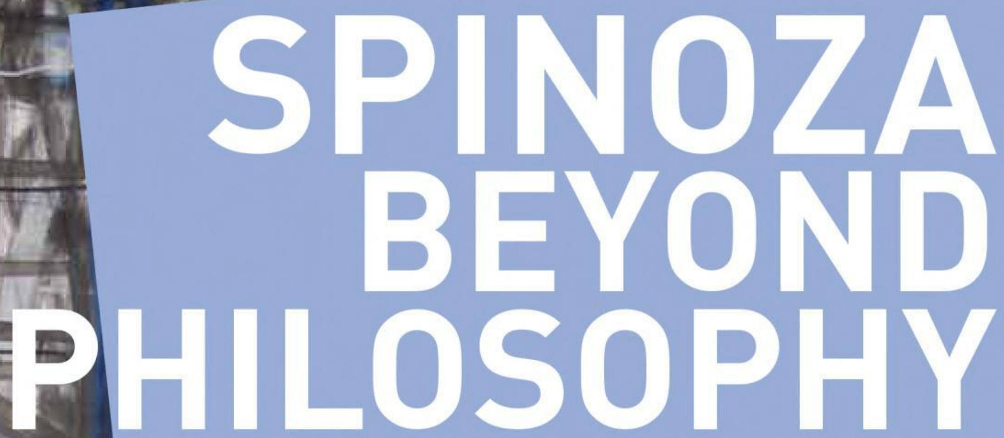

SPINOZA BEYOND PHILOSOPHY

BETH LORD

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Edited by Beth Lord

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Abbreviations

The chapter authors use different editions and translations of Spinoza's works, as indicated in the bibliography to each chapter. However, the following abbreviations and referencing system are used throughout the book for Spinoza's texts.

E *Ethics*; references are to part number in Roman numerals, followed by Proposition (or other) number in Arabic numerals, as follows: D = Definition; A = Axiom; P = Proposition; Dem. = Demonstration; C = Corollary; S = Scholium; Exp. = Explanation; L = Lemma; Post. = Postulate; Pref. = Preface; App. = Appendix; Def. Aff. = Part III 'Definitions of the Affects' (e.g. E IVP18S = *Ethics* Part IV, Proposition 18, Scholium).

KV *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Wellbeing*; references are to part number in Roman numerals and chapter number in Arabic numerals.

Letters are referenced by number, correspondent and date (where known).

TIE *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; references are to paragraph number.

TP *Political Treatise*; references are to chapter and paragraph number.

TTP *Theological–Political Treatise*; references are to chapter number and page number in the translation used.

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Introduction

BETH LORD

Baruch Spinoza is often assumed to be a philosopher's philosopher – one whose system is so metaphysically complex and so distant from everyday life that it is read by very few, and understood by even fewer. Those who read Spinoza know this not to be true. Obscure though Spinoza's ideas may be, there is no doubt that he was deeply committed to elucidating our everyday experience. Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology make way for a kind of anthropology: a philosophy of human nature and a theory of how human beings relate to one another. Spinoza gives us tools for understanding ourselves and strategies for living well, something that few philosophers since the Greeks have attempted to provide. Further, Spinoza wants us to understand ourselves as beings immersed in a world of things that affect each other constantly. While human nature is unavoidably the central concern of humanity, and thus of philosophy, it is shown not to be the central feature or purpose of the universe. His is a non-anthropocentric anthropology, or a 'non-humanist humanism'.

This complex aim – to understand that and how humanity is 'part of nature' – has made Spinoza one of Western philosophy's most popular figures, and one who is studied and known outside of the philosophy classroom. The difficulty of Spinoza's thought – its extreme 'philosophicality' – is no barrier to its being used and enjoyed by those who do not consider themselves students, teachers or writers of philosophy. People enjoy Spinoza because they feel that living a good life and taking a holistic perspective on oneself and the world *should* be philosophy's focus. That is, philosophy should ground not only anthropology, but also politics, ecology, history, and other systems that organise human thought and endeavour. Spinoza's texts make it clear that thinking philosophically leads to clearer thinking about these systems.

This book is, in part, motivated by the conviction that philosophy

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has not just a duty but also an inner *necessity* to become myriad other ways of thinking. The relationship between philosophy and other subjects is not one of grounding, but rather, truer to Spinoza's style, an *immanent* relation wherein other subjects are formed in the activity of philosophical thinking itself. Through and in philosophical thinking, multiple other ways of thinking come to be. This is what emerges in Spinoza's major work, the *Ethics*, where 'pure' philosophical thinking about being becomes, through an inner necessity, thinking about scientific knowledge and imaginative fiction, embodiment, relations to other things, and the complex systems of relations that are ethics and politics. To use the term that Deleuze found so productive in Spinoza, philosophy *expresses* these other subjects; they are immanent in it, and philosophy remains immanent in them.

This book aims to follow some of the routes taken by the *expression* of Spinoza's philosophy, routes that have not been followed before. Take, for instance, Spinoza's so-called 'parallelism' thesis: the view that mind and body are one thing, expressed in two different ways (E IIP7). This thought leads to surprising philosophical conclusions, including those about the limitations of knowledge and the impossibility of free will (see, for example, Della Rocca 1996). But in this book, it is also seen to generate new ways of thinking about political subjectivity (Chapters 1 and 2) and different modes of musical and literary analysis (Chapters 5 and 9). Spinoza's theory of the emotions (the neuroscientific plausibility of which has been recently explored by Damasio 2004) is here seen to inform thinking about architectural design (Chapter 4) and ecological activism (Chapter 3). Various schools of political thought in the twentieth century have drawn on Spinoza (see Althusser 1973, Negri 1991 and Balibar 1998 on the Marxist side; Feuer 1958 and Smith 1997 on the liberal side; and Gatens 2009 for feminist interpretations). In this book, Spinoza's political texts are considered not only in terms of their potential for thinking about individual and institutional power (Chapters 1 and 6), but also in terms of the narrative power that texts have to generate social cohesion or disruption (Chapters 2, 4, 7 and 8). The role of religion in Spinoza's thought is not restricted to questions of atheism and pantheism, but is treated here in terms of its connections to law (Chapter 7) and literary history (Chapter 10).

In taking Spinoza beyond philosophy, it is important to recognise the extent to which he is himself an 'interdisciplinary' thinker. This term, based on the nineteenth-century separation of 'natural philosophy' into different scientific disciplines, and the gradual estrangement of the sciences from poetry, history and moral philosophy, can only be used retrospectively of a seventeenth-century thinker. All philosophers

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were 'interdisciplinary' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the sense that their focus was not typically restricted by subject-matter (though it often was restricted by beliefs about what constituted suitable material for rational thought). However, not all such thinkers are of interdisciplinary relevance now, in the sense of informing thinking in areas outside philosophy. Spinoza's philosophy is interdisciplinary in both these senses: his thought, while expounding a complex metaphysics and epistemology, ventures into physics, politics and hermeneutics; and while Spinoza is studied mainly as a philosopher today, he is widely read and cited by many others. Categorising his work as 'philosophy' is restrictive, for he is interested in truth, wherever that may be found. It is not Spinoza's contention that truth is discoverable only through pure reason. Imagination has a central role to play, in building true understanding, in representing it, and in limiting and obfuscating it. It is this pursuit of truth *through* various ways of knowing – rational and imaginative – that keeps Spinoza's thought open to various disciplines today.

The search for truth, or more specifically, for a method of true understanding, is the theme of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza's earliest text (begun 1658). In this text Spinoza presents a rudimentary distinction between four types of 'perception': from hearsay, from casual experience, from inference, and from knowledge of essences (TIE 19). These are specified as 'hearsay, experience, belief, [and] clear knowledge' in the *Short Treatise* (begun 1660; KV II.4), and are transformed into the first two kinds of knowledge, imagination and reason, in the *Ethics* (written 1662–75; E IIP40S2). Throughout Spinoza's development of these ideas, imaginative knowledge from hearsay, signs, experience and inference is contrasted with rational knowledge of essences and causes.

Significantly, the examples Spinoza gives of this latter kind of knowledge are mathematical, for mathematics 'gives us another standard of truth' from experience (E IApp., cf. TIE 22–4). Experience is particular to each individual and is bound up with the bodily and mental states of that individual; it tells us more about the perceiver than about the things perceived (E IIP16C2). Mathematics, by contrast, is a way of 'seeing' things in terms of their eternal truths; the geometric relations that work the same way in all things are 'common notions' between them. It is for this reason (among others) that Spinoza's *Ethics* is written in the geometric style, through the demonstration of propositions, to inculcate in the reader a habit of seeing the world in terms of its geometric commonalities and eternal truths: 'the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves' (E VP23S). Spinoza

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shared this view with followers of the new mechanical philosophy of Descartes and, in 1663, published an exposition of this, the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, also demonstrated in geometric order.

While a purely mathematical understanding of the world may be closest to the truth in an absolute sense, such an understanding would miss what is crucial to being human (and would, in any case, be impossible for us as long as we are embodied): sensory and affective knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. From his early writings through to the *Ethics*, he stresses that humans are complexly affective: we feel and sense a great variety of things, we cause feelings in other beings, and these feelings cannot be avoided or entirely overcome. Our self-awareness and knowledge begin with our feelings (E IIP19), and the majority of our adequate ideas and common notions are formed *through* our experiences. Thus while reasoning is a 'truer' way of knowing than imagining is, reason cannot be separated from imagination, or held out in contrast to it. There is no either–or between imagining and reasoning for Spinoza; they form a single continuum of understanding. We are more rational as we understand things better, and more imaginative as we are more affected by our experiences. At no point can we ever be wholly rational (for then we would feel nothing) or wholly imaginative (for then we would know nothing truly).

A number of chapters in this book stress this point and its implications. Michael Mack (Chapter 2) comments that Spinoza was the first philosopher to break down the separation between reason and imagination, and suggests that this leads to a view of human being as that which is rational but not defined by its rationality – and therefore not punishable for its irrationality (whether natural or socially constructed). Peg Rawes (Chapter 4) uses the term 'sense-reason' to suggest, with Spinoza, that rational knowledge is always inflected by sensuous, imaginary, 'aesthetic' knowledge, and that our sensing the world has an always-already rational and geometrical outlook. Both Rawes and Simon Calder (Chapter 9) show that Spinoza helps us to break down the separation between rational (geometric or scientific) and imaginative (aesthetic, affective, sensuous or fictional) form in architectural design and literary writing.

This is why the experimental sciences are so important for Spinoza, and why he cannot be taken to advocate any system that would reduce knowledge to mathematics (as Badiou 2004 seems to suggest). By increasing our exposure to different things, and by varying the ways we affect, and are affected by, their different materials and properties, we are likelier to hit on the properties they have in common. The organised experience of an experiment will be more effective in gaining knowl-

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edge than looking at random events, just as an organised life will be more effective at reaching virtue than one that relies on happenstance. Science is the best way for humans to pursue knowledge, not because it is some purely rational pursuit, but because it brings together rational knowing – the deductive unfolding of adequate ideas – with imaginative knowing from experience and affects. Anthony Paul Smith (Chapter 3) draws out the importance of the affects in coming to understand the contemporary science, and political potential, of ecology.

Because Spinoza is interested in truth, he must take account of the representation of truth. This is another way in which our human finitude restricts our knowledge of eternal truths. We know little, if anything, in an eternal or 'intuitive' way (E VP29). In many cases, truth becomes known to us through language, but true ideas, for Spinoza, are not linguistic in form. Language does not express truth but merely represents it, usually badly. Not only do words lack any intrinsic connection to true ideas, they are connected to our experiences only by association and convention. Words 'are merely symbols of things as they are in the imagination, not in the intellect' (TIE 89; see Savan 1958). Writing is therefore several removes from the truth. Another reason for writing the *Ethics* geometrically rather than discursively (and, some argue, in Latin rather than Dutch) is that Spinoza takes the 'cumbersome geometric order' (E IVP18S) to be the best way of representing true ideas in writing, where 'best' means least prone to error and obfuscation. The geometric style might also be thought to be less prone to interpretive disagreements, though the huge variety of ways of interpreting Spinoza that has developed since the eighteenth century would suggest otherwise (see Norris 2011).

To understand the limitations of language, and the specific errors and interpretive possibilities to which a particular language is prone, one needs to understand its workings (TTP Ch. 7, p. 463). The incomplete *Hebrew Grammar* (likely begun 1669) is Spinoza's contribution to a long tradition of commentaries on this subject, one that focuses on the use of Hebrew as a living language. As Michael L. Morgan comments in his introduction to this rarely read text, 'Spinoza deserves to be called a philologist and grammatical scholar as well as a philosopher and scientist' (Spinoza 2002: 584). Yet Spinoza is interested not only in the structure of language, but also in its functions and uses. The fact that language and writing merely approximate the truth is productive and interesting in itself. The *Theological-Political Treatise* (published 1670) is concerned with the relationship between true ideas and written words in the Bible, and between true ideas and the spoken words of prophets and clerics. The representational nature of language,

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its intrinsic variance with the true nature of God, becomes crucial for Spinoza's critique of religion and the ways it mobilises words and images to its ends.

Words are no less powerful for being imaginary symbols, including the words written by Spinoza himself. Indeed, the fact that words are known imaginatively means their power lies in their capacity to affect us. The *Ethics* aims to engage the reader in the geometric deduction of true ideas from one another, a process that might well involve the rational joy of understanding (see E IVP52). Yet the reader cannot get there without feeling certain passions: frustration at the difficulty of the arguments, delight in the prose of the scholia, or shock at the definition of God as nature. Similarly, the *Theological-Political Treatise* makes different readers feel different things: it causes fury in the cleric, joy in the dissident, and fear in the common man (see Spinoza's comments on this at the end of the Preface: TTP Pref. pp. 393–4). Spinoza reflected on the affective power of his own texts because he is fascinated by the power of texts – particularly the Bible – to determine feelings and actions. Textual power is explored in very different ways by Dimitris Vardoulakis on law (Chapter 7) and Nick Nesbitt on freedom (Chapter 8). Vardoulakis argues that it is the form of law, as a linguistic and textual presence (rather than its content) that is important in Spinoza's analysis in bringing about social cohesion. Nesbitt argues that the true inheritors of Spinoza's political writings are neither contemporary Marxists nor contemporary liberals, but the thinkers and agents of revolution in the late eighteenth century.

'Fictions' have a particular textual power for Spinoza. Fictions are organised systems of words and images (see TIE 51–65), including scientific hypotheses, history and literature, all of which may be more or less useful depending on the extent to which they help us reach true understanding. Spinoza regularly makes use of fictions in his own writing, including the story of Adam and Eve, the history of the Hebrew people, the poetry of Ovid, and his own thought-experiments and (assumedly) memories. The scholia of the *Ethics*, which in Deleuze's phrase (1998: 146) 'interrupt the chain of demonstrative elements', contain discursive and often lyrical elaborations on the propositions and their proofs. We should not be surprised that the *Ethics* interweaves geometric proofs with imaginative and affective stories, for as a properly *scientific* study, it shows how eternal truths, understood mathematically and expressed geometrically, come to light through imagination, and how the imaginary stuff of experience and fiction, expressed in the scholia, is clarified through rational knowledge. This theme is touched on by Mack (Chapter 2), Rawes (Chapter 4) and Calder (Chapter 9).

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Spinoza is, finally, concerned with the power to transmit and obfuscate truth. This happens everywhere that humans come together, and is a particular feature of the systems organising human communities: politics and religion. The *Theological-Political Treatise* is Spinoza's investigation into and critique of these systems, containing his argument for the separation of religion from truth-oriented pursuits. Religion does not aim at discovering truth, Spinoza argues; it aims at obedience, and so for peaceful and stable relations between people at a specific historical juncture (TTP Ch. 14). The socio-political utility of religion is thereby drawn out, and its philosophical and scientific misuses castigated. If there is a human practice that is excluded from Spinoza's project of truth-seeking, it is religion. Yet this did not stop Spinoza's readers from working to reconcile his philosophy with Christian doctrine. The attempts of German Enlightenment thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn and J. G. Herder (members of the first generation able to read Spinoza without risking their positions) to resolve the 'pantheism controversy' with such a reconciliation are fairly well known (see, for example, Lord 2011). That Samuel Taylor Coleridge made a related attempt to identify Spinozism with Christianity in the early nineteenth century is less familiar and more puzzling in its motivation, as Nicholas Halmi explains in Chapter 10.

Depending on the distribution of power in a given political system, our ability to know things truly will fare differently. Good governments facilitate the pursuit of true knowledge and virtue, and relegate religion to its proper role of promoting social cohesion through obedience; bad ones obstruct true understanding and utilise religious and other fictions to provide explanations and control human affects and activity. Spinoza's *Political Treatise* (begun 1675) has a different aim from the *Ethics* and the *Theological-Political Treatise* in that it reveals how political life is lived, rather than demonstrating how to live or criticising current conditions. Spinoza's political philosophy must be understood in the context of his view of human being introduced earlier. Not only is the human being not defined by its rationality; it is not defined by the boundaries of its interior mind. Affectivity means we are intermeshed with things outside our physical and mental boundaries – things that affect and change us constantly. Our individuality is a composite of many lesser individuals, and a component of greater ones, each of which acquires its character from its encounters and relations with others (E IIL7S). As Caroline Williams argues in Chapter 1, this implies that our subjectivity extends beyond the traditional notion of the 'subject' and its 'identity', and should be thought instead as an impersonal, affective process. Mateusz Janik continues this discussion

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in Chapter 6, suggesting that thinking about collective political agency and the move to democracy must be grounded in material processes rather than the liberal concept of the autonomous individual.

The visual arts appear to be one area in which Spinoza thinks truth is unlikely to be found. Scholars have stressed Spinoza's view that true ideas are not, and cannot be encapsulated in, images (see Morrison 1989). In so far as art is representational, it is as inadequate as language as a conveyor of truth; a historical or allegorical painting has the same status, for Spinoza, as the story or moral lesson it represents, and is nothing more than that by virtue of being expressed visually. In so far as it is non-representational, art may be decorative and pleasing (and therefore of utility to a varied life; see E IVP45S), but it cannot be the bearer of meaning or power except by arbitrary convention or personal association.

Yet despite the impossibility of claiming Spinoza as a thinker of the arts, Spinoza's philosophy may be more relevant to the visual arts today than it has been at any point in the past. No longer centrally concerned with representation (or its denial), narrative or symbol, today's modes of artistic practice are often 'experimental' in the sense of an ordered investigation into present experience, one that is informed by true understanding and that seeks new knowledge. Experimental art is, like experimental science, based on combining ordered thought with affective experience; it explores processes of making and relating things together in order to understand the world more clearly. In addition to the cover art, this volume contains an 'interlude' of four artworks. They should not be regarded as illustrations of Spinoza's thought, but, like the chapters, as attempts at using Spinoza non- (or extra-)philosophically. The other aesthetic subjects represented here are architecture (Chapter 4) and music (Chapter 5). In the latter, Amy Cimini discusses Spinoza's utility for taking music away from models of celestial harmony and mind–body dualism, and towards 'sonic materiality' that can affect us with joy.

The chapters in this book, though wide-ranging, are drawn together by four themes: affectivity, materiality, textuality and the ethical. Affects for Spinoza are feelings, including sensations, the images associated with them, and the emotions attached to them; the term also refers to changes that result in a body from its being affected by another. As we have seen, it is a key tenet of the *Ethics* that bodies affect, and are affected by, other bodies constantly and necessarily; from breathing and eating to our complex interactions with other people, we are *affectively* part of nature. *Affectivity* might be defined as the ways physical bodies (and, in parallel, minds) interact and combine with one another

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through feeling. Spinoza has a unique way of demonstrating that the ontological basis for affectivity is epistemologically, ethically and politically significant. This theme runs strongly through the chapters in the first half of the book, which show how this idea leads to new thinking about human subjectivity (Chapters 1 and 2), ecology (Chapter 3) and architecture (Chapter 4). It also figures in Chapter 9, where a particularly Spinozan view of affectivity is seen to operate in the fiction of George Eliot.

Materiality does not refer to any modern variant of materialism, since to call Spinoza a materialist would ignore the central place of immaterial ideas in his system. Instead, it refers to Spinoza's refusal to reduce matter to thought, and, *contra* Descartes, his refusal to subordinate bodies to minds. Placing equal significance on the bodily-material and the mental-ideal, and maintaining that they are different expressions of the same being (different attributes of one substance, in Spinoza's words), allows for ways of thinking that depart from the Cartesian model without falling into either materialism or idealism. This theme figures in the middle chapters of the book. Materiality dominates the discussion of musicology in Chapter 5 and political collectives in Chapter 6. It is also significant for the three artists whose work is presented in the 'interlude' between these chapters.

The last four chapters of the book have *textuality* as their central theme. This theme in one sense combines the first two, for what is meant by this term is the affective impacts that texts have, as material objects, on human passions and actions. We have seen already that Spinoza is particularly interested in the affective and material impacts the Bible has had throughout its history. Chapter 7 considers how texts of political theology make us understand the operation of power. In the last three chapters we see the impacts that Spinoza's texts have had historically: on the French and Haitian revolutions (Chapter 8), on George Eliot and the ethical potential of her literature (Chapter 9), and on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ecumenical thinking (Chapter 10).

Finally, *the ethical* is a theme linking together all ten chapters of the book. Ethical philosophy concerns how to live (as opposed to moral philosophy, which concerns transcendent values of good and bad). All the book's authors consider how Spinoza's thought helps us to find new ways of living, and thereby explore the ethical dimension of their own disciplines. The authors come from different disciplinary backgrounds, but all converge on the significance of Spinoza's thought for addressing contemporary problems. Taking Spinoza *beyond* philosophy is not, however, a matter of closing off his metaphysics and epistemology. Rather, it is a matter of seeing how his deeply philosophical thought

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immanently contains the resources for new thinking about the arts, the sciences and the social sciences. It is a matter of seeing how *any* philosophical thinking necessarily generates other kinds of thinking.

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1. 'Subjectivity Without the Subject': Thinking Beyond the Subject with / through Spinoza

CAROLINE WILLIAMS

The problematisation and reconfiguration of the concept of the subject has long been a central preoccupation of philosophy. It also continues to orient discussions beyond philosophy, from neuroscience, ethics and philosophy, to aesthetics, architecture and science. Indeed, in recent years, a number of contemporary writers have returned to Spinoza in order to pursue such reconfigurations. They have done so primarily because Spinoza's political and philosophical writings offer many interesting reflections upon the affective composition of 'subjects' – although I admit to using this term rather cautiously since here I begin to question its precise theoretical utility and conceptual shape. What might it mean to discuss such a concept in the context of an early modern thinker who rarely utilises the term, and whose ontology, it may be argued, precludes the kind of metaphysics that historically accompanies philosophical reflections upon subjectivity?[1]

Without, at this stage, naming any philosophical approaches or proper names, we can observe the many acrobatic conceptual feats that have, in recent years, been performed by or through the *medium* of the subject. Deconstructed and displaced, distributed along chains of signification, interpellated via discursive and / or ideological formations, invoked at another place, present only in its absence, or through its effects, or as a lack, we might concur that the fate (indeed, the *necessary fate*) of the subject has been to *persist* in our philosophical grammar (albeit via new theoretical inflections), and yet to *desist* or *escape* our grasp (a somewhat slippery, as well as a *ticklish*, subject (see Žižek 1999)). Perhaps we might even be able to agree, in the wake of post-structuralism, that what we call the concept of the subject can only be utilised in critical thinking with due regard to the philosophical paradox which frames its ontological and political emergence.[2]

This paradox can take many different forms and shapes. One of its

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best-known formations is to be found in the Kantian problematic so aptly described by Foucault in *The Order of Things*: namely, the idea of the empirico-transcendental doublet – where the subject as the condition of possibility for knowledge is doubled as the subject in the world with all the inherent limits placed by finitude upon thought (Foucault 1970). Whatever the form of this paradox, however, in contemporary post-structuralist thought the essence of the problem is clear: the concept of the subject must be radically *displaced* from philosophical thought and yet it remains a *requirement* of analysis. In other words, references to the problem of *the* subject often seem to assume the existence of some form of subjectivity to be worked upon or undone, even though it is precisely this 'subject' which is open to question. We often embrace a critical rendering of the subject, then, even in approaches that endeavour to destabilise it. The nature of this paradox has been nicely captured in Althusser's deployment of the spectre of the subject as *always-already* a subject: moreover, a subject whose emergence is perpetually bound up with its subjugation to ideology (see Althusser 1971). Indeed, the history of this aporia inherent in the subject has been traced recently by Etienne Balibar, where 'the introduction of *subject* into philosophy is doubled with the avatars of *subjectum* and *subjectus*' (Balibar 2006: 16). On the one hand, this has a logico-grammatical and philosophical function, where the subject is a laying forth or a lying under, as in a ground, support or predicate for knowledge; and on the other hand, it has a politico-juridical function: under a rule, submitted, subjected. This mechanism has been radicalised further by Judith Butler, for whom the subject carries this paradox *within* itself, where subjection is presented as a general trope or retroactive 'turning' of the subject back upon itself to delineate the very possibility of subjectivity. There is, then, an attachment or relation to the outside (as power, language), some activity or form that incites the subject to take its place as the bearer of a language, a right or a norm, to become a political subject (see Butler 1997, Introduction).

It is partly the aim of this chapter to begin to excavate the ground of this labyrinthine paradox of subjectivity and to explore the theoretical and ethico-political consequences implied by this *redoubling* process of subjectivation, which produces both the subject and its subjection. Its stronger contention, however, is that a thinking of the *space* of the subject, and its complex conditions of production and existence, can perhaps only be advanced once we begin to question the precise theoretical and political *utility* of the concept of the subject. This is not a naïve request for a return to structuralism, if we understand by this move a theoretical decision to erase the subject and the question

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of experience from philosophy. Neither is it an evocation to erase the paradox of the subject itself. Rather, as I suggest here, a more measured reflection is called for: one that acknowledges the myriad ways through which the subject has been untangled by post-structuralism and rendered ambivalent at its site of production, and one that also stays close to the *productivity* of the paradox. In his *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard identifies the paradox as the passion of thought 'wanting to discover something that thought cannot think,' something without foundation or presupposition (Kierkegaard 1985: 37). As troubling burden and as passion, the form of the paradox offers the movement of thought a chance or opening through which to think new figures and concepts of political subjectivity.

It is in this context that I propose to think about subjectivity *without* the subject (whether this be without borders, identity, interiority, ground or destiny): that is, as an anonymous, generic process with varying qualities or functions (in contemporary thought this has been variously presented as a truth event, a plane of immanence, a game of truth), which itself subjectivises and produces something of the order of a 'political subject'. The term I develop here – namely, 'subjectivity as a process without a subject' – is a variation of Althusser's formulation of history 'as a process without a Subject or Goal', but this discussion will not return us to a structuralist paradigm, which is overly reductive of the richness of Althusser's writings (extending from structural contingency and overdetermination in his early writings to philosopher of the aleatory encounter in his later ones; see, for example, Althusser 1990, 2003). Despite the many tensions framing the respective projects of Althusser and Badiou (and I think there are also many fertile connections that I have begun to explore elsewhere; see Williams 2012b), Badiou still credits Althusser with the opening up of 'this enigma of subjectivity without a subject as the intra-philosophical mark of politics' (Badiou 2005: 64). It is to this kind of discussion that I wish my paper to contribute. To this end, I aim to utilise Spinoza, by placing his philosophical claims in dialogue with contemporary efforts to think subjectivity without a subject, whilst remaining mindful of the paradoxical status of this formulation.

First, however, a brief note on my reading of Spinoza: My aim here is to think *with* and *through* Spinoza, rather than attempt to interpret, for a contemporary audience, aspects of his philosophy and political thought. The degree to which I am faithful to Spinoza might, of course, be questioned; I do not consider the *Ethics* and related writings as having a single aim, and in a broader project I aim to unravel the effects of various concepts, identifying some of these as 'limit-concepts'

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that may subvert and disrupt the consistency of his argument (these concepts are *conatus* and imagination, which together point to the richness of Spinoza's political ontology). Following Pierre Macherey, I intend to think Spinoza's 'philosophical actuality' (Macherey 1998: Ch. 9). I hope to demonstrate the ways in which Spinoza's thought is deeply relevant for a thinking *beyond* the subject. This key contribution can be briefly indicated now and will be elaborated in the course of the discussion. Central to my argument is a reading of the twin concepts of encounter and relation in Spinoza's ontology that allows one to theorise consciousness and subjectivity as impersonal *processes without a subject*, as well as to give prominence to the question of our ethico-political existence. Being both *extensive* (its field recognises no distinction, difference or opposition between the human and non-human, the natural or the cultural) and *intensive* (it draws our attention to the fluidity, vacillation and intensity of affective relations flowing between all things), this ontology of encounter precludes ideas of containment and boundary and allows us to think the agency of bodies (understood in *broad* physico-corporeal terms) in new and exciting ways.

SPINOZA AGAINST THE SUBJECT?

Significantly, we find very few (only two) direct references to the subject in Spinoza's philosophy (and yet its central theme is our freedom and knowledge of causality).[3] On the one hand, this is clearly because the empirico-transcendental doublet had yet to crystallise in thought, had yet to master the elements governing its formation and hence find its way – and its voice – in philosophical discourse. There is, arguably, no grammatical 'I' in Spinoza's philosophy. On the other hand, it is simply because both Spinoza's view of the world as substance, coupled with what I have called above his ontology of encounter, *require* no theory or faculty of consciousness as interiority, since their very starting point precludes the kind of containment or identity that generally accompanies such a theory. Indeed, much of the contemporary interest in Spinoza has tended to view him 'as an adversary of subjectivity' (see Balibar (1992) for discussion). We need only recall, for example, Althusser's insistence, in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*, that he was a Spinozist and not a structuralist; and again, that his rejection of humanism was, like Spinoza's, a *strategic* rejection of the various anthropocentric (for Althusser, ideological) perspectives governing their respective times of writing (Althusser 1973, 1997). In contrast, Badiou's quite challenging textual reading finds in the *Ethics* the surging forth of a subject or

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subject-effect, a supposition that is without ground, undecidable and atypical in form (Badiou 2006).[4]

If Spinoza is no subjectivist (at least not in any straightforward sense), then neither is he an objectivist. Such a one-dimensional, epistemological reading of Spinoza would be detrimental to the kind of project initiated here. To view his philosophy as seeking objectivity is also to render it incoherent in some respects, since a *disregard for the problem of the subject does not necessarily entail a subsequent disregard for the problematic and effects of subjectivity itself.* Indeed, this latter concern emerges through several dimensions in the *Ethics*, where the discussion of individuals, bodies, ideas, affect, desire, power (*potentia*) and imagination takes place. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the ontological themes of the *Ethics*, many of which have generated intricate and lively debates within Spinoza studies (and are also broached by other chapters in this volume). However, it is important to situate briefly, within the broader context of Spinoza's philosophy, the kind of reading of subjectivity (without the subject) that I propose to develop here.

SPINOZA: 'THE FIRST THINKER OF THE WORLD' (NANCY 1998: 54)

As Jacques Derrida reminds us in one of his brief, yet provocative, remarks on the philosopher, it is Spinoza who 'disturbs the schema of philosophical thinking'; he does not narrate a story about the history of philosophy, nor does he insist upon putting things in a teleological framework (Derrida cited in Bernasconi 1987: 96). His is a strategic, political engagement, which aims to overturn all political, religious and philosophical logics of transcendence. Hegel's reading of the Spinoza who develops a determinist and all-embracing view of Substance, within which the dynamic of agency is ontologically fixed and foreclosed, fails to appreciate the attention given by Spinoza in the *Ethics* to the relational character of Substance, as well as to the *finite* mode of existing in the world. Drawing upon the more nuanced readings of Deleuze, Macherey and others,[5] I wish to present a view of Spinoza's concept of an infinite and infinitely variable, non-teleological Substance expressed *perpetually* in the infinite forms of being (by which Spinoza means the attributes, of which mind and body are but two). There is no loss of power for finite things here, including the human being, since Substance (by which Spinoza understands *Deus, sive Natura*) is an immanent structure producing complex relations and events through which finite being is constituted. All individual things in the world

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(whatever species or form) must be understood as *modifications* of the infinite variability of substance; but they must not be viewed as simply its reflections or determinations. If they might have substance as their immanent *cause*, they will none the less interact with other finite things in diverse ways (according to their unique composition and disposition), generate their own specific effects and, over time, recompose or degenerate in structure. The human mind (and, as we shall see below, consciousness too) is precisely such a finite mode flowing from the immanence of substance yet also being determined to act through the mediation of other finite modes. Understood according to an immanent causality – that is, as giving rise to both the totality of causes *and* their effects, substance is an inexhaustible, relational system folded into – and out of – natural and human life. There is no brute nature, no clear division between natural and cultural, biological and social realities; we may better think of these realities on the model of a continuum, of the becoming culture of nature, or the virtual field of the socio-political. When, in IP29S, Spinoza distinguishes between *Natura naturans* (literally, nature *naturing*) and *Natura naturata* (that is, nature *natured*), he has in mind what Georges Canguilhem has called the 'poetic horizon of *natura naturans*' (Canguilhem 1994: 311), which takes note of nature's generativity and movement rather than focusing upon some quasi-agentic (and hence anthropomorphic) *capacity* of nature / Substance. It is this dynamic formulation that underscores Spinoza's view of a complex, layered materialism and informs the qualified account of the subject developed here.

Now, if Spinoza's point of reference is not the anthropocentric subject (which is deconstructed in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*), then it is crucial to underscore the classical conception of 'individual' embraced in his approach. An *individuum* is a composite of differential relations between bodies / things, and it can refer to human and non-human forms alike. Indeed, an important aspect of Spinoza's ontology (that is, in addition to its radical thesis of the non-teleological and infinite variability of Substance) has to be the constitutive relationality established in his approach, which calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things. Relation, here, must not simply be thought as a link, connection or association between two or more discrete objects; relation is literally a 'taking in hand' (see the discussion in Massumi 2002: Ch. 3), a production of something that did not exist before and which, through the process of relation, becomes an aspect of that thing's existence. Furthermore, when a body is in motion – and we might agree with this dynamic ontology that there is always the potential for variation, then the body will always exceed or overflow

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its current state. To be an individual is always to be composed of *other* bodies. The more complex a body, then, the more relations it will have with other bodies, and the more its identity will be compatible with a great many *different* entities. An individual can be a rock, an animal, a linguistic corpus, a collective, a storm, and, of course, all individuals are subject to infinite variability and possibility. A collective individual of a political kind, Spinoza noted, may under certain conditions become *demos* or recompose as *vulgas*, just as, in Steve Barbone's example, the mass of flowing water combines with other natural forces to become the storm (Barbone 2002). Jean-Luc Nancy makes a similar point, in *Being Singular Plural*, when he writes, although without allusion to Spinoza:

> I would no longer be human if I were not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of 'me' in 'me'. A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations. (Nancy 2000: 18)

To be an individual, then, is to be a (shared) centre of action or *potentia* (or relations of motion and rest), and also to interact dynamically and in various ways with a network of other individuals. It is also to participate in a kind of virtual reality of possibility, that which Brian Massumi calls (after Foucault) an *incorporeal materialism* (Massumi 2002: 5). It is precisely these relations (which in turn give rise to an interdependency between parts – with, we might note, important ethical and communicative implications) that construct the individual. Individuals can be simple and more complex, from atoms and cells, to multi-cell organisms and institutions to, as Spinoza writes, 'the whole of Nature . . . whose parts i.e. all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual' (E IIP13L7S): *the greater the order of complexity*, we might say, *the greater the power to interact with the rest of nature*. There can be, therefore, no view of the human individual as *imperium in imperio* (a kingdom within a kingdom), as somehow independent of nature. Instead, the individual must be conceived metabolically, as it was in Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* too, as 'part of nature', as intimately woven into a *natural, social and material* web of relations upon which it depends, and by which it is continually affected.[6] There is, then, a dynamic reciprocity between the unity of substance and the multiplicity of 'individuals' which is always more than the simple exchange between two parts.

It follows from this reading that to write in the *spirit* of Spinoza, in the context of this ontology of relation and encounter, one can have recourse to the subject only in an overdetermined sense: that is, only

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by recognising that the subject is not simply produced or constructed by an external structure, power, norm or ideology. Rather, what we might tentatively call 'the subject' only appears in this ontological scene as a temporary (that is, as variable, unstable and, with reference to Badiou, an always *rare*) form that is always *more than a subject*. The modern subject, on this reading, is that ontological excess generated through a specific series of relations and spacings constituting the modern age.

BESIDE HERSELF WITH JOY

A prime example of the practice of the ontology of encounter and relation described in the previous section can be found in Spinoza's discussion of affect. The section heading above captures nicely the argument I wish to pursue here, since I understand affect, with Spinoza, as exceeding the subject. In a letter to one of his more enquiring readers, Spinoza remarks that it is to Epicurus, Democritus and Lucretius that he turns to locate the instruments to think about the experience of consciousness and imagination (Letter 56). In the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*, we learn of his intention to understand the landscape of passion and action after the ancient atomists 'as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies' (E IIIPref.). Ethics thus becomes a kind of psycho-physics, for Spinoza, who proceeds in a materialist way by recognising the irreducible complexity of the passions that cannot be attributed to the agency or intentions of the will. This is not merely because, as Lucretius understands it in *The Nature of the Universe*, the mind is located in the central part of the breast (Lucretius [55 BC] 1994: Book III 135–45).[7] Neither is it, as neuroscientist and Spinozist Antonio Damasio notes, because much of our emotional experience takes place 'in the theatre of the body under the guidance of a congenitally wise brain designed by evolution to help manage the body' (Damasio 2003: 79). It is simply because affect cannot be housed by either body *or* mind and is often viewed as overflowing the subject who experiences it. Massumi describes it as a '*prepersonal intensity* corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act' (Massumi 1988: xvi). As transitive links between states of affairs, affects pass through subjects communicating and unfolding images and intensities. They are, in a certain sense, *semiotic* as well as materialist. Spinoza describes them as images and corporeal traces (see E IIP17) that are eventually materialised in signs, norms, social and political practices, modes of living and ethical relations.[8] Denise

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Riley underscores this impersonal and semiotic aspect of affect when she writes of the 'affect-soaked power of language', 'a forcible affect of language which courses like blood through its speakers' (Riley 2005: 5, 1). Thus affect passes *through, between* and *beyond* the subjects who remain, to all intents and purposes, its effects, its subversions and its point of torsion, anchoring identity (to varying degrees) though its normative displays and often *compelling* or inciting the subject to act, to take its place.

It is, then, according to a field of circulating flows and affective relations that we can best understand the passions that appear to become our own. Their composition, strength and power will be determined by the speed and slowness of interaction, the relations of agreement and disagreement surrounding them, and especially by the degree of intensity moderating their motion and mode of communication between bodies. In this way, affects are best understood as transitive states through which bodies pass; they meander through and between bodies, resting like 'foreign objects,' or excessive impersonal forces, awaiting transformation into the thought-imbued emotions of subjective experience.[9] Spinoza explores this field of possible experience, this force field, via the concept of the *conatus* as the *fractural* site through which affects have to pass. It is arguably the *conatus* which is the only concept in the *Ethics* able to account for the unfolding of affective life. It must be linked, in this final part of our discussion, to *imagination*, which in turn functions as the vehicle through which the experience of affect is galvanised. In place of the negative reading of Spinoza's imagination as a figment or error to be overcome by reason, I understand imagination as an anonymous *conductor* of affects circulating within and between bodies.[10] Indeed, it might be this very problematic that is alluded to by Althusser when he writes in his autobiographical reflections of finding in the heretical Spinoza not only the 'matrix of every *possible* theory of ideology' but also 'the *materiality of its very existence*' (Althusser 1997: 7, 10).

It is in Part III of the *Ethics*, entitled 'Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Affects', that the basis for the investigation into the physics of bodies and the various intensities that accompany them may be found. Here, Spinoza understands the human *conatus* as tied to desire; indeed, consciousness is not a *faculty* of the subject but a relational or transindividual *process* emerging out of this understanding of desire as conative striving. As such, it is a dynamic structure beset with tensions and possibilities ripe for transformation. In so far as the human body requires many other bodies to preserve and regenerate itself, and the affects are always turned towards others, the *conatus* is

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part of an intrahuman dynamic and in consequence will give rise to a matrix of psychic and social conflict, relations of agreement and disagreement that cohere to varying degrees in the imagination.

In Part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza understands imagination as a form of corporeal awareness connecting the body's affects to understanding. His broad elaboration of imagination exceeds its presentation as a subjective faculty and emphasises instead its collective and anonymous structure. Given that the body retains *traces* of the changes brought about through interactions with other bodies, imagination will reflect the diverse ways in which bodies are affected by particular experiences, such that one is effectively many. Thus Spinoza writes that 'the human mind perceives a great many bodies together with the nature of its own body' (E IIP16C1). He further considers how the recollection of one experience may trigger imaginative associations with similar ones. In this way, imagination, image and memory are intimately tied to affective and corporeal existence. Furthermore, there will always exist an unconscious *affectus imitatio* within the process of imaginary identifications constituting a political body as citizens of a *demos*, a nation and so on. Thus, 'if we imagine something like us to be affected with the same affect, this imagination will express an affection of our Body like this affect' (E IIIP27). This dynamic psychic relation is at work in the composition (and decomposition) of individuals and groups alike. Whilst 'we *strive to further* the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to Sadness' (E IIIP28) – that is, to strengthen the *active* affects – it is also the case that any common object or image of love or hope will be inseparable from hatred or fear caused by imagining a common evil opposed to this notion of goodness. In this way, the affects are subject to vacillation or ambivalence (*fluctuatio animi*), and the object or image of the other can be the cause of many conflicting passions (see E IIIP17S). Thus the mind can be drawn, *at one and the same time*, towards passive and active affects. Affects such as love may be built upon hatred, fears upon nascent hopes, and sadness upon hidden joys. The knot tied here between ignorance and knowledge, passion and turbulence, the dependence on others, objects, relations without which no persistence is possible, implicates desire in a structure of ambivalence that may deconstitute and unravel the subject who endeavours to persist in being. In this way, the power of the affects, whilst *appearing* to originate in the power of life or *conatus*, nonetheless *fold back upon this being and contribute to its very subjection*.

It should come as no surprise that contemporary thinkers of the

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political subject should find in Spinoza resources for theorising the process of subjectivity without the subject. For example, approaches to the discursive construction of power, knowledge, subjectivity and norms by Foucault and Butler (where norms are understood not only to discipline and seek mastery over the field of possible experiences but also, by creating affective ties, to activate and produce that very field) are certainly Nietzschean in many respects, but they also point – albeit somewhat elusively at times – to an interest in Spinoza's theory of immanent causality discussed above. Interestingly, as Butler's writings have developed a more nuanced account of the constitution of the subject and the internalisation of norms, she has increasingly fleshed out her ontological commitments with reference to Spinoza rather than Hegel and Lacan. Nonetheless, in drawing attention to Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, as 'passionate attachment to existence', a 'desire to be' or 'a striving to persist in being', a *potentia* or possibility that governs the subject, she also risks essentialising and naturalising it as subjective desire (Butler 2005: 43–4).

The reading here presents *conatus* as a fractural field of affective relations rather than a primary drive towards persistence and preservation. Together with the anonymous structure of imagination, it works to undo and decompose the subject. Understood through this relational site of production, which also twists and unravels that which it produces, the subject is a doubly inscribed register of being, moving back and forth across this affective terrain, perpetually affected by the encounters and practices surrounding it. The imitative structure discussed above is not simply induced *by* the subject; rather, this structure forms the mimetic process of identification for a subject. It is through the dispersal and circulation of affects (which simultaneously produces identity and unravels, or withdraws from its completion) that subjectivity is retroactively produced. In other words, there is no subject of the affect, because affect drives the subject towards identity and performance. This is not to say that the dispersed subject presented here harbours some ontological lack or negativity within itself. There is a sense in which (as Jean-Luc Nancy (1997: 33) also observes) Spinoza wants to think finite being in its immediate (immanent) relations without the mediation (transcendence) which ceaselessly re-opens a gap, or hole, in the subject. It is important to recall that, for Spinoza, philosophy is a meditation on life and not death (see E IVP67). Thus, when I argue that the *conatus* labours also to untie, to deconstitute, the subject, this is because the wider relations within which it circulates, and where it aspires, or strives, to seek unity, render it fragile and open to possible dissolution, as well as provisional states of unity.

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CONCLUSION

What might the fleshing out of this conception of *conatus* (along with imagination) bring to our thinking about, through or beyond, the 'subject'? Some liberal commentators have reduced this quantum of vital force to an egocentric appetite for survival or self-preservation, perhaps underestimating the way in which the *conatus* must also operate as a movement that goes constantly beyond the present, hence signifying an openness to the future: a condition of ontological expansion (see Jonas 1974; Yovel 1999). With reference to psychoanalysis, it has been argued strongly by Slavoj Žižek that Spinoza's concept of *conatus* is unable to conceive the 'elementary "twist" of dialectical inversion characterising negativity' and associated with Lacan's own theorisation of lack (see Žižek 2003: 33–41). If we follow the reading of Spinoza's ontology developed here, the *conatus* requires no internal (ontologically drawn) boundary or containment, no limitation or *Spaltung*, no deathly force, no negativity and no lack. Whilst one may draw parallels with psychoanalytic theory, given that the *conatus* in its human shape is a form of *desire*, this does not arise as 'a presence from a background of absence' as it does for Lacan. *Contra* Žižek, it may indeed be argued that Spinoza's philosophy certainly offers the conceptual resources to theorise an unconscious dynamic of ethico-political existence. That the *conatus* is an abundant and wholly *positive* energy that pulsates through bodies and is not wholly contained or controlled by them *does not* imply that it cannot be used to understand the decomposition, unravelling, in short, the ambivalent structure of subjectivity. What psychoanalysts call the death drive perhaps becomes in Spinoza a reaction to certain ethico-political states of being rather than an originary drive (see Williams 2010).

Indeed, the configuration of the *conatus* presented here allows one to respond (in three distinct ways) to those positions that attach a possessive or naturalistic formulation to it. First, it enables a consideration of how the *conatus* of complex individuals (or a higher-order composite like an ecosystem or a social organisation) might promote its persistence by actively tending towards greater interaction with its environment. It also follows that what we have called the human subject extends *infinitely* beyond the boundaries of the singular body, giving a whole new sense to what we might understand by the parallelism or identity of mind and body. If this ontological argument is taken seriously, one might suggest, to paraphrase Nietzsche, that the subject is an excessive multiplicity. What we understand by an individual's autonomy or freedom would be a function of this internal multiplicity,

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or external / internal relations – that which Deleuze, in his readings of the folding of subjectivation in Foucault, refers to as *folded force* (Deleuze 1988b). Second, the possessive formulation of the *conatus* appears to ignore how the relational character of bodies described above gives rise to a dynamic 'ratio of forces' which is incessantly modified and affected, hence underscoring the *communicative* aspects of the *conatus* that can be a source of conflict and disintegration in so far as disagreements between bodies occur (see also Balibar 1997). It also seriously underplays the linkage between the *conatus* and imagination. The *conatus* works upon and mobilises the imagination, which acts as a kind of impersonal conductor of affects in Spinoza's *Ethics*. It harbours the memory traces of experiences and reflects the diverse ways in which bodies are affected. Given the vacillations intrinsic to affective relations, the *conatus* will give rise to a matrix of psychic and social conflict with important political effects.

Finally, in assuming some kind of self-referential notion of preservation, the formulation ignores the sense in which non-human 'individuals' also have a *conatus*. Some readings of Spinoza's extension of the category of individual to, for example, the state argue that this translates, literally and illegitimately, Spinoza's 'ontological physics' into the political realm (Rice 1990). However, this translation of the term 'individual' makes perfect sense in the context of the argument developed here; it also bears interesting resemblances to the recent work of Bruno Latour (2004) and Jane Bennett (2004; 2010). However, in claiming that the analysis cannot be recast in this way (that the state, or indeed any other kind of 'body', cannot *act* as an individual), Spinoza's liberal critics collapse and reduce the rich resource of his ontology into a form of methodological individualism. Their reading also captures Spinoza's philosophy within an anthropomorphic circle where every collective form must be reduced to the discrete individuals who comprise it, or else be understood pejoratively as an organic whole.[11]

I have not said much about the kind of politics engendered by this reading of an anonymous process of subjectivation, and I will not do more than sketch out some of the implications (see Janik in this volume for further consideration). What can Spinoza contribute to this problematisation of the subject's simultaneous emergence and subjection, and how might this focus on relationality inform the paradox of the subject noted in my introduction?

I have tried to indicate a certain kind of genealogy of ideas from Spinoza to the present. For Spinoza, the subject emerges (in his time) as a result of multiple practices of despotic and religious power that feed on (but also nurture and incite) the ambivalence and vacillation

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characteristic of affective life. For Spinoza (as for Althusser, Foucault and Butler), is it precisely *bodies* that are at stake in practices of subjection, and a pluralised (or collective) body too, since the body *is* subject and contains its own complex twistings and turnings, which are part of power's modifications. But it is also *more than the subject*; it overflows the subject and thus expands the scene of agency. If affects are relations occurring in the space between individuals, traversing and composing singular knots of subjectivity *as their effect*, then interiority is constituted by these very relations. Spinoza, on my reading, is not quite the ethical optimist he is often presumed to be; his understanding and sensitive portrayal of human passivity and the mobility and ambivalence attached to affective life allow us to think the provisionality / openness of the subject, as well as the ethico-political relation between subjects in new and exciting ways.

NOTES

1. Aspects of this argument have also been extensively developed in my recent article, 'Affective Processes Without a Subject' (Williams 2010), and my forthcoming article, 'Geographies of Consciousness: Reconfiguring the Subject in the Wake of Spinoza' (forthcoming 2013).
2. On the tension between structuralism and post-structuralist theories of the subject see Balibar (2003) and Williams (2012a).
3. We find only two direct references to the subject as *subjectum* in Spinoza's *Ethics,* both of which occur in relation to the first kind of knowledge, where an imaginative, self-consistent subject finds its freedom in *ignorance* of the nature of things, and the realm of causality (see E IIIP5; VA1).
4. One of the great controversies in Spinoza's philosophy concerns the relation between the infinite and finite. Badiou maintains that, because of his foreclosure of the void, Spinoza cannot account for this relation, producing a rift between the two and no adequate account of the sources of presentation, of world, in the empty set (the void). This precludes chance, excess and the subject. Badiou therefore argues that the priority of God / Substance fails and that it is here that the Subject surges forth. Badiou develops this argument in his *Theoretical Writings*, where the intellect, as a kind of singularity, the localised instance of God, occupies a fold / productive point of torsion, which acts back upon the structure.
5. Of particular influence upon my own interpretations have been Deleuze (1988a, 1990), Macherey (1987, 1998), Balibar (1997, 1998), Negri (1991), Montag (1999) and Morfino (2006).
6. See Klein (2003) for an interesting discussion of the theme of metabolism in relation to Spinoza and subjectivity.
7. It is well known that Spinoza's library contained a copy of this work by Lucretius.

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8. Interestingly, in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and in one of his very few references to Spinoza, Lacan goes so far as to align what is sometimes read off (less often now) as Spinoza's pantheism with 'the reduction of the field of God to the universality of the signifier' (Lacan 1979: 275). For a fascinating reading of this relation, see Kordela (2007).
9. It should be noted that there remains an unevenness in definitional rigour adopted by theorists in discussions around affect. There still exists a tendency to treat affect as an emotional state rather than pointing to an important distinction between the two. Following Spinoza, Massumi rightly distinguishes between affect and emotion, where the former is bodily and autonomic while the latter is a qualified, subjective, situation-specific experience. Judith Butler refers to the agency of desire as a 'foreign object' in her analysis of Kafka's *The Punishment*. See Butler (2005: 74).
10. Here my analysis draws upon but seeks to press further the reading of imagination presented in the work of Balibar (1994) and Gatens and Lloyd (1999).
11. Of course, it is not just liberal theories that tend to follow this course; in many of its forms, structuralism too displaced humanism only by endowing some *other* order or system of rules with intentionality and unity. As I pointed out in the Introduction, my argument endeavours to go beyond a structuralist paradigm.

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The first section will discuss what I call the ethics of literature: literature makes us conscious of the subjective and fictive ways of living which govern our day-to-day activities. This rationalist work of making us conscious of real fictions also provides the impetus to change our mode of action and interaction within society at large. The second section analyses one powerful fiction that has shaped various attempts to find an abstract measure of what is human. This is the fiction of biopolitics, the extreme variation of which determined the Nazi genocide. The last section analyses the ways in which the Spinozist thinker Gilles Deleuze comes to terms with philosophical repercussions of biopolitics and totalitarianism. This discussion will show that a literary mode of inquiry may prove to be closer to the ethics of living than Deleuze's ideational discourse. The radical wager proposed in this chapter is that literature, rather than philosophical discourse à la Deleuze, bridges the gap between the mental and the corporeal, between the humanities and the sciences. The bridging of these divides was a major concern of Spinoza's re-conception of the mind as the idea of the body.

SPINOZA'S *CONATUS* AND THE NEW APPROACH TO LITERATURE, HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS

There is a certain parallelism between imagination and reason, between mind and body. What has been taken to be the receptive region of both the body and the imagination turns out to be connected to the more active or constructive workings of the mind. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Spinoza's radical revision of Descartes's mind–body dualism was scientifically substantiated by neurological experiments and research findings. By now it has become common neurological knowledge 'that the human mind and spirituality originates in a physical organ, the brain' (Kandel 2007: 9). Contemporary neurology has thus proved right Spinoza's materialism of the mind (Damasio 2003). The mind is not separated from the body but partakes of it. The mind is itself corporeal matter (the brain). These neurological findings overturn the traditional divide between body and mind which places the latter above the former. The predominance of Descartes's *res cogitans* has begun to disintegrate. Descartes's *res cogitans* 'gives rise to rational thought and consciousness, and it reflects in its nonphysical character the spiritual nature of the soul' (Kandel 2007: 117).

Our contemporary culture is, to a large extent, shaped by the biomedical assumptions of a materialism which was first advanced by Spinoza in his critique of Descartes's mind–body divide (Mack 2010: 11–29). Spinoza is, however, not a straightforward materialist, because

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The concepts of good and evil denote cognition of what affects our bodies in either a beneficial or detrimental manner. Up to this point, Spinoza anticipates our biomedical age of materialism. Spinoza is, however, concerned with the discovery of a way of life where we are collectively able to reduce the politico-social exposure of individuals and minorities to harm. At this point, Spinoza counters the partial or ideological-moral-aesthetic discussions of good and evil or beautiful and ugly. The problem with bodily affects and perceptions or desires is that they can mislead us; they can make us confuse our subjective disposition with objective or universal states of affairs. In this way, we take our predilections to be universal facts rather than subjective entities.

Here we reach the point where Spinoza's thought critiques aspects of humanism. Out of our subjective notion of what is human we are prone to postulate an abstract and fixed notion of humanity in general. This form of humanism is quite moralistic; it defines its notion of humanity in accordance with the concepts of good and evil. As we have seen above, Spinoza removes these terms from the exclusively mental realm of morality – the domain of traditional humanism – and submerges them into a more fluid and less elevated element: that of biology, medicine and the corporeal. This is not to say that he abandons reason, intellect and the spiritual. His rationalist approach is, however, quite idiosyncratic and marks a difference in the history of rationalism. It is a rationalism that is aware of its dependence on, as well as exposure to, the illusions and misapprehensions of bodily sensations and impressions.

Our corporeality connects us to the outside world via the senses of sight, touch and smell. The way we interpret various sense information is, however, culturally conditioned. The corporeal work performed by the senses, its neurons and the transmission of this information to the neurotransmitters located in the brain does not exist in a neutral location. The work of how we interpret this information has to do with our culture and how we relate to it: whether we simply repeat or copy its interpretative framework or whether we differentiate ourselves from it. Medicine and biology cannot be separated from culture, and culture cannot be separated from the corporeal realm of medicine. As Sander L. Gilman has pointed out, 'medicine is a part of general culture and the general culture is shaped by medicine' (Gilman 2010: x). Spinoza's thought has solved the problem of a purported split between medicine and the humanities (the realm of culture); he argues that the mind is the idea of the body and that we therefore live within a parallelism of the mental and the corporeal. We inhabit the osmosis of mind and body. This collapse of the boundary between mind and body has serious

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implications for the validity of traditional humanism and, associated with it, rationalism and moral thought.

Significantly, Spinoza insists on both ethics and the rationalism of his thought. His is rationalism with a difference, however. Reason here does not work out abstract categories that are imposed on our life. Rather than ruling nature and the corporeal in a one-way manner, reason here listens to the medical realm of the body. It is an interconnection that reflects upon delusions of generality – such as the fixed notion of the human and, associated with it, the terms of good and evil – generated by the parallelism of mind and body which we inhabit.

Spinoza employs the term 'reason' for the opening-up of our perspective from our subjective lives to the larger, communal or universal map of our world: 'Insofar as the mind reasons, it wants nothing other than to understand' (E IVP26). The body, its affects and desires, are what the mind seeks to understand: 'the object of our mind is the existing body and nothing else' (E IIP13). In *How Literature Changes the Way We Think*, I have shown that literature does the work of Spinoza's reason; in different and related ways it seeks to understand the increasingly changing body of our world. Reason's work of understanding operates on different levels which are interrelated and depend on the imagination as one of its substantive parts.

SPINOZA'S CRITIQUE OF HUMANISTIC ANTHROPOCENTRISM, THE NAZI GENOCIDE AND THE COLLAPSE OF ETHICS

This section analyses the ways in which Spinoza's critique of purportedly objective views which are intrinsically subjective contribute to solving the problem of humanity's centrality in our ecological structure, where – via industrial pollution and waste – the human has become a geological force (changing the ecosystem of the seas and the climate of our planet). In the following, we will first establish the larger cultural context for an examination of the relevance of Spinoza's thought to ecopolitical and medical problems through a discussion of the imagination and literature. The central argument focuses on an exploration of the problematic nature that characterises endeavours to define or 'measure' what it means to be human. This is all the more important in an age where the human has become an overweening and all-dominating force in the non-human life of our planet. The biopolitical definition of humanity in terms of species existence depends on certain conceptions of normativity and human essence.

Recent debates about the 'post-human' call these normative – or,

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in other words, moral – conceptions into question (see, for example, Žižek 2006). Is there a human essence and why should there be one? Definitions of human essence have been established with the understanding of humanity's centrality in the cosmos. Spinoza was the thinker who most explicitly and stringently analysed various humanistic and theological attempts to define the human in terms of anthropomorphic conceptions of God. This and the following section (focusing on Deleuze and Nietzsche) discuss how Spinoza's thought is of continuing relevance in an age that the Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen has described as anthropocene, as a new age 'defined by one creature – man – who had become so dominant that he was capable of altering the planet on a geological scale' (Kolbert 2005: 54). Through scientific-technological dominance, humanity is in the process of altering the conditions of life on Planet Earth. In our anthropocene age, humanity has thus become a geological force (see the discussion of Spinoza and ecology in the following chapter). Spinoza is helpful in a critique of the theological and scientific-historical ideas that prepared for such a predominance of humanity within the ecological system of our planet. As I have shown elsewhere (Mack 2010), he attempted to remove man from the centre of the philosophical, theological and scientific universe. He unmasked all grand human teleologies as theology that equates humanity with God / nature.

In this way, Spinoza is a non-humanist thinker. This does not mean that he is not concerned with the welfare of humanity. The following discussion explores how his critique of theology and normative strands of humanism may help us in a critique of current medical, theological and political attempts at reinforcing the anthropocene nature of what our planet has become. This analysis will shed light on how a normative conception of the human creates inhumane fictions of monolithic dominance and single-minded commercialism. One outcome of such developments is the anthropocene destruction of non-human lifeworlds within the ecosystem of our planet. This shows that a normative conception of the human, which establishes abstract forms of what is normal, beautiful and good, does violence to the diversity of life (both within humanity and beyond). Normative conceptions of the human create fictions of truth, beauty and goodness, which can have inhumane consequences in the embodied world of both human society and the non-human life of our planet. A radically abstract and intransigently normative humanism can thus result in the collapse of the humanity which characterises traditional humanist ethics. The following will explore the ways in which Spinoza's thought assists us in solving a problem associated with the collapse of humanism: the absence of

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as explained previously, substance's genetic power underpins the particularly human mode of existence, the *conatus*, which is immanent in all human endeavour, including geometric and architectural modes of expression:

> Therefore, the power of any thing, or the conatus with which it acts or endeavours to act, alone or in conjunction with other things, that is (E IIIP6), the power or conatus by which it endeavours to persist in its own being, is nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing. (E IIIP7Dem.)

Philosophy and architecture are once again brought under the terms of a powerful 'sense-reason' which determines the nature of our existence, as well as our comportments and expressions. However, although God-as-nature, human existence and geometric thinking share the genetic power of substance, this immanent force remains distinct from human existence because of the limited life-force that constitutes the temporality of our bodies.

GEOMETRIC PASSAGES

As outlined earlier, Spinoza employs the classical geometric figures of expression in order to demonstrate the originary heterogeneity of nature. For example, the axioms, together with the definitions, provide affirmative expressions of substance's irreducibility. Yet they also embody increasingly concrete forms of differentiation, even when the modes, affects and common notions are brought together in the passage towards a 'third kind of knowledge' and agency. In Part I, the axiomatic method affirms the singularly infinite expression of substance – that is, as God-or-nature; in Part II, it explicates the specific human attributes of thought and extension; in Parts III and IV, it defines the human powers of expression in the text's analysis of the emotions and affects; and finally, in Part V, Spinoza discusses how the active subject's self-knowledge (that is, their agency) represents an 'intuitive geometry' or fully embodied sense-reason. To put it another way, we might also say that Spinoza's axiomatic architecture creates a stunningly intense explication of diverse and singular geometric figures: the figure of God in Part I, the human figure in Parts II, III and IV, and the fully acting subject that embodies geometric intuition in Part V. Consequently, each of these figures is an affirmation of the fundamental heterogeneity in the architecture of the axiomatic process.

This tiring discursivity in the axiomatic method has been remarked upon by readers such as Bergson, who compared its relentlessness to a 'dreadnought', yet also notes the 'subtle lightness' of Spinoza's

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thought.[10] The axiomatic method underpins the scope of Spinoza's geometric thinking for constructing intense differentiations in life, the emotions and expression.

The heterogeneity of this geometric architecture is also generated by Spinoza's employment of other classical geometric elements; for example, his use of propositions increases the complexity of emotional realities available to the reader and the evidence of highly transitory expressions of substance or nature. Propositions therefore further intensify the scope of the method for generating discrete differentiations of geometric thought. By emphasising and expanding the 'clarity' of expression posited in the axioms and definitions, they contribute to the genetic evolution of the subject, highlighting both the modality of the method and their own singularity within the text's architecture. But, as we will see below, it is the scholia which introduce a particularly forceful intensity of expression within the method; their asides, commentaries, corrections, emphases and demonstrations multiply yet further the expressive power of the geometric method, adding weight to the complex multiplicity of embodied geometric figures which evolve, and the interrelationship between reasoned and sense-based modes of expression.

Spinoza's redeployment of these classical geometric figures operates in conjunction with his complex triad of interdependent capacities that express existence. These capacities – the attributes, modes and affects – constitute a radically productive and speculative architecture, as well as operating as singularly expressive figures within the geometric architecture of the text. Of these, affects constitute key sites of transformation. Intimately connected with sensibility and the imagination, they are particularly dynamic ways in which nature is expressed: for example, through everyday emotions of happiness, joy, delight, pride, sadness, fear or melancholy. Examined extensively in Parts III and IV, Spinoza's analysis of the affective powers of human emotions once again draws attention to the plenitude of this genetic architecture, and its significance for understanding the psychophysical nature of human experience in the world. For example, in Part IV, the modal nature of the emotions is explained within a particularly excessive form of axiomatic analysis, which moves from the preface, to eight definitions and an axiom, through to seventy-three propositions together with their accompanying proofs and scholia. Such a dense and forceful explanation underpins how these significant 'transitive' internal powers continuously produce different subjectivities. And, although Spinoza cautions that emotions which arise from reason are more powerful than those which exceed or ignore understanding, he also observes that

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affects are essential for our ability to be able to reach a 'joyful' life, even if the understanding may 'free' them from their mistaken judgements (see, for example, E IVP61 and E VP7). The emotions are therefore central to an architecture of natural geometry. In addition, their irreducible nature constructs subjects-in-process because they are always in transition and 'go forth' (as Deleuze has observed, additional modes of diversity are achieved as a result of the different 'speeds' in which they transform from one to another).[11] So, although we may experience the same emotions on more than one occasion, Spinoza is at pains to point out that the sequence of their transition and their duration is always different, and this affective kind of transformation represents a special 'third kind of knowledge' (E VP25Proof) or 'intuitive' geometry (E VP36S). Not only do the different passages between our emotional states provide necessary ways through which we can reach 'freedom', but also the movement between them is itself a kind of geometric reasoning, expressed in the dynamic nature of our emotional lives. Later in the chapter we will see how Spinoza brings these concerns to bear in his discussion about architectural design, but first it will be helpful to consider the work of the common notions and scholia in this process.

Like the affects, common notions are part of our psychophysical architecture in so far as they are 'certain ideas or notions common to all men' (E IIIP36). Common notions are important, not just because they are one of the ways in which qualitative differences between entities are established (for example, the difference between a man and a horse), but because they represent another form of diversity which can lead us towards a proper understanding of God / nature: 'those things that can lead us as it were by the hand to the knowledge of the human mind and its utmost blessedness' (E IIP40S9). The commonality of these singular embodied ideas further enables us to understand the perfection of God through their resolution of the step-by-step agreement between mind and body, and their expression of an embodied kind of human 'perfection' or unity: 'The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God' (E VP24). However, although they constitute examples of embodied knowledge or sense-reason, in so far as they unify adequate and inadequate states of human experience, their value is not just derived from the logical progression of the deductive step-by-step process through the text. Rather, they are singularities (that is, figure-subjects) in which particular expressions of nature / substance are brought into agreement with understanding God. In this respect they are similar to the 'all-in-one totality' of geometric intuition. However, unlike classical forms of geometric intuition which are exclusively immaterial, their irreducibility is derived from the corporeal

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