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## **Spinoza: The Proper Order of Philosophy**

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## **The *Pantheismusstreit*: Spinoza as a Fork in the Road between Realism and Idealism**

**TOM GIESBERS**

The substantial German reception of Baruch Spinoza's philosophical work received an enormous boost in 1785 through the publication of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*.<sup>1</sup> The context of its debate has been well documented,<sup>2</sup> but the way in which this presentation of Spinoza's philosophy impacted the subsequent *interconnected* development of German realism and idealism has scarcely received scholarly attention. Put concisely, Jacobi engaged in conflict with Mendelssohn concerning the Spinozism of the then already late Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The following is an attempt to present the problem with which Spinozism presented the German philosophers in terms of the formulation of a realism that is intimately bound up with idealism, resulting in an outline of the basic characteristics of realism around this time.

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<sup>1</sup> In George di Giovanni's translation *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); hereafter *MPW*.

<sup>2</sup> In English scholarship most notably in Frederick Beiser's *Fate of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), the introduction to di Giovanni's *MPW* and in German scholarship in Heinrich Scholz' *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther & Reichard, 1916); hereafter *Hauptschriften*.

Anyone familiar with Spinoza's *Ethica* will conclude that Jacobi's Spinoza is a strange creature. For instance, Spinoza's insistence on the infinity of attributes is absent. Jacobi also seems uninterested in the affects and treats Spinoza as if he is only concerned with *thinking* and *being*. Instead, Jacobi focuses on the fact that both are one in the substance which is an immanent God. What, then, is Jacobi attempting to convey? The long and short of his argument is that *anyone* who attempts to demonstrate using proofs is bound to end up as what Jacobi calls a Spinozist; someone who reduces all substance to thought is a pantheist in the sense that, cognitively construed as extension, everything is divine, but is really an atheist in as much as that this pantheism does not admit of any religion. The Spinozist is better off 'not hiding behind this froth'<sup>3</sup> of pantheism in which everything is divine and should admit his atheism, because his divine is merely a mental content produced by demonstration. Secondly, since Spinozism is the logical outcome of every position which takes sole recourse to demonstration (its object being an exhaustive account, after all), this is a problem which concerns *all philosophers* in as much as philosophy is considered to be dependent on demonstration (as it certainly was in the universities). Thirdly, to the extent that demonstration ultimately aims at an exhaustive systematic account, it is inherently fatalistic, which is a moral variant of what we would now call determinism. This three pronged attack, which in fact didn't really attack Spinoza as much as it used him to attack the pretention of philosophical demonstration, shook young German philosophers to their very core, because it besieged exactly the philosophical ideals of many of their teachers, those working in the wake of a Leibnizian rationalist approach. Jacobi fashioned Spinoza into a dark mirror of Leibniz and by extension into a mirror image of every systematic philosopher who proceeded through demonstration.

## 1. Budding Idealism

To give an example, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel studied the book extensively during their studies

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<sup>3</sup> *MPW*, p. 233.

at the Tübingen Stift.<sup>4</sup> For them, the book had rather the opposite effect of what Jacobi argued for at the end of the book: they saw it as guide for what a consistent philosophical system must claim and do. Schelling's early work, *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, bears the marks of Jacobi's Spinoza, as does Schelling's insistence on being a Spinozist. Even more apparent is the influence of the book on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's idealism. In his mock conversation with Spinoza, Jacobi postulates a 'pure activity':

This activity, this energy, this primordial force in a being, is the faculty of being able to act upon the things that lie in one's sphere. This activity is directed in all possible directions, and this is what its freedom consists in; it is an indeterminate force that constitutes the aptitude to will, or the faculty of being able to will.<sup>5</sup>

This greatly resembles what would become known as an account of conditions of possibility. This activity was not just a concern for 'real' action, but also, as it would later argued in the appendix to the 1789 second edition of the book, for *thinking*. This account of a 'system of freedom' as Jacobi further calls it,<sup>6</sup> seems to be a precursor of Fichte's account of the free activity underlying all posited content in experience and thinking. Considering the respect Fichte seems to have had for Jacobi's formulation of the problem, it becomes possible to understand why he was almost honoured to be called the messiah of philosophy in Jacobi's 1799 open letter.<sup>7</sup> It meant that Jacobi had recognized Fichte's attempt to develop his position according to the strictures put forward in Jacobi's Spinoza-book. Jacobi's analysis of the idealist method was sound, but Fichte objected to the alternative to the Jacobian-Spinozism, an alternative which had gradually come to be opposed to his own transcendental idealism: *realism*.

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<sup>4</sup> Dieter Henrich, 'Dominant Philosophical-Theological Problems in the Tübingen Stift during the Student Years of Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling' in *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 31-54.

<sup>5</sup> *MPW*, p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> *MPW*, pp. 341-349.

<sup>7</sup> *MPW*, p. 501.

Granted, Jacobi's own position in opposition to Spinozism remained an outline at best in 1785. It is therefore not surprising that the book was taken up more as an exceptional analysis of philosophical method, leading to some sceptical counter-arguments. In this sense it is also a key text to the German Idealists. This was also likely the meaning of the enigmatic response Jacobi received when he attempted to draft his idol Johann Georg Hamann into his critical army. Hamann was aware of Jacobi's novels *Edward Allwill's Collection of Letters* (1776) and *Woldemar* (1779) which also conveyed this peculiar sense of an untenable position, without providing a clear way out for the reader. Hamann now issued a challenge to Jacobi: do you want to be a *wall* or a *door*?<sup>8</sup> Was Jacobi content to be a reactionary, delivering biting critique, utilizing methodological counter-arguments? Or did he want to be a door, an opening which facilitates movement between two enclosed spaces or perhaps even access to a great open space outside? It is a question which many philosophers have undoubtedly asked themselves when they permitted themselves sufficient distance from the philosophical tradition.

Jacobi has often been approached as a wall and as such he has been incorporated in many a historiography of the development of German philosophy,<sup>9</sup> but never has his attempt to act as a door been fully examined. After the publication of the Spinoza-book, Jacobi would explicitly call this position *realism*. What would become known as Jacobi's realism through his next book, *David Hume on Faith or Idealism and Realism* (1787) is intimately bound up with the group of sympathetic writers and philosophers to whom he refers when he writes in the plural: 'we realists'.<sup>10</sup> This group, in turn, is intimately bound up with the conditions under which the Spinoza-book was put together. By this I do not refer to the debate with Mendelssohn, but to the fact that Jacobi's responses to Mendelssohn and the later parts of the book were discussed

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<sup>8</sup> *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Briefwechsel* I-III, Reihe I Band 10 (I,10), edited by Michael Brüggem, Heinz Gockel, Peter-Paul Schneider (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1987.), p. 224; hereafter *J Briefwechsel*.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobi has been approached from the critique he produces, which is to be solved by the subsequent philosophers. This has led Jacobi and his allies to be characterized as '*Glaubensphilosophie*' or irrationalists. Cf. the works of Michelet, Kirchmann and Hartmann.

<sup>10</sup> *MPW*, p. 334.

closely with Johann Gottfried Herder, amongst others.<sup>11</sup> After his wife and son had recently died, Jacobi spent the last months of 1784 in Weimar with Herder at Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's invitation.<sup>12</sup> At a later point, Hamann was contacted to critique what had become known as 'the packet'; the letters between Jacobi, Mendelssohn and Herder. The one who facilitated the initial contact between Hamann and Jacobi was the poet Matthias Claudius, also known under his penname Asmus. It is clear that he had a vested interest in the Spinoza-book, because he published a short collection of reviews of it and of Mendelssohn's response<sup>13</sup> called *Two Reviews in the matter of Sirs Lessing, M. Mendelssohn and Jacobi* (1786).<sup>14</sup> Jacobi was very likely thinking of some or several of these men, when he wrote 'we realists,' and some of their ideas certainly informed, or are in accordance with, his own at the time still unnamed alternative to Spinozism.

Jacobi's debts to Hamann run deep. At least since 1759 Hamann held the position that belief [*Glaube*] is a core component of any proposition, to such a degree that reason's only function is to provide sceptical counter-arguments, which show that we are *epistemologically ignorant* and that, in the end, any claim only rests on belief.<sup>15</sup> Jacobi's tentative alternative to Spinozism drew heavily on this idea of belief as the core structure of any claim, but developed Hamann's position further in order to account for *convictions of certainty*. When we are convinced by rational grounds, we have actually, prior to this, first acquired a belief which leads us to a conviction:

How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already

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<sup>11</sup> As can be seen in *J Briefwechsel* I-III, (I,10) p. 326. Jacobi sends Herder his most recent exchange with Mendelssohn just before meeting him in Weimar.

<sup>12</sup> *J Briefwechsel* I-III, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> *Moses Mendelssohn an die Freunde Lessings* (Berlin: C.F. Voss und Sohn, 1786).

<sup>14</sup> *Zwei Recensionen in Sachen der Herren Lessing, M. Mendelssohn, und Jacobi* (originally published in 1786) in *Sämmtliche Werke* V (Carlsruhe: Christian Gottlieb Schmieder, 1789); hereafter *C Werke*.

<sup>15</sup> Hamann, Johann Georg, *Werke* II, in *Sämmtliche Werken*, edited by Josef Nadler. 6 volumes. (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1949–1957), pp. 57–82. This was reprinted recently by Brockhaus in Wuppertal, 1999.

cognize with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty, which not only needs no proof [*Gründe*], but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented*. Conviction [*Überzeugung*] by proofs is certainty at second hand. Proofs are only indications of similarity to a thing of which we are certain.<sup>16</sup>

Demonstrated proofs depart from this and leave out a specific dimension, which is the initial *acquiring* of beliefs, and the fact that beliefs are held by *living* persons. Jacobi draws out some far reaching conclusions from this point, which depart to a large degree from the way in which we still carry out philosophical debate:

It follows therefore that one ought not to derive the actions of men from their philosophy, but rather their philosophy from their actions; that their history does not originate from their way of thinking, but rather, their way of thinking from their history.<sup>17</sup>

From this it follows, in turn, that any personal position (and any philosophical position as well, in as much as it is really nothing if it is not something held by a living human being with conviction) is historically constituted and that we should treat it as such and not as a building of thought which we might inhabit or condemn, as seems to be Immanuel Kant's consistent frame of reference.<sup>18</sup>

In the conclusion to the book Jacobi argues that, if we want to improve the thought of an age, we must not attack stale depersonalized positions, but attack the 'life style' [*Lebensweise*] through which it is put forward.<sup>19</sup> Presumably this is Jacobi's reasoning behind presenting his thought in this peculiar mould (as a collection of correspondence and responses in various states of organization). In this way he means to

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<sup>16</sup> The translation is di Giovanni's in MPW, p. 230. I have slightly modified the emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 239.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, *Logik: ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1800), in the Academy edition 9:25, to point out but one of many references.

<sup>19</sup> MPW. p. 240.

capture the problem in what he believes is its actual problematic dimension: the fact that real concrete persons are convinced of the demonstrative philosophical position and (in the case of Mendelssohn) would rather whitewash their close friend's memory than admit that he held a controversial position<sup>20</sup> (which is in and of itself a denial of a personal conviction). Jacobi's titillating progressive argument is focused on the question of what we should present to our young. Considering the aforementioned attack on the vested order of established state philosophers and this ultimate focus on the potential of the young, it is not surprising that the Spinoza-book had a major influence on the young idealists. Jacobi's argument is based on the fact that the age in which our (that is to say his contemporary) youth will reach adulthood will not be the age of those in adulthood at the time of writing and that we should renounce commitment to any current age in as far as we engage in the education of the young. We can then conclude that Jacobi's position is an attempt to make room for a future world, in this case by utilizing the observation that our philosophical positions are actually historically constructed and personally held convictions. This position leads into Jacobi's Neoplatonic notion of a transcendent God who provides an impartial truth measure, but remains inaccessible through any kind of demonstrative proof.<sup>21</sup> It is this foreclosure of particular proofs which Jacobi believes should make us immune to philosophical systems. Philosophical systems are inherently reductive because they utilize demonstrative proof in order to show the validity of their central propositions. The implied danger in this is that these demonstrative attempts only serve to perpetuate the established order to the detriment of what is reduced, and thus absent, in them. As Jacobi points out, one of the major injured parties in this case are the young, whose future potential is fundamentally unrepresentable by virtue of its futurity.

Jacobi's last remark on the state of affairs we are left with reads as follows: the road to cognition [*Erkenntniß*] can be followed neither by way of syllogism nor by way of mechanism, but is secret [*Geheimnißvoll*].<sup>22</sup> This suggests that we must accept that one or several

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<sup>20</sup> As he did in *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes erster Theil* (Berlin: Christian Friedrich Voss und Sohn, 1786).

<sup>21</sup> *MPW*, p. 247.

<sup>22</sup> *MPW*, p. 249.

aspects of the origin of our cognition are fundamentally hidden and cannot be discovered (*known*) through reasoning, or even function as a foundation for reasoning as such. In the years after 1785, Jacobi develops this position into what will become realism. However, in order to gain some insight into the style of thinking which he developed into realism, we need first look at his accomplices, as Jacobi was in no way the originator of every argument he put forward. His reference to a plurality of realists points to a shared project, even at this early juncture, which we should at least outline through looking at some likely candidates.

## 2. The Death of a Youth

The fruitful interaction between the realists often led to the development of interesting ideas. An eager contributor to the 1784 discussions was the young Thomas Wizenmann, who, upon reading some of Mendelssohn and Hamann's letters, drew a conclusion similar to the theory of activity presented at the end<sup>23</sup> of Jacobi's Spinoza-book:

It just seems to me, that it follows from your own philosophy [Jacobi's], that the superiority of belief and doing must happen before that of cognition [*Erkennens*]. Then, when this is true, that 'man does not do what he wills, but wills what he does'; so it must also be true that 'man does not do, what he cognizes, but cognizes what he does.'<sup>24</sup>

Jacobi agreed<sup>25</sup> and presumably happily incorporated the conditional nature of action into the book. Wizenmann would later raise the stakes of Jacobi's argument in *The Results of the Jacobian and*

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<sup>23</sup> Jacobi's books on Spinoza and on David Hume have similar structures: an autobiographical account, a critical analysis focusing on epistemological method and, finally, a positive rendering of Jacobi's own position. Too little attention has been given to these final sections in the scholarly reception of Jacobi's works, but these final sections contain the best formulations Jacobi provides of his own position. This structure also reflects Jacobi's wish to convey his position as a lived, historically constituted position.

<sup>24</sup> *J Briefwechsel* I-III, p.401. Translation is my own.

<sup>25</sup> *J Briefwechsel* I-III, p.408.

*Mendelssohnian Philosophy*.<sup>26</sup> The fact that this anonymously published book was initially attributed to the much more famous Herder suggests that there was a general perception of the realists as a group of writers with shared views, even if there was not yet a suitable collective label to consider them together. On the whole, Wizenmann argued, with Jacobi and Hamann, that belief is far more central to humanity than reason. We use belief and not reason to perform everyday actions and we usually ignore reason almost entirely. Jacobi's position is therefore not dark at all, but very sensible, Wizenmann argues.<sup>27</sup> Reason, according to Wizenmann, in a strikingly clear definition, consists in comparing two (or more) things. But in order to compare, there needs to be a posited *relation* between the two terms, be it an a priori or an a posteriori relation. The problem is then that God cannot be considered in a relation (at least not exhaustively, by definition) and thus reason cannot yield proof of the existence or non-existence of God. The same goes for the existence of things considered by themselves. Lacking proof or demonstration, all we are left with is subjective belief, not just in God, but also in the existence of simple things. Like Herder and Jacobi, Wizenmann describes this immediate relation to the things we experience as *feeling* [*Gefühl*] and *revelation* [*Offenbarung*], two terms which can be considered to be conceptual flagships of the realists, referring to a highly singular and specialized immediacy and a wholesale donation of Being or meaning, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

In a short article *To Sir Professor Kant: from the Author of the Results of the Jacobian and Mendelssohnian Philosophy*,<sup>29</sup> which he wrote while in bad health, Wizenmann both elaborates his position and distances himself from Jacobi's notion of a transcendent God. He elaborates that cognition of really existing things starts with feeling, which is taken to be belief from the perspective of reason.<sup>30</sup> In this

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<sup>26</sup> *Die Resultate der Jacobischen und Mendelssohnschen Philosophie* (Leipzig: G.J. Göschen, 1786); hereafter *Resultate*.

<sup>27</sup> *Resultate*, p.19. Some of the Berlin enlighteners claimed that Jacobi was dark in their reviews. See *Hauptschriften* p. LXXXIV.

<sup>28</sup> *Resultate*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> "An den Herrn Professor Kant, von dem Verfasser der Resultate Jacobi'scher und Mendelssohnscher Philosophie" in *Deutsches Museum* I (Leipzig: Weigandschen Buchhandlung, 1787); hereafter *An Kant*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.

distinction, he seems to follow Hamann, who claimed that reason necessarily leads to epistemic ignorance as to our capacity to know things.<sup>31</sup> However, since this is coupled with an analysis of the workings of reason, showing exactly where it fails (the cognition of the existence of things themselves) Wizenmann actually develops Hamann's position quite a bit further. Drawing on the idea from the *Results* that we do not need reason for everyday tasks, he seems to suggest that feeling is our regular way of relating to existing things, while belief is a term we use when we try to couch the existence of things in epistemic claims but fail to do so. This distinction is somewhat clearer than the way Jacobi would develop his position in terms of belief, since it is not presented in response to problems in epistemology. On the other hand, we can also say that this distinction was inherent in Jacobi's emphasis on 'lifestyle', since that implied the existence of less philosophical ways of relating to existence. This emphasis on real life also finds its way into Wizenmann's alternative to Jacobi's transcendent God. Wizenmann prefers the Biblical God, because the Bible suggests a long history of non-philosophical cognition of God.<sup>32</sup> The inherent critique is clear: Jacobi and Mendelssohn focus too much on the philosophical way of accounting for God. Even though Jacobi presents the Spinoza-book from the outset as a critique of the aims of philosophy through demonstration, he remains caught up in the philosophical discourse himself.

In the end, Wizenmann refers to his Biblical God as a *conviction*, which suggests that it concerns merely a personal difference between him and Jacobi (whose notion of God he also calls a conviction).<sup>33</sup> In the rest of the article, Wizenmann goes on the offence and critiques Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Shortly after the publication of the article Wizenmann passes away. He did not live to see Kant's response in the *Critique of Practical Reason* or the development of realism to which he had contributed so much through his sharp analyses.

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<sup>31</sup> Hamann, *Werke* II, p.57-82.

<sup>32</sup> *An Kant*, p. 119.

<sup>33</sup> *An Kant*, pp. 117-118.

### 3. The Poet in the Wings

Not everyone's commitment to Jacobi's cause was as clear-cut. Since he was not involved in the metaphysico-epistemological debate, Claudius' commitment to the realist cause has sometimes been questioned.<sup>34</sup> On the surface, his text seeks to mediate between two (or three, if we count Lessing) friends (Jacobi and Mendelssohn) who have had a falling out. However, Claudius' realist commitments become apparent when we focus on what arguments he uses to mediate: i) the dead can justifiably be dissected for the use of the living (this is ultimately an argument for Jacobi's use of Lessing and Spinoza; 'the master of demonstration') and ii) the living all have a mere intimation of truth and, lacking a direct recourse to truth, they have arrived at their (theoretical) position through *conviction*.<sup>35</sup> Argument (i) and (ii) refer, as we have seen, to exactly the same conviction which was an integral part of Jacobi's positive arguments in the Spinoza-book. Claudius' commitment to the realists then seems obvious: although Mendelssohn also had a living position of conviction, Claudius really declares a victory for Jacobi, since Mendelssohn would have argued that his demonstrations are based on something more objective, in which he denies his 'lifestyle.'

Another indication that the poet Asmus is committed to realism can be found on the title page of the book, which bears two quotations and an illustration. The first quote is from Horace<sup>36</sup> and implies that Claudius seeks to appease offended gods more effectively than through costly sacrifices. A clue to the identity of the offended gods might be offered by the illustration below this quotation, which depicts an owl and some moles sitting on a hat, which seems to be a renaissance theatrical symbol for darkness.<sup>37</sup> This is likely an inversion of the light associated with the

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<sup>34</sup> For instance by Herbert Rowland in *Matthias Claudius: Language as "infamous Funnel" and Its Imperatives* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> *C Werke* V, p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> 'Mollibit aversos Penates, farre pio et saliente mica.'

<sup>37</sup> Brownell Salomon, *Critical Analyses in English Renaissance Drama: A Bibliographic Guide* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979), p. 497. Jacobi would later question the torch metaphor for reason in his

Berlin enlighteners, who were angry at Jacobi at the time, for having ‘annoyed to death’ their friend and colleague Mendelssohn.<sup>38</sup> Owls and moles are both creatures which thrive and hunt in the darkness, but are relatively helpless in the light. The next quotation provides an explanation for the inversion. It is taken from the preface of renaissance editions of Virgil’s *The Aeneid*: ‘I am he who once tuned my song on a slender reed - ----- but now of Mars’ ruggedness.’<sup>39</sup>

This seems to be an unmistakable declaration of war at the address of the Berlin enlighteners, who were attacking Jacobi.<sup>40</sup> The darkness in question would then be a reference to the unmistakable darkness, as argued by Jacobi and Wizenmann, that lies all the more beneath the rational edifice of the enlighteners.<sup>41</sup>

Such coded tactics might seem needlessly complicated, but many authors used them at the time, drawing on the works of Horace and Virgil in order to render a message which germinally encapsulates the entire

*David Hume*, arguing that a torch illuminates one thing but makes everything else dark. *MPW*, p. 320.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Johann Heinrich Schulz’ polemical post-mortem attack on Mendelssohn: *Der entlarvte Moses Mendelsohn: oder der völlige Aufklärung des räthselhaften Todverdrusses des M. Mendelsohn über die Bekanntmachung des Lessingschen Atheismus von Jacobi* (Amsterdam: Schulz, 1786).

<sup>39</sup> ‘*Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena ----- at nunc horrentia Martis.*’

<sup>40</sup> Of course none of this implies that the realists were anti-enlightenment or counter-enlightenment, as Isaiah Berlin would have it in *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (New York: Random House, 2000). It can just as well be argued as in Oswald Bayer’s *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988) that in terms of the social commitments of Hamann, he is infinitely more radically committed to the Enlightenment than the so-called enlighteners of the time, in terms of his feminism, and opposition to state interference in public and intellectual matters (censorship, sexual prudishness). Similar arguments can be made for many other realists.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Jacobi’s Spinoza-book: ‘But we expect of error that it see itself, that it know itself, as if it were the truth; and we stand in fear of it, as if it were also as strong as the truth. Can the darkness possibly penetrate the light and extinguish its rays? It is the light that on the contrary penetrates the darkness and shows it for what it is by partly illuminating it.’ Translation is di Giovanni’s in *MPW*, p. 236.

work.<sup>42</sup> Jacobi himself had used an enigmatic illustration of an altar in the first edition of the Spinoza-book. The altar is that of the unknown God, who provides a measure of truth which cannot be demonstrated in any proposition. Jacobi likely believed that this image encapsulated the entire book, though its meaning was by no means covert in this text. Asmus only took this practice up a notch, mirroring his friend Hamann's writing style, which sought to utilize metaphor and reference in order to address the right persons, those who are willing to do the interpretative work in order to join the discussion.<sup>43</sup> All of the above would seem to show that Asmus was cautiously sympathetic to the realist cause.

#### 4. Herder's Realist Pantheism

It is not surprising that Wizenmann's *Results* was taken to be a work of Herder's, since Wizenmann was greatly influenced by Herder's position<sup>44</sup>. After all, it was Herder who, some years later, would write a fascinating book-length commentary on the *Critique of Pure Reason* in which he made exactly the same claim concerning the inaccessibility of the existence of individual things to reason. The book is a continuation of the project Hamann started in *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* (1784)<sup>45</sup> which Herder entitled *Understanding and Experience, Reason and Speech: a Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> To name but one example, compare Solomon Maimon's *Über die Progressen der Philosophie veranlaßt durch die Preisfrage der Königl. Akademie zu Berlin für das Jahr 1792: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolf für Progressen gemacht?* in *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie erster Theil* (Berlin: Wilhelm Vieweg, 1793), pp. 1-58. The extended quotation from Horace immediately after the title page, which addresses metaphysics (quite possibly in reference to Jacob Hermann Obereit's 'desperate metaphysics', since Maimon published him in the journal *Gnothi Seauton*).

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Lacan, much closer to our time, employs similar methods in his *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966): through reflection on metaphor and reference, a short text gives way to a greatly extended body of work and thinking.

<sup>44</sup> Herder, *Briefe* VI (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1981), pp. 454-456.

<sup>45</sup> Hamann, *Briefwechsel* V (Frankfurt a.M: Insel, 1965), pp. 210-216.

<sup>46</sup> *Verstand und Erfahrung, Vernunft und Sprache: eine Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1799); published in two parts; hereafter *Metakritik*.

In terms of initial sympathies it might seem as if Herder favours Lessing's pantheism in a way which prefigures the later idealists. In fact, he says he has sympathies for Lessing in response to the first letter to Mendelssohn that Jacobi sent him.<sup>47</sup> However, one should keep in mind that monism is not what Jacobi objects to in Spinozism, but that he rather objects to Spinoza's attempt to *demonstrate* this monism, which leads to a fatalism and a false pantheism that is really an atheism behind the froth. In this, Herder and Jacobi are in agreement. Jacobi's relation to Herder is highly complex. While Herder is critical of Jacobi's reading of Spinoza, both saw eye to eye on several key components of what will become the realist position.

In *God: Some Conversations* (1787)<sup>48</sup> it seems as though Herder took Spinoza's side against Jacobi,<sup>49</sup> but Herder in fact offers a novel way to defuse the problem with monism, without taking recourse to demonstration, in a way which is not far removed from the Wizenmannian/Jacobian pure activity: God is all, not as substance, but as *power* [*Kraft*].<sup>50</sup> It is probable that this solution has been highly influential on the later idealists, because it further develops this germinal thought at the end of Jacobi's Spinoza-book.

Whereas in *God: Some Conversations* Herder developed his notion of a monism of force, for which he clearly drew on Jacobi and Wizenmann's ideas concerning pure activity, in his *Metacritique* Herder sought to demonstrate, amongst other things, that idealism was in no way capable of excluding realism. This effort has two steps. Firstly, Herder shows that Kant did not actually refute George Berkeley's arguments for idealism<sup>51</sup> and secondly, that critical idealism remains powerless against real things in that it neither acknowledges nor refutes them.<sup>52</sup> Thus he is

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<sup>47</sup> Herder, *Briefe V* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1978), p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (Gotha: Karl Wilhelm Ettinger, 1787).

<sup>49</sup> This has been argued by Michael Forster in *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to say that Jacobi agreed with Herder's notion of God. In a 1788 letter to Christian Jacob Kraus he mainly objects to Herder's 'vague philosophy' and 'nasty method.' *J Briefwechsel I-VIII* (I, 8), p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> *Metakritik I*, pp. 363-369.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 406-414.

still clearly working within the realist project, as is evidenced by the fact that Wizenmann's argument concerning the inability of reason to relate to the reality of things returns. This inaccessibility dovetails nicely into Jacobi's further arguments concerning the fact that propositional claims (for instance 'I have a body') are only based on belief and that the wholesale acceptance of the given (revelation) can only occur through faith.<sup>53</sup>

Another indication of Herder's allegiances can be found in the second edition of the *God: Some Conversations*, which bears an extended title: *God: Some Conversations on Spinoza's System with Shaftesbury's Nature-hymn* (1800).<sup>54</sup> In an added afterword, Herder distinguishes two types of philosophers: philosophers of *conviction* who concern themselves with the thing [*Sache*] and philosophers of *convincing* [*Überredung*], who concern themselves with the word.<sup>55</sup> We've seen that the realists all clearly identify with conviction and Herder now argues that Spinoza, contrary to Jacobi's reading, is in fact also a philosopher of conviction and uses lengthy quotations to illustrate this point. Herder is then committed to a *realist Spinoza* who is not a philosopher of demonstration and wants to bring him into the realist fold. Closing the afterword, Herder commits himself to many of the core realist concepts:

the inner belief, to be clear, of the single, lively perceived [*lebendig empfundene*], which underlies the idea of the true, good and beautiful, without which all of our speech and writing remains trumpery.<sup>56</sup>

Since this was written a year after the *Metacritique*, Herder is likely suggesting that the Neoplatonist ideas of the true, the good and the beautiful are, in the end, also derived from a lived experience, thereby

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<sup>53</sup> Although Jacobi renders belief and faith both as '*Glaube*', I have chosen to separate these in order to highlight the logically distinctness of these operations. Whereas 'belief' is propositional, particular and univocal, 'faith' is a wholesale commitment to the givenness of Being and therefore more universal.

<sup>54</sup> *Gott: Einige Gespräche über Spinoza's System nebst Shaftesbury's Naturhymnus* (Gotha: Karl Wilhelm Ettinger, 1800). Herder also added Lessing's short text *Über die Wirklichkeit der Dinge außer Gott* and Shaftesbury's *Naturhymnus*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

showing that Jacobi's recourse to it was unnecessary. For Herder we start with a living experience, which then results in an inner belief. This genesis suffices in order to account for all our cognitive claims, including metaphysical notions like the true, the good and the beautiful. So while Herder in the end seems to share many of the core notions involved in realism, he is critical of Jacobi's extra-realist claims, offering a realist critique of them, based on Spinoza's writings.

Now that we have covered the main candidates for Jacobi's fellow realists, it is time to consider how he develops his notion of realism.

## 5. Idealism and Realism

In the prefatory note to *David Hume*, Jacobi emphatically notes that he chooses realism over idealism and that his recourse to belief in the Spinoza-book was indicative of this choice:

I am now forced to admit that only the affirmation of identical propositions is *apodictic* and carries absolute certainty, and that any assertion of the existence *in itself* [*Daseins an sich*] of a thing, outside my representation [*Vorstellung*], cannot be apodictically affirmed and carry an absolute certainty with it. So an idealist, basing himself on this distinction, can compel me to concede that my conviction about the existence of real [*wirklicher*] things outside me is only a *belief*. But then, as a *realist* I am forced to say that all cognition [*Erkenntniß*] derives exclusively from belief, for *things* must be *given* to me before I am capable to enquire about relations.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note that Jacobi formulates his realism implicitly as a *critical* realism, utilizing the arguments already popularized by Wizenmann, about the fact that reason only operates by comparing relations and thus cannot consider the existence of objects themselves. Jacobi then spends a lot of time showing that his use of belief is comparable to David Hume's, although, following Hamann, he believes

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<sup>57</sup> *MPW*, p. 256. I have modified the translation in order to remain closer to the text.

that Hume drew the wrong conclusions, which is clear in his rejection of miracles. Jacobi notes that the way in which objects [*Gegenstände*] reveal themselves to us [*offenbaren*] is exactly the miracle which Hume is so intent on eliminating.<sup>58</sup> Miracles are not rarefied events, but a continuous occurrence, in the sense that the origin of the content of our experience is inexplicably inaccessible to reason.

The determined realist on the other hand, unquestionably accepts external things on the testimony of the senses. In keeping with this certainty, he considers every other conviction, and cannot think any other way than that every concept, even those that we call *a priori*, must have derived from this fundamental experience.<sup>59</sup>

If we are to take any and all possible propositions as given, as long as we have a conviction to believe in them (i.e. if they are truly beliefs), how would this formulation of realism relate to Jacobi's recourse to neo-platonic truth, as put forward in the Spinoza-book? In *David Hume*, Jacobi's conception of God is less explicitly present, because he is mostly engaged with critical epistemology, but in the supplements to the 1789 second edition of the Spinoza-book (which contains, amongst others, a critique of Herder's monist God) we see that Jacobi is still committed to the unknown God of truth, since he argues that this God also provides us with our freedom.<sup>60</sup> We can then draw out the implications of these positions for the status of belief and the donation of the given, which becomes meaningful (subject to living conviction) through the historical formation of our position or belief (a position seems to be an accrument of beliefs) as a conviction.

If we look at Jacob Hermann Obereit's *The Desperate Metaphysics*,<sup>61</sup> which appeared in the same year as Wizenmann's *Results*, the novelty of Jacobi's position becomes apparent. Obereit's essay deals with similar problems, reacting to Kant and Wizenmann's debate by intervening as 'the fairy of metaphysics,' in order to show that the lack of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 272-273.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., translation modified.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>61</sup> *Die verzweifelte Metaphysik* (Berlin: Obereit, 1787).

recourse to an absolutely true God, as the ultimate ground of being, leads to *nothingness* in every instance (indeed, in a later publication that year,<sup>62</sup> Obereit would coin ‘nihilism’ as a modern philosophical term). Obereit is committed to a similar Neoplatonic notion of truth which Jacobi accords to a transcendent God. However, Jacobi’s realism holds to a critique of epistemology, which accepts that there is no definite certitude to be had through demonstrative truth. Although he maintains a Neoplatonic ‘true’, it is barred from epistemic access. The difference can be made apparent if we render Obereit’s position in the following way, following Plato:

knowledge = justified true belief

Obereit is not particularly clear as to what belief would consist in, or how exactly we go about connecting particular propositions to what he calls the ‘real-metaphysics’ of the divine truth. Jacobi’s response to the problem is to bar access to the true in terms of particular propositions altogether, leaving merely our subjective conviction of it as a belief. This could be rendered in the following way:

Truth  


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~~justified true belief~~

From this follows a thesis which is present in many realists: if beliefs have no inherent hierarchy, since one belief is no more true than another, beliefs are, at a formal level, decidedly *univocal*. Such a position is a powerful way to counteract the workings of *power* (in the form of the hierarchically structured claims implicit in the authority of intellectuals and the state), because it allows for i) a critique which draws out the hidden hierarchies in established discourses and ii) could be used to argue that there is no inherent difference between ‘real’, fictive or mental contents (all are univocally *real*), thus clearing the way for the perpetuation and production of marginalized claims. Although Jacobi remains dedicated to the first option, he does not explicitly operationalize

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<sup>62</sup> *Der wiederkommende Lebensgeist der verzweifelten Metaphysik; ein kritisches Drama zu neuer Grund-Critik vom Geist des Lebens* (Berlin: Obereit, 1787).

the second. In contrast, Hamann at times argues from the second point, as is evident in his creative aesthetics,<sup>63</sup> whereas Jacobi has nothing resembling an aesthetics.

Although he is far less present in *David Hume*, the specter of Spinoza still looms large in the Jacobi's realism. His focus on the immediate relation to sensible things and the wholesale donation of being are clearly reflections borne out of the possibility of a monism of sense, which Jacobi is able to develop through a hypothetical overseer and donator of sense in the form of the transcendent God. What is highly unique in his approach is the use of transcendent notions in order to critically interrogate epistemology, resulting in a minimal epistemology, which emphasizes the genesis of our convictions.

## Conclusion

All in all, Fichte's later characterization of the overall strategy of the realists<sup>64</sup> is quite fair: they operationalize God and his working on the world as a way to interrogate various inconceivable or rationally inaccessible aspects related to experience. While Fichte does not elaborate on this remark, we can also understand Hamann, Jacobi, Wizenmann, and Herder's focus on the impossibility to demonstrate knowledge of the origins of experience *qua* content as a result of this strategy. Jacobi and Herder adhere disparately to a transcendent Neoplatonist God and an immanent Spinozist God respectively, while still being committed to these sceptical counter-arguments and the resultant conclusions regarding belief as a base structure of propositional claims. Seen from the net result of the realists counter-arguments, the notion of God functions as a limiting notion, or rather, a notion which through its indeterminateness shows that demonstrative proof cannot transcend the sphere of reason (in Wizenmann's narrow sense; reason as comparing dissimilar things by virtue of their logical relation). Through the fact that the notion presents them with indeterminacy, it forces them to interrogate the degree to which reason is unable to account for it concretely. What

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<sup>63</sup> Hamann, *Werke* II, pp. 195-218.

<sup>64</sup> Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe Nachlaß* IX, pp.12-13.

actually seems to matter more to the realists (considered *as realists*) than the notion of God (since they disagree quite a bit on this point) is what must be concluded concerning the following points which, lacking an overt statement of the realist mission statement, show that there are definite conceptual similarities shared among the discussed realists.

- i) The inconceivability of the origin of experiential content
- ii) The impossibility of distinguishing singular ‘original’ objects in experience (i.e. we cannot demonstrate the existence of a thing on its own)
- iii) The methodological problems with demonstration/idealism (leading to a nihilism where the inconceivability of the original given is not recognized, only our idealist construction of experience)
- iv) The univocity of propositional claims in terms of belief (i.e. experience is in itself not structured, not lawful, not categorical, neither in terms of the five senses nor in terms of fiction/deception/reality)
- v) The historical constitution of conviction in feeling/belief and our resultant ‘lifestyle’

In the years that would follow (starting with the publication of Jacobi’s *Letter to Fichte* and Herder’s *Metacritique*, both in 1799) Jacobi and Herder’s brand of realism gains new followers. Some are young (Jean Paul Richter, Friedrich Köppen, Johann Neeb), some are old (Karl Leonhard Reinhold). There are also those who explicitly seek to reconcile this brand of realism and idealism, such as (the same) Reinhold (who characterizes his new position as ‘Reinhold IV’ and reflects on what it would mean to hold to a measure of truth which is impossible to exhaustively articulate or demonstrate),<sup>65</sup> Friedrich Schlegel in his 1801 lectures on transcendental philosophy and Fichte in his 1804 presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, where he deals prominently with problems concerning the incomprehensible and life. Jacobi himself would also have some altercations with Schelling and Hegel.

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<sup>65</sup> Reinhold, *Beiträge zur leichtern Uebersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie beim Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts: ersters Heft* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1801).

We must finally conclude that there are actually twin Spinoza's haunting this period: the Jacobi-Spinoza, who is the master of demonstration, and Herder-Spinoza who is the master of monism. Both are key stages in the development of the realists. Jacobi deduces metaphysics back to a minimal epistemology, which places an emphasis on life, belief and conviction, while Herder reduces a monism of substance back to a monism of active forces. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century advances, these two Spinoza's are slowly integrated into the overall Spinoza reception of the German states.

To what extent can we say that Jacobi took up Hamann's challenge to be a door? That depends on how one takes up the metaphor. To be a wall would be to present a simple impossibility. Surely the realists have done that. But to where would a door provide access? Is it a door to the outside, a Meillassouxian 'great outdoors'? Or does the door lead from one enclosed room to another? As to the first option, there are intimations in Jacobi's position which certainly *could* be developed in the direction of unrestricted spaces, such as the futurity of youth, the idea of 'lifestyles' and the theoretical univocity of belief. However, Jacobi never fully commits to these options. To the extent that Jacobi remained entrenched in philosophical discourse, even while critiquing it, Jacobi's door is more like an escape hatch, using the topology of the room in order to show the location of the door, the way to escape the dangers of demonstration. In a very different sense, Jacobi was also a door to a new enclosed room, the room where the German Idealists dwell, who greatly benefitted from his inability to definitively escape philosophical discourse.

Considered as an attempt to rally the troops and found a movement, Jacobi's 'we realists' was not overly successful. It became most cemented in the eyes of his intellectual adversaries. Not every one of Jacobi's allies explicitly identified himself as realist, for varying reasons (Wizenmann died before he could comment on Jacobi's *David Hume*, Asmus seems to have preferred subterfuge, etc.). It is doubtful whether Jacobi really intended to found a movement in this specific way. More than likely he was giving a somewhat controversial name to a set of shared concerns and counter-arguments. In this sense we can speak of realism, not as a

name by which a group identified itself across the board, but as a contested label which nonetheless allows us to capture a group of philosophers who shared key concerns and counter-arguments.

These concerns and counter-arguments are actually more important to the realists, considered as realists, than a notion of God (and this is exactly why someone like Johann Kaspar Lavater, though cited in the Spinoza-book, does not belong to the realists, since he is exclusively concerned with the notion of God). Many of its exponents, including Herder, refer favourably to the notion of putting reality *before* any determinate experiential or thought content. In contrast, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are not always happy to refer to themselves as idealists either. Still, philosophical scholarship has benefited greatly from considering them together as such, since this indicates a set of shared arguments and concerns in philosophical projects which only really intersect at times. Because they share similar concerns it is possible and even productive to consider them as idealists. I would propose that a similar approach to the realists would be highly beneficial for understanding this set of philosophers, their interaction with Kant and the idealists, their overall significance for the intellectual development of the period and ultimately our current-day notions of realism.

## **Back to Metaphysics in Spinoza's Ethics: Spinoza's Theory of Reading**

**RYAN J. JOHNSON**

### **1. The Minor Tradition**

In September of 1674, Spinoza responded to a letter from Hugo Boxel. Boxel had asked Spinoza about his thoughts on the nature of ghosts, and cited as evidence the testimony of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Spinoza responded:

The authority [*auctoritas*] of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates carries little weight with me. I should have been surprised if you had produced Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius or one of the...defenders of the atoms. It is not surprising that those who have thought up occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms and a thousand more bits of nonsense should have devised spectres and ghosts, and given credence to old wives' tales with view to disparaging the authority of Democritus, whose high reputation they so envied that they burned all the books which he had published amidst so much acclaim.<sup>1</sup> If you

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<sup>1</sup> 'Aristoxenus, in his *Historic Commentaries*, says that Plato wished to burn all the writings of Democritus that he was able to collect; but that Amyclas and Cleinias, the Pythagoreans, prevented him, as it would do no good; for that copies of his books were already in many hands. And it is plain that that was the case; for Plato, who mentions nearly all the ancient philosophers, nowhere speaks of Democritus; not even in those passages where he has occasion to contradict his theories, evidently, because he said that if he did, he would be showing his disagreement

are minded to put your trust in such people, what reason have you to deny the miracles of the Holy Virgin and all the saints?<sup>2</sup>

While some might question Spinoza's understanding of the Socratic tradition, there is a more interesting point to take from this letter. To see it, focus on the italicized words in the first line.<sup>3</sup> Spinoza says that the stories of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates do not carry much weight with him.<sup>4</sup> What could this mean? It could mean that they do not positively affect him very much.<sup>5</sup> For such a tradition, according to Spinoza's letter, postulates transcendent or occult qualities, which are not very different from the fantastical tales of spectres, miracles, and supposed divine miracles that Spinoza spends a great deal of time deflating.<sup>6</sup> What is most important to see is that the significance of Spinoza's, or any reader's, relationship to a text is construed in terms of affects, the various ways in which a text can affect or be affected by other things. In the *Ethics*, such affectivity occurs in at least two registers: the corporeal and the cognitive.

with the best of all philosophers.' Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Bohn, 1853), p. 393.

- <sup>2</sup> *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 902; emphasis is mine.
- <sup>3</sup> In early modernity, the Latin term *auctoritas*, had a rather specific sense; it meant both authorship and authority. Given this, there is ambiguity in the relationship between authority and textuality. At the time, authority was certainly *tied* to textuality but it was not reducible to it. So, some might claim, what Spinoza says is that it is this 'authority' of Plato and Aristotle that doesn't have much power for him, not necessarily their texts. While this is true, the overall claim holds. That is, neither the authority nor the texts of these authors carries much weight with him.
- <sup>4</sup> In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza compares 'the speculations of Aristotelians and Platonists' with the fear-mongering, mystifying, and self-aggrandizing church leaders. A few lines later, he again uses this phrase 'carries weight' when describing the 'authority [*auctoritas*] of the prophets.' See *Spinoza: Complete Works*, pp. 391-2.
- <sup>5</sup> While Spinoza did have a Latin translation of the complete works of Aristotle in his library, his library did not contain any trace of a Platonic text. This suggests that Spinoza was not greatly affected by, at least, Plato, and if Aristotle did affect him, such affection was characteristically sad (*Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 906, n. 200).
- <sup>6</sup> Beyond my claim, Spinoza might have another specific target in mind: the scholastic Aristotelians who illegitimately transformed Epicurean *eidola* into intentional *species*, and thus made possible the (for Spinoza ridiculous) notion of immaterial entities bearing intelligible properties.

It is generally assumed that reading is a highly intellectual activity, wherein an almost occult significance is arbitrarily contained in the different ‘markings, letters, and words’ on the page.<sup>7</sup> Given Spinoza’s emphasis on the parallelism of the attributes of extension and cognition, there is, while reading, equal to the cognitive register, the production of effects in the corporeal register. In short, a text is evaluated by the production of effects on the body and the mind. In terms of Spinoza’s own encounter with the ancient Greek texts, while Plato and Aristotle did not carry much weight with him, the Epicureans moved him with the great weight of infinite atomic rain.

As I take it, Spinoza situates himself into one of two movements moving through the history of philosophy. Using Deleuze’s distinction, there is an underlying ‘minor tradition’ moving against a ‘major tradition.’ The major tradition follows the standard trajectory of the history of philosophy, as it is expressed in many introductory philosophy textbooks: Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. The minor tradition, by contrast, follows a different lineage: Epicurus, the Stoics, Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Maimon, Nietzsche, Bergson, Foucault, and Deleuze. When Spinoza says that it was the atomists, not the Platonists and Aristotelians, who *carried much weight with him*, he is explicitly situating himself outside the major tradition. From the atomists to Spinoza to Deleuze we see a ‘secret link.’<sup>8</sup> As a later member of this tradition, Deleuze echoes Spinoza:

For my part, I could not see any way of extracting myself. I could not stand Descartes, the dualisms and the Cogito, or Hegel, the triad and the operation of negation. But I liked writers who seemed to be part of the history of philosophy, but who escaped from it in one respect, or altogether: Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Spinoza, *Tractatus-Theologico Politicus* in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 508.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomilson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 14-5.

This essay assumes this position and associates Spinoza with the ideas and concepts that populate the minor tradition.<sup>10</sup>

We follow the themes of this minor tradition in order to develop a Spinozist theory of reading.<sup>11</sup> We first detail Spinoza's account of the three kinds of bodies, then give his description of the three kinds of knowledge, and conclude with a series of exploratory arguments offered in support of this mapping.

## 2. What is a Body?

In IIP13-14, Spinoza explains what is often called his 'proto-physics.' First he describes how he, in contrast to Descartes, understands bodies, and then details a typology of the three major kinds of bodies.

According to Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, motion is extrinsic to matter, which means 'it is possible to understand extension without shape or movement.'<sup>12</sup> In Cartesian physics, corporeality is a kind of substance. Just as mind is substance that is characterized principally as thought [*cogitatio*], a body is a type of substance that is conceived as a particular region of extension [*extensio*]. 'Everything,' Descartes says, 'which can be attributed to a body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing.'<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Descartes, Spinoza is not first a fixed and static substance that subsequently moves in some way or other.<sup>14</sup> For Spinoza, a body is a singular thing that is 'distinguished from

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<sup>10</sup> To list some popular terms commonly associated with most member of this minor tradition: immanence, materialism, difference, becoming, affirmative ethics, joy and pleasure, naturalism, critique of superstition and mystification, etc.

<sup>11</sup> For a very detailed account of this position, see the last two chapters of Daniel Selcer's *Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Descartes, Rene, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part One, section 53; CSM I 211/AT VIIIA 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that Spinozist physics has nothing to do with Cartesian and atomistic physics. Instead, Spinoza's strategy is more akin to pushing these other accounts beyond their traditional boundaries to what Spinoza construes as their

one another by reason of motion and rest [*ratione motus et quietis*], speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance.<sup>15</sup> Spinoza inverts the order. Motion is not a mode of matter because matter is motion itself; to be extended is to be in motion.<sup>16</sup> Spinoza says this explicitly in the *Short Treatise*, ‘If...we consider extension alone, we perceive nothing other than Movement and Rest.’<sup>17</sup>

Since to be a body is to move, bodies are in constant contact with other bodies. Bodies are always caught up in affective relations with other bodies. These capacities for affection then define the nature of a body. This insistence on kinetic communication among bodies means that it is not possible to abstract bodies from the mobile causal networks in which they are embedded. Knowledge of a body is equivalent to knowledge of how a body causally determines, or is determined by, other moving bodies. This means that there is no absolute beginning of a body. Instead, a body is always in the middle, always spilling over and into other bodies.

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logical conclusions. In this way, Spinoza uses his predecessors in order to produce a new theory of corporeality.

<sup>15</sup> Spinoza, *The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), IIP13L1.

<sup>16</sup> A possible objection: If a body is defined in terms of *both* motion *and* rest, then it seems that matter should be a combination of both, not just motion. The response: There is no such thing as rest, in an absolute sense, in Spinoza. Instead, rest is simply a different kind of motion, which appears to be at rest only from the perspective of another moving body. But that supposedly resting body is in motion from the perspective of a different moving body. So, while a body appears to be at rest from one perspective, the parts composing that body must continuously move. This is basically the ancient atomic account of rest (see Epicurus’ ‘Letter to Herodotus’ 43, or Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, DRN, 2.80-124). Further, Spinoza inherits this account of the motion of bodies from Book II of Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy*. Since Cartesian physics sees motion as the translation or transfer of a body from a neighbourhood of one set of bodies to the neighbourhood of another set of bodies, all motion is relative motion. All motion is relative to a neighbourhood of surrounding bodies. This is also a way to eliminate void and develop a plenistic physics.

<sup>17</sup> *Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 87. Macherey also emphasizes this point: ‘...extension cannot be grasped outside this relation of movement and rest that animates it, and it is clear that what is reject here is the Cartesian conception of an inter extension...and one to which movement must be added from the outside.’ Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 2011), p. 149; hereafter *Hegel or Spinoza*.

Putting this all together, a body is defined as a certain ratio [*ratio*] of motion and rest. The word *ratio* can mean many different things, e.g., ‘ratio, relation, proportion, pattern, form, reason, rationality,’ etc. While it is important to keep all of these possible meanings at hand, the primary sense, at least for now, is ‘pattern’ or ‘ratio.’

### 3. The Three Kinds of Bodies

So far, we have seen how Spinoza conceives of bodies as complex ratios of affectivity, motion, and rest. We now define the first kind of body in Spinoza’s tripartite physico-ontology: the simplest bodies [*corpora simplicissima*].

#### 3.1 First Kind of Body

While it is unclear what exactly Spinoza means by a simple body, it is clear that Spinoza does not postulate the existence of physical minima.<sup>18</sup> To make sense of this, let us continue the comparison between Cartesian and Spinozist physics. Both Descartes and Spinoza argue that simple bodies are only *relatively* simple bodies.<sup>19</sup> Simple bodies are closer to conceptual minima than physical minima. Simple bodies are

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<sup>18</sup> For some of the most influential interpretations of the status of simple bodies in Spinoza, see H.H. Joachim’s *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 83; Gilles Deleuze’s *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone, 1992), pp. 181-88; Martial Gueroult’s *Spinoza*, vol. I (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1968), pp. 158-64.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari define Spinozist simple bodies this way: ‘They are infinitely small, ultimate parts of an actual infinity...They are not defined by their number since they always come in infinities. However, depending on their degree of speed or the relation of movement and rest into which they enter, they belong to a given Individual, which may itself be part of another Individual governed by another, more complex, relation, and so on to infinity. There are thus smaller and larger infinities, not by virtue of their number, but by virtue of the composition of the relation into which their parts enter. Thus each individual is an infinite multiplicity...’ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 254.

abstractions, for even the simplest bodies are still composite, composed of various parts that are, themselves, also relatively simple bodies. To see this, take the example of a library. In itself, a library is an ordered collection of books. The simplest parts of a library are the books themselves. The books, however, are not utterly minimal. Instead, books are composed of a number of other, even simpler, bodies: pages, binding glue, cover, letters, numbers, etc. These even simpler bodies are then also composite, and thus can be further divided into its composing parts.

A body is simple in terms of its randomly acquired association. Corporeal simplicity is merely contingent, and could have been organized differently. A body's status as simple is externally determined, derived merely from an arbitrarily selected manner of organization. To continue with the library analogy, think about the various ways to organize a library. Depending on what is selected as the simple body (author's name, size of a text, theme, etc.), a library can be organized differently. Depending on the size of a library, the organization (and thus the determination of a simple body) differs. We could even have a library of libraries. The point is that a body is considered simple relative to the set of associations in which a body is embedded. Put differently, a conceptual minimum is merely arbitrarily, and so inadequately, determined. Since no body is absolutely simple, Spinoza postulates the category of simple bodies in order to be able to talk about different scales of relative complexity.

Descartes and Spinoza push this all the way to the infinite (or, for Descartes, the indefinite). To be a body is to be composite; it is to be composed of an infinite amount of infinitely divisible particles. To call a body 'simple,' is to conceive of an individual not as absolutely simple but as 'composed only of bodies which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness.'<sup>20</sup> Simple bodies, although still composite, are thus simple because they are moving according to respectively different ratios of motion of rest. One simple body is different from another because each is obeying a different pattern of movement, and thus can barely be said to be active.

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<sup>20</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

### 3.2 Second Kind of Body

The principle of the infinite composition of corporeality leads to the second kind of body. As Spinoza says, ‘we should now conceive of another [kind of body], composed of a number of individuals of a different nature.’<sup>21</sup> A composite body arises when a number of simple bodies come into contact with other simple bodies and enter into a shared pattern of motion. The composite individual thus emerges out of the emergent behaviour of simpler bodies because they communicate and preserve a certain ratio of motion and rest. When a number of simple bodies act in accord, when they move at the same speed and direction, they produce a larger individual. This larger individual is thus a sustained ratio composed out of the interaction of simpler bodies.

Since these bodies are now ‘moving as one,’ so to speak, we ‘find that it can be affected in a great many other ways and still preserve its nature.’<sup>22</sup> One of the major differences between simple bodies and composite bodies is that composite bodies are more active; composite bodies are more able to affect and be affected by other bodies. Notice that the word ‘agree’ is the translation of *conveniunt*, which literally means a coming [*venire*, ‘to come’] together [*con*, ‘with’]. In this sense, the agreement between bodies is the way in which they come together. To agree is to combine in a sort of affective harmony, to fit into each other so as to form a coherent collectivity.

Spinoza explains his use of agreement in more detail. ‘For all bodies agree [*conveniunt*],’ he writes, “in that they involve [*involvunt*] the concept of one and the same attribute.”<sup>23</sup> Notice the proximity of *conveniunt* and *involvunt*. Etymologically, *involvere* means ‘to roll or unroll, turn about, to speak fluently, to breathe.’ Bodies are involved in each other insofar as they move together. As Spinoza writes:

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<sup>21</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

<sup>22</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

<sup>23</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L2.

[I]f, of a body, or of an individual, which is composed of a number of bodies, some are removed, and at the same time as many others of the same nature take their place, the individual will retain its nature, as before, without any change of its form.<sup>24</sup>

An individual can lose some of the parts that compose that body, but as long as new bodies enter into that same ratio of motion and rest to each other as before, the individual continues to exist. All bodies continuously swap bodies composing bodies. For this constant swapping of body parts, the borders of bodies must not be utterly enclosed, but instead remain relatively porous. Moreover, every single body is composed of simpler bodies that are not unique to that body alone, but are actually part of other bodies. The parts of a human body can simultaneously function as parts of that body, or of the body politic, or of a student body, etc. This is another way in which bodies can combine and connect with other bodies to form even larger bodies. As we will see, this will be important for us because a human body and the body of a text can interact in such a way that they also form a single body, the human body-text of reading.

### 3.3 Third Kind of Body

We turn finally to the third kind of body. To do this, we need to withstand a temptation to push things too far, especially when Spinoza says things like this: ‘if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without change of the whole individual.’<sup>25</sup> Just as the second kind of body was composed of simpler, albeit also composite, bodies, the totality of the attribute of extension or the ‘face of the whole universe’ [*facies totius universi*] is also an individual composed of bodies which are composed of bodies *ad infinitum*.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, all bodies come together in the sense that they are all particular expressions of the single divine attribute of extension. Taken as a sort of infinite collective harmony of all singular extended

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<sup>24</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L4.

<sup>25</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

<sup>26</sup> Spinoza: *Complete Works*, p. 919.

things, each body involves every other body. The face of the universe is a whole singular thing, the collectivity of all collectivities.

It is tempting to conclude that the third kind of body necessitates turning to this extreme example of the maximally composite body for all complex composites whatsoever. We need not, however, go that far; all we really need for the third kind of body is an individual ‘composed of many individuals of this second kind.’<sup>27</sup> As the postulates immediately following the proto-physics make clear, the more tempered example of the third kind of body, and the one that Spinoza proceeds to examine in Book II, is the *human body*. If the third kind of individual is defined as an individual composed of many individuals of this second kind, and the ‘human body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite,’ including fluid, soft, and hard bodies, then we have found the perfect example of the third kind of body.<sup>28</sup> Thus leaping all the way to the unity of all extended modes is not necessary for the third level of corporeality.

In order to be able to map the third kind of body onto the third kind of knowledge, we should notice something about the human body. What makes the human body the obvious candidate for this highly complex type of corporeal individual, is its complex affective powers, not the fact that is considered human. As the appendices to Books I and II make clear, Spinoza is at great pains to de-anthropomorphize God. One of the great targets of attack in the whole of Spinoza’s oeuvre is superstition, guilt, and associated sad passions, and Spinoza considers the tendency to anthropomorphize to be a major source of such negative effects. This is why he goes to such great lengths to urge us to not think of God ‘in our image,’ or as a human with supernatural powers. Now things get interesting: Spinoza not only de-anthropomorphizes God, he does the same to humans. Spinoza de-anthropomorphizes humans. What is special about humans, especially the human body, is not the supposed kernel of humanity within. The humanity of a body is an effect, not a form or

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<sup>27</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

<sup>28</sup> I mention the fluid, soft, and hard bodies in order to support the rejection of taking such a tripartite division as the definitive distinction of kinds of bodies. Cf. note 23.

function. Instead, what makes them special is their high capacity for acting and being acted upon. To highlight Deleuze's favourite line from the *Ethics*: we 'do not know what a body can do, or what can be deduced from the consideration of its nature alone.'<sup>29</sup> This is why, for Spinoza, the human body is not coextensive with what we normally understand by this term. Instead, the human body is more of an amorphous, constantly changing and shifting, porous surface; it is a compound site of ever-changing affects, which requires several other bodies for its continuation. 'The human body,' Spinoza writes, 'to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated.'<sup>30</sup> Even more so, our bodies are caught up in various complex bodily networks. This is not only my body, but a part of the body politic, the body of the philosophy department, the university faculty body, a soccer team, part of the American body politic, and many more. This human body is always implicated in many other bodies. What makes the human body the chosen example of the third kind of body is thus not its humanity but its power to affect and be affected in highly complex ways. As Spinoza concludes the proto-physics, 'the human body is affected in a great many ways by external bodies, and is disposed to affect external bodies in a great many ways.'<sup>31</sup> With this, Spinoza turns to the mind.

#### 4. The Three Kinds of Knowledge

We now turn to Spinoza's semi-epistemology, which appears directly after the final proposition of the proto-physics. As we explain the three kinds of knowledge, we will mention some of the ways in which they map onto the three kinds of bodies.

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<sup>29</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP2s.

<sup>30</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13post.iv.

<sup>31</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP14.

#### 4.1 First Kind of Knowledge

The first kind of knowledge comes ‘from random experience [*experientia vaga*].’<sup>32</sup> The Latin word for ‘random’ is *vaga*, also meaning ‘vagueness, roaming, without distinct place,’ as in a vagabond. Random experience is unordered experience, a life of chance encounters and happenstance. While wandering, one encounters particular things in a way that is ‘mutilated, confused, and without order,’ making knowledge derived from such experience mere ‘opinion, imagination.’<sup>33</sup> Less than knowledge, this is the mere association of two things, which might otherwise have nothing to do with each other. The first kind of knowledge is confused because it is derived from ‘fortuitous encounters’ or the ‘common order of nature [*communi naturae ordine*].’<sup>34</sup> As Spinoza puts it, the first kind of knowledge consists of inadequate [*inadaequatus*] ideas. He starts a short list of what he considers inadequate ideas: parts of our bodies, our bodies, external bodies, the duration of a body, etc.<sup>35</sup> As this list implies, the first kind of knowledge is inadequate because it operates according to random associations. This should remind us of our remarks about the first kind of body: a body is considered simple due to its randomly acquired associations.

The way I take it, one of the main targets here is Aristotle’s categorical logic, wherein singular things are ‘known’ insofar as they are considered members of kinds, or particular instances of genera. Such categorial thinking is an example of imaginary thinking because the categories operate according to resemblances. Rather than discerning the immanent organization amongst causal networks, it forces abstract categories onto singular things. In this way, thinking according to Aristotelian categories is restricted to thinking, at the minimum, particular things, but it is unable to think singular things in their very singularity. As we will learn with the third kind of knowledge, no singular fits perfectly in an abstract category. Instead, things always exceed, bend, and misfit categorial subsumption.

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<sup>32</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40s2.

<sup>33</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40s2.

<sup>34</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP29c, IIP29s.

<sup>35</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP24-6.

While knowledge of the first kind ‘is the only cause of falsity [...] knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true.’<sup>36</sup> There is a definitive break between the lowest and the higher kinds of knowledge, and many commentators still argue about how the transition to the higher kind of knowledge occurs.<sup>37</sup> However this transition occurs, it moves from inadequate ideas to adequate ideas and common notions. As Spinoza says, ‘from the fact that we have common notions [*notiones communes*] and adequate [*adaequatus*] ideas of the properties of things [...] This I shall call reason [*rationem*] and the second kind of knowledge.’<sup>38</sup>

## 4.2 Second Kind of Knowledge

The first thing to note about the second kind of knowledge is that the same word – *ratio* – is used to describe both the second kind of bodies and the second kind of knowledge. This must be intentional. We defined bodies above by means of a fixed proportion or *ratio*, but what does *ratio* mean when it comes to knowledge? In short, *ratio* requires the development of a set of common notions.

What are common notions? It is helpful to define common notions in juxtaposition to what they are not: Transcendentals or Universals, two kinds of abstract concepts. An abstract concept arises when the capacity for being affected, due to the limitations of the human body, is overwhelmed. Since one is overwhelmed, and thus unable to clearly and distinctly understand the various relations constituting the given composition, one’s sight blurs, in a sense, which forces one to decide which traits are considered essential. In doing so, one disregards other contributing factors, traits, or capacities that still enter into the composition of the individual. Spinoza says, “when the images in the body are completely confused, the mind also will imagine all the bodies

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<sup>36</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP41.

<sup>37</sup> While I certainly do not claim to be able to answer the question as to exactly how the transition from the first to the second kind of knowledge occurs, I do contend that reading a text, such as Spinoza’s *Ethics*, plays some important role in this process.

<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40S2.

confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute, namely, under the attribute of Being.”<sup>39</sup> In short, one substitutes an unclear and confused image in place of clear and distinct understanding. The general concept ‘Being’ is a result of something to which we grant transcendent value and determine through an absolutized opposition: being/nonbeing, good/evil, etc. Rather than paying attention to the immanent ways in which bodies affect and are affected by each other, a confused image is used to sum up the inability to grasp the complexity of the composition of individuals. Similarly, a universal is an abstract concept that has been defined by abstracting a certain sensory characteristic (e.g. erect stature, featherlessness, bipedality), which is then used to set clear-cut boundaries that establish classes, genera, species, etc. As Spinoza writes, transcendental and universal ‘terms signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree.’<sup>40</sup>

Transcendentals and universals are inadequate because they fail to relate singular things to Nature or God, that is, they fail to see how singular things follow necessarily from the attribute of extension. To see bodies as following necessarily from the attribute of extension means perceiving the internal structure and determinations of modal relations, and this is exactly what common notions do. Unlike the contingent and associative nature of inadequate and abstract ideas, common notions introduce necessity.<sup>41</sup> A common notion expresses necessary agreement among modes. Such agreement (the Latin term used here is *conventus*, the same word used to describe the agreement among composite bodies) emerges due to a similarity of composition among the parts of the composite bodies. Sometimes modes come together because they have an identical structure; sometimes agreement is less complete.

In short, a common notion captures what is shared by really existing things. This is another attack on Aristotelian-style definition in which the abstract form or function of a kind of thing is taken to completely define the capacities of that kind of body. In contrast to

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<sup>39</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40S1.

<sup>40</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40s1.

<sup>41</sup> Looking back in order to look ahead, we recall that random association characterized the first kind of body and necessary agreement was introduced with the second kind of body. The mapping has already begun.

Aristotle, a common notion, since it is not an abstract formal definition, is defined in terms of a shared structure [*fabrica*] or a communal fabric of relations among parts of a body and parts of other bodies. This agreement is expressed in terms of affectivity. Singular things express a similar structure when they produce similar affects. While Aristotle's categorial trees organize particulars in terms of an abstract set of general predicates, common notions organize singular things in terms of affective capacities. Take, for example, what Deleuze says in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, "there are greater differences between a plough horse or draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and a plough horse. This is because the racehorse and the plough horse do not have the same affects nor the same capacity for being affected; the plough horse has affects in common rather with the ox.<sup>42</sup> Rather than grouping in terms of *what something is*, common notions organize in terms of *what something can do*. In this sense, common notions are general without being abstract.

### 4.3 Third Kind of Knowledge

In addition to these two kinds of knowledge, there is [...] another kind, which I shall call intuitive knowledge [*scientiam intuitivam*]. And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things.<sup>43</sup>

There are a variety of conflicting interpretations of what Spinoza has in mind with this. For example, Edwin Curley sees the third kind of knowledge as a kind of 'cognitive therapy,' a position that echoes Stuart Hampshire's recasting of Spinoza as almost a proto-Freudian analyst.<sup>44</sup> To me, this seems wrong, and on Spinozist grounds. Rather than empowering, therapy fetters us to passive affects, thereby decreasing our power. As Herman De Dijn slyly notes, the 'best therapy is the

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<sup>42</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40s2.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (London: Penguin Books, 1962); Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

one...which eliminates the need for therapy.<sup>45</sup> On our reading, the third kind of knowledge is clearly not a kind of therapy.

The third kind of knowledge involves the circulation of common notions.<sup>46</sup> Insofar as common notions capture the internal structure of an existing agreement among singular things, each common notion shows how each singular thing is an expression of Nature, in part and in whole. Now, we do not see individuals as mere particular copies of general kinds, but instead see them as singular things, as *res singulares*. It is only at the third kind of knowledge that it becomes possible to see anything as truly singular. We only begin to see the singular nature of all things once we take up the highest kind of knowledge: *scientia intuitiva*.

In this process, the mind understands even itself as another singular thing. It sees itself not only as an effect or cognitive chamber for recording experience, but as a natural individual that contributes to the natural order of things, as a necessary and singularized expression of Nature. Seeing the whole of Nature involved in singular things is a process of becoming active, a dynamic understanding of the essence of oneself, one's world, and Nature or God. Essence, we should note, does not imply a Platonic form or Aristotelian category, but instead means precisely this: an essence is a singularity.

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<sup>45</sup> De Dijn, 'Ethics IV: Ladder, not the top,' p. 9. A great example of this comes from the joke in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* in which Alvy, after learning that Annie had a psychological breakthrough during her first therapy session, complains of not having a single breakthrough in fifteen years of therapy.

<sup>46</sup> The transition from common notions to *scientia intuitiva* occurs in the *Ethics* at IIP45-47 and IVP14-15. For different takes on this transition, see Spencer Carr, 'Spinoza's Distinction between Rational and Intuitive Knowledge,' in *Philosophical Review*, 87:2 (1987), pp. 241-52; Don Garrett, 'Spinoza's Theory of *Scientia Intuitiva*,' in *Scientia in Early Modern Philosophy: Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Tom Sorell, G.A.J. Rogers, and Jill Kraye (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009); Sylvaine Malinowski-Charles, 'The Circle of Knowledge: Notes on Reason and Intuition in Spinoza,' in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy, Vol. I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. 139-63; J. Wetlesen, *The Sage and the Way: Spinoza's Ethics of Freedom*, (Assen: Gorcum, 1979), pp. 278, 319.

Rather than climbing up an ideal epistemological ladder, there is a shift in perspective. It is not that we ever become completely free from imagination, opinion, and the passions, but that we begin to relate differently to the unavoidable mass of external causes. De Dijn calls this ‘an affective-dynamic force’; Spinoza calls it the intellectual love of God [*amor Dei intellectus*].<sup>47</sup> Since love is a kind of joy and activity, the third kind of knowledge is the full activation of the powers of the mind. The individual mind sees itself as a singular thing that is determined yet active component in a quasi-causal<sup>48</sup> network of ideas stretching out infinitely in all directions.

Thinking of the structural parallelism with the proto-physics, while common notions correspond to the second kind of bodies, which were defined as determinate ratios of speed and slowness, *scientia intuitiva* corresponds to the third kind of body, e.g. the human body. While common notions move at the relative speed of the relations of the bodies that they capture, *scientia intuitiva* is characterized by what Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as ‘thought operating at infinite speed.’<sup>49</sup> ‘In the last book of the *Ethics*,’ they write, ‘[Spinoza] produced the movement of the infinite and gave infinite speeds to thought in the third kind of knowledge.’<sup>50</sup> To think at infinite speeds means to be able to see individuals as singular expressions of the infinite attribute of thought; it means being able to think across that infinite distance from singularity to God and back again.

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<sup>47</sup> De Dijn, ‘Ethics IV: Ladder, not the top,’ p. 9. Spinoza rejects pure reason as the highest form of ethical life. For reason is dependent on notions of good and evil, which serve to ‘guide’ a rational being to a human ideal, whereas the highest kind of life, characterized by the third kind of knowledge, is intuitive. For more, see De Dijn, ‘Ethics IV: Ladder, not the top,’ pp. 5-7.

<sup>48</sup> This is not meant to be a confusing reference to Deleuze’s use of the concept of a ‘quasi-cause’ in *Logique du sens*, but instead is simply meant to show that Spinoza conceived the connections and relations among ideas on the model of corporeal causation.

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 21

<sup>50</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 48.

On this note, Macherey identifies knowledge of the third kind as knowledge that ‘the infinity of substance passes intensively, in all its modes, *without dividing itself*.’<sup>51</sup> Just as all of thought is contained in each act of thought, every body contains the infinite causal web of bodies. Put differently, knowledge of the third kind reveals the necessary interconnections among all ideas, just as the third kind of body reveals the necessary linkages among all bodies. The loss of a single body or idea would alter the whole of the attribute of extension or cognition. ‘If one part of matter is annihilated,’ Spinoza says, ‘the whole of Extension would vanish.’<sup>52</sup> The third kind of knowledge is the affirmation of substance in all modes, of God in all things, of the infinite in the finite. To say that every finite idea or body is produced by an infinite causal sequence is also to say that it is a finite expression of the infinite power of its immanent cause: *Deus sive Natura*. This is what it means to understand singular things as truly singular.

Let us review the three kinds of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is characterized by unsystematic and random encounters, and so is characterized by opinion, imagination, and signs; this is the realm of passive affects and externally determined relations. The second kind of knowledge is the realm of reason [*ratio*], and it is populated by common notions that express agreement among affective capacities and bodily structures. In a way, the *Ethics* mostly takes place between the first and second kinds of knowledge, somewhere between the most orderly of random experience and the least universal common notions. It is only in the latter half of the final Book V that a full account of the third kind of knowledge appears. This means that the text is a sort of rational project that provides an opportunity for the reader to move towards the third kind of knowledge: *scientia intuitiva*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Hegel or Spinoza*, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> *Spinoza: Complete Works*, Letter 4 to Oldenburg.

<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that the *Ethics* actually does lead the reader to the third kind of knowledge, for such knowledge requires a return to actual interaction with singular things, but merely to say that the text can spark the eventual emergence of a form of life that is operating by means of *scientia intuitiva*.

## 5. Mapping Bodies and Knowledge

So far, the exposition has been relatively straightforward. Now comes the difficult task: *mapping the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge onto each other*. I propose four interlocking arguments in support of this mapping.

1) Recall that Spinoza's epistemology begins right after his proto-physics, which leads us to believe that they share many features. For one, the plenistic nature of his proto-physics implies a plenistic character of his epistemology: the structure of the three kinds of bodies entails the structure of the three kinds of knowledge. That is, given Spinoza's insistence on the parallelism of thought and extension, the three kinds of bodies must have a parallel correlate in the cognitive register.

This allows for a rather interesting approach to the *Ethics*. While Spinoza clearly insists on the parallelism thesis, he often does not explain the exact ways in which what occurs in one attribute is paralleled by the same "order and connection" in another attribute.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he often turns to the attribute that offers the most familiar or demonstrably plausible account. This often leaves us puzzled, wondering how the exact nature of the parallel occurs. Spinoza leaves it to the reader to discover the cognitive correlate of the three kinds of bodies. It is our intention to take advantage of this unclaimed space and show that textual order helps us fulfill this task. The textual proximity of Spinoza's theory of parallelism, his proto-physics, and his semi-epistemology supports this mapping of the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge. To be exact, the account of the semi-epistemology appears directly after the story of the proto-physics, which itself appears just on the heels of the presentation of the thesis of parallelism. The order and connection of these three discussions is intentional.

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<sup>54</sup> Given that there are many different ways to interpret such a parallelism thesis, and a proper discussion of the various interpretations of this thesis would take us far beyond the present discussion, I will not go into that now.

2) The parallel between the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge is more about order than amount of complexity. If bodies were differentiated only by a difference in complexity – where simple bodies would be defined solely by less complexity and composite bodies characterized by more complexity – then the mapping would seem less plausible, especially given that the difference between the kinds of knowledge is not drawn solely in terms of complexity. Instead, the parallel has more to do with order [*ordo*]. While complexity does have to do with order in some sense, both complex and simple things can be ordered. That is, complexity is not a category that strictly applies to order, and order does not apply solely to complexity. And so, our claim is that simple bodies do not possess the kind of order that is exhibited by composite bodies. Similarly, imagination and opinion do not possess the kind of order that we see in common notions. There are several good reasons for making this claim.

Recall how bodies are distinguished from one another: they are distinguished because their respective motion, rest, and direction operate according to different ratios. Put differently, simple bodies do not cohere because they are not ordered by the same *ratio*. Now compare the various senses of *ratio* and *ordo*. On the one hand, *ratio* can mean “ratio, relation, proportion, pattern, form, reason, rationality.” Such meanings of *ratio* are used to describe the arrangement of a collection of bodies, the course of a plan, or the causal order of a pattern of reasoning or argumentation. On the other hand, *ordo* can mean ‘a regular row, the right order, a disposition, a series, or an arrangement.’ *Ordo* basically mirrors the meaning of the Greek words *táxis* and *diáthesis*. These meanings of *ordo* are used to describe such things as a layer of stones in the ornamentation of a temple, a row of benches or seats in a theatre, or a line of soldiers in battle formation; it is even used as a musical term that indicates a rhythmic pattern of motion and rest in the construction of a musical phrase. While *ratio* and *ordo* do not mean exactly the same thing, there is a shared sense of pattern, organization, union, etc. Thus, the *formation of composite bodies is structurally similar to the formation of common notions*.

When bodies or ideas are ordered in a certain way, according to a certain *ratio*, a composite body or a common notion can emerge. Thus,

the threshold separating, on the one hand, kinds of bodies, and on the other hand, kinds of knowledge indicates a distinct kind of ordering. As bodies lock into a certain pattern or *ordo*, and thus share a *ratio* of motion and rest, different kinds of composite bodies emerge, including human bodies. Similarly, as the mind picks up on this different ordering, as it discerns the ways in which bodies begin to agree with each other through *ordo* and *ratio*, common notions emerge and begin to organize a life guided by reason. Living according to *scientia intuitiva* is then a form of life in which all singular things are understood as necessarily ordered singular expressions of *Deus sive Natura*.

3) Spencer Carr makes some important claims that also support this mapping.<sup>55</sup> By attacking the ways in which Curley and J.J. MacIntosh distinguish the three kinds of knowledge, Carr claims that Spinoza's 'classification is presented as one of different ways of knowing the same thing and not as one of different objects of knowledge.'<sup>56</sup> Carr bases this claim partly on Spinoza's use of a single example for three kinds of knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Carr says, 'Spinoza's use of the same example for all types of knowledge implies that the same thing can be known in each of the ways of knowing.'<sup>58</sup>

It is true that a simple body is not strictly identified as an object of the first kind of knowledge. Opinion about a relatively simple body lacks the knowledge of its connection or agreement with other bodies while rational knowledge of a body involves understanding how that body agrees with other bodies. The same simple body can thus be known through imagination or through reason. The difference, it seems, is

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<sup>55</sup> Spencer Carr, 'Spinoza's Distinction between Rational and Intuitive Knowledge,' *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 87, No. 2 (Apr. 1978), 241-52; hereafter *Spinoza's Distinction*

<sup>56</sup> *Spinoza's Distinction*, p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> Spinoza says, 'I shall explain all these with one example. Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first... Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth number is 6 – and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second.' (Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP40S2).

<sup>58</sup> *Spinoza's Distinction*, p. 244.

between ways of knowing. The imagination only discerns the differences in ‘motion and rest, speed and slowness,’ but reason grasps a ‘higher’ agreement among seemingly distinct bodies.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the third kind of knowledge also grasps simple bodies, albeit in a different manner. *Scientia intuitiva* considers things, even simple bodies, not ‘in relation to a certain time and place’ but ‘insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature.’<sup>60</sup> The highest kind of knowledge sees the infinite essence of Nature or God in every singular thing.

To understand what this means for our mapping, consider an example of a large flock of birds.<sup>61</sup> Knowledge of the first kind focuses on one bird, abstracting it from the group, and concludes that that the bird exists apart of the flock, as a distinct simple body. Or it might do the opposite, and assume that birds are always found in flocks. It is true that the birds in a flock move at slightly different speeds and in slightly different directions; one bird moves further away or closer to a nearby bird, sometimes moving faster or more slowly than the surrounding birds. Yet if one takes note of the larger behaviour of the whole flock, it is possible to see that the minor differences in direction and speed eventually reach a sort of patterned agreement. This is the shared *ratio* of motion and rest. Admitting a slight anachronism, this *ratio* is like a differential relation in that the shared *ratio* of the flock is determinable whether or not the flock flies. The differential relations that are expressed by the behaviour of the flock while in motion would stay the same even when the flock is not in flight. The *ratio* that is expressed by the flock is perfectly determinable, albeit not always assignable. The *ratio* has not vanished, but is actualizable as soon as the flock flies again. Thus, the second type of knowledge is able to pick up on this shared rate of motion and rest, unlike the first kind of knowledge. In this way, the same object

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<sup>59</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7.

<sup>60</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, VP29s.

<sup>61</sup> Leibniz would notice a difference between an aggregate and free unity, and an organic unity. A flock would be an aggregate unity and not truly a unified individual composed of simpler bodies. The individual birds, instead, are truly unities in the organic sense. Spinoza, however, argues directly against this claim by arguing that individuation is scale-invariant, and so can occur at all levels. Even the totality of the corporeal bodies is an individual composed of other individuals.

(a bird) can be the object of all three kinds of knowledge. The difference is in the way in which the object is known: a) as a simple object (bird) distinct from other simple objects (other birds); b) as a simple object insofar as it plays a part in a larger pattern of behaviour (flock); or c) as a singular modal expression of a divine attribute interacting with other singular things according to the necessary order of nature.

While this makes sense, Carr draws the wrong conclusion. The three kinds of knowledge can take the same object as the object of a certain kind of knowing, albeit in different ways, but this *difference in ways of knowing* actually implies a *different object of knowing*. To know an object as distinct from other bodies is to know a different kind of object than it is to know an object as a part of a larger whole. The same object is known in different ways, but this difference in knowing means that the object known is also different. In short, a distinct object and an object as part of a larger whole are different objects. The same applies for the third kind of knowledge: to know an object in this way is to know a different object than knowing it simply ‘in relation to a certain time and place.’ It is to know it as truly singular, rather than merely a particular instance of a general kind. Thus, different objects correspond to different ways of knowing. As we have said all along, *different kinds of bodies correspond to different kinds of knowledge*.

4) At IIP13L7, right after concluding the account of the proto-physics, Spinoza says that he only said this in order to make a different claim:

If it had been my intention to deal expressly with body, I ought to have explained and demonstrated these things more fully. But I have already said that I intended *something else*, and brought these things forward only because I can easily deduce from them the things I have decided to demonstrate.<sup>62</sup>

While this ‘something else’ that Spinoza intended might, at first, seem mysterious, it seems clear to me that he is referring to the scholium

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<sup>62</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13L7; emphasis is mine.

of IIP13, the very place at which Spinoza began his proto-physics. He says:

In proportion as a body is more capable [*aptius*] than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable [*aptior*] than others of perceiving many things at once [...] And from these we can know the excellence [*praestantiam*] of one mind over the others, and also see the cause why we have only a completely confused knowledge of our body, and many other things which I shall deduce from them in the following. For this reason I have thought it worthwhile to explain and demonstrate these things more accurately. To do this it is necessary to premise a few things concerning the nature of bodies.

Spinoza clearly offers the proto-physics not for its own sake, but in order to make this claim: *the structure of the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge is parallel*.

The proposition that contains the whole account of the proto-physics says: ‘The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body.’<sup>63</sup> This proposition is the ground for the psychophysical interpretation of the parallelism thesis, which states, among other things: ‘we cannot deny that ideas differ among themselves as the objects themselves do.’<sup>64</sup> This means that the differences among ideas are the same as the differences among corporeal objects. That is, the ways in which the three kinds of bodies are distinguished from each other is the same as the ways in which the three kinds of knowledge are distinguished from one another. The reason for this is that the very idea that makes the mind what it is, a cognitive object, is the actually existing body, and nothing else.

We conclude by running through the ternary organization in both registers. As kinds of bodies change, kinds of ideas change. As bodies agree with other bodies so as to form composite individuals, common notions are formed so as to represent a shared corporeal structure. As all

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<sup>63</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13.

<sup>64</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP13s.

corporeal bodies are singular expressions of the infinite attribute of extension, *scientia intuitiva* involves seeing the infinite totality of the attribute of thought in every singular idea. The account of the proto-physics thus shows how the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge map onto each other.<sup>65</sup>

## 6. The Movement of Meaning

We can now return to the original question: What does it mean to read, for Spinoza? It means, among other things, that reading affects the mind *and* the body in the exact same order and connection. We can pose this question to Spinoza's own texts: What does it mean to read Spinoza's *Ethics*, for Spinoza? It means that the movement of the meaning of the text acts as an opportunity to cause a reader to consider what kind of life she is living. This is not to say that reading the text will cause us to live a life of reason. Instead, it is to say that it provides the opportunity for considering our lives not simply in terms of the local interaction among finite things but as singular expressions of the infinite organization of Nature. If we are affected in the best way, we never leave the world of individual modes, but simply see them as truly singular things in the infinite expanse of *Deus sive Natura*.

In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza says, 'I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture is no different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in complete accord with it.'<sup>66</sup> While Spinoza is making a claim about a hermeneutical method, the method, like all of Spinozism, is based on his ontology. Since the text and the reader of the text are equally part of nature, the method of interpreting a text is identical to the method of interpreting Nature. This is why Spinoza's hermeneutics of scripture involves relating the text to the historical circumstances in which it appeared, 'giving the life, character and pursuits of the author of every book, detail who he was, on what occasion and at what time and for whom and in what language he

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<sup>65</sup> This mapping was, if not this 'something else' that he intended, then at least one of the 'many other things' that he could deduce after the proto-physics.

<sup>66</sup> *Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 457.

wrote.<sup>67</sup> A book is a product of the natural and historical causes expressed in a set of concrete circumstances. This means that the text is more than merely analogically related to the world; the order and connection constituting the character of the text is not simply *like* the order and connection of the world. Instead, textual order and connection *is* part of natural order and connection.

As part of nature, there are two dimensions to significance of texts. On the one hand, there is what might be called the *longitude*. This is the sedimentation that accrues in the surface of the text through repeated uses by a different people, in various circumstances, for an almost unimaginable variety of purposes. An example might be the dominant interpretations of Spinoza's *Ethics* that circulate through readers and commentators. On the other hand, there is the *latitude*. This is the diverse set of effects caused by the longitude or the use of the text. Engaging or being affected by a text thus means that texts 'are so arranged that readers are moved.'<sup>68</sup> Movement here describes both physical and cognitive change. Since matter is motion, by a certain *ratio* of movement and rest, to engage the materiality of a text is what it means to move or be moved by a text. In short, reading is a sort of moving.

In order to see why we understand reading as movement, consider the word translated as 'meaning': *sententia*. This Latin word means 'a way of thinking, perspective, sentiment, purpose, determination, decision, will, etc.', and is derived from the verb *sentire*, meaning 'to sense, perceive, or feel.' The point is that there is a focus on sensation, on movement, on bodily and cognitive affectivity. We again see that *meaning is a sort of movement*. There is thus no difference between what it means and what it moves. Sometimes the movement of the book is minimal, whereby the text is soon forgotten. Sometimes, however, it radically changes the body and mind of a reader. 'Very often,' Spinoza says, 'it happens that while we are enjoying a thing we wanted, the body acquires from this enjoyment a new constitution, by which it is differently determined, and other images of things are aroused in it; and at the same

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<sup>67</sup> Spinoza: *Complete Works*, p. 459.

<sup>68</sup> Spinoza: *Complete Works*, p. 505.

time the mind begins to imagine other things and desire other things.<sup>69</sup> Thus, a text is able to spark a change in constitution, disposition, or *ratio* of the body and the mind.

This leads to a provocative claim: When a text no longer moves its readers, it ceases to exist. It is no longer a text, but merely a random collection of sheets of paper. To exist as a text, or anything at all, is to cause effects, to make a difference, to move bodies and minds. A text is not merely evaluated in terms of the truth of its theses, or even the degree of correspondence between it and the world. Instead, as Althusser says, the value of a text or ‘of a philosophy lies entirely in its *effects*.’<sup>70</sup>

## 7. The Three Kinds of Reading

For Spinoza, reading is understood in causal terms, or the varying capacities for cognitive and corporeal affection. Through this model of reading, along with parallel tripartite typologies of kinds of bodies and knowledge developed above, there are three kinds of reading.

### 7.1 First kind of reading.

If a reader is confused or lost by the complex contour of, say, an axiomatically structured text, then the reader remains at the first kind of knowledge, the life of opinion and imagination. Such a reader offers only associative interpretations that only convince others by means of abstract ideas, ‘occult qualities,’ and a ‘thousand more bits of nonsense,’ etc. The meaning of a text thus remains hidden by the set of abstract concepts to which such a reader clings. Spinoza’s example of a worm living in the blood exemplifies the first kind of reading. A worm lives in the blood just as the life according to imagination or opinion lives in his part of the universe. Since the worm regards the particles of blood as the whole, and

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<sup>69</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP59s.

<sup>70</sup> Louis Althusser, ‘The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza,’ in *The New Spinoza*, trans. Ted Stolze (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 4.

not as merely parts of a much larger whole, it is unaware that the blood is simply a modal expression of the attribute of extension. A common example of this occurs at most philosophy conferences when, during the question and answer portion of a presentation, an audience member asks this question, ‘How does this relate to what *I* study?’ This is an imaginary kind of reading that it is based on random association, and so confuses the part in which one lives with the whole.

## **7.2 Second kind of reading**

If a reader is able to see a body or idea as necessarily embedded in a set of relations of things with which it shares a common structure, then she encounters the text through reason, a second kind of reading. That is, if she is able to accurately express relations of agreement among the features of the text and its causal relations, including her own body and mind, then she can overcome the imagination and begin to operate according to a rational understanding of the text. Since it is composed with its relations, rather than imposed on them, there is no need to postulate fantastical explanations or occult meanings. Consider, for example, the hermeneutical strategy for reading the Scripture in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Rather than as literal descriptions of factual occurrences, Spinoza interprets seemingly miraculous and supernatural events contained in the Scripture as mere metaphors. Like all products of nature, the text must submit to the laws of natural causation. This hermeneutic reads the text as a singular thing engaging with another singular thing, the reader, in such a way that both function as singular parts of ever-expanding causal complexes of nature. The agreement of the reader and the text form a larger singular thing, which is part of a larger singular thing, and on. This is reading from a rational perspective.

## **7.3 Third kind of reading**

If a reader is able to understand how her mind, her body, the text in front of her, and all singular things that she encounters are modal expressions of the single divine substance, then she is able to move with the text according to the third kind of knowledge. It thus ‘follows that

every body [and idea], insofar as it exists as modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the infinite whole of the universe, and as agreeing with the whole and cohering with the other parts.’<sup>71</sup> As we know, to see individuals as part of the infinite whole of the universe is simultaneously to see them as singular things.

Bringing all three kinds of readings together, we return to the beginning of this essay, where we saw Spinoza mention his reading of the ‘defenders of the atoms.’ In that discussion, Spinoza talked about how the movement of a text *carries weight* with the mind and the body. A text can move the reader to become more passive or it can move it to act. The activated body of the reader then acts according to the movements of the text with which it agrees. In such a way, a body can actively encounter and agree with other bodies, perhaps causing them to form a circle of readers that all meet together on different occasions and engage the various movements of a text, as in the members of the Spinoza circle. Or a text can move a body to encounter the world as an infinite set of singular determinations that follow necessarily from the attribute of extension. Thus, the various movements of a text are able to move minds and bodies to accord with the infinite movement of Nature.

Considering a text as yet another complex site of causal affectivity thus eliminates questions like ‘Have we understood what is written?’ or ‘Who has truly read the *Ethics*?’ in favor of enumerating a set of possible movements and effects. The question then becomes, ‘What effects has this body produced?’ or ‘What kinds of movements, in what directions, and at what speeds do affects flow out of the text?’ Or we could ask: ‘Does a text play a causal role in sparking a revolution? Does it produce the desire for living among like-minded people, those living the life of reason?’ Given that ‘experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone,’ it is not always clear as to the exact ways in which a text can affect a reader.<sup>72</sup> This is why a single text can have contrary effects. This is also why the *Ethics* itself cannot necessarily produce the third kind of knowledge in a reader. As Spinoza

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<sup>71</sup> Spinoza, ‘Letter 32: To the most noble and learned Henry Oldenburg’ in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 849.

<sup>72</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP2s.

wrote in the letter to Hugo Boxel, while reading Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle he was not moved into activity, however, the writings of Leucippus, Democritus, and the atomists produced positive effects in him. The atomists even had a great effect on Plato. The same atomic texts greatly affected Plato and Spinoza, although the actual effects were drastically different: Plato wanted to burn all the writings of the defenders of atoms, while Spinoza rejoiced in the form of life he saw exemplified by men who affirmed lives full of joy and pleasure. Thus ‘one and the same thing can be affected in many ways [...] From this we can easily conceive that one and the same object can be the cause of many and contrary affects.’<sup>73</sup> A text, such as the *Ethics*, can thus open up the opportunity for a body to enter into relations as a modal expression of the third kind of body just as it can re-constitute a mind so that it can operate according to the third kind of knowledge.

## 8. From Ontology to Ethics and Back again

As we conclude, we should think about this pattern of returning to the beginning of a text. To do this, take note of a few intriguing interpretation of the *Ethics*. Several interpreters have made some variation on this claim: *The text does not end with the last proposition of Book V*. We round out this essay by beginning to consider such intrigue. First, recall how the *Ethics* ends:

If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent [*omnia praeclara*] are as difficult as they are rare.<sup>74</sup>

Now remember how it begins: ‘D1: By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.’

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<sup>73</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIIP17s.

<sup>74</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, VP42s.

Deleuze gives a surprisingly Hegelian interpretation of the *Ethics*, one that resembles the provocative structure of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or even Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.<sup>75</sup> Each of these texts does not terminate with the last word of the last sentence on the last page, but instead wraps back around to the beginning, returning to the first word of the first sentence on the first page. In the *Ethics*, a discussion about the difficulty and rarity of excellent things leads directly into the first definition of Book I, the definition of something *causa sui*. Having been affected by that first movement through the definitions, axioms, propositions, etc., the reader reads again. On this second textual movement, the reader now proceeds from the perspective of the second or maybe even third kind of knowledge.<sup>76</sup> To take another example, Dan Selcer argues that the *Ethics* includes all the necessary caveats for a Book VI (or another part of Book V), in which Spinoza would write about bodies what he already writes about the intellect in Book V.<sup>77</sup> Selcer follows Spinoza's insistence on parallelism and claims that, if Spinoza is true to his own project, then he is able to develop an account of corporeality that corresponds to the discussion of beatitude and *scientia intuitiva* in the cognitive register from Book V. When Spinoza says that he will "treat only of the power of the mind, or of reason [*de sola Mentis, sue ratione potentia*]," he provides enough conceptual material to similarly "treat only of the power of the" body as adequate corporeal cause, as eternal extension, as the infinite power of corporeal life. Blessedness thus becomes the freedom of the mind and the body.<sup>78</sup> One aim of this paper was to offer a parallel structure between the three kinds of bodies and the three kinds of knowledge in the hopes of offering a starting point from which this possible sixth Book might be written. Whether it is Deleuze, Selcer, or other interpreters, there is clearly an ongoing discussion about the problematic status of the end, or lack of end, of the *Ethics*. This raises some intriguing questions.

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<sup>75</sup> Deleuze, *Cours Vincennes* transcript, 'Sur Leibniz,' 20/01/1981 <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=191&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2>.

<sup>76</sup> Remember our earlier claim that the *Ethics* functions somewhere between the second and third kind of knowledge.

<sup>77</sup> Seminar on "Spinoza's *Ethics*," Daniel Selcer, Duquesne University, Fall 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, V, Preface.

However plausible these suggestions may or may not be, the very possibility of having this discussion implies a clear conclusion, albeit one that designates an open-ended end of the text. This conclusion is simple: *ontology involves ethics and ethics involves ontology*. That is, ontology and ethics stand and fall together. Phrased negatively, there is no ontology that is devoid of ethical commitments, just as there is no ethics that is free from ontological commitments. And now in positive language, all ontologies involve certain kinds of ethics and all ethical theories involve certain kinds of ontologies.

One obvious indication in support of this comes from the argumentative trajectory of the *Ethics*: It begins with ontology and ends with ethics. From the theory of ‘what things are’ to ‘how we act,’ there is an unbroken movement. Metaphysics and ethics are not cut off from each other, but are connected by continually varying movements.<sup>79</sup> The most obvious reason for this is that Spinoza thinks both of these kinds of philosophies belong in the same book. If Deleuze’s reading is correct, then Spinozist ethics wraps back around to his ontology, which then feeds his ethics, and repeat. Given how many years Spinoza worked on this text, it does not make sense for Spinoza to use this structure if he did not think that ontology and ethics involve each other.

If this claim is true, then we can begin to enumerate ways in which Spinoza’s ontological commitments involve ethical commitments. To do this, simply start to list a number of shared features among his ontology and his ethics. Negatively phrased, they both seek to eliminate negativity, transcendence, myth, superstition, religion, sadness, guilt, pain, and they initiate the practical critique of all mystifications.<sup>80</sup> Positively phrased, they both insist on the positivity of nature; they are immanent, materialist, and naturalistic; they involve infinite difference and plurality; they affirm

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<sup>79</sup> I saw movements because there are multiple ways to move through the *Ethics* Deleuze, for example, sees at least two movements. One moves through the definitions, axioms, and propositions; the other moves through scholia. He even notices a third movement that occurs in the final fifth book. See Gilles Deleuze, ‘Spinoza and the Three *Ethics*,’ trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, in *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: The University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), pp. 21-36.

<sup>80</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 279.

singularity; they cultivate joy. Interestingly, this list is basically a modified version of what Deleuze identifies as the five basic characteristics of ‘Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius [...] the [...] defenders of the atoms.’<sup>81</sup> In accord with the defenders of atoms, who also argued for the continuum between metaphysics and ethics, Spinoza develops an immanent, affirmative, joyous, and empowering ontology that involves an immanent, affirmative, joyous, and empowering ethics. In metaphysics and ethics, the movement of meaning is the same.

There is one final point to be made. In reading and thinking about Spinoza’s *Ethics*, the reader begins to operate more and more according to the second and maybe even the third kind of knowledge. The indication that this is occurring is that the third kind of knowledge involves seeing minds and bodies as singular expressions of nature. As we read, we begin to see the very text that we hold in our hands is itself just such a singular expression. That we begin to see this implies that the meaning of the book is beginning to move our minds and bodies. This, in turn, implies that we, as singular things, are beginning to move along with the movement of the meaning of the text, and thereby form a complex, moving text-reader assemblage. In moving with the text, we soon find ourselves a part of the text and the ontology expressed therein. We, the readers, are as much singular expressions of nature as anything else. We read ourselves into Spinoza’s ontology and thereby begin to see ourselves as singular expressions of the whole of nature. As we know, this does not mean that we leave the domain of passions and causal networks; when we finish the book and look up, we are still amidst a modal world, still subject to the infinite array of causal networks. Rather than rising above the world, what happens is that our relationship to the world undergoes a transformation. Similar to the Ancient Stoic call for a transformation of one’s relationship to the external world, there is an insensible shift such that our affective lives are considered from a different perspective. In the end, we see that the relationship among ourselves, other things, and *Deus sive Natura* is the relationship among singular expression of the same immanent substance. Since we have a rational understanding of *what is*, we are enabled to practice a life of joy, activity, and reason. A form of

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<sup>81</sup> *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), p. 902; hereafter *Spinoza: Complete Works*. Emphasis is mine.

understanding our essences, our singularities, involves a form of existential practice.

For most people, to say that ontology shapes ethics is not a difficult theme to accept. The more difficult claim to accept is the inversion: ethics shapes ontology. And yet, this is exactly what we are claiming. If this is true, then we can offer a provocative understanding of the text: we are able to read the *Ethics* in either direction, both forwards and backwards. We not only can follow the movement of the text from a single definition of being (God) to a plurality of singular ways of being; from essence to existence; from ontology to ethics. We are also able to move from the plurality of singular ways of being to a single definition of being; from existence to essence; from ethics to ontology. In this sense, the text is expressed as a singular dimension of a single infinite plane of *Deus sive Natura* moving out in infinite directions and back again, and ontology and ethics are two ways of describing this plane.

# **The Situation of the Human Subject in the Philosophy of Spinoza**

**ANDREW SACKIN-POLL**

## **Introduction**

In opposition to those who argue, like Léon Brunschvicg, that the geometrical system is, in intent and purpose, solely the objective and logical explication of reason's proper order, Michel Henry, in his *Le Bonheur de Spinoza*, argues that this method has, at its core, a concern for the subject. By placing the subject at the heart of Spinoza's philosophy, Henry's reading leads us to ask different questions about the *Ethics*' metaphysical system. Through the following questions we will illustrate what it means to read Spinoza as a philosopher of the subject and outline some important aspects to Henry's interpretation of Spinoza: 1) What is the ethical significance of the geometrical method? 2) What is the role of reason and rationality in the ethical development of the human subject? 3) What importance to place upon the situation and experience of the subject in the *Ethics*?

## **1. The Context**

The assertion that Spinoza is, in truth, a thinker of subjectivity is made contrary to many of the great interpretations of his work during the first half of the twentieth-century in France, which would have comprised the context for Henry's interpretation. The prevailing interpretation at that

time, and, to a certain extent, even today, is that the *Ethics* is solely the objective development of the inner laws and structure of thought. For example, Jules Lagneau claims that the purpose of what he calls the ‘metaphysical method,’ which involves philosophical reflection and analysis of reason, is to ‘make known the static or logical forms of thought.’<sup>1</sup> The critical movement of the *Ethics* is, on his view, to purify thought of the imaginative element and lead man to a proper understanding of his reason. The ethical significance of the text rests in this alone. We see this kind of interpretation repeated later in Brunschvicg’s interpretation, for which the geometrical method is the necessary instrument for the purification of thought, that is, the elimination of any contingent or subjective element.<sup>2</sup> The general current of this kind of interpretation is that Spinoza is a thinker of the logical and objective forms of thought.

What Henry takes issue with is not so much that these interpretations are incorrect, rather that they remain insufficient to the extent that they do not take account of the subject’s experience, including the experience of Spinoza. The importance of experience is posed by F. Alquié, who notes that:

even if one admits that the order of reason constitutes the essential of philosophy, one will agree that all comprehension is a fact [*le fait*] of a consciousness, and that the logical chain of concepts accompanies some inner experience, an experience that, precisely, this order [*enchaînement*] and these concepts allow [us] to attain.<sup>3</sup>

The main claim made by Henry is that alongside the logical development abides an inner experience, one which is irreducibly subjective.

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Lagneau, *Célèbres Leçons et Fragments* (Paris: PUF, 1950), p. 58. The text referred to formed part of an earlier publication entitled ‘Notes sur Spinoza’ in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1889); all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Léon Brunschvicg, *Spinoza et ses contemporains* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris: PUF, 1951), p. 34; hereafter *Spinoza*.

<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Alquié, *Le rationalisme de Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 1981), p. 10; hereafter *Le rationalisme*.

We must stress that by turning our attention to the subjective aspect of the *Ethics* we do not intend to challenge any particular interpretation but to deepen the sense of the definitions, propositions, etc. that comprise it and uncover their ethical significance for the human subject. To this end, we follow the reading offered by Michel Henry, who formulates three central interpretative theses, the sense of which we will develop through the course of this article:

First, there is an ‘*exigence de bonheur*’ that motivates the system and describes an inner urgency or need for happiness.

Secondly, in addition to the first ‘*exigence*’ there is an “*exigence d’autonomie*” and that the mathematical concept of truth is a response to this second ‘*exigence*’.

Finally, the role of subjective experience plays a determinative role in distinguishing intuition and reason.

These are not all of the interpretative theses put forward by Henry but are the most relevant for the purposes of our article. In the next section we will discuss the relevance of the first part of the *Ethics* for the human subject and their happiness. We will then proceed to examine the initial state in which the human being finds itself and the movement by which the subject attains a state of reason. In the penultimate section, we examine the role of reason in the ethical development of the human subject and, finally, in the ultimate section, we come to examine the difference between reason and intuition.

## **2. “L’Exigence du bonheur”**

What is the purpose of the geometrical method? What is its full significance for a book whose title begins with the word ‘*ethica*’? According to Brunschvicg, the chief target of Henry’s criticisms, the geometrical method is meant to provide a secure means by which to

preserve ethical thought from the ‘faults which have corrupted almost all the moral doctrines of men,’<sup>4</sup> namely our subjective prejudices, opinions, and partialities. The common root for such prejudices and false notions about man, nature, and God, lies, as Spinoza makes clear in the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics* and elsewhere, in our thinking in terms of ends.<sup>5</sup> The cause for this ‘teleological thinking’ stems from man’s ignorance concerning the cause of all things, including his own desires and appetites. Instead of thinking from causes to effects, our knowledge proceeds from effects to causes of which we remain wholly ignorant.<sup>6</sup> The human being would have remained beholden to such thinking ‘if mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with essences and properties of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth.’<sup>7</sup> In opposition to thinking that proceeds from ends, mathematics provides another standard by which to determine the truth of things.

The mathematical standard of truth marks a significant departure from the Aristotelian and Scholastic notions, which were dominant during the mid-seventeenth-century. During Spinoza’s epoch, the notion of truth often meant either the real itself (reality) and is called *veritas rei* – the truth of the thing – or it meant the conformity of our thoughts and ideas with reality, called *veritas intellectus*, often opposed to *veritas rei*.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, despite their apparent contradiction, the standard of truth is subordinate to the thing (*res*). Either truth is in the nature of thing itself or it is in the conformity of our ideas to the thing itself. In both cases, the truth of an idea is dependent upon the thing outside it. In opposition to

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<sup>4</sup> Brunschvicg, *Spinoza*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> ‘All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to a certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God.’ (II/78). References to works other than *Ethics*, including the parts of the *Ethics* which do not fall under Definitions, Axioms, or Propositions, refer to the standard edition of Spinoza’s Work by Carl Gebhard (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925, 4 vols).

<sup>6</sup> ‘[M]en are born ignorant of the causes of things.’ (II/78).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> F. Alquié, *Leçons sur Spinoza: Nature et Vérité dans la Philosophie de Spinoza; Servitude et Liberté selon Spinoza* (Paris: La table ronde, 2003), p. 13’ hereafter *Leçons*.

these notions of truth stands mathematical truth, which is not determinable by an external thing, but by the intrinsic properties of an idea. This notion of truth concerns only what follows objectively from the definition(s) of its object. Truth is the mark of itself: *verum index sui*.<sup>9</sup> We say that it is the mark of itself to the extent that it remains wholly independent of the actual existence of the thing. For example, from the formal definition of a triangle, the same properties and relations follow regardless of whether any triangle exists in duration.

The merit of the mathematical standard of truth and its application in the geometric method of exposition to the question of ethics is found in its autonomy from anything external to its development and order of deduction. By means of the geometric method, true ethical thinking is, according to Brunschvicg, able to avoid the serious risks that accompany teleological thinking, which has hitherto ‘corrupted’ its development. The chief risk for such thinking is that the idea of an intended end may ‘react upon the very principle of philosophy,’ intervening in the logical development from outside, and thus alter the ‘natural form’ of philosophical thought.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to ethical and philosophical thought which proceeds from ends, philosophy conducted in accordance with the mathematical standard of truth is able to begin on its own firm footing and approach the question of ethics in the proper order. Here lies the principal merit of the geometrical order of demonstration: by beginning with precise definitions and axioms the system of thought develops autonomously of any ends.

The effect this method of exposition has on the subject is to signal that ‘we must rid ourselves of [our] intellectual habits that our childhood, our education, our tastes [*goûts*], our previous conduct and our practical interests, have made us involuntarily contract.’<sup>11</sup> In opposition to the prejudices of our intellectual habits and subjective partialities, which introduce into the order of philosophical reflection elements from outside, the necessity of the method will find its justification and guarantee in the fact that it follows the logical development of simple and precise

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<sup>9</sup> Alquié, *Leçons*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>10</sup> Brunschvicg, *Spinoza*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

definitions. The question of ethics follows, thus, in strict accordance with the objective and logical development of the system. Through the application of the geometrical method, thought no longer falls, as Henry observes, under the influences that follow ‘from affective modalities, from individuality, and from nature,’ but solely under the guidance of reason.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, thought obeys the intrinsic rational order, which constitutes the system, and the necessity of its internal logic. This is, according to Brunschvicg, the meaning of the complete title of the Ethics: *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*.

Henry does not doubt that the geometrical method forms part of an effort to eliminate from philosophical reflection all that is contingent and external to reason. What he does doubt, however, is whether the evacuation of all subjective content from thought to the benefit of a purely objective and absolute system is an exhaustive account of Spinoza’s motivation for using the geometrical method. He asks: is the geometrical method only a form that Spinoza uses in order to retrieve and retrace an essential and intimate experience? Does not the employment of this mathematical method of exposition find its motivation elsewhere in a concern for the subject?<sup>13</sup>

These questions lead us to what is most essential to the development of the system. The most important claim that Henry makes is that beneath the logical development of the system operates a deeper urgency and need, which he calls the ‘*exigence du bonheur*,’ that is, the need and urgency for happiness, which covers all senses of the word, from the most basic pleasures to the active joy in the state of beatitude. The definitions, propositions, axioms, etc., are, for him, only the objective products of an inner movement of thought. They articulate something more profound. ‘It is only the objective content [of the *Ethics*] which can appear to develop itself on the surface of [the system], like paint on canvass. In reality, there is a third dimension, [...] an interiority’ which motivates the development of the system.<sup>14</sup> This ‘third dimension’ and ‘interiority’ refers to this urgency and demand for happiness in

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<sup>12</sup> M. Henry, *Le Bonheur du Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 2004), p. 13; hereafter *Bonheur*.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

human life. In virtue of this deeper urgency and need, the abstract concepts and logical development of the system are not remote from concrete human experience, but rather ‘the end which give[s] to the system this character at once affecting and proud [*émouvant et fier*] by which it is no longer only a system but an engagement.’<sup>15</sup>

The thesis that an inner urgency or need for happiness motivates the development of the system is not so much intended to challenge any of the major claims made by the likes of Brunschvicg, for it is true that the *Ethics* does provide a critical function with respect to our subjective prejudices and partialities, rather, Henry seeks to deepen our understanding of the system, which, for him, finds its motivation in an experience, felt as a demand or exigency, which provides ‘the immanent finality to the system.’<sup>16</sup> What this thesis allows us to do, or at least begin to do, is think more concretely the formal geometric explication of the system in terms of the subject.

In order to avoid the criticism that this thesis is itself extraneous to the system, an arbitrary judgement made by Henry, we must explore the evidence and motivation for this claim. The case made for the claim that an inner need for happiness motivates the system begins with an appeal to the preface of the second part of the *Ethics*, where, after the demonstration of the existence of an infinite and eternal substance, God, and those things that necessarily follow from the essence of God, Spinoza informs us of the intention and scope of what remains to be dealt with in the text:

I pass now to those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God [...] but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness.<sup>17</sup>

The preface explicitly states the ‘finality immanent to the system of Spinoza,’ which is, of course, the direct intention to guide the reader

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<sup>15</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> EII, Pref., II/84.

towards beatitude.<sup>18</sup> The problem with Henry's appeal to this preface in support of his claim that the *Ethics* is motivated by and a response to an urgent need for happiness is that it appears at the beginning of the *second* part. The role that the first part plays in man's ascent to blessedness remains unclear. In order for Henry's hypothesis to stand, we must establish how the "*l'exigence du bonheur*" is operative in the first part.

In order to support the claim that such an exigency is operative throughout the text, Henry directs our attention to Spinoza's early work. The opening passages to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* provide a useful introduction to the primary motivations of Spinoza's thought. There are three principal claims made in the first pages of the *Emendation*. 1) The author's subjective experience of the futility and impermanence of quotidian existence motivates the search for an eternal and abiding joy.<sup>19</sup> 2) Human happiness very much depends on the object to which we attach our love: 'all happiness or unhappiness [is] placed in the quality of the object to which we cling with love.'<sup>20</sup> Our desires are multiple and contradictory in nature; the objects to which we attach ourselves often only satisfy one aspect of our being, not the whole, and only for a short while. Unrest, conflict, and disquiet, appear to be the rule for such desires. In order to find an eternal and abiding joy, our love must, therefore, attach itself to an infinite and eternal thing.<sup>21</sup> 3) The highest good is the knowledge and enjoyment of this infinite and eternal thing, which constitutes the truth of our natural existence, and its communication to as many others as possible.<sup>22</sup> The first condition of happiness is, therefore, the existence of an infinite and eternal being, and only in the knowledge and love of this object is man able to attain true happiness. So, the first task is to demonstrate the existence of an infinite, eternal, and unique substance.

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<sup>18</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> 'After experience had taught me that all things which regularly occur in ordinary life are futile [...] I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be a true good [...] [that] would give me the greatest joy, to eternity.' (II/5, 1).

<sup>20</sup> *TdEI*, II, 7, 9.

<sup>21</sup> 'love toward the eternal and infinite thing feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness. This is greatly to be desired, and to be sought with all our strength.' (II/7, 10).

<sup>22</sup> *TdEI*, II/8, 2-4.

The opening passages of the *Emendation* identify the first condition of human happiness and the attainment of the highest good as the knowledge and existence of an infinite and eternal being. We can see that this is precisely what the first part of the *Ethics* intends to offer, namely the rational demonstration of the 1) unity of a single substance<sup>23</sup> that is 2) infinite, not in kind, as the attributes are, but infinitely infinite,<sup>24</sup> 3) eternal, necessary, and *causa sui*, which 4) Spinoza calls God.<sup>25</sup> To the extent that the rational comprehension of the existence and nature of God provides the metaphysical basis for man's understanding of his own essence and ascent toward the highest blessedness we can say that the demonstration of an infinite and eternal being is not ethically neutral in value. It is the infinite, necessary, and eternal being, which, according to the *Emendation*, constitutes the necessary object of thought for the human being seeking eternal and abiding joy. So, with the caveat that this 'object' must be understood *rationally*, we say that the formulation of this infinite and eternal object is a response to the urgency and need for happiness.

### 3. Man Becomes Rational: "*l'exigence d'autonomie*"

The necessary object for the happiness of man – the infinite and eternal being, God – is deduced in the first part from the definitions and axioms with which the text begins. In this part, the reader is presented with the demonstration of the existence and nature of God. The task now is to determine the passage from man's natural position of ignorance and suffering to the state of reason, which is, as we will see, the second condition for man's joyous affirmation of our intimate relation to God and the world.

There are two movements in operation in the *Ethics*, the first is found in the geometrical method, which begins with God and proceeds from there to deduce the rest of the system; the second begins from the

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<sup>23</sup> IP14.

<sup>24</sup> IP11-13.

<sup>25</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 28.

human being and returns ‘regressively’ to the attributes, and to substance, God.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the first part of the *Ethics* is written in accordance with the proper order of reasoning, the second part makes continual reference to experience. Many of the axioms from the second part are affirmed, not from the necessity of relations, like those of the first, but as truths of fact: for example, ‘Man thinks’<sup>27</sup> or ‘[w]e feel that a certain body [our body] is affected in many ways.’<sup>28</sup> These axioms are not deduced from the necessary relations between definitions but asserted on the basis that we constantly experience them to be true. To this extent one might claim that this marks a break in the order of reasoning between the first to the second part. But such a break is unavoidable, for, as Alquié correctly observes, we are unable to effectuate the deduction of the totality of modes that comprise nature.<sup>29</sup> Spinoza is therefore obliged to make a selection from amongst the totality of modes for his starting point, and, given his ethical intent, this starting point must be the experiences of man in the world.

From the perspective of man, we are neither immediately in God nor do we begin in knowledge of God. Man begins, rather, in ignorance. The conditions in which we initially come to have ideas appear to condemn us to have only inadequate ones and the conditions in which we are affected condemn us to have only passive affections.<sup>30</sup> Spinoza categorises this state of affairs under the first kind of knowledge, which is knowledge by imagination or opinion.<sup>31</sup> The first kind of knowledge comprehends perceptions which come either from singular things, which is called knowledge *ex singularibus*, or from signs, which is called knowledge *ex signis*.<sup>32</sup> One may suppose perceptions, or sensible impressions, to be distinct from signs, with the former being immediate, and the latter mediate and indirect, but, for Spinoza, they both fall under the same genre of knowledge in virtue of their cause. Both knowledge *ex singularibus* and knowledge *ex signis* are caused by bodies external to

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<sup>26</sup> Alquié, *Leçon*, p. 129.

<sup>27</sup> IIA2.

<sup>28</sup> IIA4.

<sup>29</sup> Alquié, *Le rationalisme*, p. 203.

<sup>30</sup> IIP22-31.

<sup>31</sup> IIP40s2.

<sup>32</sup> Alquié, *Leçon*, pp. 50-1.

our own. External bodies cannot be known directly, rather they are known through the momentary and partial effects they have upon our own body. Thus, sensible knowledge, although direct in one sense, offers only indirect ‘signs’ of existing bodies.

There are a number of reasons given for the inadequacy of the first kind of knowledge. First, sensible perception attributes to external bodies what is only subjective. The ideas given in the imagination express more the state of our body, of which the mind is the idea, than express the objective content of the idea of another body. For example, when Paul apperceives Peter, the object for the idea that Paul has is not Peter himself, but rather the body of Paul, or, to be more precise, the idea of Peter mixed with the idea of Paul.<sup>33</sup> Ideas derived from sensible perception are, then, confused.<sup>34</sup> Second, in addition to being confused, ideas of the imagination are cut off from the true order of reasoning. The order of ideas in sensible perception, as Alquié observes, gives only the experience of the effect alone and thereby leads the mind in the reverse direction to the proper order of reasoning; instead of going from cause to effect, imagination leads us from the effect to an imagined cause, for which the mind has no exact knowledge.<sup>35</sup> The ideas of imagination are, then, mutilated, that is, detached from the proper order of reasoning.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the ideas and affections of the first kind are given in duration, that is, given in the unfolding of events as they are experienced in time, and, as such, are not eternal and necessary ideas, but rather contingent and subject to change.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ‘we clearly understand what is the difference between the idea of, say, Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter’s mind, and the idea of Peter which is in another man, say in Paul. For the former directly explains the essence of Peter’s body, and does not involve existence, except so long as Peter exists; but the latter indicates the condition of Paul’s body more than Paul’s nature.’ (IIP17s).

<sup>34</sup> IIP28dem.

<sup>35</sup> Alquié, *Le rationalisme*, pp. 200-1.

<sup>36</sup> II, 35; the description of these ideas as ‘mutilated’ is anticipated in the demonstration to IIP28: ‘these ideas of the affections, insofar as they are related only to the human mind, are like conclusions without premises.’ (IIP28dem).

<sup>37</sup> ‘so long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of Nature [that is, in duration], it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated idea of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies.’ (IIP29c).

The passive reception of ideas and affections is not a matter of indifference to the human subject, for the subject suffers from them. The human being suffers in two senses, each characterising in different ways the insufficiency and failure of this first kind of knowledge. Man not only suffers from the affections and ideas that he has in the first kind of knowledge because he experiences them passively, in the sense that his ideas and affections ‘befall’ him insofar as he is only the *partial* cause of them, but also, as Henry argues, because it leads him to place his happiness in the hands of things over which he is not at all the master. Not only is our knowledge dependent upon sensible impressions and signs, but also our happiness. ‘Consciousness is completely dependent in regard to the exterior, which takes in its hand, so to speak, our happiness and plays with it and us.’<sup>38</sup> It is not so much that one is unable to experience happiness or joy in this passive state but rather that these positive experiences are wholly dependent upon things over which one has no control that is at issue. To the extent that man’s affective states are dependent upon external causes, the objects or persons that give rise to these passive affective states and ideas cannot bring the enduring joy that Spinoza seeks. The double sense of ‘to suffer’ defines the original *pathos* or ‘pathetic’ state of man, whereby his ideas as well as his affective states (his joy, hope, fear, sadness) are entirely in the hands of external things.<sup>39</sup>

Part of the ethical purpose of the *Ethics* is to lead man away from this initial state of suffering and a relation of bondage to external and contingent things toward a state of active joy and a relation of freedom to a necessary and eternal being. For, as we have seen, on Spinoza’s view, only the latter is able to secure us a lasting and eternal joy. At this point we are now able to bring further into light the ethical significance of the mathematical concept of truth, whose sole criterion is itself. Henry captures the ethical sense of this concept of truth through his formulation of the “*exigence d’autonomie*.”<sup>40</sup> To the ‘*exigence de bonheur*’, discussed above, Henry adds this other ‘*exigence*’, which includes, as its terms of reference, both the need for man to extricate himself from his relation to

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<sup>38</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Where ‘pathetic’ must be understood in the Greek sense of *pathētikos*, whose semantic domain extends from the first sense, ‘to befall’ or ‘undergo’, through to the second sense, ‘to suffer’.

<sup>40</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 65.

external things, for both his happiness and ideas, and the response to this exigency, namely truth. ‘To a relation of dependence [...] truth substitutes a new relation where the autonomy of thought develops itself in its own order [*se développe dans son sens propre*], separate from all external constraint, [and] restores to consciousness the security and assurance it has searched.’<sup>41</sup> Part of the ethical significance of the mathematical concept of truth is due to its autonomy from the perception of external things and the happiness bound up with them.

The first necessary condition for man’s attainment of truth and reason is the formation of a common notion. Our passage toward the active exercise of reason is entirely conditional upon the formation of such notions, which, in Spinoza’s words, form the very foundations of our reasoning: *ratiocinii nostri fundamenta*.<sup>42</sup> The term ‘common notion’ is Euclidian and designates either a rational axiom or principle. The common notions are the principles of our reasoning and are, as such, first in the order of reason. Their priority in the order of reasoning means that they are, in themselves, indemonstrable by another, that is, they are known through themselves.<sup>43</sup>

There are two kinds of common notion, ‘universal’ (i.e. ‘common to all’ [*omnibus commune*]) and ‘common properties’. The first kind is ‘universal’, in a way that is common to all modes that share the same attribute.<sup>44</sup> The second are ‘common properties’, that is, properties that are common to only a certain number of modes.<sup>45</sup> We will discuss these two kinds of common notions below.

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<sup>41</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 65.

<sup>42</sup> IIP40s1; II/120.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza II: L’Âme*, (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974), p. 358, hereafter *Spinoza II*.

<sup>44</sup> ‘What is common to all things [*omnibus commune*] (on this see L2, above) and is equally in the part and in the whole does not constitute the essence of any singular thing.’ IIP37.

<sup>45</sup> ‘If something is common to, and peculiar to, [*commune est, et proprium,*] the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind.’ IIP39.

The first type of common notion describes ‘what is common to all things (on this see L2, above) and is equally in the part and the whole.’<sup>46</sup> In this proposition, Spinoza refers us to the second *lemma*, which claims that ‘all bodies agree in certain things,’ making it clear that what is common to all things, in part and in whole, refer to bodies.<sup>47</sup> The fact that bodies agree in certain things provides the basis upon which to form common notions. But there is a qualification to the extent and scope of common notions. What is common to all things does not ‘constitute the essence of any singular thing,’ because these notions are not dependent for their conception as an idea in the mind on any singular existing thing, rather, in the case of ‘universal’ common notions, they are dependent upon those properties to which *all* bodies agree.<sup>48</sup> If we are to have notions that are *common* to bodies, they cannot pertain to any singular body alone. The common notions therefore concern neither those ideas found in the imagination, knowledge of the first kind, nor, as we will see, ideas of the third kind of knowledge, which concerns itself with the eternal essence of singular things.

The common notions are founded upon what is common to all bodies but are limited to only considering precisely this, what is common to all, and cannot, therefore, provide an idea of the singular essence of a thing. The commonality of these properties confers upon them their status as adequate ideas. ‘Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.’<sup>49</sup> The adequacy of the common notions separates them from ideas of the imagination. Thanks to the common notions, we are able to attain adequate ideas.

The second type of common notion are ‘common properties’ that are shared between the ‘human body and certain external bodies.’<sup>50</sup> These common notions are more restricted in scope than the first kind, for the common notions that are ideas of properties common to the human body

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<sup>46</sup> IIP37.

<sup>47</sup> IIP L2.

<sup>48</sup> IIP37dem.

<sup>49</sup> IIP38.

<sup>50</sup> IIP39.

and certain other external bodies which affect it are only of what is ‘proper’ to the human body and certain other bodies, to the exclusion of others. These ideas are not indifferent to the characteristics and nature of the bodies affected, like the first, for they involve only the ideas of the affections that are common to two or more bodies.<sup>51</sup> We find that Spinoza’s description of common properties specifies that the cause of the affection is not, in a general way, ‘the nature of the human body and that of an external body,’ but the property that belongs to both my body and certain other external bodies which affect it.<sup>52</sup> These kind of common notions are therefore dependent upon the nature of the affected body and the extent to which it is able to be affected by other bodies.<sup>53</sup>

From the preceding discussion of the common notions we are now in a position to determine how it is possible, from an epistemological perspective, for the human being to form a common notion. The common notions, as we have seen, derive from what is common to bodies and, as such, have something in common with ideas of imagination. In both cases, i.e. sensible perception and common notions, we are able to be affected only by bodies with which we have something in common. The origin of the ideas of the imagination and the ideas of reason are both explicable in terms of the affections of the human body, although, of course, the former consider only what is singular in the affecting body whereas the latter considers what is common between it and the external body. ‘This is why,’ Gueroult observes, ‘the common notions of reason, involved in all imaginative perceptions, appear to emerge from them [the latter].’<sup>54</sup> The ideas of the imagination and the common notions are both present in the perception of the affections of the human body. But this conjunction between imagination and reason should not lead us to overlook the radical disjunction between them, for the ideas of imagination are explicable in terms of duration, but the common notions, as adequate ideas, are clear and distinct ideas of eternal properties.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, pp. 336-7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>53</sup> IIP39c.

<sup>54</sup> Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, p. 354.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355; ‘the foundations of reasons are notions [...] which explain those which are common to all, and which, do not explain the essence of any singular thing. On

The ideas of reason reside in a domain that is autonomous from the variations in duration. But the separation of reason from the ideas of the imagination, and the passive affective states that accompany them, raises the question: how is the former able to overcome the latter? Do not reason and knowledge find themselves impotent in the face of the affective sway of the passions? Given the separation between the two, how can reason counter the passions? The answer is simple: these ideas are more powerful in their affects than images and signs in the imagination, for, as Spinoza tells us, ‘affects arising from or aroused by reason are, if we take account of time, more powerful than those related to singular things we regard as absent.’<sup>56</sup> The ideas of reason respond more effectively to the need for happiness (*exigence du bonheur*), because they provide the human mind with ideas that are necessary and eternally true, rather than changeable. They are ideas of which the human mind is the author and, to this extent, the master. The formation of common notions thus marks the entrance of the human mind into precisely that ‘domain which escapes the caprices of the world and the contingency of objects,’ and marks the confluence of both exigencies, the ‘*exigence du bonheur*’ and the “*exigence d’autonomie*”.<sup>57</sup>

In response to our second question, which, recall, is ‘what role does reason play in the ethical development of the human being?’, we can say that in the passage from the first to the second kind of knowledge it is reason that guides the mind from dependence upon external things for the cause of its joys and ideas, and thus, from its dependency upon the caprices of nature for its happiness. The exercise of reason diminishes the influence of inadequate idea and sad passions upon the mind and this activity distinguish it from those minds which are ‘most acted upon.’<sup>58</sup>

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that account, they must be conceived without any relation to time, but under a certain species of eternity.’ (IIP44c2dem).

<sup>56</sup> VP7.

<sup>57</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> VP20s.

#### 4. The Passage from Reason to Intuition

What distinguishes Spinoza from almost all his contemporaries is, as Alquié puts it, ‘the affirmation that one is able, in following his doctrine, to attain eternal life and beatitude.’<sup>59</sup> Unlike Descartes, for example, Spinoza is not content to provide a metaphysical foundation for our knowledge and leave our salvation to faith and religion. Reason may teach man to ‘bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands’ but it does not, alone, offer us salvation.<sup>60</sup> In order to reach salvation, one must pass from the second to the third kind of knowledge, intuition.

The centrality of reason for the ethical development of the human subject becomes clearer once we acknowledge, with Henry, that Spinoza looks beyond the calm repose of rational knowledge and toward the intuitive knowledge of our intimate relation with God. Reason forms the ‘basis’ for the transition to the third kind of knowledge, but only to the extent that it provides the conditions for the passage: ‘The striving, or desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge, but can indeed arise from the second.’<sup>61</sup> Reason is, thus, the medium for the ascent to the third kind of knowledge, for no other means is given in the *Ethics* for the human subject to advance towards intuitive knowledge.<sup>62</sup> Hence, the central status of reason, which at once relates to imagination and intuition. In regard to the relation between the first and the second kind of knowledge, we have seen that both ideas of imagination and the ideas of reason are explicable in terms of affections of the body. The ideas of the imagination and the common notions are equally present in the sensible perception of the affections of the human body. It goes without saying that the common notions are not themselves images, because they comprehend rationally an agreement between bodies.<sup>63</sup> In regard to the relation between reason and intuition,

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<sup>59</sup> Alquié, *Le rationalisme*, pp. 10-1.

<sup>60</sup> IVAppXXXII, II/276.

<sup>61</sup> VP28.

<sup>62</sup> We owe our understanding of the central status of reason in part to Gilles Deleuze. See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988), pp. 54-8.

<sup>63</sup> IIP29s.

each common notion is an adequate idea, that is, they are in us as they are in God,<sup>64</sup> and necessarily determine us to have the idea of God.<sup>65</sup>

One key difficulty of the *Ethics* is determining the difference between reason and intuition. What distinguishes, if anything, the second and third kinds of knowledge? If we are to fully understand the status of reason in the *Ethics*, we must determine the difference between the second and third kinds of knowledge; otherwise, both reason and intuition will remain obscure to the extent that they are not properly distinguished from each other. The way in which Henry responds to this difficulty reveals the most significant aspect of his interpretation, because he seeks to distinguish between the second and third kinds of knowledge through close attention to the experience of the human subject.

There are three important characteristics of the third kind of knowledge which are relevant to our discussion of how he distinguishes between the second and third kind of knowledge.

- 1) The third kind of knowledge concerns knowledge of the essence of singular things, rather than knowledge of common properties.<sup>66</sup>
- 2) Knowledge of the third kind involves ideas of the singular essence of things ‘under a species of eternity [*sub species aeternitatis*].’<sup>67</sup>
- 3) Knowledge *sub species aeternitatis* is conditional upon conceiving the eternal essence of the body. ‘Whatever the mind understands under a species of eternity, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the

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<sup>64</sup> IIP38-9.

<sup>65</sup> IIP45-7.

<sup>66</sup> IIP40s2 & VP23s; See our discussion of IIP36 above.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. IIP45(d)(s); This contrasts with the second kind of knowledge, reason, which perceives things ‘under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam specie aeternitatis*].’ (IIP44c2).

body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the body's essence under a species of eternity.'<sup>68</sup>

There are two key claims made by Henry regarding the eternal essence of the body, its idea, and how the human subject experiences it. The first is that the eternal part of the human mind is the idea of the eternal essence of a particular body, which is not the body-in-general but the idea of the subject's own body. The motivation for this claim is found in the twenty-second proposition to the fifth part where Spinoza states that 'in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of *this or that human body* [*hujus et illius corporis humani*], under a species of eternity,' which serves to found the eternal part of the mind.<sup>69</sup> The demonstratives 'this' and 'that' indicate that this is necessarily an idea of a *particular* body's essence, rather than an idea of a body-in-general.<sup>70</sup> The idea of the eternal essence of the subject's body is thereby distinct from the common notions, which, as we have seen, do not involve ideas of the singular essences of things. The second is that along with the idea of the eternal essence of the body there is also the feeling of its eternity:

We feel and know by experience that we are eternal [*sentimus, experimurque, nos aeternos esse*]. For the mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory.<sup>71</sup>

The difficulty for us is, however, to comprehend how we are to grasp the idea and feeling of our eternal essence. One of the chief obstacles to comprehending this experience stems, in part, from the claim that this experience and idea leaves no trace upon our existing body, that is, there is no sign that indicates our eternal essence.<sup>72</sup> Knowledge of our eternal essence does not come to mind by signs or sensible impressions, nor can it be 'defined by time *or* explained through duration.'<sup>73</sup> Far from

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<sup>68</sup> VP29dem: 'This power of conceiving things under a species of eternity pertains to the mind only insofar as it conceives the body's essence under a species of eternity.'

<sup>69</sup> VP22.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Henry, *Bonheur*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>71</sup> VP23s.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. VP23s.

<sup>73</sup> VP23s.

claiming, in the face of this difficulty, incomprehension,<sup>74</sup> Henry instead takes seriously the claim that we experience our eternity and that this experience is separate from sensible perceptions. From the claim that the mind experiences both the world of external affects *and* its eternity, he formulates a schema that outlines two aspects to man's '*existentielle*' situation: on the one hand, there is man-in-the-world, who experiences the cerebral traces and impressions of external bodies in the form of affects and, at first, inadequate ideas, and, on the other hand, man-in-God, who feels the eternity of his essence.<sup>75</sup>

The two aspects to the *existentielle* situation of man provide, according to Henry, the criterion for distinguishing the two active forms of knowing described above. The first 'situation' includes both the ideas of the imagination *and* the ideas of reason, because both involve ideas that are explicable in terms of the affections of the body in existence, and, to this extent, things in *natura naturata*.<sup>76</sup> But one of the things that separate reason from imagination is that the former has ideas that are 'under a certain species of eternity,' which separates them from idea of the imagination. How, then, can Henry place them in the same situation with imagination? Recall that the foundation of reason is the common notions, which are adequate, necessary and eternal, and true in virtue of their presence in two or more bodies. They provide ideas of the properties of things, either common to all, in the whole and in the part, or common to only certain bodies, but not ideas of the singular essences of things. By the fact that they concern what is common between bodies, the common notions provide only ideas of the extrinsic relations between bodies, and therefore, ideas of the determinate character and limits of bodies through the causal relations between finite bodies. Despite the fact that the common notions are necessary and eternal, they are, nevertheless, necessary and eternal ideas of extrinsic relations between finite bodies in existence. To the extent that they involve such extrinsic relations, the common notions are in the same situation as sensible perception; they both concern affections that involve other bodies.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Alquié, *Le rationalisme*, p. 9; although he is not the only one to encounter this experience with incomprehension. It is to the credit of Henry that he takes this experience seriously and attempts to construct a positive schema from it.

<sup>75</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 135.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Henry, *Bonheur*, p. 144.

The second ‘situation’ consists in the knowledge and experience of an immediate and internal link between the finite mode and the divine essence, *natura naturans*. The existence of man is not only determined extrinsically by the infinite chain of finite causes that unfold in duration but also by an inner principle. What the second situation of man describes is precisely this knowledge and feeling of an inner force of being. ‘Man exists not by his limits, which are only extrinsic determinations, [...] but by the inner principle which sets him in being [*qui le pose dans l’être*] and which gives him the force to persevere in being.’<sup>77</sup> The feeling and knowledge of our eternity is the feeling of the ‘necessity of our being and its absolute dependency on God.’<sup>78</sup> The feeling of eternity derives from an *a priori* necessity, rather than from fact, and it is in virtue of this necessity that reason is able, to a certain extent, to express it, give it an idea, and organise it into a system, because this original determination is not contrary to intelligence, but its condition.<sup>79</sup> ‘It is certain that the richness proper to the rational system testifies to the value of the experience it expresses.’<sup>80</sup> The distinction between the second and third kind of knowledge appears, then, to turn on the difference between the principle of rational activity and the fruits of this activity. The first situation, on the one hand, reveals the limits, determinations, and causal relations among existing things. On the other, the second situation reveals the inner force by which we persevere in being and, by this, our intimate relation with God as proximate cause.

## Concluding Remarks

The strength of Henry’s interpretation lies in its effort to foreground the place of the subject in the *Ethics* and in showing how a concern for, and an experience of, the need for human happiness plays a central role in the development of the system. One way in which his focus on the position of the subject in the *Ethics* has been effective is in offering a novel criterion for determining the difference between the second and third kind of knowledge. The criterion for making the distinction between

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<sup>77</sup> Henry, *Bonheur*, pp. 98-9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

the second and third kind of knowledge cannot be the objective content of their respective ideas, for they both involve ideas that are adequate, necessary, true, and eternal, and they both involve an idea of God, but rather the experience of the subject. The separation of the experience of our eternity from any affection in duration provides the basis upon which to distinguish *scientia intuitiva* from reason.

A number of questions remain to be decided. First, the content of this idea remains unclear: what is the idea of the eternal essence of the body and how do we experience this idea? Second, the separation of intuition from experiences in the world may undermine the ethical significance of reason and its central status in the progression toward an intuitive grasp of our intimate link with God, because, as Henry asks, if we feel and know ourselves to be eternal, and if this feeling is separate from the world, why take the circuitous route of reason in order to reach God? Why not begin with this experience?<sup>81</sup> The most obvious response to such questions is a negative one. We cannot begin with the experience of eternity, for we are initially in a state of ignorance regarding ourselves and the world. The sole route for the human being's passage out of ignorance and toward beatitude is via reason.

Nevertheless, questions concerning what the experience of our eternity means, how we achieve it, and how it is distinct from reason remain. Given that this experience is precisely where Spinoza intends to lead his readers, we cannot claim to comprehend the Ethics without a proper understanding of it. Despite the fact that no clear answer to these questions has emerged, what has become clear over the course of this article is the fundamental importance of the experience of the human subject in approaching such questions. Something which one may argue motivates Henry's later phenomenological research. If we are to lay any claim to understanding the Ethics, we must determine the content of this experience of eternity and its relation to, and distinction from, reason.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

## **Contents: The Swerve of Freedom after Spinoza**

***JONATHAN LAHEY DRONSFIELD***

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## **A Melancholy Science?: On Bergson's Appreciation of Lucretius**

**KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON**

### **Introduction**

Some significant receptions of Epicurean philosophy take place in nineteenth century European thought. For Marx, writing in the 1840s, and in defiance of Hegel's negative assessment, Epicurus is the 'greatest representative of the Greek enlightenment',<sup>1</sup> whilst for Jean-Marie Guyau, writing in the 1870s, Epicurus is the original free spirit, 'Still today it is the spirit of old Epicurus who, combined with new doctrines, works away at and undermines Christianity.'<sup>2</sup> For Nietzsche, Epicurus is one of the greatest human beings to have graced the earth and the inventor of 'heroic-idyllic philosophizing'.<sup>3</sup> Here my focus is on the reading of Epicureanism to be found in Bergson's commentary on Lucretius's remarkable poem, *De Rerum Natura*. For Bergson, the task Lucretius sets himself is a 'pioneering one', one that will serve humanity, in particular making the Romans aware of previously unknown or misunderstood truths. In order to demonstrate these truths with precision

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, 'Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature' in K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works: Volume One* 183-43 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure* (Paris: Librairie Gerner Baillièrre, 1878), p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), §295.

it was necessary for Lucretius to be acquainted with Greek philosophy, and especially the teaching of Epicurus.

In what follows I propose to highlight some of the central features of Bergson's commentary of Lucretius's text, *De Rerum Natura*. Bergson's commentary is interesting to us for a number of reasons: (a) it's interesting that Bergson, typically represented as part of a French spiritualist tradition, should embark on this encounter with Epicurean materialism and atomism at the beginning of his philosophical career; (b) he encounters Lucretius in a way that I think resonates with any reader coming to Lucretius's text for the first time: there is the clear recognition of the brilliance of the text as well as of the tremendous challenges it presents to us as mortal subjects; (c) in recent years, and largely through the work of Pierre Hadot, there has been a great deal of interest in the idea of 'philosophy as a way of life', and we find such a conception of philosophy at work in Bergson's appreciation of Lucretius. Bergson makes us aware of the offensive character of the text, noting that Christians and pagans agreed in leaving his teaching aside: the pagans could not cite him as an authority since, as a poet, he had spoken out violently against their gods, whilst in excluding the supernatural from the universe and denying any divine intervention in human affairs he caused offence to Christians. It's largely with advances in modern science, and on account of a growth in our enlightenment sensibilities, that we moderns can come to a renewed appreciation of the text and its main ideas. Nevertheless, Lucretius' text continues to pose a challenge to us: we have to accept that the universe not only is not the work of the gods but it is also not in any way made for us; that it has been shaped haphazardly by the coming together of atoms, and that all things, including earth, are destined to disappear. What is the function of philosophy and the aim of wisdom in the face of our insights into the nature of the universe? For Bergson, the science of Lucretius is fundamentally a melancholic one, and in what follows I want to show why he holds to this view in his reading of, and encounter with, the text. Indeed, it is only the French text that makes it clear that Bergson conceives the poem as 'profoundly melancholic' [*mélancolie profonde*] since the English translation from 1959 alters the order of the original text, and it's the point about melancholy that the text begins with and indicates that this is Bergson's main concern in his commentary. This

opening of Bergson's commentary does not appear in the expurgated English edition until well into the translation.<sup>4</sup> For Bergson the teaching is 'sad and disheartening' since it raises the fundamental question, 'why persist in living?' if life is nothing more than a treadmill that leads nowhere and desire never finds a fulfilment. Moreover, pleasures are deceptive and no joy is untainted, and all striving is in vain.

I

Let me begin with citing some lines from the work itself. I cite from the opening of book two:

What joy it is, when out at sea the stormwinds are lashing the waters, to gaze from the shore at the heavy stress some other man is enduring! Not that anyone's afflictions are in themselves a source of delight; but to realize from what troubles you yourselves are free is joy indeed. What joy, again, to watch opposing hosts marshalled on the field of battle when you yourself have no part in their peril! But this is the greatest joy of all: to possess a quiet sanctuary, stoutly fortified in the teaching of the wise, and to gaze down from that elevation on others wandering aimlessly in search of a way of life, pitting their wits one against another, disputing for precedence, struggling night and day with unstinted effort to scale the pinnacles of wealth and power. O joyless hearts of men! O minds without vision! How dark and dangerous the life in which this tiny span is lived away! Do you not see that nature is barking for two things only, a body free from pain, a mind released from worry and fear for the enjoyment of pleasurable sensations?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Henri Bergson, *Extraits de Lucrèce avec un commentaire, des notes et une étude sur la poésie, la physique, le texte et la langue de Lucrèce* (Paris: C. Delagrave, 1884), Introduction 1, p. II & *The Philosophy of Poetry. The Genius of Lucretius*, trans. W. Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 44; hereafter *Philosophy of Poetry*.

<sup>5</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), II: 1-19; hereafter *De Rerum*.

In these lines Lucretius is being faithful to the core tenets of Epicurean teaching. Philosophy for Lucretius is about attaining an elevated perspective on existence and providing human beings with a special kind of joy. The immediate object is pleasurable sensations of a stable and modest kind and the ultimate object is *ataraxia* or tranquillity and imperturbability. Later in the book Lucretius will define philosophy as a ‘rule of life’,<sup>6</sup> the aim of which is to rescue life from existence lived in ‘a stormy sea’, ‘so black a night’, and hence to learn how to live well.<sup>7</sup> Lucretius makes it clear that the superior mode of existence attained is a modest existence, one enjoyed with a tranquil mind.<sup>8</sup>

For Lucretius, the object of philosophy is the cultivation of health and he speaks of philosophy as a form of treatment that can be administered;<sup>9</sup> it is a therapeutics, one that has specific illnesses and afflictions to cure, notably the fear of the active gods and the fear of death as well as the whole realm of superstition. Lucretius thinks that his Roman brethren suffer from what he calls the ‘dead weight’ of superstition and are haunted by the fear of eternal punishments after death. A thoroughgoing and clear-sighted program of naturalism is needed in order to emancipate the mind from subjection to fear and superstition. Several occasions in the book Lucretius provides the following lines as a refrain of learning:

The dread and darkness of the mind cannot be dispelled by the sunbeams, the shining shafts of day, but only by an understanding of the outward forms and inner workings of nature.<sup>10</sup>

We are not to ask of the universe ‘what does it mean?’, since it means nothing, there is only the dance of the eternal return of atoms and the void; rather, we are to ask, ‘how does it work?’ Lucretius writes in book five of his text:

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<sup>6</sup> *De Rerum*, V: 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, V: 1119.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, IV: 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, II: 59-62; see also III: 91-94.

So many atoms, clashing together in so many ways as they are swept along through infinite time by their own weight, have come together in every possible way and realized everything that could be formed by their combinations.<sup>11</sup>

True piety for Lucretius, as an Epicurean, consists in the serene contemplation of such a universe.<sup>12</sup>

His philosophy is one of immanence: nature is a self-producing positive power, eternally self-creating and self-destroying; the elements postulated at the base of nature work bottom up, in which the diverse products of nature are generated rather than assumed as already given.<sup>13</sup> The immanence at work is a radical one for it means that no ‘divine power’ has created the universe;<sup>14</sup> that there is no ‘divine plan’;<sup>15</sup> and that:

...our world has been made by nature through the spontaneous and casual collision and the multifarious, accidental, random, and purposeless congregation and coalescence of atoms whose suddenly formed combinations could serve on each occasion as the starting point of substantial fabrics – earth and sea and sky and the race of living creatures. On every ground, therefore, you must admit that there exist elsewhere other clusters of matter similar to this one which the ether clasps in ardent embrace.<sup>16</sup>

We can note the influence of Epicurus on Lucretius: virtue is related to pleasure and this pleasure consists in peace of mind, being the privilege of the sage. Epicurus has understood that human beings have materially everything they need to live and more, and yet humankind brings suffering upon itself, enslaving itself to superstition, fear, and desire or the ‘deplorable lust for life’, as Lucretius calls it. We could reflect here on the various paeans to Epicurus that structure the text, in

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<sup>11</sup> *De Rerum*, V: 186-190.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, V: 1203.

<sup>13</sup> R. J. Johnson, ‘Another Use of the Concept of the Simulacrum: Deleuze, Lucretius and the Practical Critique of Demystification’, *Deleuze Studies*, 8: 1 (2014), p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> *De Rerum*, II: 181.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, V: 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, II: 1058-66.

which Epicurus is presented as a noble saviour-like figure freeing human beings from the inauthentic life – excessive pride, lust, aggression, self-indulgence, and indolence – and inspiring them to a new way of life, including an ethics of refined egoism, as Nietzsche calls it, and the cultivation of the self (see especially the opening of book six, the final book of the text).

Let me stress once again the naturalism informing the ethical doctrine: it rids philosophy of supernatural explanations with its scientific principles of nothing springing from nothing and nothing ever being destroyed. The emphasis all the time is explaining phenomena through natural causes, so lightning is to be explained in such terms and not as a divine warning. Nothing springs from nothing since for anything to be created there is required specific germs, a set of conditions, and time. As noted, the teaching has radical aspects: for example, the soul is nothing more than matter and is subject to death since it is made of subtle atoms scattered throughout the body, and is therefore as material as the body and without which it cannot exist. Death is radical in its finality and Lucretius is uncompromising in his account of this: it denotes the end of our existence and yet is not to be feared for the reasons that Epicurus has provided and that Lucretius rehearses in dramatic fashion in the denouement to book three of the text.

Such is the stark realism of his words on death that Nietzsche called the poet ‘sombre Lucretius’. Life is mortal, and death is immortal, says Lucretius. To none is life given on freehold, but to all on lease. But we have nothing to fear from death since there is nothing sensory to experience: ‘One who no longer is cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who has never been born, when once this mortal life has been usurped by death the immortal.’<sup>17</sup> And yet human beings do live in bondage to the fear of death and on account of this fear, ‘the life of misguided mortals becomes a Hell on earth.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *De Rerum*, III: 868-871.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, III: 1023-4.

As far as the ethical task is concerned, the aim is to raise ourselves to serene regions for whoever complains of the nature of the universe and their existence in it, gritting their teeth, is ignorant of the true nature of things. We need, therefore, to resign ourselves to certain facts:

That the body of necessity must waste away.

That old age is forced to succeed youth by an eternal law.

That beings necessarily reproduce at the expense of other beings.

That the movement of atoms is eternal and the formation of new worlds continues eternally.

We do not need to marvel at the creation of life since the laws of matter are all that is needed to explain everything.

Finally, that humankind is not separate from nature and is not in any way a special case or exception to the laws of material existence. It is destined to perish since, as a result of the movement of atoms, everything will one day disintegrate. The atoms, converted into dust, will be drawn together again, and new combinations of atoms will produce new worlds, and on it will go throughout eternity.

Nietzsche, as I have noted, refers to the poet as the 'sombre Lucretius', and Bergson holds that he produces a melancholic philosophy of nature and of life; indeed, for Bergson this is where Lucretius departs from his great master, Epicurus. Let me now turn to Bergson's commentary.

## II

Bergson's encounter with the text is of a specific kind. For example, at the start of his commentary he makes it clear that he does not propose to refute a philosophical system, such as we find in Epicurean teaching, but to understand the system: what are its main claims? How does it argue for them? What are its achievements? And what philosophical challenge does it present to us? He proposes to read the poem as a whole and not just focus on the descriptive passages since, he argues, the most gripping passages of the poem, such as the depiction of the life of primitive humans, the effects of lightning, and plague of Athens, are there to try and make us comprehend a significant philosophical principle. Right at the beginning of the commentary he notes the fundamental dimension of Epicurean teaching (and that also had such an effect on other nineteenth century readers such as Nietzsche), namely, to liberate the human mind that is plagued by fear and superstition: 'religion, guilty of many crimes, has kept mankind in constant dread of death.'<sup>19</sup> In short, Epicurean teaching has an essentially practical function, its chief aim being that of restoring calm to the human mind. Bergson stresses here the inspiration of Epicurus on Lucretius, in which virtue is related to pleasure and in which pleasure consists of peace of mind and is the privilege of the sage. Epicurus has understood that the human has materially everything it needs to live and more and yet it brings suffering upon itself, being enslaved by desire, superstition, and fear. Epicurus teaches that our happiness depends not on external things but on our state of mind. Second, Bergson notes the naturalistic character of the teaching: it rids philosophy of supernatural explanations with its key 'scientific' principles of nothing springing from nothing and nothing ever being destroyed (principles first brought to light, Bergson notes, by Democritus and who, incidentally, the early Nietzsche regards as 'the freest human being that has ever lived'). In Lucretius the emphasis all the time is to explain things in terms of natural causes, so lightning is to be explained in such terms and not as a divine warning. So, the Epicurean achievement, so amply displayed in *De Rerum Natura*, is to attempt a scientific explanation of the workings of universe: 'What proves that nothing springs from nothing is that anything, to be created, requires a

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<sup>19</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 14.

specific germ, set of conditions, and time.’<sup>20</sup> Bergson describes Lucretius’s theory of atoms as ‘one of the most beautiful creations of antiquity.’<sup>21</sup> Later in the commentary he will describe atomism as a ‘profound philosophical system’ in which the best explanation of the universe is the simplest one.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the system of Democritus, who invents atomism, is ‘perhaps the most perfect expression of materialism.’<sup>23</sup> Epicurus adopts and modifies the atomic theory, and here Bergson notes both Epicurus’s ‘abysmal ignorance of scientific things’ and ‘the originality of his approach’. In the hands of Epicurus the aim of philosophy is not, strictly speaking to instruct human beings but to soothe them.<sup>24</sup> Bergson also notes that for Lucretius, Epicurus was not just a sage but the ‘matchless sage and great benefactor of mankind.’<sup>25</sup> More than this Epicurus is a god for Lucretius with his ‘sublime discoveries.’<sup>26</sup>

Bergson notes that each of the six books that make up the poem feature a remark or observation about philosophy in general or about Lucretius’s particular aim. Book two, in particular, he notes, commences with ‘a magnificent eulogy of philosophy.’ Book I, he notes, contains the essence of Epicurean materialism and of atomism, and Bergson discusses the main claims Lucretius makes about atoms, such as that they move at infinite speed, and that their movement is eternal, and so on. What especially interests Bergson is the attribution by Lucretius of an occasional slight variation in the movement of atoms, or the ‘imperceptible and unpredictable trait he called *clinamen*.’<sup>27</sup> This deviation is to be regarded as a capricious trait of atoms. Similar to Marx, Bergson highlights the fact that this grants a degree of freedom to human existence, so, in short, our existence is not completely mechanically governed and determined; we are not, Bergson adds, completely passive.<sup>28</sup> This aspect of the teaching is of crucial significance to Bergson who in a few years time will write his great first book on time and

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<sup>20</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> *De Rerum*, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

freedom, and principles of freedom, novelty and creativity will assume a tremendous importance in his subsequent books such as *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*. Bergson ends his initial treatment of the poem by noting the tremendous challenge of the ideas presented in it: the gods, though they exist, do not interfere with the things in this world and therefore it is childish to live in fear of them; and, second, all living things are subject to growth and eventually disappearance, and here Bergson notes the poignancy of Lucretius's insights – the same is true of our planet Earth (which is a 'living being' for Lucretius, notes Bergson), as this too will one day fall to dust.

The next main idea of the text Bergson treats next, and treats extensively throughout the commentary, is Lucretius on death. He notes the salient features of the teaching: that the soul is nothing more than matter and therefore this soul is subject to death since it is made up of subtle atoms scattered throughout the body and is, therefore, as material as the body. Death is radical and Lucretius is uncompromising in his account of this: it denotes the end of everything, and yet, it is not to be feared and for all the reasons Epicurus has given us and that Lucretius rehearses in dramatic fashion towards the close of book three of the text. Life is mortal and death is immortal, says Lucretius. To none is life given as freehold but to all on lease: 'Rest assured', he writes, 'that we have nothing to fear in death. One who no longer is cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who has never been born, when once this mortal life has been usurped by the death the immortal.'<sup>29</sup> And yet human beings do live in fear of death and on account of this fear, 'the life of misguided mortals becomes a Hell on earth.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Bergson goes on to note that Lucretius was not able to completely destroy belief in the immortality of the soul since this belief is stronger than his philosophical arguments. What Lucretius does develop though, Bergson says, is an insight into one of the sources of the belief in the immortality of the soul, namely, 'the instinctive tendency which every living being has to perpetuate itself indefinitely in time.'<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, Bergson locates in Lucretius's text a melancholy science or teaching, and he rightly draws our attention to the

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<sup>29</sup> Lucretius, *The Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. E. Latham (Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 88, lines 866-70; hereafter *The Nature*.

<sup>30</sup> *De Rerum*, p. 91, lines 1023-4.

<sup>31</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 19.

remarkable and emphatic ending of book three of the text: 'Life is nothing more than constant movement that leads nowhere, that desire is never fulfilled', and so on.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in the text, at the very close of book three, Lucretius speaks of the lust for life as 'deplorable' since it 'holds us trembling in bondages to uncertainties and dangers' and the 'unquenchable thirst for life keeps us always on the gasp.'<sup>33</sup> As a way of indicating the noble way to face one's demise and inevitable death, Lucretius hold up the lives of Democritus and Epicurus as examples: the former approached ripe age by making 'a willing sacrifice to death' with his unbowed head, whilst the latter, 'the master himself', endured intense pain in his final days and yet only looked back with pleasure on his life and friendships.

Here we may wish to note a comparison with Nietzsche and his attempt to develop a gay or joyful science. In the book that bears this name, which he published in 1882, there is a paean to Epicurus who, notes Nietzsche, takes a voluptuous delight in existence and in full recognition of its essentially transient character.<sup>34</sup> However, what kind of 'joy' does Nietzsche's gay or joyful science refer to and name? It certainly seems to share in some of the sublime or elevated quality of the Lucretian perspective on the world and existence. Let us note that Nietzsche's attempt at joyful thinking is not without its melancholic character: in an earlier text from 1878, *Human, all too Human*, he had written of the 'sorrow of knowledge' and, referring to Byron's *Manfred*, argued that the 'tree of knowledge' and the 'tree of life' do not coincide. Nevertheless, as far as I know, Nietzsche writes only in praise of Epicurus, not Lucretius, and there may be an important difference between the two. Bergson certainly thinks there is, and I shall provide insight into this in my concluding thoughts.

I now wish to comment on how Bergson construes what we might call Lucretius's modernity. For him this consists in two things: the first is the attempt to account for the origin of the first living beings; the second

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<sup>32</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> *The Nature*, p. 95, line 1084.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), aphorism 45.

is to develop insight into the adaptation of their organs to their needs. Regards the first point, Bergson notes that an adequate explanation defeated Lucretius – he falls back, he says, on a myth, namely that all living things spring from the earth as the mother of all things - and goes on to explain the appearance of the first living organisms. Regards the second point, Bergson thinks that Lucretius's answer anticipates that provided by Darwin. I quote:

Of a multitude of living organisms that spring up haphazardly, the only ones to survive are those capable of providing for their needs and adapting themselves to their environment. In these beautiful descriptive passages Lucretius's imagination is given full reign. Latin literature offers nothing superior to the last half of Book V (pp. 22-3).

What can be said of the birth of living beings, including the human, is that it was due to chance. The human is not different to the rest of the animal kingdom in this regard, being weaker than other animals, the human has evolved slowly and painfully through a struggle that has involved intelligence and will, resulting in a social order and civilization. Bergson departs from Lucretius here, attributing to the human an ethical superiority: 'The more humble our origin, the more praise we deserve for becoming what we are.'<sup>35</sup> This remains a feature of Bergson's thinking throughout his intellectual life: the human being is the animal that has the chance to break out of animal closure and, as Deleuze puts it in his *Bergsonism* of 1996, 'scrambling the different planes of Nature'. One could also look at what Bergson says in his last text of 1932 on 'the two sources of morality and religion' about the human and its creative embodiment and expression of the original *natura naturans*.

A specific feature of Bergson's interpretation of Lucretius – which stands in contrast to Deleuze's much later appreciation of Lucretius – is the emphasis I have already alluded to on the melancholy character of *De Rerum Natura*. Bergson thinks melancholy pervades the book and is, along with the sublime, its most striking feature: the teaching is 'sad and disheartening' since it raises the fundamental question, 'why persist in living?' if life is nothing more than a treadmill that leads nowhere and

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<sup>35</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 23.

desire never finds a fulfilment. Moreover, pleasures are deceptive and no joy is untainted, and all striving is in vain. Now this sounds a lot like Schopenhauer, but his doctrine is nowhere mentioned in the text: ‘we spend the best part of our lives in pursuing vain honours or in cultivating land that is barren and indifferent to our toil. Then comes senescence and with it the childish fear of death.’<sup>36</sup> We are tortured by our visions of death, in which all hope and joy disappear. Although death is the end of everything and deprives us of the comforts of life, it at the same time delivers us from our need of them and the sufferings that always accompany them. Thus, why should we not gain consolation from the thought that all this will end for us when our lives end? This, says, Bergson, ‘is the conviction of the sage and the conclusion of the philosopher.’<sup>37</sup> Knowledge, then, for Lucretius serves to show us that we count for practically nothing in the universe since we are but a fortuitous combination of elements and where we decay just like all bodies do. Bergson notes that there is a certain joy to be had from the materialist philosophy: this is the joy of the sage who imbued with ‘great truth’ calmly awaits a death that, he well knows, reduces him to nothingness: ‘he possesses supreme knowledge’ and yet at the same time savours the sweetest joys that a human is privileged to experience.

Bergson inquires into the sources of Lucretius’s melancholy and notes that the spectacle of civil strife had an enormous impact on his thinking; from a young age Lucretius witnessed bloody struggles, for example, those arising from the rivalry between Marius and Sylla and that can be seen as a prelude to the violent upheavals that cast a dark shadow over the Roman republic. Bergson notes that the first lines of the poem are a prayer to Venus. It is no surprise, Bergson thinks, that Lucretius should extol the virtues of philosophy, which affords peace and sanity of mind, compared to the vanities of the pursuit of power and wealth. Lucretius attacks those who are full of ambition and intrigue, and Bergson cites him: ‘Let them sweat and bleed in the narrow road where their ambition writhes...’<sup>38</sup> Bergson notes that, like his great mentor, Lucretius stood apart from public affairs and public life. However, he maintains that Lucretius’s melancholy is not simply a result of his

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<sup>36</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

alienation from the world or the time he inhabited. In addition, he does not think that Lucretius reduces philosophy to being little more than a means of consolation. Knowledge is not simply a refuge or a consolation in terms of strife; rather, it is ‘the object of life itself’; wars and disasters are ills because they divert the attention of humans from the only noble preoccupations worthy of the mind. Philosophy is noble, says Bergson, because it frees us from social ambition and competition. As a philosopher Lucretius liberates himself from indignation and anger; he feels only pity for those who fail to see where genuine happiness lies and thus unknowingly afflict great harm on themselves.

I have mentioned that Bergson is interested in Lucretius’s thinking on the *clinamen* or the swerve, since it seems to grant a degree of freedom to human existence. However, Bergson also notes the deterministic character of Lucretius’s materialism. He notes that Lucretius is a thinker with an abiding love of nature and who observes it closely. We need to be enlightened by a ‘great truth’ according to Lucretian teaching: behind the smiling and picturesque face of nature and beyond the infinitely diverse phenomena that constantly change, we discover pre-established, unchangeable laws, ones that work uniformly and constantly, yielding predetermined effects. This means, of course, that nothing in the workings of the universe is fortuitous and that there is no place for nonconformity:

everywhere there are collective or compensatory forces, mechanically linked causes and effects. A number of invariable elements have existed throughout eternity; the inexorable laws of nature determine how they combine and separate; these laws are rigidly prescribed and adhered to.<sup>39</sup>

Bergson thus sees as the dominant feature of Lucretius’s poem this stress on events being mathematically predictable, ‘for they are the inevitable consequence of what has preceded.’<sup>40</sup> For Lucretius, then, at least on Bergson’s reading, nature is bound by a contract with each phenomenon being mathematically predetermined and predictable.

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<sup>39</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Ultimately for Bergson recognition of this is the main source of the melancholy of Lucretius. He argues that the concept of the rigidity of natural laws 'obsesses and saddens the poet'. Let me quote Bergson at some length:

Unable to see anything in the universe except cumulative or compensatory forces and convinced that whatever is results naturally and inevitably from whatever has been, Lucretius takes pity on the human race. Man stands helpless in the face of blind, unchanging forces that are and will continue throughout eternity to be at work. Man is the accidental product of a wretched combination of atoms brought temporarily together by inexorable natural laws and destined eventually to be torn apart by the same forces. Does he have a purpose in the universe? We think that matter was made for us, as if we were not subjected to its selfsame laws. We think that friendly or jealous gods protect or persecute us, as if unpredictable alien forces could intervene in nature, or as if we were not borne along in the all—embracing stream by inexorable laws of matter. This is the source of Lucretius' melancholy and of his compassion for mankind.<sup>41</sup>

One might say, then, that the ethical or existential task, at least as far as philosophy is concerned, is for us to raise ourselves to serene regions for whoever complains of the nature of the universe and their existence in it, gritting their teeth, is ignorant of the true nature of things. We need, then, to resign ourselves to certain facts: that the body must of necessity waste away, that old age is forced by an eternal law to succeed youth, and that beings necessarily reproduce at the expense of other beings, and so on.

What of Lucretius's achievements as an observer of nature, and what are the weaknesses in his approach? Bergson notes that in the poem the role of science is just as important as the role of philosophy. He notes several shortcomings though in his approach to nature and in his physics. The poet, he claims failed to liberate his mind completely from mythological notions and occasionally he falls back on the pagan notion

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<sup>41</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, pp. 51-2.

that nature is animate and personal: 'He would of course condemn a theory which suggests the earth is an animate being; yet we cannot fail to note that he repeatedly compares the earth to the human body.'<sup>42</sup> For Bergson many of the weaknesses in Lucretius's approach to nature stem from his reliance on Epicurus who, he says, paid little attention to the science of physics, and he was always ready to adopt the first explanation offered so long as it did not involve the supernatural: 'In astronomy especially the philosopher showed his utter contempt for pure science. According to him, the sun is approximately as large as it looks...'<sup>43</sup> This criticism does not prevent Bergson from appreciating that Lucretius's poem hits upon 'astounding truths', one that modern science has confirmed on the basis of controlled experiments. The problem with Lucretius's attempt at science is that although it contains observations and advances hypotheses there is no attempt at proper experimentation. What Lucretius lacks is not genius but rigorous technique. Bergson writes: 'Proof of this is his penetrating insight into the mechanism of the universe; it was he who first appreciated fully the principle that underlies modern science: nothing is ever created or destroyed.'<sup>44</sup>

Bergson's commentary ends with an appreciation of the main challenges presented by Lucretius's materialism and naturalism. The movement of atoms is eternal and the formation of new worlds will continue eternally. The earth has been formed relatively recently, engendering plants and then animals. We do not need to marvel at the creation of life or living beings since the laws of matter can explain everything. Humankind is not separate from nature and certainly not a special case or exception to the laws of material existence; it is destined to perish since as a result of the movement of atoms everything will one day disintegrate: 'the atoms, converted into dust, will be drawn together again; new combinations of atoms will produce new worlds; and so it goes, throughout eternity.'<sup>45</sup> Bergson notes the 'eternal recurrence' aspect of the doctrine (not that we, as humans, have any consciousness of this since, as Lucretius points out, we lack the memory of our previous existences): '...atoms, which are constantly moving about, uniting and

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<sup>42</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.63.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

disuniting, will naturally yield every possible combination during the infinite course of the centuries.’<sup>46</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

In spite of his reliance on Epicurus’s teaching, including the science and the ethics, Bergson sees Lucretius as ‘singularly original.’<sup>47</sup> He is original in his conception of the nature of things and in his conception of human nature. For Bergson, Lucretius differs from Epicurus in being an enthusiastic observer of nature, showing a gift for its picturesque aspect (its ‘fleeting, transitional variations’). Moreover, he appreciates simultaneously both the pattern of nature that appeals to the geometrician and that of the artist: he admires the beauty of nature and understands it, but this does not stop him from analyzing it and breaking it apart anatomically into fibres and cells. This ability on the part of Lucretius to grasp the two-sided character of things is for Bergson the source of the originality of his poetry and his philosophy. For Bergson, Lucretius is not like Democritus: he does not depict collections of atoms in their stark nakedness but decks them out in natural or in fancied colours. Moreover, his descriptions of the universe are not cold but ‘imbued with an oratorical fervour that stimulates and sways.’<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Bergson speculates that Lucretius would not have written his text if he had seen in Epicureanism little more than a dry and self-centred doctrine, ‘contrived for the purpose of bringing to man the calm placidity of the beast and ridding him of his most noble anxieties.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 74. Lucretius himself writes: ‘We who are now are not concerned with ourselves in any previous existence: the sufferings of those selves do not touch us. When you look at the immeasurable extent of time gone by and the multiform movements of matter, you will readily credit that these same atoms that compose us now must many a time before have entered into the self-same combinations as now. But our mind cannot recall this to remembrance. For between then and now is interposed a break in life, and all the atomic motions have been wandering far astray from sentience’ (*The Nature*, p. 88, lines 852-62).

<sup>47</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 80-1.

Lucretius differs from Epicurus in as much as Epicurus did not study nature or physical phenomena simply for the purpose of increasing knowledge and instructing his followers in the nature of things. Bergson notes that Epicurus disdainfully rejects the idea that we acquire and enjoy knowledge for its own sake; rather, the whole purpose of knowledge is to banish gods from nature and defeat superstition. Bergson even goes so far as arguing that the Epicurean doctrine leads, in fact, to futility in the study of any question that is not directly linked to everyday life and the attainment of happiness or peace of mind. Here Bergson echoes a criticism of Epicurean doctrine that, as far as I know, goes back to Francis Bacon (Marx has an interesting take on this issue too in his doctoral dissertation). For Bergson we cannot ignore the fact that the theory of atoms offers a poetic conception of the universe. What he means by this is that it cannot but have a deep impact on our imaginations, in which nature takes on a new majesty, and with every description pointing to an eternal truth. Bergson well appreciates the sublime quality of Epicureanism, especially as we find it articulated in Lucretius's text.

Finally, what do we make of Bergson's claim that Lucretius's materialism is fundamentally melancholic? For Bergson this is where Lucretius departs from Epicurus. The doctrine of Epicurus, he argues, excludes melancholy and sadness as these would only continue to trouble the mind when the whole point of practising philosophy as a way of life is to attain a state of undisturbed serenity or what Bergson describes as a 'placid state of joyfulness' that may not be intense but is nevertheless permanent. Lucretius draws different conclusions from the theory of the atom according to Bergson. We are subject to rigid natural laws so why work or take pains to accomplish anything? Why struggle or complain?: 'We are victims of a common law, and nature shows little concern over us.'<sup>50</sup> As Bergson notes, the poem ends with a frightful description of the plague of Athens during the Peloponnesian War (and borrowed from Thucydides), and that stands in marked contrast to the poem's opening celebration of life. For Bergson, Lucretius succeeds in painting an 'awesome picture' of the nature of the universe and one that fills our mind with dread. One fairly recent extensive interpretation of *De Rerum Natura* by David Sedley argues that the closing description of the plague must contain some message for us as the readers of the poem. In short,

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<sup>50</sup> *Philosophy of Poetry*, p. 82.

have readers really learnt their Epicureanism? That is, do we know how to remain serene in the face of severe and even terminal physical suffering? According to Sedley, Lucretius has dealt with three of the four Epicurean remedies in the book before the plague description – God presents no fears, death no worries, the good is readily attainable – but not the fourth one that the terrible is endurable. This, he thinks, is what the closing description of the book is meant to do: if we have not learnt the ultimate lesson and attained philosophical serenity over the most intense physical pain and suffering, then we cannot face the nature of the universe with truly Epicurean equanimity.<sup>51</sup>

As I have noted, Bergson's reading of *De Rerum Natura* has Schopenhauerian echoes, echoing Schopenhauer's deep-rooted pessimism, his depiction of the world as will (or the lust for life) that fills us with dread, and even something of his ethics of compassion. In final conclusion, we might ask: has Bergson got Lucretius's tone right? Are other readings of Lucretius possible? What of the Epicureanism we find, for example, in Nietzsche's middle period texts such as *The Joyful Science*? And what of Deleuze's 1960s reading of Lucretius that concludes by claiming that naturalism exists to *defeat* sadness. He writes: 'From Lucretius to Nietzsche, the same end is pursued and attained. Naturalism makes of thought and sensibility an affirmation.'<sup>52</sup> According to Alain Badiou, it is Bergson who is Deleuze's real master, and not Spinoza or Nietzsche. However, one area of philosophical inquiry where Deleuze appears to show an intellectual independence from Bergson is in his interpretation of Lucretius.

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<sup>51</sup> See David Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 160-5.

<sup>52</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by M. Lester with C. Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 279.

## **Metaphysical Nihilism and Meontological**

### **Realism<sup>1</sup>**

**MIROSLAV GRIŠKO**

I

The paper develops a line of thought according to which the shift of modal metaphysics<sup>2</sup> from an account of ‘how the world is’ to an account of ‘why the world is’ suggests a rudimentary metaphysical model where modality is primitive (i.e. foundational in this metaphysics) and being is not primitive. At the heart of this interpretation is the following claim: being’s lack of immanent necessity entails that the metaphysically primitive may not be conferred any ontological status. The interrelated positions of what will be termed a ‘non-trivial metaphysical nihilism’ and ‘meontological realism’ elaborate the orientation of the metaphysics which emerges after the separation of the metaphysically primitive from any general concept of being.

Some contemporary metaphysical models which place the modal cases at the centre of their investigations, such as those of David Lewis and Quentin Meillassoux, employ modality in a manner that dissolves the priority of how the world is. This eliminates any ontological privilege to what Lewis terms ‘the actual.’ Modality is used to propose extended

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Danilo Šuster and Andrej Ule for their comments on the paper.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. metaphysics that address the modal cases: necessity, contingency, possibility, impossibility. In this paper the term ‘metaphysics’ is used in its more generic sense, such as in contemporary analytic philosophy.

ontologies, whereby the putative actual way the world is, is in no way metaphysically foundational. This application of the modal cases accordingly undercuts intuitive accounts of what is ontologically or metaphysically primitive.

Yet from another perspective, modality may also subvert the primitive status of ontology itself. The interpretations of Lewis and Meillassoux do not conceive of modality as transgressing ontological primitivism, but instead as opposing the conflation of the actual with the metaphysically fundamental. In other terms, these accounts exponentiate ways in how the world was, is, or could be, yet they either exclude or trivialise the classical metaphysical question of ‘why the world is’ or ‘why there is something.’ Modal cases taken in this deeper metaphysical sense problematise the necessity of being *tout court*. This means that it is not sufficient to state that, for example, being is necessarily contingent, as the question of the necessity of being itself remains open. If modality’s destabilisation of being through the interrogation of the necessity of being entails a metaphysics where any ontological concept is no longer primitive, this annuls the reciprocity of ontology and metaphysics.

## II

‘It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.’<sup>3</sup> The literature has at times interpreted this remark from the *Tractatus* as Wittgenstein’s variation of the classical metaphysical question ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’;<sup>4</sup> insofar as a similarity between the two holds, Wittgenstein can be said to reformulate the question as follows:

- 1) the how of the world in no way determines that the world is, namely, why there is a world.

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<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.44.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Judith Genova, *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing*. (London: Routledge, 1995), *inter alia*.

- 2) 'that the world is' as mystical is entirely alien to 'how things are in the world.'

The fissure Wittgenstein draws between 'how the world is' and 'that the world is' opposes the abstraction of the how of the world as *explanans* to the *explanandum* of that the world is. In the terms of the classical metaphysical question, 'the why of the something' is separated from the 'something.' If for Wittgenstein the world is, for example, the state of affairs, objects, all that is the case etc., this is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain why the world is such, as the mystical dimension of that the world is fractures this circularity. The why of the world is a parsimonious delimitation of the world that at once dispossesses the latter of its primitivism on the basis of a fundamental estrangement of the world from itself.

This fissure concomitantly indicates why determination may be used to describe the irreducibility of the 'why of the world' to the 'how of the world'. The 'why of the world' as separated from the 'how of the world' affirms both a form of determination and a directionality of determination. The 'why of the world' as separated from the world (somehow) initiates the world. At once, how the world is, is ineffectual in this sequence. The basic form of determination across the fissure is therefore not reciprocal, but unilateral. This unilateral determination means that the world is in virtue of that which is not the world. The world is trivial with regard to the foundational question concerning its determination as something that is.

The type of determination at stake in Wittgenstein's account may be made more precise through its resemblance to the 'determination in the last instance' of the Marxist tradition. In Althusser's interpretation,<sup>5</sup> determination in the last instance allows for a relative autonomy that is nevertheless trivialised when considered in terms of the 'base' of determination. Hence, although the superstructure is ascribed this relative

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Books, 1971), p. 135. Hereafter *Lenin*.

autonomy, the base unilaterally determines the superstructure, such that the relative autonomy of the superstructure does not reciprocally determine the base.<sup>6</sup> Relative autonomy thus names the ultimately trivial nature of this autonomy when viewed from the perspective of the base that occasions it.<sup>7</sup>

In the remark from the *Tractatus*, the ‘how of the world’ is made peripheral by the ‘why of the world’ according to a similar unilateral determination in the last instance. If ‘how the world is’ does not determine ‘that the world is’ the former is an instance of such relative autonomy. With the priority conferred to the ‘why of the world’ any ‘how of the world’ always indicates the more fundamental dimension of the

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<sup>6</sup> The extent to which there is a contrasting ‘reciprocal action’ (Althusser, *Lenin*, p. 135) of determination by the superstructure on the base remains contested, yet the Althusserian interpretation can be read in line with, for example, Laruelle as indicating a pure unilaterality of determination. Cf. Francois Laruelle, *The Dictionary of Non-Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 11. Hereafter *Non-Philosophy*.

<sup>7</sup> The apparent similarity between supervenience and determination in the last instance, lying above all in a unilateral directionality of determination consistent with the importance of ‘base’ *qua* some type of dependence, is only superficial. Determination in the last instance is ultimately a non-relation, as opposed to the relationality of supervenience: the latter is mobilised for a non-trivial relativised autonomy (e.g. the separation of consciousness from its physical determination) so as to 1) avoid reductionism and 2) uphold the directionality of determination *qua* dependence. Determination in the last instance, in contrast, emphasises this reduction; its ‘rigorously irreversible character excludes that it is a question of a “linear” causality, “mechanistic” causality always being de jure irreversible and dialectizable’ (Laruelle, *Non-Philosophy*, p. 11). Possible changes in that which subvenes engenders, to a degree, “mechanistic” changes in that which supervenes; but in its metaphysical appropriation the base cannot be changed, because it is in Laruelle’s terms the Real and in the terms of this paper the absolute. Rather, all relative autonomies are thought through the ‘base’, and thus, in the last instance, are trivial. From the perspective of supervenience, some change in the supervening phenomenon could lead to a conclusion about a change in the subvening phenomenon; yet this is the ‘reversibility’ which the ‘irreversibility’ of determination in the last instance opposes. In terms of the question of the ‘why of the world’, the radicality of the asymmetry precludes the notion that possible changes in the ‘how of the world’ could register some speculated change in the ‘why of the world’.

why in a manner that dissolves the explanatory remit of the ‘how of the world’ with regard to the ‘why’.

The ‘why of the world’ is, of course, germane for the world because it establishes the *explanans* of that the world is. Yet the ‘why of the world’ also trivialises the world. The antecedent cannot be derived from the postcedent; the postcedent is not problematised as in, for example, concepts of emergence, but rather undergoes this trivialisation. Following this line of thought, the Wittgensteinian mystical ‘why of the world’ suggests a metaphysical model where the world itself is not primitive.

### III

The non-primitivism of the world can be interpreted as the non-primitivism of ontology. Without any fundamental ontologically equivocal distinction within being (i.e. in the absence of God) the term world is interchangeable with the term being. This ontological univocity here means that ‘being is said in a single and same sense.’<sup>8</sup> If the mystical interpretation of the why of the world maintains that the world is not primitive, *mutatis mutandis*, the equation of world with being maintains that being is not primitive. A de-divinisation of the Wittgensteinian mystical, which is consistent with ontological univocity, entails that the ‘why of the world’ as the ‘why of being’ cannot be pursued through ontology.

The philosophical relevance of this model, that is, as a model which is not necessarily purely mystical or theological in character, may accordingly be parsed as follows: the acceptance of this particular interpretation of the fissure between ‘how the world is’ and ‘that the world is’ as a conjectural rejection of an approach to metaphysics that retains being as primitive implies what can be termed a meontology, i.e. a metaphysics in which there are no ontological primitives.

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Althone, 1994), p. 45.

Structured in this manner, the question of the ‘why of the world’ is an (a)foundational revocation of the correspondence between metaphysics and ontology. Despite the *prima facie* aberrance of this move,<sup>9</sup> a meontological approach to the question nevertheless contains various degrees of precision which at once justifies its development:

- 1) It adheres to a parsimony which satisfies the expectations of method in the clear commitment to a form of Ockham’s razor, whereby the world is reduced to a minimum (i.e. all that can be conferred an ontological status falls within world: being = world), yet with the proviso that this reduction is consistent with a vitiation of the explanatory self-sufficiency of the world.
- 2) It enacts the shift in the structure of scientific explanations developed for example, by Hempel and Oppenheim, towards ‘why-questions’, although in a certain anti-nomological form, since the apparent grounding operation constitutive of this approach is modified by an unknown of the antecedent which is engendered by the antecedent’s displacement from the ontological.<sup>10</sup> The how and the why are nevertheless asymmetrical, as is potentially the case in concepts of grounding,<sup>11</sup> whilst the vector of determination present in the *explanandum* and *explanans* movement is also retained.
- 3) It recalls the intuitive position of a radical contingency of life or, more broadly, existence (and is thus not entirely intuitional in the sense that this entails intuition’s lack of necessity on the basis of the in last instance annihilation of intuition itself).

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<sup>9</sup> Namely, this anti-Parmenidean premise, following Parmenides, *prima facie* disables the tangibility of what may be discriminated as primitive according to the revocation of some imputed coherency, however minimal or rudimentary, of ontological primitives.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. the displacement of some principle of sufficient reason from being.

<sup>11</sup> A form of determination where X is in virtue of Y. See, for example, Kit Fine ‘Guide to Ground’ in Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (eds.) *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 37-88; hereafter *Guide to Ground*.

- 4) It can be developed as a modal question and therefore in accordance with theories of modality since it confers no necessity to the world, i.e. being. In other words, the absence of either a rigorous argument for the ascription of necessity to being or a robust reduction of modality to some form of ontological primitive motivates a meontological approach.

#### IV

The fissure between the ‘why of the world’ and the ‘how of the world’ appears implicitly in the work of David Lewis. Yet Lewis prosecutes the how in a manner that eliminates the ‘why’. The understanding of how this elimination functions in the context of Lewis’s system can aid in the clarification of how modality may invoke ontology’s lack of primitive status within a prospective metaphysics.

The fundamental claim of Lewis’ modal realism is that the actual world exists in the same manner as possible worlds. The meaning of worlds within Lewis’s account follows from the analytic current’s approach to treating questions of modality. According to the standard interpretation, the modal case of, e.g. necessity is defined as that which is necessarily true in all possible worlds, whereas possibility is formulated as possibly true in a possible world.<sup>12</sup> For Lewis, however, such ‘possible world talk’ used to investigate modality is not merely discursive, but possesses an ontological ground. The realism of Lewis’s interpretation lies in the commitment to the existence of such possible worlds in the same sense of existence used to designate the ‘actual world’.

Lewis defends his position from the perspectives of, *inter alia*, its consistency with the logic of the quantifier, the coherency of its treatment of the modal cases and the explanatory potential of this model, which is compared to set theory. The rationale behind Lewis’ approach can,

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. John Divers, *Possible Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2002) for a thorough synopsis as well as original development of the fundamental positions of contemporary modal metaphysics.

however, be abstracted in terms of the homology between a concept of ontological univocity and ontological primitivism. For Lewis, a privileged or equivocal ontological status of the actual world, defined as a ‘maximal mereological sum of spatiotemporally interrelated things’<sup>13</sup> is incoherent, insofar as it implies some necessity or ontological privilege to the actual. The perspectives which modality introduces vitiate this privilege. The modal invokes various possible arrangements of the world; in this sense, the only necessity in Lewis’s system is that there are such possible arrangements, namely, that there is a world. Yet through the introduction of a univocal ontological status to every possible world, this necessity is ultimately a symptom of the claim that there always is a world. This is the ontological primitivism of Lewis’s account, as for Lewis, there is always ‘something’. That which modality addresses is the ontologically univocal nature of worlds which are at once ontologically primitive.

Whilst a decisive premise of his realism is that the actual and possible worlds do not overlap, i.e. they are strictly delimited worlds, this is a consequence of how Lewis envisions the relations between worlds and does not overturn his fundamental commitments, i.e., there is no ontological precedence conferred to the actual world over the possible world, as this would violate ontological univocity. Although ontological univocity binds worlds, which may then be discriminated in accordance with the formal operations of the modal cases, univocity also extends the remit of ontological primitivism in that there is no exception to the world.

Accordingly, this ontological primitivism does not entail a modal primitivism. This is because the modal cases in Lewis’s account are reduced to the plurality of worlds. The concept of a possible world is thus an ontologically “real” world; the modal case of possibility is thus reduced to an ontologically real world. This is why Lewis qualifies the terminology of “modal realism”: the realism of the modal cases does not mean that they subsist independently of that which is, but rather that they are “quantifiers” of such ontologically real worlds.

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<sup>13</sup> David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (London: Wiley, 2001), p. 73. Hereafter *Plurality*.

If Lewis's liquidation of the ontological privilege of the actual so as to treat the modal is, crucially, rooted in a commitment to ontological primitivism, the logic behind the elimination of the question "why is there something?" is based on this same commitment to ontological primitivism. In more detail, this elimination can be presented as the corollary of various interrelated premises found in Lewis:

1) Insofar as every possible 'how of the world' is, the 'why of the world' becomes trivial. The realism of possible worlds *pace* some posited ontological privilege of the actual deflates the 'why of the world' with the contrasting inflation of the 'how of the world'. The 'why of the world' in this sense is the possibility of the world itself; yet this is a case of the subjective genitive, as the plurality of possible worlds in the Lewisian model binds possibility to the possibilities of *worlds*. The plurality of worlds as the releasing of world from its conflation with actuality preserves the primitivism of the world according to the preclusion of an exception to such primitivism. In this sense, what for Wittgenstein is the mystical dimension of 'that the world is' becomes for Lewis the plurality of worlds. The why of the world vanishes in the extension of how the world is *qua* the plurality of worlds that is simultaneously a commitment to ontological primitivism.

2) This is at once a marginalization of the importance of what Lewis terms 'etiology', i.e. a form of determination that is also present, for Lewis, in the question of the 'why of the world'. Etiology recapitulates the structure of the metaphysical question 'why is there something rather than nothing?' as the latter posits the 'why of the world' according to what in Lewis' terms are 'forms of causality' and 'event.'<sup>14</sup> It is not that Lewis denies the event, but rather that the event is rendered trivial. For Lewis, the world itself is not an event; instead, possible events and actual events are considered on the basis of the shared ontological status of actual and possible worlds. The rejection of the event as something that exceeds the world – precisely the classification of event operative in the 'mystical' or meontological formulation of the 'why of the world', since this is an event that cannot be reduced to the world –

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *Plurality*, pp. 73-4.

occurs through the interpretation of the event as indicative of an ontologically equivalent possible world amidst other ontologically equivalent *possibilia*. The Lewisian equation of the world with mereological spatiotemporal relations or mereologically analogous relations construes event as complicit with a nomology whose relational form does not oppose the mereological relational form of the world. The event of the ‘why of the world’ in its ‘mystical’ sense, is, in contrast, anti-nomological in character, to the extent that inherent to the why-question is the trivialisation of how the world is. There is no consistent nomology in this structure, since how the world is, is entirely innocuous to this question. For Lewis, how a particular world is, like event, is also trivial, because all possible worlds possess the same ontological status. The trivialisation of how a world is, is motivated by the primitivism of the world, i.e. of ontology. How a world is, is *simpliciter* an instance of such mereological spatiotemporal relations between concrete things. The trivialisation of the why-question emulates the trivialisation of how a world is according to the prioritisation of the world or being as such.

3) Lewis defends the ontological univocity of possible worlds, but rejects ‘impossible worlds’ in his metaphysics. These impossible worlds include worlds that do not obey the laws of logic, or a world where there is not ‘something’. This prohibition of impossible worlds in Lewis’ system follows from the sense in which impossible worlds violate his reduction to world, that is, his commitment to ontological primitivism. The admission of impossible worlds into Lewis’ metaphysics can potentially infer the admission of that which is not world; the rejection of the impossible world thus coincides with the prohibition of any movement away from world or being as primitive. This is the prohibition of an exteriority or exception to the world, i.e. ontology. The impossible is excluded from Lewis’ metaphysics because it does not have any worldly or ontological status; the ‘why of the world’, insofar as it is not an ontological question, is subject to this same exclusion. The elimination of the impossible rejects a non-worldly exteriority that is also required for the mystical or meontological formulation of the question.

**V**

According to the Lewisian model the ‘why of the world’ is nevertheless only addressed in the ‘indirect light’ of the priority of the how of the world, rather than in the ‘direct light’ of the Wittgensteinian mystical. The opposition to this priority, to use Chalmers’ terminology, is the ‘hard problem’ of the world,<sup>15</sup> that is, why is there a world. If the why of the world is a hard problem, it cannot be reconciled with the ontological reductionism proposed by Lewis, insofar as, for Lewis, the question of the ‘why of the world’ is trivialised by the ontological primitivism upon which this reduction is based.

Yet the development in a rigorous manner of the hard problem of the world can perhaps at once take as its point of departure Lewis’ reduction of the modal. Following Lewis’ elimination of the hard problem of the world through ontological primitivism, an affinity can be posited between this problem’s disappearance according to its reduction to ontological primitivism and the reduction of modality to world. In short, the strategy of reducing the modal is based on the sense in which modality, if unreduced, undercuts ontological primitivism, as it interrogates the necessity of being. It is this undercutting which is essential to the question of the why of the world in what Wittgenstein terms its ‘mystical’ sense in that the latter opposes an ontological primitivism.

Whereas the dominant approach in analytic philosophy towards modality is that of various forms of reduction, the application of reductionism with regard to modality arguably invokes even more foundational questions than, for example, similar reductionist debates concerning the reducibility or non-reducibility of consciousness. Opposition to reduction in the theory of consciousness introduces a form of equivocity within being which, although radical in that it controverts dominant materialist accounts, still maintains a general concept of being as primitive. Anti-reductionism of consciousness does not overturn the

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<sup>15</sup> Yet with explicit differences in determination that are not necessary to the problem of consciousness, i.e. the hard problem does not entail consciousness’ determination of the physical.

veracity of some general ontological concept as primitive. That which may be conferred some ontological status, be it matter, or consciousness, or matter and consciousness, still functions in a foundational role. Modality, in contrast, if not reducible to some general ontological concept, problematizes the necessity of being itself. Van Inwagen describes this problem as follows:

I can only say that it seems to me hopeless to try to devise any argument for the conclusion that it is a necessary truth that there are beings that is not also an argument for the conclusion that there is a necessary being.<sup>16</sup>

The underlying problem of contemporary reductionism of the modal is that if modality cannot be reduced to that which can be conferred an ontological status, i.e., concepts associated for example with forms of matter, the claim ‘that there are beings’ cannot be foundational for metaphysics. The physical investigation of the cosmos demarcates either only one aspect of metaphysics or is entirely trivialized from the perspective of metaphysical first principles or primitives. In this light, the modal evinces an endemic hostility to the commitment to being as primitive.

Quine’s dismissal of modality is accordingly motivated by the sense in which modality threatens the validity of empiricism. Possibility and necessity undermine what Fine calls ‘constancy’ in the context of his interpretation of Quine’s as well as Lewis’ motivations for their respective reductions and eliminations of modality;<sup>17</sup> in other terms, the problem of induction, owing to its fundamentally modal character, invalidates empiricism. The usurping character of the modal is resolved

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<sup>16</sup> van Inwagen, Peter. ‘Why is There Anything at All?’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume, 70, (1996), p. 96; hereafter *Anything at All*. Hence, according to the modal subversion of a necessity ascribed to being, van Inwagen in the same paper approaches the question of ‘why there is something?’ from the perspective of probability, an approach which he acknowledges may be insufficient, insofar as probability is neither conceptually equivalent to modality nor can the latter be reduced to the former.

<sup>17</sup> Kit Fine, *Modality and Time: Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

through such reductions that are more palatable with scientific, naturalist or physicalist accounts. Yet in a deeper metaphysical sense, the irreducibility of the modal is not only indicative of a potential collapse of empiricism, but invokes the transgression of being as metaphysically primitive. If modality can be said to problematise empiricism by dissolving the necessity of, for example, physical laws, modality may also be said to transgress the necessity of any ontological concept as foundational in a metaphysics. In its most stringent form the difficulty of ascribing necessity to being marks the fissure between metaphysics and being; without a satisfactory explanation of the modal cases, metaphysics is not reducible to ontology.

In this sense, the Ptolemaic-Copernicanism of Lewis (i.e, the metaphysical decentring of the actual world and the re-inscription of the world, that is, being as primitive) intends to counteract the insurrection of modality against being. The construction of possible worlds so as to address modal cases becomes symptomatic of modality's exceeding of world; the posited realism of possible worlds attempts to cordon the modal's breach of ontology. Whereas Lewis preserves the reciprocity of metaphysics and a general concept of being in terms of various notions consistent with a physicalist account (such as the mereological spatiotemporal relations of concrete things), the inflation of that which is granted a univocal ontological status entails the concomitant reduction of modality to worlds, according to which the reciprocity of metaphysics and ontology is upheld. This approach levels the ontological distinction between the possible and the actual, and, by extension, pacifies the question of the necessity of the world, i.e. being. Yet this ontological primitivism can only be maintained through the admission of the ontological univocity of every possible world. From this perspective, the extent to which modality and, more specifically, necessity, destabilizes being results in the inflation of that which falls under the remit of ontology. The lack of an endemic ontological necessity can only be contravened by an expansion of that which may be ascribed an ontological status. Lewisian worlds become so ubiquitous that they trivialize the problem of their necessity; this is the same ubiquity of world that also trivializes the problem of the 'why of the world'.

If the modal's insurrection of the world is to be alleviated by ontological primitivism, or, in other words, modality's ungrounding of that which may be conferred necessity is to be adjudicated through the countermove of collapsing modality into the plurality of worlds, then perhaps the question of the 'why of the world' in its meontological sense invokes the irreducibility of modality. The modal erasure of ontological primitivism is namely consistent with the erasure of ontological primitivism demonstrated in the why of the world's separation from how the world is. Insofar as the reduction of the 'why of the world' to the 'how of the world' in Lewis mirrors the reduction of modalism to the world, the contrasting unbinding of modalism from its reduction to world mirrors the unbinding of the 'why of the world' from the 'how of the world'. The 'why of the world' as hard problem or meontological problem becomes a variant of modal metaphysics according to which modality is taken as primitive over against the world as primitive. The orthogonal inscription of the why of the world with regard to ontological primitivism is structured around a form of modal primitivism homologous with the separation of modalism from its reduction to world. The 'why of the world' in this sense is a propaedeutic to a modal primitivism that at once invokes a meontological metaphysics, i.e. a metaphysics where ontology is not primitive.

## VI

The position of modal primitivism is defended by some contemporary analytic philosophers. DeRosset, for example, supports a form of modal primitivism where particular statements cannot be grasped without reference to modal concepts. This is an epistemological form of modal primitivism. The modal primitivism presented by, in contrast, Yagisawa is a metaphysical form of modal primitivism. Yagisawa proposes a modal primitivism *qua* 'modal dimensionalism', which confers to the modal the same primitive status as to the dimensions of space and time.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the physical and temporal dimensions imply an ontological status, i.e., space and time function as indices of that which is or may be, the modal dimension does not produce this same ontological

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Takashi Yagisawa, 'Primitive Worlds', *Acta Analytica*, vol. 17, 28, (2002), pp. 19-37. Hereafter *Primitive Worlds*.

commitment. The use of possible worlds to address modality is from this perspective, indicative of the detected inadequacy of any modal reductionism. The very concept of a possible world implies variations of such worlds that oppose reductionism to an ontological primitivism; the latter does not admit, for example, a possible (or impossible) world that entails the rejection of the ontological primitivism upon which the reduction of the modal is based. As Yagisawa writes, ‘the universe has spatiotemporal dimensions. According to Modal Dimensionalism, it also has a modal dimension. Unlike the spatiotemporal dimensions, the modal dimension is not a physical dimension. It is, well, an alethic modal dimension – a kind of *metaphysical* dimension.’<sup>19</sup> That the modal does not entail the physical or the ontological follows from the premise that the alethic modal cases in their entirety do not entail an ontological status. The modal case of impossibility taken as impossible world could be a world that has no ontological status, for example, a world of nothingness, which is not merely an ‘empty’ world. The admission of this nothingness, in consequence, rejects the pure ‘physicality’ or, in a deeper sense, ontologicality, of such a world. The modal dimension is metaphysically discriminated from the spatial and temporal dimensions, since these ontological dimensions do not exhaust the modal cases. If the ontological concepts cannot satisfactorily explain the modal, the primitive status of the modal, alongside the ontological, must be conceded.

With this argument Yagisawa reiterates the tension between the modal and being which can be said to motivate all forms of modal reductionism. At once, he abjures from the latter option in favour of a commitment to the primitivism of both. In this sense, the significance of the Yagisawa’s threefold dimensionalism, of which the modal is one dimension, is that it is a non-reductive attempt to reconcile the antagonism between modality and being.

Yet, whereas Yagisawa’s proposed shared primitivism provides a conceptual support for the irreducibility of the modal, it only partially addresses the tension of the modal and the ontology which motivates modal reductionism. The modal nominates an “outside” to the ontological or what Yagisawa terms the physical; this division, however, functions as

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<sup>19</sup> Yagisawa, *Primitive Worlds*. p. 27.

a form of compromise between the reductive and the non-reductive approaches to modality. The thought of this outside of modality in its strongest sense – which the reductions of modality attempt to address – namely opposes a corresponding ontological primitivism, the latter also eliding the question of the why of the world.

## VII

In Avicenna, the outside of modality takes the form of God.<sup>20</sup> Avicenna can be described as introducing a modal approach to the question of the ‘why of the world’ with a modal argument for the existence of God that is developed through the world’s contingency. For Avicenna, the commitment to modalism extinguishes the metaphysical privilege of the world. Avicenna denies God in the first instance; this operation is informed by the search for a necessity primordial to the world. Yet the total barrenness of the world in regard to necessity coincides with an injection of contingency into the world that effectuates a splintering of the world which is not immanent to it. The world’s contingency means that the world is not contingent in virtue of the world, as this would indicate a necessity of the world with regard to its contingency. Contingency, in other words, is grounded in a necessity which is entirely distinct to that which is contingent for the latter to be truly contingent.

This contingency leads vertically to the necessity of God. The primacy of the modal that haemorrhages the world inaugurates a shift away from the presupposed primitivism of the latter – i.e. the primitivism of existence now re-formulated as the contingency of existence – towards the necessity of that which is not of the world. The existence and essence distinction crucial to Avicenna, i.e., that essence precedes existence, is the consequence of modalism’s recantation of existence, which, in turn, is resolved in a sacred necessity.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Avicenna Ibn Sina. *Avicenna on Theology (Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn ‘Abd Allah)*. translated by A.J. Arberry (Chicago: Kazi Publications Incorporated, 2007).

The Avicennian use of modality articulates the entirety of existence and that which is transcendent to this same existence. Although Avicenna, like Lewis, does ultimately reduce modality, Lewis' reduction to world becomes, for Avicenna, a reduction to God, that is, an absolute. In contrast to the Lewisian folding of modality into world, Avicenna employs modality against the world, yet with the subsequent reconciliation of the debasement of existence that this procedure realises in God.

## VIII

These respective approaches to modality may be abstracted according to, in the case of Avicenna, a rejection of ontological univocity, and, in the case of Lewis, an adherence to ontological univocity. The Avicennian equivocity differentiates the being of God from the being of the world with a confluence of essence and existence in the absoluteness of a necessary God who subsists over against the inferior contingent being of the world. Lewis' modal realism adversely maintains a rigorous ontological univocity with the elimination of the actual and possible distinction which at once preserves ontological primitivism. According to this dissimilarity, the reduction to God as opposed to the reduction to world *ex hypothesi* adjourns ontological univocity.

If the equivocal incision into ontological univocity tends towards the postulation of a form of God consistent with the prescription of a necessity within being, the question becomes whether a form of modalism which commits to ontological univocity may also address the 'why of the world' according to its 'mystical' separation from the 'how of the world'. This is a demystification of the mystical inherent to a rupturing of the world's primitivism that is also a rupturing of the primitivism of God. The 'why of the world' is not to be confronted through the effacement of ontological univocity, insofar as the 'why of the world' in its non-equivocal mystical sense, as consistent with a modalism irreducible to world, entails the 'why of being'. The initial modal abasement of an ontological ground, as in Avicenna, does not enact the inscription of ontological equivocity against ontological univocity, since both equivocity and univocity are instances of an ontological

primitivism that is insufficient with regard to the ‘why of the world’ *qua* the ‘why of being’. Yet the Lewisian repudiation of the actual and possible distinction in this context bears the same insufficiency, despite its adherence to ontological univocity, as the latter for Lewis is synonymous with an ontological primitivism which also prohibits the ‘why of the world’. In this sense the Avicennian employment of modalism as an initial impairment of ontological primitivism and the Lewisian adherence to ontological univocity taken as an opposition to the approaching of the ‘why of being’ in terms of an ontologically privileged form of being converge at a point that is exterior to ontological primitivism and thereby consistent with the ‘why of the world’ *qua* the ‘why of being’.

## IX

Let us suggest that the simultaneous preservation of and break from ontological univocity required for the shift to the interrogation of the ‘why of the world’ *qua* the ‘why of being’ in a ‘mystical’ sense is congruent with the modal case of the impossible. Namely, if the impossible is posited as rendering the world or being incoherent in the sense that the former is exterior to the latter, this premise introduces a limit to the explanatory remit of ontological primitivism.

This approach is symmetrical with the logic for Lewis’ decision to exclude impossible worlds from his metaphysics in their potential undercutting of the foundational status of the world, viz. being. The impossible as that which is exterior to world and thus absent from Lewis’ metaphysics denotes a modal case which avoids the reduction of the modal to ontological primitivism. From the perspective of the meontological ‘why of the world’, the impossible is not to be appended to the systematic of possible worlds, for example, in the form of, e.g. ‘extended modal realism’,<sup>21</sup> but is rather to nominate, following Lewis, that which is not world. This engenders a space for thought disengaged from worldly or ontological primitivism. The impossible is the impossibility of the ontological; the impossible as non-world and non-

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<sup>21</sup> I.e. the terminology used for models such as Yagisawa's.

being also invokes a modal case. The synthesis of Lewisian ontological univocity and the non-ontological status of the impossible with an Avicennian lack of worldly necessity understood as the modal's insurrection of being initiates a meontological transcendence *qua* the impossible *vis-à-vis* being.

## X

The meontological character of the impossible appears in the problems surrounding what in the literature on possible worlds is termed 'metaphysical nihilism.' Metaphysical nihilism refers to the admission of an 'empty world' within a modal metaphysics, and more specifically, the Lewisian inspired modal realist model. Positions that support the inclusion of metaphysical nihilism within the modal realist model do not construe this variation as a threat to the consistency of this system. The rejection of metaphysical nihilism, in contrast, implies the potential incoherency its inclusion creates with regard to the foundational status of world, i.e., ontological primitivism. Such incoherence only surfaces according to what may be termed a non-trivial metaphysical nihilism, whereby nothingness cannot be reduced to the ontological, as opposed to a trivial metaphysical nihilism that dissolves nothingness in being.

In the case of the latter form, the empty world is a possible world. The 'nothingness' of an empty world is still a minimal instance of world as either maximal sum of mereological relations or mereologically analogous relations. From this perspective, the empty world is ultimately trivial, since an empty world as 'concretely' minimal world does not merit any distinction within modal realism following the retention of the primitivism of world.<sup>22</sup>

The rejection of non-trivial metaphysical nihilism is, in turn, based on an ontologically minimal primitivism that functions as an impasse to the declaration of an absolute nothingness which, as absolute, is not reducible to world or being. The non-trivial character of metaphysical nihilism is thus conversely informed by a unilateral sedition from

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lewis, *Plurality*, pp. 73-4.

ontology according to a nothingness that is not an ‘emptiness’ (as in ‘empty world’). The latter is, in van Inwagen's terms, a ‘counterfeit nothing’,<sup>23</sup> as it retains the minimal commitment to world or being as primitive. Nothing is only the privation of something, such that something ultimately can be mobilised to explain its own absence. This absolute nothingness of non-trivial metaphysical nihilism – and hence the basis for its exclusion from a modal realism – is therefore not privation, negation or subtraction.<sup>24</sup> Absolute nothingness is not relative to world *qua* index of some, however minimal, ontological status. It rather resembles a theological absolute nothingness in the form of an *oukontic* absolute nothingness as opposed to a *meontic*<sup>25</sup> privative nothingness, a nothingness also found within the philosophical tradition, exemplary of which is Heidegger’s conception of a nothingness that is not a negation.<sup>26</sup>

Absolute nothingness at once possesses a modal character. Insofar as this nothingness is not the counterfeit nothing of privation, it is an ontological impossibility, whereby the impossible is, symmetrically, not to be taken as a negation of ontological possibility. The impossibility of a non-trivial metaphysical nihilism is not an empty world, but a

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<sup>23</sup> van Inwagen, *Anything at All*, p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> This non-trivial metaphysical nihilism is not synonymous with a ‘stronger version’ of metaphysical nihilism (i.e. such as that analysed by Phillip Bricker, ‘Island universes and the analysis of modality’, in Preyer, Gerhard and Siebelt, Frank, (eds.): *Reality and Humean Supervenience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 27-55 (2001) and Rodriguez-Pereyra, ‘Modal Realism and Metaphysical Nihilism’, in *Mind*, 113(452), pp. 683-704 (2014).) in three interrelated senses. 1) nothingness *qua* absolute is not to be assimilated into a modal realist framework, since the latter is consistent with an ontological primitivism; 2) the distancing of ‘it is possible that nothing exists’ from ‘it is possible that nothing concrete exists’ is not radical enough, as it a) relies on ontological language, and b) examines nothing in terms of possibility against the meontological absolute nothingness of impossibility, namely, absolute nothingness is not the possibility of nothingness, but rather impossible; 3) it fails to prosecute the break with being of which the question of the why of the world is a non-necessary symptom.

<sup>25</sup> Despite the historically terminological use of *me on* as privative, as opposed to the contrasting absolute denotation of the also grammatically privative *ouk on*, the term meontology is utilised because of its precedence in the literature.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’ in *Basic Writings*, ed. by D.F. Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), pp. 89-110.

nothingness of world that is also an impossibility of world itself. *In nuce*, this non-trivial sense of metaphysical nihilism admits:

- 1) The metaphysical relevance of forms of modalism (at once unbound to a particular formalisation), as it immediately invokes impossibility and necessity according to the meontological character of its absolute.
- 2) Ontological univocity, as this absolute nothingness does not discriminate with regard to ontological status, whilst also suggesting an autonomy from the ontological in the sense that nothingness is not determined by a relation to being, for example, in the form of negation, subtraction or privation
- 3) The meontological or mystical variation of the why of the world *qua* the 'why of being', as the latter inscribes a break from being.

With this armature, metaphysical nihilism opposes both its trivialisation and assimilation in the name of ontological primitivism, whilst also annulling the bond of the ontological and the primitive through what may be provisionally termed a notion of *non-privative ontological non-necessity*. Being, in a wholly univocal sense, is vitiated by a nothingness that is non-relational and absolute. Resembling the Avicennian model, the absolute nothingness implied in ontological non-necessity indicates the exteriority or transcendence to being. Yet, *pace* Avicenna, the modal disturbance of existence is not accommodated by the juxtaposition of a contingency seeking a necessity through a cut of equivocity ultimately internal to the ontological, as this tactic maintains being as primitive in the form of the being of God. Necessity is transplanted from world, but cannot be resolved in any kind of ontological absolute, such as God or a necessary being. Necessity as located in an absolute nothingness annuls all ontological primitivisms. The dispossession of the necessity of world taken as the dispossession of the necessity of being symptomatically indicates a necessity of the impossible; the absolute nothingness of the impossible contains its own

modally primitive non-ontological form of necessity over against the necessity of the world.

In other terms, Lewis's effacement of the ontological privilege of the actual world that is ultimately motivated by the desired reduction of modality does not lead to the ontological equivalency of possible worlds, but rather abrogates world *tout court*. The absence of an endemic necessity to the world in both its actual or possible forms discloses a necessity which is exterior to world, but not determined by world. Non-privative ontological non-necessity maintains the lack of immanence of even this necessity, i.e. it cannot be reformulated as the contingency of being in the subjective sense of the genitive. The operative form of determination is unilateral since the immediate dissolution of ontological primitives concomitantly indicates that this non-necessity is initiated from an exteriority which is autonomous to being.

The Wittgensteinian mysticism of the 'why of the world' does not name an epistemological limit, but rather an ontological limit *qua* the totalisation of the ontological<sup>27</sup> in terms of its non-necessity and univocity, whilst at once breaking from ontological primitivism. This is not an obscure mysticism, but rather a *meontological realism*. The ontological limit does not rescind ontological univocity, but instead indicates the 'why of the world' transcendent to being, that is, a transcendence as an absolute nothingness which is *eo ipso* a non-privative nothingness irrespective of world.

In this sense, meontological realism maintains in the last instance impossibility of all worlds, i.e. of being. The unilateral determination of a meontological realism invocative of an absolute nothingness construes world and possible worlds as instances of a trivial relative autonomy, thereby *a fortiori* annulling the world's putative metaphysical primitivism. The modally primitive dimension of meontological realism entails a necessity and impossibility complicit with an absolute nothingness according to which the contingency and possibility of world

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<sup>27</sup> 'To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole – a limited whole.' *Tractatus*, 6.45.

or worlds are collapsed through their non-necessity in the last instance into nothingness. The foundational uprooting of world contained in the world's separation from its own genesis is recapitulated in the meontological abrogation of world that is the latter's non-privational absence of an endemic necessity.

## XI

The basic elements of this programme may be abstracted as follows:

- 1) The 'why of the world' as a crucial philosophical question cannot be reduced to a remit defined by world; this decision emerges from a posited worldly insufficiency that is above all evinced in the modal notion of the world's lack of necessity.
- 2) Modal metaphysics is accordingly complicit with this question because of the posited absence of ontological necessity. The question of the 'why of the world' is consistent with a modal interrogation of the world, e.g., the possibility of the world, its contingency, and, in the last instance, its non-necessity and impossibility. The modal renders worldly insufficiency potentially rigorous instead of opaquely mystical in a theistic sense.
- 3) Insofar as the impossibility of the world in the sense of the objective genitive invokes the 'why of the world' – that is, the question of the why of the world is arguably a symptom of the impossibility of the world, and, more acutely, the nothingness of the world - the *explanans* and *explanandum* schema does not require a concrete ontological antecedent, but rather entirely rests on the nothingness of the antecedent. This is consistent with modality's disturbance of being as the attenuation of ontological primitivism. The modal as unbound to world reiterates the insufficiency of the world with regard to the why of the world. If the world does not exhaust modality, that is, if all cases of modality cannot be reduced to some ontological primitive (i.e. the lack of purely ontological necessity; impossible worlds that are precisely not worlds; how things are in

the world as discreet possibilities, whilst the possible is not the entirety of the modal), ontology is not primitive.

- 4) If the impossibility of the world is not assimilated to a worldly or ontological primitivism, but instead unilaterally determines world, the ‘why of the world’ entails an acute sense of ground as *Abgrund* or unground as absolute nothingness. To conceive of the impossibility of the world is to propose a general concept of non-privative ontological non-necessity that forces a movement away from the ontological. This is the Aviecentian thesis: that which is radically non-necessary cannot be the *explanans* for its non-necessity without transgressing its non-necessity. The non-primitivism of ontology invokes a meontological realism *qua* metaphysical necessity that cannot be recapitulated in terms of the world. The following rudimentary formulation abstracts this model: Being is relatively autonomous to a ground, that is, being is a possibility;<sup>28</sup> this ground (potentially elaborated on the basis of an appropriation of the work of Fine, according to which inherent to ground are notions of modality and a directionality of determination<sup>29</sup>) is an *Abgrund* of the *philosophia teutonica*,<sup>30</sup> yet in the purely meontological form of an absolute nothingness.
- 5) The position of meontological realism is a universal Cotard’s delusion that is not a delusion.<sup>31</sup> As opposed to constructing, in the spirit of Lewis, a philosophical paradise equivalent to the mathematical ‘paradise’ of *possibilia*, philosophy reflects a certain Schopenhauerian cosmic pessimism of the postlapsarian world, constricted by the metaphysical ‘formalisms’ of death, nothingness and the impossible, all the while without any recourse to God, that is, without an absolutisation of the ontological through some ascription of necessity to being. Philosophy is the performance of the *prima facie* tension between disenchantment and enchantment,

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<sup>28</sup> The world or being namely does not exhaust possibility; there is the possibility of nothing.

<sup>29</sup> Fine, *Guide to Ground*, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> A reference to the historical persistence of the concept of *Abgrund* in German philosophy, i.e., Eckhart, Boehme, Schelling and Heidegger.

<sup>31</sup> Cotard's delusion: the psychopathology of thinking one is dead or does not exist.

i.e., between the enlightened rational disenchantment of nature (the non-necessity of thought “within” the non-necessity of being) and the Greek *thaumazein* that is the wonder at the impossibility of being itself *qua* the nothingness of being in the last instance (the condition of thought).

This recalls a classical account of truth as the utter separation of truth from *doxa* and the mundane. Truth is neither located in prosaic immediacy nor in variations of the familiar, but at a unilateral extremity (the Platonic sun against the cave) which inscribes the necessity of only truth. The extremity of truth *vis-à-vis* the world means that the metaphysical apocalypse of the modal reveals the world to itself (the total *alētheia* of apocalyptic truth) as non-necessary according to a unilateral transcendence over against the world.

## The Title's Claim to Thought in Heidegger

**ADAM R. ROSENTHAL**

### Introduction

There appears in the work of Heidegger from the 1950s a minor, yet recurring, interest in the title. Although this interest takes form initially in no more than a worrying of his own, proper titles, the stakes can be seen to quickly escalate. From a staged point of reflection—what seems to be only a call to think the terms of his discourse's assumptions—the significance of the title grows to nearly unthinkable proportions, whereby one reads in the 1957 lecture, *Basic Principles of Thinking* [*Grundsätze des Denkens*], a claim such as the following: 'In fact, refining the significance [*Verdeutlichung*] of the title is the sole task.'<sup>1</sup>

Of course, one can find throughout Heidegger's writings a careful attention given to titles. From his earliest lectures up through those of the 40s, his work displays a tireless energy for interrogating headings, whose consolidation or metonymization of a text's contents justifies the allotted attention. More often than not, this simply means discussing the reasons for the use of one word rather than another, or elucidating the sense of a

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. by Andrew J. Mitchell. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), hereafter *BF*, and Heidegger, Martin, Ed. Petra Jaeger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 79: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. (Frankfurt Am Main: Klostermann, 2005), hereafter *GA 79*; *BF*: 125/*GA 79*: 133. All page numbers are given first with reference to the English translation of Heidegger's works, then their German counterparts.

technical term employed therein, but from time to time the interest becomes more pointed.<sup>2</sup> As early as *Being and Time* (1927) the problem of the title becomes one of *titling*, where the difficulty of inverting the title's components is a matter of the highest philosophical importance.<sup>3</sup> In the first part of his lectures on Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, originally presented from 1936-39, the very justification for the lectures rests on the problem of Nietzsche's title.<sup>4</sup> And in what is one of the more mysterious embroilments of titling, in the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, an 'official title [*öffentliche Titel*]' is paired with an 'essential title [*wesentliche Überschrift*],' on whose distinction and play depends the very possibility of the work's reception.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To cite only a few of the instances in which Heidegger problematizes or highlights someone else's title with the use of his own, see, for example, the introduction to the early lectures *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, (1923) called: 'The Title "Ontology"'; the subheading to the later lecture series, *The Question Concerning the Thing: On Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Principles*: "The Title of Kant's Main Work" (1935/36); the opening to the lectures *Basic Concepts* (1941): 'The Elucidation of the title of the lecture "Basic Concepts"'; or 'The Title "Logic"' in the 1944 *Heraclitus: Logic. Heraclitus' Teaching of the Logos*.

<sup>3</sup> This is, of course, the problem of 'Time and Being,' the unwritten third division to Part One of *Being and Time*.

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1: *The Will to Power*, trans. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). In his 1961 forward to the published edition of his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger opens with the following: "Nietzsche"—the name of the thinker stands as the title for *the matter* of his thinking. The matter, the point in question, is in itself a confrontation. To let our thinking enter into the matter, to prepare our thinking for it—these goals determine the contents of the present publication' (xv). If Nietzsche's name stands as the title for the matter of his thinking, it is in order to supply the title of the title 'Will to Power,' whose constitution as a work, and as the *main work* of the man, Heidegger must here insist on.

<sup>5</sup> The motif of the title reappears in *Contributions*, not only in Heidegger's opening remarks entitled, 'The official title: Contributions to Philosophy and the essential rubric [*Überschrift*]: Of the Event,' but also intermittently throughout the work. See, for example, this particularly telling indication of the title's importance in section 35, 'The event': 'The event' would be the right title for the "work" which can only be prepared here; for this reason, the title must instead be *Contributions to Philosophy*.' Heidegger, Martin, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 62.

And yet something else seems to be at stake in the 50s, when the title's elucidation may be called 'the sole task.' The baldness of such a claim testifies to the newfound visibility of what elsewhere, if not simply absent, still remained latent.<sup>6</sup> Even in context, however, the strangeness of the claim is marked, as it presumes that concern with the basic principles of philosophy would essentially be a concern with titling. Much, it seems, will depend on the thrust of what is here meant by '*Verdeutlichung*.' In what follows it will be argued that the 'clarification' here called for cannot simply be understood as an elucidation of sense, but concerns no less than a rethinking of the essence of the title, of what we might call *the title of the title*. In other words, it concerns a thinking of that which *grounds* the title, and can therefore no longer simply be another title (both in the sense of a heading and a principle). Although the fact that the title should bear so much weight for the lecture remains a stunning turn of events, it is one, this paper will argue, whose impetus ultimately derives from the rigors of the Heideggerian thinking of *Er-eignis*. For if the lecture is to think the event of appropriation and thereby give the being of beings otherwise, this movement must be visible at the top or head, in the uppermost space of the text, as the becoming *Nachschrift* of the *Überschrift*. By tracking the title's development in three post-war lectures from 1955 to 1958 the necessity of this movement will be shown, as well as the resistance against which Heidegger himself had to contend in order to make it manifest.

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<sup>6</sup> See in particular the 1941 lecture series *Basic Concepts*: 'We now take more literally the title of this lecture, according to which the first elucidation was given. We write it correspondingly: *Ground-Concepts*. The title expresses the demand [*Forderung*] to reach the ground of all that is, of what can therefore be called beings, or to anticipate it and not to let what is anticipated go again.' Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Concepts*, trans. by Gary E. Aylesworth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) p. 10. Although Heidegger here begins to manipulate the writing of the title, which then even speaks as a 'demand,' the title itself does not yet explicitly enter into the issue at stake in the lectures.

## 1. The Principle of Reason and the Serpent's Incipit

In 1955 Heidegger gave a series of lectures at the University of Freiburg under the title, *The Principle of Reason [Der Satz vom Grund]*.<sup>7</sup> The subject of these lectures, as indicated by their title, was precisely the nature of this principle and its relation to the other, so-called, fundamental principles. *Der Satz vom Grund* is here meant to translate Leibniz's Latin: '*nihil est sine ratione*,' and it is to Leibniz that Heidegger credits the first serious reflections on the topic in Western thought.

Although, Heidegger comments, the principle of reason may at first appear to be completely self-evident, its nature is inherently paradoxical and even aporetic. The principle of reason, it seems, if not the *first* principle, should at least be contemporary with the first, most basic principles. For even the principle of identity, in affirming identity as 'the belonging-together of distinct things on the basis of the same,' needs assume 'the basis [*Grund*] of the same',<sup>8</sup> which is already a ground. If, then, the principle of reason has an ontological priority over all other principles, it is because it is the principle of principles.<sup>9</sup> But one is in this case faced with the daunting dilemma of not knowing whether this principle is itself grounded (as it should require of anything that *is*), or if it is, as the principle of principles, exempt from its own unconditional condition.

According to our assertion, it is supposed to be the principle of all principles. Taken to its extreme, this means that the principle of reason [*Grund*] is the ground/reason [*Grund*] of principles. The principle of reason is the ground/reason [*Grund*] of the principle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), hereafter *PR*, and Heidegger, Martin, *Der Satz Vom Grund* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), hereafter *SG*.

<sup>8</sup> *PR* 8/*SG* 22.

<sup>9</sup> *PR* 13/*SG* 31.

<sup>10</sup> 'Er [*Der Satz vom Grund*] gilt als Grundsatz. Nach unserer Behauptung soll er der Satz aller Sätze sein. Ins Äußerste gesprochen heißt dies: Der Satz des Grundes ist

But such a realization leads Heidegger to the vertiginous conclusion:

[T]he principle of reason—the ground/reason of the principle. Here something turns in on itself. Here something coils in on itself but does not close itself, for it uncoils itself at the same time. Here is a coil, a living coil, like a snake. Here something catches [fängt] itself at [an] its own end. Here is a commencement [Anfang] that is already completion.<sup>11</sup>

By reducing the aporia to a single sentence: the principle of reason—the ground/reason of the principle, Heidegger reveals the necessity of this unsettling relationship, the virtue of which is precisely to resist resolution through analysis. The image of the coiled snake *disorients*, and does so by troubling the ground of the ground.

It is at this point, in the form of a negative assurance, that the question of the title first emerges. For it is not, Heidegger assures his listeners, merely by virtue of a fortuitously chosen title that this vertiginous position has been reached. The nature of such an aporia does not result, Heidegger protests, from mere wordplay. The title does not represent a simple investment that would here be cashed out with the significant dividends of a fortunate paradox. In other words, Heidegger confirms, *it is not simply a matter of a title*:

The enigma does not lie in the title, as though we were playing an empty game with words. The enigma of the principle of reason lies in the fact that the principle under discussion is the principle which has the rank and role of a Principle.<sup>12</sup>

It is no mere ruse. Rather, the principle of reason, because it is itself a principle, opens us to the groundlessness of all such fundamental principles and it is this that is expressed in the serpent-like formulation that takes the lecture's title and wraps it back upon itself.

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*der Grund der Sätze. Der Satz des Grundes ist der Grund des Satzes.*' (PR 13/SG 31).

<sup>11</sup> PR 14/SG 31.

<sup>12</sup> PR 14/SG 32.

We thus see an initial attempt in Heidegger's thought of the 50s to grapple with the basic principles of philosophy. What is here yet in its incipient stage, drawing on and playing with the title without yet thematizing the *necessity* of such an interrogation, will develop in the two lectures to be examined. That is, what will shift in the lectures to come will not be the conceptual import of the abyssal structure of fundamental principles, but rather the necessity of passing this thought explicitly through that of the title. While here the play of the title is deemed *not mere wordplay*, insofar as it yields to the necessary movement of the principle, in the next two lectures it will become the host or body—even the source—of that very movement. Consequently, the task of what follows will be to further elucidate this movement, its relation to the principle, and the growing necessity of its passing through the title.

## 2. The Essence of Language

Two years after *The Principle of Reason*, in the 1957-58 academic year at Freiburg, Heidegger gave a three-part lecture series under the title 'The Essence of Language [*Das Wesen der Sprache*].' The lecture series took as its point of departure a late poem of Stephan George's called 'The Word', and centred on questions of poetry, and above all the relation of poetry to thinking. As Heidegger emphasizes throughout the lectures, often repeating it as their refrain, the following are intended to, 'bring us face to face with a possibility of undergoing an experience with language [*Sie möchten uns vor eine Möglichkeit bringen, mit der Sprache eine Erfahrung zu machen*].'<sup>13</sup> A necessary consequence of such an experience, we learn, is to be overwhelmed by it. We undergo or suffer an experience with language only by letting it surprise us, and thus only from a position of non-mastery. The stakes of such an experience for the language speaker should be nothing less than a transformation of the self,

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *On the Way to Language*, trans. by Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), hereafter *OW*, and Heidegger, Martin, *Unterwegs Zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), hereafter *UZ*; *OW* 57/*UZ* 159. The following translations have been systematically altered, replacing Hertz's translation of '*Wesen*' as 'nature,' to 'essence.' All appearances of 'essence' therefore refer to Heidegger's term, '*Wesen*,' which can refer variously to essence, nature or being, but which for clarity's sake I have left as essence on each occasion.

and it is this that Heidegger indicates as he goes on to explain: ‘To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim [*Anspruch*] of language by entering into and submitting to it. [...] We who speak language may thereupon become transformed by such experiences.’<sup>14</sup> While the production of such an experience may require no more than drawing our attention to our own relation with language, comprehending the scope and implications of the *knowledge* thereby gained, as well as the nature of such an *experience*, proves a much more difficult task. It is with this task, then, that Heidegger’s lecture series is occupied.

The difficulty with language, as with being, is that it seems the most obvious and self-evident thing. But to undergo an experience with language would require facing language as language: *as it brings itself to language*. Because, Heidegger explains, this seems that which is most excluded by everyday modes of communication that bring everything except this to language, instead emphasizing meaning and sense, or ‘content’ in opposition to ‘form,’ and because this is also excluded from the sciences of language such as linguistics and philology, Heidegger turns instead to George’s poem which, we will see, attempts to put into language an experience with language’s denial of itself. Because language is what is forgotten each time meaning presents itself in it, it is by narrating a denial of meaning that George’s poem will bring into language what can only be outside of meaning or presence, i.e. language itself or ‘the word.’

George’s poem, then, poses the question of the relation of word to thing, hence of language to *the world*, and begins by envisaging the poet as something of a go-between for the two. It narrates an experience that the poet must undergo and through which a different vision of the word, thing, and poetry comes about. While in the first stanza the poet carries ‘wonders’ without name while awaiting the eventual arrival of their appellations, by the final stanza the poet has suffered the disappointment of their absence, and ‘learns’ the intimate boundedness of what initially seemed separable. Beginning his analysis with the final line of the poem, ‘Where word breaks off no thing may be [*Kein ding sei wo das wort*

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<sup>14</sup> *OW 57/UZ 159*.

*gebricht*],<sup>15</sup> Heidegger asks what kind of experience George's poem testifies to:

But the title of the poem is simply 'The Word.' The decisive experience is that which the poet has undergone with the word—and with the word inasmuch as it alone can bestow a relation to a thing. Stated more explicitly, the poet has experienced that only the word makes a thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present. The word avows itself to the poet as that which holds and sustains a thing in its being. [...] But the word is also that possession with which the poet is trusted and entrusted as poet in an extraordinary way. The poet experiences his poetic calling as a call to the word as the source, the bourn of Being.<sup>16</sup>

The deeper one delves into language and the word, the more it becomes clear that the role of the poet cannot be conceived of as that of an arbiter: as a mediator of things that he or she would simply express through words. For the word is better understood as the 'relation,' which, 'retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it "is" a thing.'<sup>17</sup> The poet does not then find two separate, pre-existing fields of words and things that he would mediate or approximate to one another, but is above all sensitive to the being of things as always already in language. The word bears with itself the possibility of the thing's appearance, outside of which, or prior to which, no relation to the 'thing' would be possible. But this knowledge, in turn, is no 'mere knowledge,' as if of two independent and self-sustaining objects. It is instead, an 'entrance into the relation of word to thing,'<sup>18</sup> or into the being of these beings, in their interconnectedness. One notices early on in Heidegger's lecture a stress on the difference between *understanding* [*Kenntnisse*] the experience of the poet as it is narrated in 'The Word,' and *undergoing* [*Erfahrung machen*] such an experience. While understanding and knowledge would be but a matter of ratiocination, the event of undergoing an experience is

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<sup>15</sup> All translations of George's poem are taken from Peter D. Hertz's translation of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*.

<sup>16</sup> OW 65-66/UZ 168-169.

<sup>17</sup> 'Das Wort selber ist das Verhältnis, das jeweils in sich das Ding so einbehält, daß es ein Ding "ist".' (OW 66/UZ 170).

<sup>18</sup> OW 66/UZ 170.

in the same region as thinking, and it is here that ultimately both thinking and poetry have the privilege of dwelling.

Facing, then, the question of whether, and how, his own lecture might undergo the experience named in George's poem—rather than simply *understand* it—Heidegger turns to the title of his lecture:

This series of lectures bears the title 'The Essence of Language.' It is intended to bring us face to face with a possibility of undergoing a thinking experience with language. Be it noted that we said a possibility. We are still only in the preliminaries, in an attempt, even though the title does not say so. That title, 'The Essence of Language,' sounds rather presumptuous, as though we were about to promulgate reliable information concerning the essence of language [...] But what if we were to get rid of the presumptuousness and triteness of the title by a simple device? Let us give the title a question mark, such that the whole of it is covered by that mark and hence has a different sound. It then runs: The Essence?—of Language?<sup>19</sup>

The title, *The Essence of Language*, given everything being discussed, certainly seems out of place. Amending its form, appending a question mark, rids it of its presumptuousness and triteness. The title would go from the indicative mood to the interrogative, it would question rather than suppose, and in so doing, it would alert us to the problem of 'essence [*Wesen*],' which otherwise appeared assumed. Such a 'device [*Vorkehrung*]' will not however prove sufficient. For questioning itself requires as its very possibility the grant [*Zusage*] of whatever is to be questioned.<sup>20</sup> One can only question "language" or "essence" if one

<sup>19</sup> OW 70/UZ 174, translation altered.

<sup>20</sup> In the following passage Heidegger gives one of his more thorough accounts of this logic: 'Wenn wir bei der Sprache anfragen, nämlich nach ihrem Wesen, dann muß uns doch die Sprache selber schon zugesprochen sein. Wollen wir dem Wesen, nämlich der Sprache, nachfragen, so muß uns auch, was Wesen heißt, schon zugesprochen sein. Anfrage und Nachfrage brauchen hier und überall im voraus den Zuspruch dessen, was sie fragend angehen, dem sie fragend nachgehen. Jeder Ansatz jeder Frage hält sich schon innerhalb der Zusage dessen auf, was in die Frage gestellt wird.' (OW 71/UZ 175, my emphasis).

possesses—is granted—already, the one or the other; that is, if the one or the other has already been *spoken for* [*zugesprochen*]. For the very articulation of a question *about* something presupposes its determination, i.e., that it be a being, that it is given. Questioning, therefore, does not capture the proper relation of a thinker to that which is to be thought, and consequently the appending of the question mark does not suffice for the task. Instead, Heidegger explains, thinking requires a ‘listening to the grant [*das Hören der Zusage*]’.<sup>21</sup>

What do we discover when we give sufficient thought to the matter? This, that the authentic attitude of thinking is not a putting of questions—rather, it is a hearing of the promise/grant, of that which in the question should arrive. [*Daß das Fragen nicht die eigentliche Gebärde des Denkens ist, sondern—das Hören der Zusage dessen, was in die Frage kommen soll*].<sup>22</sup>

And then:

[T]he true stance of thinking cannot be to put questions, but must be the hearing of its promise—and all questioning begins to be a questioning only in virtue of pursuing its quest for essential being [...*daß die eigentliche Gebärde des Denkens nicht das Fragen sein kann, sondern das Hören der Zusage*

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The repetition of ‘*zugesprochen*,’ ‘*Zuspruch*,’ and ‘*Zusage*,’ each of which carries the denotations of promise, grant, or award, gives us also to hear within the logic of Heidegger’s argument the most literal sense of *spoken to* (*sprechen zu*), here where it is above all a matter of *Sprache*. These must be understood as derivate modes of speech, which in *being granted, promised, or awarded*, are heard as already *spoken for*. Once language is spoken as a question, (i.e., treated through a question, but also treated as merely a mode of questioning), it is heard as *promised, granted, or awarded*, instead of *promising, granting, or awarding*. That is, that which is *not* given, promised or granted. As we will see in what follows, a language of *Zuspruch/-sprechen* will be replaced by one of *An-spruch/-sprechen/-klang* (*demand, address, echo*), as the mode of listening to the *Zusage* becomes intelligible as claim or claiming, instead of as claimed.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, who treated the complexities of the Heideggerian notion of ‘*Zusage*’ in his *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, has also dedicated a number of works to the problem of the title. For discussions of the title in his work, see especially ‘Before the Law,’ ‘Title (To Be Specified),’ and *Given Time*.

<sup>22</sup> *OW 71/UZ 175*, translation altered.

*dessen sein muß, wobei alles Fragen dann erst anfragt, indem es dem Wesen nachfragt].*<sup>23</sup>

It will therefore be necessary to amend once more the title of the lecture, as a question mark by itself does not suffice for the title to become, ‘the title for an experience [*Erfahrung*] of thinking.’<sup>24</sup> Rather, if the essence of language is to be granted to us, it will be as the ‘grant of its essential being.’<sup>25</sup> And this would mean, in turn, that ‘the essence [*Wesen*] of language becomes the language of essence [*Wesen*].’<sup>26</sup> The problem, then, is not simply one with the question mark as such, but with the mode of questioning that it reflects. A question is always in language, but since we are asking about the essence [*Wesen*] or ground of something, no answer which assumes *a being*, and the being of a being, will do. That is, will be sufficiently *questioning*. The question must be re-posed in such a way that it does not pre-empt its object *as an object*. Additionally, that which is here to be questioned, the essence of language, is already in the question before it even succeeds in being posed as a question. The question is always in language, and thus we must get to the being-language of the question rather than going through the question as a mode of interrogating language (as an object). We must question the question and question it in its terms as knowing its object.

Thus, if language first vouchsafes itself to us as language before posing itself as a question (with a content and object), the question itself as language becomes the key to its answer. The question of “the essence of language” has become not quite a *solution* (for there is no proper solution to a question that is not yet a question), but a reformulation of the question no longer on questioning terms. Hence: the essence of language, the language of essence. This says that the question looks no further than language for the answer to its essence. The essence of language is contained—albeit in a paradoxical manner that is not simply one of containment—in the language of essence. Essence is to be found

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<sup>23</sup> OW 72/UZ 176, translation altered.

<sup>24</sup> OW 72/UZ 176.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Wie immer wir bei der Sprache nach ihrem Wesen anfragen, allem zuvor braucht es dessen, daß sich uns die Sprache selbst zusagt. In diesem Falle wird das Wesen der Sprache zur Zusage ihres Wesens, d.h. zur Sprache des Wesens’ (UZ 176).

<sup>26</sup> OW 72/UZ 176.

nowhere else or beyond language, and that is because it is in language itself that language is grounded. Such is, for Heidegger, the lesson of George's poem. If language, *being* in language, is in fact the necessary condition of being—that is, if the realm of being, of being as presence, is determined by an entry into language—then the essence [*Wesen*] of language is co-determined by the language of essence [*Wesen*], and there would be nothing prior to the linguistic moment of language's own articulation of itself. Essence [*Wesen*] then, as the ground, as the essence of being of the thing, is thought already in terms set by language which gives itself and the thing in their difference, and to think this is what is necessary. That the essence of language is located in the language of essence also means that while one cannot look *outside* of language for an answer to the mystery of the 'essence of language,' it is neither the case that by remaining *within* language something resembling knowledge or meaning might ever be produced that would be adequate to the difficulty. The very circularity of this tortuous formulation serves to indicate that no departure from the circuitousness inherent in language would be adequate to it; thus, that any formulation of language that would succeed in testifying to its essence must also resist giving a distinct or clear sense to what is anterior to signification.

Having registered the difficulty then, we must recognize that it is the first step in thinking the belonging-together of thinking and being. Because the essence of language is in the language of essence, we will have to come to terms with something necessarily abyssal about language, which cannot be overcome or exceeded. A thinking experience suffers this *aporia* of language, which is the poet's experience.

After pronouncing this crucial point of the lecture, Heidegger once again returns to the question of the title and its status:

Our title, 'The Essence of Language,' has now lost its role as title. What it says is the echo of a thinking experience, the possibility of which we are trying to bring before us: the essence of language—the language of essence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *OW 72/UZ 176.*

And then:

The whole that now addresses [*anspricht*] us—the essence of language: the language of essence—is not a title, let alone an answer to a question. It becomes a guideword, meant to guide us on our way. On that way of thinking, the poetic experience with the word which we heard at the beginning is to be our companion.<sup>28</sup>

The title is no longer a question, nor an answer to a question, nor even a title. Something has happened to the title which has stripped it of its title. But what, we might ask, was the necessity of this movement, by which the title has become an ‘echo [*Anklang*]’? To say that this work of *untitling* has been solely for the sake of clarity—of correcting the possible error of a reader or listener who would hear or read it and mistake it for a claim to knowledge—while an effect of the operation, somehow misses the force of the work. For even while this might account for the first movement of the title, from constative to interrogative in its becoming question, something else occurs in the transition that follows. The becoming echo of Heidegger’s title answers to a more profound call than that of clarity. That which is sought is nothing other than, ‘the title for an experience of thinking,’<sup>29</sup> as was noted above. And what is then put forward is, strictly speaking, no title at all. There is something incoherent or incompatible between *the* title (as type, as a category of language) and an experience of thinking, such that *no* title could properly *entitle* such an experience. Instead, the proper mode of language is here the echo. That is—and we will return to this—it is an articulation that does not come *first*, hanging over and down upon what follows, but which is already derivative, a *sounding* of the experience itself. Furthermore, the title should become a ‘guide word [*Leitwort*].’ The guideword is an echo of the thinking experience that, we might say, leads from within itself. Like a companion, it accompanies us on the path.

Let us recall that all this—the re-titling of the title first by question mark, and then by its becoming echo through the formulation: ‘the essence of language: the language of essence’—all this followed as a

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<sup>28</sup> *OW 72/UZ 176.*

<sup>29</sup> *OW 72.*

consequence of wanting to undergo an experience with language.<sup>30</sup> To understand the poet's experience in George's poem 'The Word' through a narration of its content was not sufficient. Indeed, it seems that *we too* needed to lose something in order to open the possibility of such an experience. The loss then, our proper loss, may be nothing other than the loss of the title. Not the loss of the title, 'The Essence of Language'—although we lost this as well—but the loss of our *entitlement* to entitle, our entitlement to titles. This is perhaps already at stake in Heidegger's opening remarks about the nature of an experience, which must be suffered rather than wilfully brought about and which thus can be decreed or ordained by no one.

The category of the title, as such, is therefore no longer applicable to the domain of thinking. Instead, we are subjected to the echo within 'the essence of language,' which is heard as: 'the essence of language: the language of essence.' An echo of a thinking experience, but also, formally, itself an echo. This new 'title' echoes the thinking experience but is itself, also, formulated as an echo with two sides which must be the same, but which are different. In this redoubling of the echo (text-title, title-title) is an explicit refusal to exit the circularity of language, which in turn strips every instance of its primacy. The experience of the repetition of the echo, the echoed echo, then, is also the renunciation of a more direct or meaningful (in the sense of something objective or transparent) formulation of 'the essence of language.' Like the experience of George's poet with word and thing, thinking here renders inextricable text and title.

Let us recall now that in *The Principle of Reason* thinking faced a similar double bind in 'the principle of reason—the reason/ground of principle.' It was there a matter of thinking the foundation of foundations, which could not however yield a new, more secure ground. Here, with the essence of language at stake, the experience will once more pass through the title, although this time the title itself will be problematized and made to succumb to the force of thinking, by means of the form of the echo. It

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<sup>30</sup> Heidegger makes a similar gesture, also through the use of a colon, in the 1969 Le Thor seminar. There it is a matter of circumventing saying 'is' in the case of 'being : nothing.' I am grateful to Andrew J. Mitchell for alerting me to this, as well as for his help in formulating the argument of this essay.

seems that, as the privileged site of textual mastery, not only must the title suffer the *aporia* of the lecture if thinking is to hold sway, but also that, insofar as it occupies the odd liminal space above the text, the title may indeed present the best opportunity to bear out the labour of the *aporia*, giving, in some sense, the very space for its event. In *Basic Principles of Thinking* we will see the fullest account yet of this logic, as the title comes to take on a position of unparalleled importance. By subjecting the title to the force of thought something essential to both is revealed.

### 3. Basic Principles of Thinking

Of the three extended lecture series that Heidegger gave at Freiburg after the war, including *What Is Called Thinking?* and *The Principle of Reason*, *Basic Principles of Thinking* would be the last. Given in 1957 in the same academic year as *The Essence of Language*, but just before it, *Basic Principles of Thinking* raises once more the question of thought's relationship to its ground, but this time by focusing on the principle of identity. It is a question in *Basic Principles of Thinking* both of the formal concept of this principle and, more generally, of how to think about the principle's ramifications for history, and for philosophy's relationship to the tradition by which it lives.

As already noted, the position and centrality of the title here reach new heights, or, to speak precisely, *depths*. With respect to the previous two texts, the title's explicit conceptualization attains greater refinement in *Basic Principles of Thinking*, and its significance is gauged as being of greater importance. The question we must ask in reading the lecture is, *Why?* What justifies, or perhaps necessitates, the title's coming to prominence *here*, in this lecture? If the title's newfound significance is not simply to be contingent, then something within the rigor of the text's thought must call, as a claim, to the title. As we shall see, it is a matter in *Basic Principles of Thinking* of making the title lose its essence *as* title, and having it speak instead as claim [*Anspruch*]. But is the necessity of such a transformation prescribed in the thought of claim itself, such that the title, in some way, calls to thinking to think it as claim in the first place? And if indeed this is the case, if the title *must be* subjected to the untitling force of thought in order for the claim of thinking itself to be

heard, then would this merely be a variation upon the echo heard in ‘The Essence of Language,’ or a constitutively different form of enunciation?

The first lecture of *Basic Principles of Thinking* begins by reflecting on the necessity of reflecting on the beginning, and especially the title of the lectures:

‘Basic Principles of Thinking’—we begin with an elucidation of the title of the lectures. Through the elucidation a path can open for the following course of thought. [...] We are refining the title ‘Basic Principles of Thinking’ in order to keep away what does not belong. It happens in that we arrive at those determinations that the title would name as the title of the following lectures. The elucidation of the title thus brings us on the path of a thinking that thinks after thinking.<sup>31</sup>

The beginning of the series, its first lecture, begins by reflecting on its beginnings. Thinking cannot simply begin, because in order for thinking to think after itself it must first be on its path. But the path itself can only be arrived at by locating where one already is, and this has the form here of elucidating or refining the title.

The first such series of elucidations takes the form of exploring its double genitive. ‘Basic Principles of Thinking’ leaves us divided between understanding these principles as being posited by thinking, as the possession and presupposition of thinking, on the one hand, and as being that from which thinking itself stems, on the other. In addition to this equivocality, Heidegger quickly points out another, in the form of an ‘ambiguity.’ For thinking itself is historically determined, and the presumption of *a* or *the* thinking, of a universal and absolute human capacity for thought, is itself part of the destiny of Western thought. ‘Accordingly,’ Heidegger clarifies in the second lecture, ‘the multiply equivocal title of the lectures, assuming we now hear it contemplatively, is a hint into the question of how we keep to thinking, of whether we are inclined to experience it in terms of the basic principles.’<sup>32</sup> The title,

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<sup>31</sup> *BF 85/GA 79: 90.*

<sup>32</sup> *BF 93/GA 79: 98.*

considered contemplatively, is a hint. And yet this hint, while bringing us to the path, does not suffice to set us off along it:

An elucidation of the mere title, even one of this kind, still cannot at all enter into the issue at stake. The provided elucidation remains perforce a precaution for the proceedings, but is not yet the entry into the matter, i.e. the strife, in which Western thinking is inceptually entangled. It would then have to be that the title ‘Basic Principles of Thinking’ speaks a language entirely its own, a language that takes away from it the role of being merely a title and grants [*gibt*] it the linguistic character of an address [*An-spruchs*].<sup>33</sup>

Once again it will be a matter of altering the mood in which the title speaks. A title, as title, even if subjected to semantic scrutiny, remains restricted to preliminaries, ‘a precaution for the proceedings.’ But there exists the possibility of the title entering the issue at stake. This would consist in the title coming to speak an altogether different language, and one which has the ‘linguistic character of an address [*An-spruchs*].’<sup>34</sup> By elucidating the sense of thinking Heidegger will attempt to orchestrate just such a change.

While the tradition, Heidegger explains, has come to interpret thinking as logic or calculation, this represents only one aspect of the Greek sense of *lógos*. *Logos*, from the verb *légein*, means to gather or lay together. Aristotle, who clarifies its sense further by appending the adjective ‘*apophantikós*,’ understood by ‘*lógos apophantikós*’ something like:

the gathering that lays before such that it is able to bring something to the fore. The *logos* brings to the fore that which

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<sup>33</sup> *BF 98/GA 79*: 103.

<sup>34</sup> The word for ‘address’ here, ‘*Anspruch*,’ as we have already seen, also carries the sense of claim. It can also signify entitlement, address, or right. The point is not then to simply undermine *any* possibility for propriety or privilege, to destroy in other words all *rights*, but to alter the place from which these relations of obligation speak: *An-spruch* (by-saying/judgment). In other words, that this claim, for example, could be heard as that of language itself, prior to any speaker. Here the title is untitled so as to be titled otherwise, by thinking.

up until now and each time does not properly appear, though it already lies before us.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, Heidegger clarifies, thinking for the Greeks meant the letting appear of that which lies before.

The initial question that the grounding principles raised was whether they were to be understood as given by thinking, as its possession, or instead as the conditions through which thinking could be constituted in the first place. But if thinking in the Greek sense of *logos* is always already concerned with the ground as a letting appear of that which lies before, then what would become of the specificity of these grounding principles? Returning once more to the principle of identity, Heidegger broaches this difficulty:

What does it bring to appearance of all that lies before? Not this or that particular thing? Therefore something general? Therefore any arbitrary indeterminate entity that lies before? By no means. The statement A is A exposes A as A. The statement is so little swept away into an indefinite emptiness that it binds itself in a singular determination. A is A. Toward what is the exposition directed? Toward that which belongs to everything that lies before: [that it is the] same as itself. More precisely spoken: This sameness does not belong to everything that lies before like some general condition. Rather, everything that lies before belongs in a sameness with itself, for otherwise something that lies before could never lie before us of itself.<sup>36</sup>

The principle of identity therefore exposes that identity is nothing that itself lies at the ground. Rather, identity is that which *inheres in* that which lies at the ground, constituting it as such. ‘Identity is itself nothing that lies before, but it co-constitutes what lies before as such.’<sup>37</sup> The ‘ground’ that the principle of identity therefore appears to let lie before, identity, is itself no ground, and the principle would therefore expose nothing but the *groundlessness* of the principle:

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<sup>35</sup> BF 101/GA 79: 107.

<sup>36</sup> BF 104-5/GA 79: 111.

<sup>37</sup> BF 105/GA 79: 111.

What appears to lie at the ground of the basic principle A is A, this ground that the statement exposes, the sameness of something with itself, is nothing that lies before, nothing that lies at ground, and in this sense it is no longer ground. But because it is no longer a ground, we speak in a rigorous and sober sense of an abyss [*Ab-grund*]. The statements that are called basic principles of thinking in an exceptional sense lead us—when we adequately think them—to the abyss.<sup>38</sup>

If the grounding-principles of thinking expose no ground, but instead an abyss, then they can hardly still be understood as *grounding-principles*. The grounding-principle [*Grund-satz*] would instead become a leap [*Satz*]. For, any statement or principle that leads thinking away from ground to the abyss [*Ab-grund*] which underlies it, would rather be a leap *from* ground. Playing on the double sense of ‘*Satz*,’ which can mean either principle or leap, Heidegger returns to reflect on the title that has herewith undergone a change:

The elucidation of the title ‘Basic Principles of Thinking’ now first achieves its goal. It takes away from the title its role as a mere title. Basic principles of thinking—this now speaks as a claim [*Anspruch*] upon the leaps of thinking into its abyss.<sup>39</sup>

The title has been untitled. It speaks now as a claim, as a reflection of thought, about the very being of thought and its essence. The title, *as such*, is not here necessarily of import, but bears significance to the extent that it can be transformed by thinking. Thinking untitles the title and thereby allows the title to speak instead as a claim for and of thinking. Just as the grounding-principle has become a leap from ground—revealing the abyss by which it is (un)-grounded—so too has the title become untitled, and come instead to speak as a voice for the address [*Anspruch*] of thinking. Indeed, these would constitute the same movement.

In the lecture that follows, subtitled *The Principle of Identity*, Heidegger explains with greater precision the sense of the abyss here

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<sup>38</sup> *BF 105/GA 79*: 112.

<sup>39</sup> *BF 105/GA 79*: 112.

uncovered, even *leapt into*. The abyss, he clarifies, ‘is neither the empty nothing nor an obscure confusion, but rather the event of appropriation [*Er-eignis*].’<sup>40</sup> The abyss names the event of appropriation, or put otherwise, that by which the human and being are delivered into the ownership of one another. Here ‘ownership’ does not refer to the transfer of a being or pre-determined essence, but names the process by which the human is opened to the essencing of being. Heidegger clarifies that such an event is precipitated by thinking and constructed out of language, whose pliancy is what allows for such an opening in the first place. At stake in the event of appropriation then is the very possibility that the human and being might come into possession of one another in their *belonging-together*, and thus from a relatedness that is prior to the objectivity, or presence, of either.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, it is also what has been at stake all along in the consideration of the principle of identity. For it is the event of appropriation that ultimately thinks the propriety of the proper—the coming into possession of the proper—which is the subject of the principle of identity. The title, or more precisely the un-titling and becoming claim of the title, would be complicit in the event of appropriation to the extent that it voices thinking’s claim into and out of this abyss.

The importance of this thinking of *Ereignis* is far-reaching for Heidegger. At stake in the possibility of thinking its event is not simply that the lecture should prove more compelling, or that philosophy attain some abstract worth or pertinence. At the limit, the meaning of thought and of philosophy here hang in the balance. Thinking, so long as it concerns the event of appropriation, glimpses into the givenness of the being of beings, and in so doing *acts*. It acts first by thinking, and thus uprooting, the ground of ‘positionality’ by glimpsing into the givenness or sending of beings. But second (although in truth this is only an artificial distinction) it acts there by ungrounding the distinction between thought and action, which itself must force a reconsideration of the *act of thinking*, hence philosophy, the lecture, and even, insofar as it is here brought into play, the title. The language of action is not explicitly Heidegger’s, but is implicated as soon as it becomes a matter of *Ereignis*:

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<sup>40</sup> *BF* 120/*GA* 79: 128.

<sup>41</sup> *BF* 113.

The essence of identity is the propriety of the appropriative event. We can only sensibly speak of authenticity when we think it in terms of the event of appropriation. If there could be something tenable in the attempt to point our thinking into the place of the essential provenance of identity, then what would become of the title of this lecture? The sense of the title ‘The Principle of Identity’ would have changed.

[...]

Principle of identity now says: a leap that achieves the event of appropriation, i.e., the essence of identity, because the event needs it if the *belonging-together* of the human and being are otherwise to achieve the essential light of the event of appropriation.

On the way from principle as an expression about identity to the principle as a leap into the essential provenance of a *belonging-together*, thinking has transformed itself. Thus the thoughtful glance looks past the situation of humans in the present and catches sight of the constellation of being and the human from what first appropriates each to the other, from the event of appropriation.<sup>42</sup>

Heidegger had already anticipated these remarks in the second lecture, when he clarified, ‘What is meant by leap is the transformation of the thinking that determines our age world-historically.’<sup>43</sup> Here, however, the ambit of thought is contextualized through its implicating of the event of appropriation.

We may finally now observe that the importance of a de-centred title is at least two-fold. On the one hand, to undermine or untitled the title is to do so to a site of ostensible mastery that would hang over the text of the lecture and preside or proclaim upon it, much in the fashion of a preface. On the other hand—and while this is inextricable from the former, it also speaks to the originality of the Heideggerian text—the title

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<sup>42</sup> *BF* 119-120/*GA* 79: 127-8.

<sup>43</sup> *BF* 106/*GA* 79: 113.

serves as a site for the projection of the labour of thinking. It speaks, announces, or registers the work of thought *at the top*, as if a beacon in the otherwise half-illuminated night of thinking. Of course, it is precisely the supremacy of the title—of the head—that we have shown Heidegger to time and again undermine. If something remains unquestioned here, it is only the *punctuality*, or we could also say the discreteness, of the title's altered speech. As the voicing of the event of thought, of thinking, the title would supply the conceit of a visible trace of what otherwise remains the distinctly *non-present* disruption of the presence of the present, in positionality.

The concern then is precisely history. Thinking, through language, is transformed, just as language—in the title—will be, and this supplementary sense now names the very ungroundedness of being. By registering this on the level of the title not only is the essential pliability of language demonstrated, but so too is the historical [*geschichtlich*] event of a shift in the constellation, which is arrived at through the bringing to intelligibility of the event of appropriation. In contrast here is Heidegger's frequent reticence throughout the lectures to claim that thinking *happens*—it is instead a matter of 'approaching thinking'—versus what indeed *happens* to his titles. It is important to note that on both occasions, in both the second and third lectures, when Heidegger announces an amendment to his titles, he opposes a language of the constative to that of the performative. Hence, in the second lecture the title comes to speak as 'claim [*Anspruch*]':

The elucidation of the title 'Basic Principles of Thinking' now first achieves its goal. It takes away from the title its role as a mere title. Basic principles of thinking—this now speaks as a *claim* upon the leaps of thinking into its abyss.<sup>44</sup>

And in the third, it becomes a 'leap [*Satz*]': 'On the way from principle as an expression *about* identity to the principle *as a leap into* the essential provenance of a *belonging-together*, thinking has transformed itself.'<sup>45</sup> The sense of these 'performances'—what we might call

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<sup>44</sup> *BF* 105, my emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> *BF* 120, my emphasis.

ontological-performatives—concerns language’s ability to speak *historically*. Thus not *about* beings, but *for* the being of beings. They would be historical to the extent that they inaugurate a shift in the bearing of positionality by showing how being presences: Precisely what positionality disavows. The leaps and claims of language systematically operate in *Basic Principles of Thinking* as performatives that implicitly undermine the distinction between a constative and performative language, by revealing the always already performative character of any constative statement that claims (in *mere* description) that something *is*. The title, then, would in some sense consolidate this line of thought and place it at the top, at the head, at the very same time that it would undermine its own elevation. And this is, finally, the point that the title’s thought reaches in the fourth lecture. And, indeed, why Heidegger can proclaim that, ‘the sole issue of the lectures is their title.’<sup>46</sup> The title is significant precisely because it is not something *above the text*, but *after* or in *pursuit* of that which is thought in the text.<sup>47</sup> That at this very moment in the lecture Heidegger voices his own reticence towards what he calls in the title, ‘the written [*Geschriebenen*],’ makes it all the more significant that *despite* its written character, it could be so vital in carrying through thinking:

Nothing stands under the title, nothing in the sense of a collection of utterances about a topic. Nothing stands under the title because everything lies therein. The title, therefore, is likewise no title; it is not a heading [*Überschrift*], but rather a *postscript* [*Nachschrift*]. Fraught with all the dubiousness of the written [*Geschriebenen*], it writes something out that follows upon our thinking, and this means it would like to come near and nearer to our thinking, in that it attempts to transform what is written back into something heard, and that which is heard, however, into something caught sight of. For only what we have caught sight of do we see, do we preserve as what has been seen (the beautiful).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *BF* 127.

<sup>47</sup> The point then must be this: the title of the title is no mere title, but like all fundamental principles speaks to the groundless ground of all titling/principles.

<sup>48</sup> *BF* 127/*GA* 79: 135.

But does it not also announce the happening of *Ereignis* as a discrete, even temporal event? While on the one hand, by situating the title *after* the text Heidegger achieves his aim of placing it in relation to the text it names, so that instead of speaking before it, it now speaks from it, on the other hand, is this not also, precisely, the place from which all titles—or prefaces—already speak? Being written in the interim of a first and second reading, precisely so as to consolidate what *has* thereby *happened*? Insofar as each of Heidegger's lectures that we have examined present exercises in the suffering of thought, in the subjection of any point of mastery—principle or title alike—to a moment of reading that ungrounds it, the title does indeed become exemplary for the irruptive force of thinking, whose authority, as well as whose meaning, is ever deferred. But such a thought, *at the same time*, requires that the *event* of untitling, and our hearing of the claims of thought, also be deferred. That thought's claims themselves risk falling silent, and that we risk ever again taking the title's title for what it is not: a mere title. Refining the significance of the title *is* the sole task, but one, we could say, that must also be subject to an endless deferral of its aim.

**H. Sharp and J. E. Smith's *Between Hegel and Spinoza: A Volume of Critical Essays***

**(London: Bloomsbury, 2012)**

**JAMES KAY**

Macherey and Deleuze cast large shadows over the understanding of the relationship between Hegel and Spinoza within continental philosophy, with which this volume is certainly aligned. Macherey interpreted Hegel as harbouring a Spinozism within himself which he could only falteringly acknowledge, a reading which can, if not handled with care, serve to shield Spinoza from instructive Hegelian criticism just as well as protecting him from being swallowed up in Hegel's history of philosophy. Deleuze famously took sides with Spinoza even more strongly, viewing him as the philosopher of affirmation *par excellence* as against Hegel's suffocating negativity. Commendably, while acknowledging the importance of the work of Macherey and Deleuze, this collection opens up space for other and often more even-handed formulations of the Hegel-Spinoza relationship, and points to other instructive interlocutors for these thinkers, such as Adorno, Althusser, Marx and Butler. Lauer, for example, suggests in his essay 'Affirmative Pathology: Spinoza and Hegel on Illness and Self-Repair' that Spinozists can learn from Hegel's anthropology in augmenting Spinoza's *conatus* into a more complete psychology. McCumber, in "Hegel's Reconciliation with Spinoza", allows them to be reconciled yet different on the nature of freedom. Bernstein, in the particularly strong closing essay to the volume, succeeds in establishing a 'non-reductive dialog', as he puts it, between

Spinoza's concrete history of the life and death of the Hebrew Commonwealth and Hegel's dialectical account of the same.

The region of exchange which dominates the accounts of Macherey and Deleuze, along with most commentary in general on Hegel and Spinoza's relationship, namely the ontology and metaphysics of Spinoza's *Ethics* and Hegel's criticisms of it, does not go neglected in this volume. Sadly, it is when it covers traditional sites of discussion that the collection is at its least interesting, adding little to existing debates. Fortunately, however, this is not the mainstay of the volume, the greater part of which succeeds in casting light on areas of exchange away from this well-trodden ground. The variety of topics covered is a great strength of the collection, branching out to look at interconnections between these philosophers in politics, psychology, history and subjectivity among other areas. There is also refreshingly strong representation of Spinoza's corpus outside of the *Ethics*, particularly the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Even long-time scholars of this area are likely to find something new here, which is a commendable quality for a collection of essays on centuries-old philosophies.

Unfortunately it must also be noted, on the other hand, that the format of the collection in a number of cases seems to thwart the adventurous spirit of the contributing authors. There are eleven essays and an introduction here in around two hundred and thirty pages, which, allowing space for endnotes, leaves many of the essays well under twenty pages, some under fifteen. While this is not an intrinsic issue, the amount of ground that must be covered in bringing together and analysing two challenging and complex philosophies means that frequently the essays feel short of space, lacking room to flesh out significant points. The task of balancing Hegel and Spinoza within an essay is not always successful, on the one hand sometimes resulting in essays being weighed down in trying to give a sufficient exegesis of both, eating away much of the space for analysing them, and on the other, sometimes foregoing deep textual engagement in favour of a lengthier analysis which is thereby robbed of some persuasiveness as a result. Many of the essays leave the reader wanting more, and not always in a good way, with loose ends not fully tied up hanging at the end. Williams' essay, 'Thinking the Space of the Subject between Hegel and Spinoza' suffers particularly from this. It is

brimming with interesting ideas and directions but feels starved of space to fully elaborate them.

An additional side-effect of the same issue is that the essays must often proceed at an unforgiving pace, and so this is generally not a collection for those without some established familiarity with the two thinkers, though this may be viewed as a forgivable trait. More problematically, particularly when Hegel is the focus, there can be a failure to unpack complex terminology, resulting in passages of 'Hegelese', to use Pippin's term, just as dense as the original text. The opening essay, by Morfino, is particularly prone to this, and also includes an over-abundance of lengthy quotes from Hegel's *Science of Logic*, some up to a page long.

However, these unfortunate points should not be taken to rob the collection of worth, and overall this is certainly a valuable and refreshing addition to scholarship of the field, if bearing notable imperfections.

**Peter Wolfendale's *Object-Oriented Ontology*:**

***The Noumenon's New Clothes***

**(Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014)**

**LYNN KHANOVA**

Peter Wolfendale's book has already caused quite a sensation in the small world of Speculative Realism, the new philosophical movement tentatively coagulated by collective opposition to 'correlationism' and the agenda of 'bringing back the real'. Graham Harman, author of one of the most daring philosophical endeavours of this sort, known as Object-Oriented Ontology (or Philosophy; OOO or OOP) has gathered a lot of followers and critics, and Wolfendale is the most reverent of the latter.

Firstly, Wolfendale offers a concise and very faithful reconstruction of the main points of OOP: the withdrawal, the fourfold structure, and vicarious causation. To avoid the dubious task of summarising the summary, I will leave this part to the reviewers of Harman's own work, stating only that Wolfendale's account is to be recommended to anyone in need of a short, comprehensive guide to OOP.

What follows Wolfendale's overview is a total critique of almost every claim ever made by Harman. Wolfendale's presentation of arguments is clear and concise, but 'downright mean' would be a mild way of describing the tone. Despite the claims of 'discursive charity' (30), it is a book dripping with venom. Its scathing tone brings to mind the

finest examples of philosophical polemical journalism, such as Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*. A surgical knife is an operative metaphor throughout this book: the whole enterprise is one of a surgery or rather an autopsy. Speculative Realism, and OOO as its flagship, is dead, Wolfendale claims, and he is its coroner. Wolfendale provides a vast array of arguments, each of which is enough to proclaim the patient dead. This book provides a rare example of an all-encompassing critique that leaves no place for even the smallest bit of agreement; for Wolfendale, Harman is doing *everything* wrong.

These wrongs, however, are classified into three groups. The first concerns Harman's treatment of historical narrative. Drawing on his supreme knowledge of Heidegger (proven by reference to his PhD thesis (31)), Wolfendale first dismembers Harman's (ontological) interpretation of Heidegger's readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand in his account of withdrawal and tool-being. Then the misuse of phenomenology is exposed as a slip from phenomenology to metaphysics. The metaphysical criticism proper is the subject of a chapter of its own and will be discussed later.

From Harman's readings of other philosophers Wolfendale proceeds to the claims themselves. By parallelising OOP with Meinong's theory of subsistence and Frege's theory of sense, Wolfendale plans to expose Harman's apparent anti-representationalism as a 'pernicious' (115) representationalism; then his theory of metaphor is called into question, then the theory of individuation... On the way, multiple cases of explanatory circles, illicit substitutions of terms, and non-sequiturs are exposed. The counterarguments build up like a storm, attacking OOP on every turn.

Then Wolfendale proceeds to dismantling Harman's metaphysics in general, starting with the notion of object.

Each consequential step seems unnecessary in the light of his previous critical achievements, but Wolfendale holds to the view that a single counterargument is not enough to prove the falsity of a theory

(which is a peculiar view, since if his patient has been drowned, poisoned, stabbed, and strangled at the same time, he is dead anyway). Due to this, the connections between the sections are rather strange: having dismantled one level of the theory, Wolfendale has to proceed to the critique of the next level, which is already deemed null and void by his previous efforts, so he has to disregard his own previous efforts to proceed, recreating the next stage ‘as if’ the basis was legitimate and functional: such is the price of an all-encompassing critique.

What is confusing about this book is that Wolfendale disagrees with pretty much every point of Harman’s philosophy, thus refusing to ‘show his hand’ and engage in a productive discussion. If Wolfendale often complains that Harman’s ideas are difficult to disentangle (39), it is even more difficult to untangle his own position. He makes it a personal quest not to have one: ‘My own commitments [...] I have endeavoured to keep out of this book wherever possible’ (35). This is understandable in the light of the author’s self-positioning. This total critique is performed not from the position of a particular private thinker, but from the disembodied point of view of ‘proper practice of philosophy’ (105). The true object of Wolfendale’s criticism is therefore, not Harman at all: it is the philosophical public that has taken Harman seriously (among the lines of the titular fairy-tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, which mocks not the oblivious Emperor but the gullible public). The public mistook for philosophy something that is ‘pathological’ (xvi), ‘mysterianism’ (65), and generally a ‘train wreck’ of a philosophy. Wolfendale’s account is here to serve not as a counterargument or amendment, something that would leave space for a constructive outcome, but as a scarlet letter to drive any sensible philosopher away from Harman’s books. This creates a paradox Wolfendale himself is not unaware of: ‘it [the book] undertakes a long and detailed discussion of a single philosopher’s work, and yet it aims to show that his work does not warrant such serious attention. Why read, let alone write, such an odd book?’ (ix) Indeed, why write a book the sole aim of which would be the total exposure of one Graham Harman as a philosophical fraud?

The reason becomes explicit when one reaches part 3.4, and it is, surprisingly, a political one. The actual nature of the conflict reveals itself as a pre-election debate between the supporters of *ontological*

*conservatism* and *ontological liberalism/egalitarianism* (the combination of anti-reductionism granting the voice to all kinds of objects, and noetic attentiveness to the real effects of illusions and fictions). Harman here ends up in the same cell with Tristan Garcia and Markus Gabriel. It is not, we are told, a matter of ideas, or interpretations of previous philosophers, or the fate of realism itself. At stake here are the *ontological commitments*, i.e., as with every political movement, the electorate: the impressionable young minds who are in danger of being seduced by Harman's supposedly *laissez-faire* ontology. This political thread ends up, naturally, in a sociological answer to the question of how OOP became so popular. Accessing the past and the present of the movement, Wolfendale concludes that it is due to style, accessibility, casual interdisciplinarity, catering to the needs of artists and the surrounding infrastructure, and, more importantly, a particular combination of presuppositions Wolfendale finds already at work in the Continental circles, the most prominent one being the addiction to the easy virtue of liberal non-restrictiveness.

The book is ripe with critical accounts of what OOP 'licences' (114) and what it lets one do (404). But it raises the question: what is Wolfendale's own book supposed to allow us to do? What is the positive output of this overwhelmingly negative treatment?

What is actually going on here is the dispute about the nature of philosophy and the criteria of philosophical writing, and it is, I daresay, the most productive way of reading this book: as another participant in the discussion about what philosophy should be. *What is metaphysics?* would be a better name for it, and a better central topic, which is sadly obscured by author's petty feud with Harman.

When answering this question, Wolfendale really comes to himself. The thing he does in chapters 3.4-3.6 is remarkable: it is an attempt to reconstruct the general notion of metaphysics which would serve as a passcode for everyone, on both sides of the analytical/continental 'split', a notion of philosophy that would include both Deleuze and Quine (but exclude Harman). An extensive historical study, spanning from Kant's demarcation of *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*, through

Husserl's formal and regional ontology, and Heidegger's critique of metaphysics (symptomatically treated first of all as a reaction to Husserl's lack of methodological awareness), to Derrida, Badiou, and Meillassoux, Wolfendale reconstructs the pattern of what he repeatedly refers to as 'the Continental circles' or 'tradition' (216, 220, 227, *et passim*). Then he takes to the analytical side, from Frege and Wittgenstein to Quine and Carnap.

The resulting norms of philosophical engagement (mostly coming with support of oft-quoted Brandom) are more explicit in forbidding some moves, the most dangerous of which is the illicit liaison between these three modes of argumentation: the historical, the phenomenological and the metaphysical. It is harder to figure out what, for Wolfendale, proper philosophy *should* do: be critical and systematic; engage in a reciprocal manner with sciences on their own terms; stick to disciplinary borders between art, politics, science and philosophy itself; hold on to ontological humility (expelling the human from the central position) while refraining from epistemological humility (which he equals to the sceptics-critical hegemony of Derrida and the like); and, most of all, favour the theories that constrain before the theories that emancipate. This is what, for Wolfendale, distinguishes the 'proper practice of metaphysics' (325) from dangerous metaphysical speculation. And 'dangerous' here is to be taken seriously: the last chapter is a powerful dystopian image of an 'object-oriented' world where inanimate things organise a congress, philosophy students learn the language of silk and graphite, and scholasticism is making a comeback along with the social order it entails, all the achievements of modernity undone.

To prevent that, Wolfendale defends a particular type of philosophy, which Harman rejects with the same fervour. Where Wolfendale would advocate seriousness, profundity and gravitas, Harman parades parody, dare, and style. What is truly at stake in this book is not any of the particular claims Harman has made (or if it is, it is the one about Cthulhu replacing Minerva's owl as the mascot of philosophy<sup>1</sup>), but the idea of what philosophy is. Harman 'deliberately flaunts the demand

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<sup>1</sup> Harman, Graham. 'On the Horror of Phenomenology: Lovecraft and Husserl' in *Collapse IV: Concept Horror* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2008), p. 338.

for explanation' (122), hyperbolises the authors he reads, 'challenges the presumption that the worth of philosophical positions is to be gauged primarily in terms of the strength of the arguments' (362), praises style over argumentative explicitness (371) - i.e. overthrows everything Wolfendale holds dear, with full awareness and purpose. *Object-Oriented Ontology* finds Harman guilty of not confirming to this particular brand of philosophy. Which is precisely Harman's quest: redefining the idea of what constitutes philosophy was, at least in part, his explicit aim.

Wolfendale's critique is, though extremely well-argued, left in the position of stating the obvious: Harman's endeavour is not the kind of philosophy that follows the academic philosophy's 'code of conduct', and it is not trying to be one. It is backed by the sociological fact that may dissolve some of Wolfendale's fears: there are not that many people drawn to Speculative Realism. The connection between the norms of philosophical engagement and the possibility of realism has, however, just been sketched. Harman sees his ontology as an attempt to return philosophy to its right subject matter - the real itself - and in order to do so he sees as worthy to overthrow the standards of writing and argumentation that have supposedly led it off the right track. Wolfendale would rather have the standards. Is it possible to have one's cake and eat it too? This questions remains not just open but unaddressed by both sides of the conflict. In this aspect, Wolfendale's book is a beginning of a very interesting discussion.

**Fabio Gironi's *Naturalising Badiou:***

***Mathematical Ontology and Structural Realism***

**(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)**

**CHRIS HENRY**

No doubt spurred on by Žižek's repeated reference to him as a 'master' figure, there is a penchant in the secondary literature on Badiou to treat his figure as a target for assault. Gironi's stated aim is 'to offer a naturalist correction - something between a creative misreading and an unsolicited deliverance - of Alain Badiou's philosophy' and can be seen as following in the footsteps of Laruelle's brazenly polemic *Anti-Badiou*,<sup>1</sup> which also uses Badiou as a starting point for the author's own work. Gironi uses Badiou's mathematical ontology to proffer his own naturalised version, yet what is left at the end is so far removed from Badiou's work that the two positions are nearly unrecognisable. Badiou is certainly not the only theorist to share the author's position that mathematics holds a 'metaontological weight [...] put upon twentieth-century metamathematical results and on their description of a formally incomplete mathematical reality'; so why single him out? In fact, Gironi acknowledges himself that 'one of the main vices of continental philosophy is its penchant for endless, bromidic and intellectually incestuous exegesis of "master figures".' So the question that faces the reader from the beginning of this book – and a question that is never addressed—is *why* does Gironi take aim at Badiou in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Francois Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: The Introduction of Maoism Into Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

*Naturalising Badiou* is not an in-depth study of Badiou's mathematical/ontological system at all: it is an exceptionally well supported tour (a full fifth of the page count is taken up by useful and interesting notes) through the history of mathematics and its relationship with ontology that has been bookended by synopses of Badiou's position on the issue. More importantly, it is a development of Gironi's own project towards an immanent mathematisation of being, a project which tries to avoid both the idealist trappings of Badiou's work and the issues plaguing a number of other thinkers referenced. At tactical moments throughout the exegesis, Gironi takes time to spell out his own commitments to naturalist ontology and his formation of its immanent relationship to mathematics, providing useful focal points to his synthetic exposition. Yet his attempt to target Badiou (or Badiou's simulacrum in the form of the prophetic master) is never satisfactorily justified. Is it a cynical attempt to cash in on Badiou's ever-increasing popularity and a burgeoning secondary literature? To claim so would be to undersell Gironi's efforts, for *Naturalising Badiou* excels in demonstrating the easy command Gironi has over the detailed material at hand and the important stance that he develops in his own right. However, the arrogant tone with which he sets about 'eviscerating Badiou' and condescending 'lesser postmodernists' blots the clarity of his work.

Gironi develops his argument in five chapters. Chapter one proceeds by way of a clear overview of Badiou's ontological position with regard to mathematics, characterised by Brassier's term 'scriptural materiality'.<sup>2</sup> Mathematics, for Gironi's Badiou, constitutes the language that does not *represent* the emergence of Being, so much as acting as an index of the scriptural production of difference. In other words, it is not the fact that, for Badiou, Being consists of mathematical objectivities themselves but, rather, it is only through mathematics that we can articulate the productivity of Being itself. Gironi is at pains to point out that Badiou is really interested in the second half of the term *ontology*, the language of expressing Being, for any focus upon the ontic would risk entrapping thought within the realm of presentation. What would be wrong with that? Badiou's oeuvre is rife with denigration of the sensible

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<sup>2</sup> Ray Brassier, "Badiou's Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics", in *Angelaki* 10(2) (2005), pp. 135-150.

over the truth of thought and Gironi describes it through the concept of God.

In *Briefings on Existence*, Badiou highlights three Gods: the God of metaphysics that runs from Aristotle to Descartes, which provides the philosopher a tool to make sense of things; the God of religion which facilitates a ‘vivifying’ engagement with life and which was replaced by the God of metaphysics; and the God of the Poets.<sup>3</sup>

For Badiou, the death of God, which was announced by Nietzsche, was only finished by Heidegger for whom, through a “meta-poetic metaphorizing” the post-metaphysical philosopher hopes for a re-injection of meaning into the world and orients his own finite being towards an attentive but passive receptivity to the historical self-presencing of Being.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the individual can only have faith in a meaning-to-come, anchored in a poetic description of the realm of presentation which takes its place as the third God. Gironi shows that ZFC set theory is Badiou’s answer to Heidegger’s self-presencing: an immanent expression of Being that does not itself constitute an object. Set theory thus avoids any metaphysics of representation itself, whilst still being able to truthfully express Being. Furthermore, as Gironi shows, the Cartesian-inspired axiomatic decision that is Badiou’s replacement for God (following the ‘Cantorian revolution’ that revokes the finitude of the ontic in favour of the infinite set) avoids the trappings of various other versions of the One, such as a recourse to description, a repressed infinity (Heidegger/Wittgenstein) or an infinite One (Nietzsche/Bergson/Deleuze).

Instead of remaining within the representative boundaries of the One, Badiou offers a ‘mathematically articulated possibility of thinking real differences between infinities.’<sup>5</sup> Despite agreeing with Badiou’s support of immanence and the revocation of all types of One, Gironi

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<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: a Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Naturalising Badiou*, p. 32.

finishes the chapter by pointing out three elements of Badiou's work that he cannot accept, the first of which provides the problematic for the rest of the book.

Firstly, Gironi takes issue with Badiou's split between the empirical and the ontological. How can changes in the ontological be assumed to correspond to the empirical world? Secondly, how are non-ontological situations (i.e. situations in the every-day and non-mathematical sense) to be understood? Thirdly, what, he asks, is the relationship between the four types of situation that are characterised by Badiou's four truth procedures (politics, science, love and art)? Are these situations merely analogous to each other, or are there any underlying similarities? This important initial chapter balances an exposition of Badiou's position, making a good case for Badiou's contextualisation within an Althusserian and post-Platonic milieu, and a portrayal of issues in the relationship between the ontological and empirical. However, having finished the chapter, I was still unsure of Gironi's intended project and why Badiou in particular was being used to foreground the discussion. His project does become clearer in the next chapter, however this is a book that rewards a patient reading through to the end.

Gironi's second chapter opens up discussion to various perspectives in mathematical ontology, engaging with what Badiou denigrates as the 'little style', or the 'philosophy' of mathematics. Beginning with a fuller development of Badiou's inability to offer 'an intelligible account of the relationship between the ontological and the empirical,'<sup>6</sup> Gironi aptly uses another of Brassier's terms, 'noocentrism', to point the finger at Badiou's dogmatic and reductive rationalism. The main issue for Gironi is not that Badiou distinguishes between matter and thought (Gironi himself holds to a representational/computational theory of mind which runs counter to some versions of naturalism), but that Badiou's rationalism removes the legitimacy of the natural sciences to inform thought. Gironi makes a strong argument against Badiou's revelatory theory of science: because of Badiou's unwillingness to do away with the split between the ontological and the ontic (favouring the former), novelty according to Badiou can only be a radical break from

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<sup>6</sup> *Naturalising Badiou*, p. 2.

that which is already known. Yet, as Gironi explains, the progression from Galilean mathematisation (starting with observation and measurement of phenomena) towards Dirac's 'methodological revolution' (where mathematics itself became an inductive tool for new phenomenic aspects) could only come about *via* Newton's initial success at conceptualising general mathematical laws (such as the law of universal gravitation). As he concludes, 'it is simply *not true* that the mathematised concepts employed by contemporary physics retain "a relation to the world which means that they cannot be deduced from any mathematical corpus whatsoever".'<sup>7</sup>

As a solution to Badiou's prioritisation of the rational over the empirical, Gironi takes a surprising turn to neurophysiology in order to naturalise thought. Because, for Gironi, naturalism is the removal of any supernatural causes of Being, and that 'all there is is what the natural sciences describe,'<sup>8</sup> neurophysiology is interesting for Gironi therefore because it places the sense of mathematics and the physical world together in empirical perception. Arguing that the cognitive neurosciences hold the potential to explain the 'brain-dependent conditions of possibility of our mathematical cognition', Gironi's aim is to keep mathematics as 'the highest form of thought' but, through 'a naturalist demystification of its origin' (i.e. debunking fictionalised accounts of the creation of rationality), 'placing it on an immanent continuum with the rest of reality.'<sup>9</sup> Mathematics remains the highest form of thought not because of Badiou's subtractive distrust of the sensible, but because it simply works with science as the way of knowing about the world.

Gironi's commitment to naturalist ontology is set out in chapters three and four, and it is here where he starts developing his own project. Chapter three presents an overview of Gironi's commitments with regard to both metaphysics and the historicity of conceptual systems (bearing in mind that neurophysiology—as the immanent form of human investigation—is also now a key part of the system he advocates). In what is perhaps an attempt to ward off any criticism that he idealises

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<sup>7</sup> *Naturalising Badiou*, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

naturalism—as Badiou idealises mathematics—Gironi reassures the reader that he holds, rather than a dogmatic ‘position’, a ‘stance’ that ‘may involve or presuppose some beliefs’, but that cannot simply be equated with these beliefs. By admitting that ‘the logical priority goes to a mind-independent reality which must be (transcendentally) taken as condition of possibility for our access to it’, Gironi removes the supernatural from his stance and immunises himself against claims to reductionism.<sup>10</sup>

It is through his cautious positioning and a clear engagement with Collingwood and Bachelard, that Gironi can show how science’s ‘endlessly self-critical stance’ ensures that none of the claims that science makes act as mind-independent entities that lie outside the boundaries of critique. This is what Gironi calls ‘transgressive naturalism’.<sup>11</sup> Following a path that Gironi draws from Kierkegaard and Heidegger to Levinas, transgressive naturalism argues that, ‘reality cannot be fully grasped by the raw power of reason since it exceeds conceptual capture,’<sup>12</sup> yet science still remains the best way of developing an understanding of it.

In connection with an introductory paragraph on the responsibility of science in Kant, Gironi allies himself with Bachelard in claiming that the ‘mark of the scientific intellect [...] is the endless dialectical struggle against the laziness of thought.’<sup>13</sup> Given that there ‘is’ a world to be known (realism) and that this ‘is’ is ‘all there is’ (naturalism), Gironi’s realist metaphysics can be both naturalist and historicist; an immanent part of the world itself, the conceptual apparatus of mathematics is thought by the human but remains, as Deleuze would put it, problematic (and therefore ever questioning) in its lack of totality. Having established the immanent role that mathematics takes in understanding the mind-independent world, Gironi takes up the task in chapter four of explaining how (and precisely what) mathematics articulates. Comparing epistemic structural realism (ESR) to ontic structural realism (OSR), Gironi argues that it is only the latter to which a realist can turn to in the hope of understanding the world. As opposed to Worrall’s ESR and its curtailment

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<sup>10</sup> *Naturalising Badiou*, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

of knowledge to epistemic structures which then have an empirical relationship to the world, OSR ontologises structures and argues that in fact there is nothing to know but structures. Building on Ladyman, French and Ross, Gironi argues that OSR provides a groundwork for natural realism through rejecting an *a priori* world of being to that which is structured in favour of a world that consists through structure alone. In lieu of atomist or epistemic structuralist accounts, Gironi helpfully shows how Ladyman and Ross both argue that one can still think naturalistically of a world really composed of, for example, protons, but where ‘theories in which protons are elements characterize real structure.’<sup>14</sup> As a compromise between full-scale structuralism and non-structuralist Platonism then, mathematics, for Gironi, takes the role of an explanatory structure that ‘*at an elementary scale*’ blurs with concrete reality without one being reducible to the other.

In the final chapter, Gironi sums up his position to offer, what he describes as, ‘a much needed naturalist supplementation to Badiou’s philosophy’. Given that much of the secondary literature on Badiou makes the claim that his biunivocal positioning of thought and sensibility is too strong a divide, Gironi’s argument is interesting. For him, Badiou does not go far enough and, rather than mathematics being premised on Being itself, Gironi argues that it does not present anything and stands entirely on its own weight. Summing up his stance, Gironi claims that, ‘there is nothing more to the matter/form distinction than there is to the abstract/concrete one, but rational thought is ontogenetically possible thanks to the pre-noetic existence of object and extra-mental structure: the real is the causal antecedent of the conceptual.’<sup>15</sup> Gironi briefly turns to Badiou’s conception of the subject as the driver for change arguing that, because his own position removes the ontological support for the mathematical veridiction of Being’s novelty, Badiou’s militant-subject cannot, in truth, be the key to political (or scientific, etc.) revelation. Given the strength of his argument throughout the book, this argument feels like (excuse the pun) a natural conclusion and a suitable critique of Badiou. However, Gironi’s attempt to outline his position by juxtaposing it to Badiou’s means that the five pages he devotes to Badiou’s truthful

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<sup>14</sup> Ladyman, J., D. Ross and H. Kincaid (eds.), *Scientific Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> *Naturalising Badiou*, p. 120.

subject leaves a lot to be desired and his critique is not developed as fully as it could be. As even a cursory glance at a bibliography of Badiou's works will show, Badiou's project is primarily a political one, motivated by the desire to explain the emergence of the new from historical situations. By setting Badiou up as the straw master to be demolished, Gironi seems to miss the role that axiomatics takes in Badiou's project: set theory is a secondary priority to his Maoist-derived philosophy, even if it is more prominent in his later work. Thus, if Gironi is to supplement Badiou's philosophy, then what is Gironi's theory of the militant subject? How is the individual to resist the trappings of capito-parliamentary sophistry? Given that Gironi has repudiated the status of truth in Badiou's militant, is it now even possible to ask this question? Gironi's focus on the relationship between mathematics and ontology is very well developed, providing an excellent overview and allowing him to put forward a novel and important thesis. It should be read by anyone interested in the topic. However the lack of further engagement with Badiou's political project will prevent this text from being of significant use to most Badiou scholars.

**Mark Anderson's *Plato and Nietzsche: Their  
Philosophical Art***

**(London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)**

**BETHANY PARSONS**

In a note from 1875, Nietzsche states, 'I must confess that Socrates is so close to me that I am almost always fighting a battle with him.'<sup>1</sup> This confession highlights the enormous impact of the Platonic dialogues on Nietzsche's thought. In his book, *Plato and Nietzsche: Their Philosophical Art*, Mark Anderson claims to diverge from the enormous scholarship that exists on the philosophy of these thinkers and present something new and refreshing by providing an examination of the Platonic and Nietzschean ideas that 'can be joined in dialogue or debate' (Preface). Anderson attempts to achieve this goal by arguing that Plato and Nietzsche are 'thinker-artists' (11) - that is, that they are 'alike in being thinkers and artists simultaneously' (46). The title itself is derived from the idea of being both a philosopher *and* an artist, rather than it being an attempt by the author to suggest that there is, or was, a form of *techne* called 'philosophical art' employed by these thinkers. Unfortunately, the book does not appear to present a unifying argument for this thesis. It can best be described as an ambitious collection of short discussions on various philosophical themes in the works of Nietzsche and Plato, such as 'art, reason, ontology, epistemology, and ethics' (9).

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.) 6 [3], p. 209.

These discussions take place under broad chapter headings, with sometimes very little connecting the individual sections in a chapter.

My initial judgement is that the book is well researched in terms of primary sources, minor bibliographical errors aside.<sup>2</sup> It displays both a love for and familiarity with the key concepts and the two philosophers themselves. Anderson distinguishes between the historical, literary, and Platonic Socrates early on, and discusses the intricacies of attributing any idea in Plato's works to Plato himself (13-15). While this will be familiar to any scholar working in the field, establishing the slippery nature of Socrates is important for the casual reader who may not have encountered this distinction before or understood the importance of it. Anderson's background in Classics helps paint a well-rounded picture of Greek culture and society in some of the discussions of Plato, most noticeably in the short section 'Kalokagatha' (119-120) in Chapter 4, 'Noble and Good'. This section explores the etymology and relevance of the term 'kalokagatha', a portmanteau of *kalos* and *agathos*, or noble and good, a term used in reference to the aristocratic youth.<sup>3</sup> Anderson deftly identifies its use in Platonic ethics in the Symposium and Republic. Much of the book is written with clarity and is enjoyable to read. However, it is difficult to construct a sustained critical engagement with a book that has neither a sustained nor critical argument to present. Due to this, the rest of the review will address some of the book's specific flaws.

In regards to the form, many sections of the book dissolve into pure exposition without making specific arguments. For instance, the section 'Forms' (51-60) from Chapter 2, 'Being', reads like a generalist introduction to Plato. The specialist will be bored with such a broad retelling of basic tenets of Platonic philosophy. The exegetical work, whilst written in compelling clarity, will alienate scholars looking for an argument to contend with; the heavier parts of the section will drive away the layman. Another instance of this is the section 'Historical

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<sup>2</sup> The publication of Greg Whitlock's translation of Nietzsche's lectures, '*The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*', is erroneously listed as 1995. This is, in fact, the publication date of part 2, volume 4, of *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, the critical German text upon which Whitlock's translation is based. The correct date for Whitlock's book is 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herodotus 1.30.

Background' (91-100) in Chapter 3, 'Becoming'. The section explains a history of sceptical philosophical positions, from those of the ancient Greeks through to early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Montaigne, and Kant. The aim of the section is to produce a historical context for Nietzsche's views on reality and truth. 'It is a history of more than two thousand years,' the author states, 'but I shall strive for brevity by covering only the essentials.' (91) The problem is both the lack of brevity – the section continues for nearly ten pages – and that there is no substantial connection made between these ten pages of historical background and Nietzsche's work. The section appears irrelevant, and again the sense of audience is confused.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion of the Platonic view that tragedy is the furthest from reality (35), while worth mentioning as an interesting section of the book, could have benefitted from being directly contrasted to a Nietzschean view of tragedy. In fact, one issue is the lack of sustained and direct comparison between Plato and Nietzsche of the kind one would expect from a book focused on these two philosophers.

The book is broadly historical, broadly exegetical (perhaps to a fault), and, in some places, broadly *biographical*. Whilst I would readily agree with Long's formulation<sup>5</sup> of the close link, for some philosophers, between life and thought, some of the biographical points made by Anderson are at best irrelevant and at worst imaginary. On 160-161, in a discussion of the tension between written and oral philosophy in the dialogues, Anderson makes ahistorical concessions for the sake of a dreamy passage about Plato sitting around writing at his desk and teaching in the Academy. He states, 'We have no evidence that Plato

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson himself appears confused as to who his audience is – in the Preface, he states, 'think of this book as a scholarly work not restricted to scholars.'

<sup>5</sup> Made of the Hellenistic philosophers, but truly applicable to Nietzsche – that 'there is a tendency [...] to ignore biography, on the grounds that the philosophical historian should restrict attention to the formal analysis of moral concepts. In the case of philosophers in the Socratic tradition, life and thought are too closely related for such restriction to be defensible.' Long, *The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics*. In: Robert Bracht Branham, Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.), p. 42.

taught in the Academy, but I am willing to allow that he did', and the result is that the passage comes off as disingenuous.<sup>6</sup> The whole section seems to be drifting towards an equally imaginary comparison with Nietzsche, as we see on 162; 'This is the image of Plato I wish to take from his activities as a writer. It is an image he has in common with Nietzsche.'

The flow of the text is often interrupted by dreamy conjecture on the author's part, such as in Chapter 5, 'Plato as a Creative Writer'. On 153, he conducts a 'thought experiment' concerning Axiothea, a female disciple of Plato. Axiothea is said to have found Plato's *Republic* so thought-provoking that she left her home to dedicate herself to philosophy under the guise of a man. Anderson conducts his 'thought experiment' by asking the reader to imagine that it was really the *Phaedrus* that impelled Axiothea to pursue a life of philosophy. The result is a confused mishmash of history and imagination – it is not entirely clear why it is not conducted with the *Republic*, as to be accurate to the ancient anecdote, other than Anderson's preference for the *Phaedrus*' 'creative, poetic qualities' – which comes across as question-begging in the construction of the 'thought experiment' itself when one looks at his results.

Another issue is when Anderson makes arguments based solely in his personal opinion, such as his dismissal of Nietzsche's doctrine of the *Will to Power* on 91; 'There are those who make much of the "doctrine" of will to power, but to my mind Nietzsche is not at his best when writing about this subject'. This statement is made at the end of an extended discussion that does not lend itself to such a personal conclusion without further justification, nor does it provide any clue of how to interpret the quotation marks surrounding 'doctrine'.

The more concerning scholarly flaws are the following. There are some sections containing questionable interpretations of Plato and Nietzsche's philosophy, such as the attribution to Nietzsche of an idea of

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<sup>6</sup> I would appeal to Geuss here, when he states that 'accounts of the ancient ought to strive to avoid anachronism at any cost.' Raymond Geuss, 'Culture as Ideal and as Boundary', *Arion*, 16.1 (2008), 133-154 (p. 135).

enduring selfhood on 90. Such a claim warrants more discussion than is allowed, and is, in fact, directly contradicted by a section of *Human, All too Human* that Anderson quotes on 5.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the lack of reference to the literature from the broad field of Nietzsche studies on this subject lets the discussion down. Another example of the discussion being let down by a lack of reference to the literature appears on 14, where Anderson makes a dismissive claim about Xenophon. '[I]t is standard practice to dismiss or diminish Xenophon's Socratic works on the ground that the man was just too simple, too shallow, to comprehend a mind as restless and original as Socrates', (14) states Anderson. When the endnote at the end of this bold statement is followed to 186, we find not a reference to back up this claim that dismissing Xenophon is 'standard practice', but a quote from Nietzsche made in admiration of Xenophon's works. Finally, the author's assertion in the introduction that he makes no extended claims using Nietzsche's unpublished texts<sup>8</sup> is thrown out of the window by 81-85, where an entire section on Nietzsche, Heraclitus, and the theme of Becoming is constructed almost entirely from the unpublished lectures, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, and unpublished book draft, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.

In conclusion, I think that this book is best suited to a reader largely unfamiliar with the works of Plato and Nietzsche, due to the lengths that Anderson goes to in both explaining and contextualising many of the most important themes in their works. Much of the book would make a good introductory secondary text for students. However, between the lack of unifying argument and the other problems as outlined above, the scholar may not find this work as useful.

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<sup>7</sup> '[Nietzsche] suggests [...] to resist "treating ourselves as fixed, stable, *single* individuals" (HH 618).' *Plato and Nietzsche*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> 'I should point out that I do not base any significant claims exclusively on Nietzsche's notes.' *Plato and Nietzsche*, p. 8.