say, a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values. Morality is the judgment of God, the *system of Judgment.* But Ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad). The illusion of values is indistinguishable from the illusion of consciousness. Because it is content to wait for and take in effects, consciousness misapprehends all of Nature. Now, all that one needs in order to moralize is to fail to understand. It is clear that we have only to misunderstand a law for it to appear to us in the form of a moral "You must." If we do not understand the rule of three, we will apply it, we will adhere to it, as a duty. Adam does not understand the rule of the relation of his body with the fruit, so he interprets God's word as a prohibition. Moreover, the confused form of moral law has so compromised the law of nature that the philosopher must not speak of natural laws, but only of eternal truths: "The application of the word

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11. Cf. the text on suicide, *Ethics,* IV, 20 schol.

'law' to natural things seems to be metaphorical, and the ordinary meaning of law is simply a command. . . . "[12] As Nietzsche says concerning chemistry, i.e., the science of antidotes and poisons, one must be wary of the word law, which has a moral aftertaste.

It is easy, however, to separate the two domains—that of the eternal truths of Nature and that of the moral laws of institutions—if only one considers their effects. Let us take consciousness at its word: moral law is an imperative; it has no other effect, no other finality than obedience. This obedience may be absolutely necessary, and the commands may be justified, but that is not the issue. Law, whether moral or social, does not provide us with any knowledge; it makes nothing known. At worst, it prevents the formation of knowledge (*the law of the tyrant*). At best, it prepares for knowledge and makes it possible (*the law of Abraham or of Christ*). Between these two extremes, it takes the place of knowledge in those who, because of their mode of existence, are incapable of knowledge (*the law of Moses*). But in any case, a difference of nature is constantly manifested between knowledge and morality, between the relation of command and obedience and the relation of the known and knowledge. The tragedy of theology and its harmfulness are not just speculative, according to Spinoza; they are owing to the practical confusion which theology instills in us between these two orders that differ in nature. At the least, theology considers that Scripture lays the foundation for knowledge, even if this knowledge must be developed in a rational manner, or even transposed, translated, by reason: whence the hypothesis of a moral, creating, and transcendent God. In this, as we shall see, there is a confusion that compromises the whole of ontology; the history of a *long error* whereby the command is mistaken for something to be understood, obedience for knowledge itself, and Being for a *Fiat.* Law is always the transcendent instance that determines the opposition of values (Good-Evil), but knowledge is always the

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12. *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 4

Gilles Deleuze

SPINOZA: PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Translated by Robert Hurley

Spinoza's theoretical philosophy is one of the most radical attempts to construct a pure ontology, with a single infinite substance, and all beings as the modes of being of this substance. This book, which presents Spinoza's main ideas in dictionary form, has as its subject the opposition between ethics and morality, and the link between ethical propositions and ontological propositions. His ethics is an ethology, rather than a moral science. Recent attention has been drawn to Spinoza by deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher; and this new reading of Spinoza by Deleuze lends itself to a radical ecological ethic. As Robert Hurley says in his introduction, Deleuze opens us to the idea that the elements of the different individuals we compose may be nonhuman within us. One wonders, finally, whether Man might be defined as a territory, a set of boundaries, a limit on existence.

Gilles Deleuze, known for his inquiries into desire, language, politics, and power, finds a kinship between Spinoza and Nietzsche. He writes, "Spinoza did not believe in hope or even in courage; he believed only in joy and in vision. . . he more than any other gave me the feeling of a gust of air from behind each time I read him, of a witch's broom that he makes one mount." Gilles Deleuze is a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris at Vincennes. Robert Hurley is the translator of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

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