

2. *Spinoza's Non-Humanist Humanism*

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INTRODUCTION: SPINOZA, LITERATURE AND THE HUMANITIES AND ARTS

This chapter continues the investigation into Spinoza's contribution to fields outside philosophy, developing and extending the preceding discussion about the relevance of Spinoza's work vis-à-vis a novel understanding of the imagination.

Further developing Spinoza's rationalist perspective on the imagination, I have recently delineated a new approach towards the ethical significance and social impact of literature and the arts (Mack 2011). This chapter shows how Spinoza's thought is helpful in formulating a nascent approach to the study of literature and the arts / humanities in general. I attempt to place emphasis on the active rather than merely receptive aspect of the humanities and arts. Here it creatively re-reads Spinoza's term *conatus* as the striving or, in other words, the unending attempt to act within and perceive the world in radically new life-enhancing ways. The humanities and arts have traditionally been associated with the imagination. The imagination, in turn, has often been separated from the work of reason. Spinoza was the first philosopher to break down the separation between reason and imagination as well as between mind and body.

In order to understand Spinoza's philosophy of the *conatus* better, we must therefore attend to his novel approach to the mind-body problem. It will emerge from this discussion that bringing together literature, humanities and the arts with medicine, social sciences and science depends on Spinoza's post-humanist humanism. Spinoza does not deny humanity and human rationality. His reason is, however, that of the *conatus*: the striving to create and preserve ever-new forms of life. Rationality here consists in recognising the subjectivity of each form of life.

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

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

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

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

he combines a biomedical (*avant la lettre*) understanding of our humanity with an ethical perspective. Deleuze has analysed the ways in which ethics is different from morality. An ethical approach attempts to delineate ways of living, whereas a moral approach is concerned with conceptual issues or with representative models where questions of right and wrong are fixed and mutually opposed to each other (Deleuze 1988). Deleuze pinpoints the intellectual location of ethics within Spinoza's parallelism of mind and body:

According to the *Ethics*, on the contrary, what is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind. There is no primacy of one over the other. (Deleuze 1988: 18)

The ideational name for such understanding of ethics is what Deleuze calls 'a philosophy of "life" in Spinoza; it consists precisely in denouncing all that separates us from life, all these transcendent values that are turned against life, these values that are tied to the conditions and illusions of consciousness' (Deleuze 1988: 26). In *How Literature Changes the Way We Think*, I have shown how Spinoza's ethics solves the problem of a divide between art and life, which has characterised traditional approaches to aesthetics.

Spinoza tried to delineate ways of living from the perspective of an active and preservative principle which he called *conatus*. This principle equally informs the body and the mind, as it does the imagination and reason. The imagination is not passive or simply receptive (of images and other sense data); it also acts upon reason in either beneficial or detrimental ways. Spinoza appreciates both desire and reason as being compelled by the *conatus*. In this way, 'desire is the very essence of man, that is, a striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being', and, in parallel, reason demands 'that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can' (E IVP18). Spinoza relates the imagination to desire, to the affects and to the body but also to morality, morality being determined by the concepts of good and evil. Spinoza submerges these concepts in a material or biological / corporeal realm. What we take to be morally good or evil varies according to what we desire, to what affects our body as either good or evil:

And so knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an idea of joy or sadness which follows necessarily from the affect of joy or sadness itself. But this idea is united to the affect in the same way as the mind is united to the body, that is, this idea is not really distinguished from the affect itself, or from the idea of the body's affection; it is only conceptually distinguished from it. There, this knowledge of good and evil is nothing but the affect itself, insofar as we are conscious of it. (E IVP8)

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

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

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

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

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

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

SPINOZA’S CRITIQUE OF HUMANISTIC ANTHROPOCENTRICISM, THE NAZI GENOCIDE AND THE COLLAPSE OF ETHICS

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

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

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

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

that can be remedied via a Spinozan re-appreciation of ethics and literature. Hannah Arendt and Martha Nussbaum are important thinkers who have struggled with the collapse of traditional humanist ethics. What is missing in Arendt's and Nussbaum's respective analyses is a Spinozist perspective on how the collapse of humanism is already part of a humanist intransigence regarding abstract norms, which Spinoza has famously (or infamously) unmasked as fictions of power.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, humanism has lost some of its ethical validity. Partly as a response to disturbing biopolitical practices within the twentieth century (Nazism, Stalinism and other forms of totalitarianism), traditional conceptions of humanity have been questioned (see Arendt 2004 and 1994). This has been the case because, as Arendt has argued, various forms of totalitarian rule made use of certain humanistic traditions of ethics while perverting these traditions. In her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she attempts to describe 'the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society' (Arendt 1991: 125). The Nazis corrupted Biblical, Socratic and Kantian ethics while proclaiming to be their true heir. Here the infliction of harm, violence and mass death has become a duty. Acting unlawfully has become a law. Harmful acts have lost their traditional association with temptation. Instead harm, murder and robbery have transmogrified into the new content of an otherwise seemingly intact morality of duty and obedience.

Arendt's famous 'banality of evil' consists in the way cruelty has come to govern the normal way of social life. Eichmann and his fellow perpetrators were not abnormal or pathological. On the contrary, they represented normal and respectable German society. Evil has become normalised here; it has turned moral. Evil thus no longer denotes a temptation to break laws or a transgression of norms but the fulfilment of the law and an accommodation to the social norm:

Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom (for that the Jews were transported to their doom they knew, of course, even though many of them may not have known the gruesome details), and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation. (Arendt 1991: 150)

While breaking with the content of traditional ethics (Socratic, Biblical or Kantian), Nazism continued and even reinforced notions of respectability and of what is acceptable or normal. In this way, Nazism's corruption and distortion of traditional morality rein-

forced, as well as magnified, the normative dimension of traditional humanism. Indeed, the Nazis made it a duty to rob, deport and kill minorities (Jews, gypsies, people with a disability and homosexuals) by classifying them as abnormal, as carriers of infectious disease, and, worse still, as non-human and therefore not morally worthy to be alive. Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and people with a physical or mental disability were first deprived of rights. This loss of rights prepared for the legality of their being put to death. Arendt analyses this political process, which declared certain groups of people to be outside the realm of the political and the publicly useful. The exclusion from politics and the public good grows out of a normative or moralistic system which contrasts bare life, the mere fact of existence, with that of politics as the sphere of historical signification and public achievement. Arendt critiques the politics of normative exclusion that led to the division of humanity and, in the case of the Nazi genocide, the radical exclusion of certain groups from the category of humanity. Arendt examines the perversion and collapse of traditional politics and morality (here conflated with ethics). She attempts to understand this process of disintegration with a view to drawing consequences that could promote new beginnings for a non-exclusive approach towards politics and ethics in the post-war era. Arendt is especially concerned with the ways in which the re-enforcement of traditional practices of exclusion became the publicly valid form of ethical and political life under the Nazi regime.

In order to win public approval for its murderous norms, the Nazi propaganda machinery worked on the emotions of its audience. It provoked one emotion in particular: that of disgust. As Winfried Menninghaus has pointed out, 'the fundamental schema of disgust is the experience of a nearness that is not wanted' (Menninghaus 2003: 1). Disgust seems to work in an immediate manner; what is perceived as disgusting has a direct way of permeating our skin and entering into the information-gathering mind – the brain. The experience of a nearness that is not wanted is, however, culturally conditioned. It is not something that comes naturally but depends on memory and learning. Emotions such as disgust are part of our psychological constitution and 'aspects of many psychological problems are learned' (Kandel 2007: 116). So, to identify a group or groups of people with the immediate feeling of disgust requires some training. Martha Nussbaum has shown how disgust 'expresses a universal discomfort with bodily reality, but then uses this discomfort to target and subordinate vulnerable minorities' (Nussbaum 2010: XV). The identification of the abject body with a word denoting a group of people is clearly a form of cultural training or

conditioning. This is what Nazi propaganda provided; it depicted Jews (and other minorities) in a way that made the word 'Jew' immediately identifiable with the feeling of disgust.

How is all of this relevant for today? Martha Nussbaum has recently shown how 'the politics of disgust continues to exercise influence, often in more subtle and unstated ways' (Nussbaum 2010: XIV). Whereas totalitarian societies are governed by a 'politics of disgust', in liberal democratic societies disgust has 'gone underground' (Nussbaum 2010: XV). Being hidden does not necessarily prevent disgust from exerting its harmful and often lethal political consequences. To counter the open or hidden influence of a politics of disgust, Nussbaum makes a strong case for a politics of humanity. Whereas a politics of disgust denies the humanity of the other, the politics of humanity acknowledges our shared human condition. The former is exclusive and the latter is inclusive. How, however, can we cultivate inclusion? Nussbaum argues that we can become more inclusive via the imagination: 'Disgust imputes to the other a subhuman nature. How, by contrast, do we ever become able to see one another as human? Only via the imagination' (Nussbaum 2010: XVII). Here Nussbaum's contemporary critique meets with Arendt's analysis of totalitarian terror. Both see the imagination as vital for ways of diminishing social exclusion, violence and genocide. Arendt makes a lack of imagination responsible for both Eichmann's lack of feeling of guilt and his inability to repent:

It was precisely this lack of imagination which enabled him [i.e. Eichmann] to sit for months on end facing a German Jew who was conducting the police interrogation, pouring out his heart to the man and explaining again and again how it was that he reached only the rank of lieutenant colonel in the S.S. and that it had not been his fault that he was not promoted [...]. He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. And if this is 'banal' and even funny, if with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann, that is still far from calling it commonplace. (Arendt 1991: 287–8)

As I have shown elsewhere (Mack 2009), Arendt does not understand by the word 'thoughtless' what it commonly means. Her usage of the term is uncommon in order to emphasise the non-communality of what the term describes. 'Thoughtless', in Arendt's usage here, does not mean absent-minded or stupid or dysfunctional. It rather denotes what its linguistic isolation performs: the loss of communality and the denial of humanity's interconnection. According to Arendt, Eichmann and his

fellow perpetrators enacted such loss of our communality by declaring certain groups of people to reside outside of what they fixed in their racist nomenclature to be human.

Arendt assumes that such loss of communality goes hand in hand with the collapse of humanism. Spinoza, however, has already shown how such a collapse of humanism is potentially part of its normative intransigence that can do violence to the embodied world where we encounter a diversity of life forms that all strive to create and preserve their life (*conatus*). Arendt relates the imagination to understanding. Spinoza, as we have seen in the preceding section, and defines reason as the work of understanding corporeal reality. The reality reason seeks to grasp is in constant flux and hence cannot be accurately depicted via static concepts of duty and obedience. Eichmann and his fellow perpetrators refer to such static concepts – even to Kant's categorical imperative (in Eichmann's case) – in order to move acts of mass murder into a detached or intellectual realm. The imposition of culturally determined standards of evil – the Jews, according to anti-Semitism, are 'evil' and thus evoke the bodily sensation of disgust – on to the universe of matter is what happened during the state-sponsored reign of Nazi terror on the European continent.

Spinoza critiqued the fictions that come to shape socio-political reality. The most brutal fiction is the genocidal anti-Semitism which the Nazis enacted. Nazism thus brings to the fore the cultural or, in other words, subjective / fictive construction of the body; it fabricated the Jewish body as the non-human body. This harnessing of the term 'humanity' in order to exclude groups of people from the human highlights the importance of our cultural engagement with deleterious fictions that determine the empirical core of the social sciences and the sciences. In this way, Spinoza's analysis of humanist or moralistic thought about good and evil highlights the ways in which cultural inquiry – of which literature and the humanities partake – helps us tackle issues of violence, racism and other forms of stigmatisation in debates about and formulations of public policy. The Jews were certainly placeholders of evil for both Nazism and the quasi-scientific and quasi-theological racism that prepared its way (Mack 2003).

The following section analyses the predominance of a philosophical discourse that prioritises an abstract sphere of norms and ideas over and above the more fluid realm that characterises the ethics of literature. This will be accomplished in an exploration of how the work of twentieth-century Spinozist Gilles Deleuze and that of the contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière comes to terms with the collapse of humanist morality after the Holocaust.

DELEUZE, NIETZSCHE AND THE TURN FROM ETHICS TO AESTHETICS

On an ideational level, Deleuze takes seriously Spinoza's critique of humanism and its concept-based morality of good and evil. He takes it so seriously that he decomposes the human body, which, in his thought, morphs into a body without organs. His work pivots around a reflection about indistinction that does away with hierarchy, with various hierarchies which have informed the moral system of humanism and traditional theological thought. It is important to emphasise that Deleuze's approach towards Spinoza's non-hierarchical vision is purely philosophical; it concerns Spinoza's philosophical term *attributes*. This is Deleuze's post-humanist / idealist take on Spinoza:

Any hierarchy or pre-eminence is denied in so far as the substance is equally designated by all attributes in accordance with their essence, and equally expressed by all the modes in accordance with their degree of power. With Spinoza, univocal being ceases to be neutralized and becomes expressive; it becomes a truly expressive and affirmative position. (Deleuze 2004: 50)

According to Deleuze, Spinoza has philosophically / ideationally done away with the differentiations and hierarchies which characterise traditional humanism and theology. Instead of hierarchical differentiations, we find ourselves on an equal ideational playing field where every philosophical attribute has a right to engage in forms of expression. My concern is with human equality. Deleuze's philosophy does not bridge the divide which separates the ideational or mentalist world from the embodied sphere of human equality and public policy. My argument is that literature, rather than philosophical discourse à la Deleuze, bridges the gap between the mental and the corporeal, between the humanities and the sciences. The bridging of these divides was a major concern of Spinoza's re-conception of the mind as the idea of the body.

Deleuze's post-humanism has a decidedly idealist edge. His expressionism does not relate to the distinct individual of traditional humanism. It rather refers to a series of expressions that are impersonal and ontological. This emphasis on the non-distinct results in Deleuze's rejection of personalised representation in favour of impersonal repetition:

The world of representation presupposes a certain type of sedentary distribution, which divides or shares out that which is distributed in order to give 'each' their fixed share (as in the bad game or the way to play, the pre-existing rules define distributive hypotheses according to which the results of the throws are partitioned). Representation essentially implies an analogy of being. However, the only realized Ontology – in other words, the univocity of being – is repetition. From Duns Scotus to Spinoza, the univocal position

has always rested on two fundamental theses. According to one, there are indeed forms of being, but contrary to what is suggested by the categories, these forms involve no division within being or plurality of ontological senses. According to the other, that of which being is said is repartitioned according to essentially mobile individuating differences which necessarily endow 'each one' with a plurality of modal significations. This programme is expounded from the beginning of the *Ethics*: we are told that the *attributes* are irreducible to genera or categories because while they are *formally* distinct they all remain equal and *ontologically* one, and introduce no division into the substance which is said or expressed through them in a single and same sense (in other words, the real distinction between attributes is formal, not a numerical distinction). (Deleuze 2004: 377)

On the basis of Spinoza's one-substance ontology, everything is more than interconnected or interrelated; it is univocally at one and all distinctions are simply formal rather than numerical. Deleuze's philosophy takes issue with representation because representation presupposes distinct entities; representation constructs concepts that do not do justice to the world they claim to depict. Distinct entities cannot exist (in an absolute sense) in a univocal world. One of the most striking distinctions is the one between good and evil, as has been discussed above. Whereas representation divides the world into spurious oppositions such as good and evil, the idea that, according to Deleuze, most accurately accounts for the univocal constitution of life is that of repetition. The concept of representation is premised on a humanist understanding of our lives being fixed in their proper place – proper according to the hierarchical coordinates of morality and theology. Deleuze's repetition, by contrast, is mobile; repetitions are on the move. Deleuze's repetitions enact infinite series of repeating movements which are not identical but differ as they move. His approach to repetition is thus via difference and contrasted with representation. Representation works through categories and concepts; repetition operates through the movement of ideas.

Representations are fictions whereas repetitions instantiate the truth of ideas. In contrast to Spinoza's, some aspects of Deleuze's thought attempt to do away with the imagination, which he equates with representation (fictions, non-truth) and which he contrasts with the truth of his ontological idea (repetition). Representation is the untruth of the imagination which violates the truth of the idea: repetition. Deleuze endeavours to propound a philosophy of difference. In order to do so, he distinguishes between repetition of the same (which is representation) and non-identical repetition. For non-identical repetition to work in a philosophy that attempts to combine Kantianism and Spinozism (Lord 2011: 130–54), the idea has to play a decisive role. Deleuze

differentiates his understanding of the idea from the norms of traditional humanism, which does its work via representation rather than non-identical repetition. Identical repetition depends on a standard or a norm of which it would be representative.

Deleuze denies that this origin of the normative exists in reality. In truth, reality consists not of originals but of simulacra:

However, difference does not lie between things and simulacra, models and copies. Things are simulacra themselves, simulacra are the superior forms, and the difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum, to attain the status of a sign in the coherence of the eternal return. (Deleuze 2004: 81)

Deleuze here combines Nietzsche with Spinoza and Kant. He affirms the primacy of the idea (idealism) by equating the idea with the reality of the senses (Spinoza's univocity), and then reads the product of this equation in terms of Nietzsche's eternal return. Nietzsche, as Alexander Nehamas's *Life as Literature* has shown, is concerned with turning life into literature. Deleuze's Nietzschean background is crucial for both his approach to Spinoza and his ideational reading of literature. Nietzsche's eternal return may well be a response to Spinoza but is one that diverges from and warps Spinoza's questioning of anthropomorphism. Spinoza argues that we should not conflate our idea of God or nature with God or nature. This conflation results from the mind's uncritical acceptance of information the brain receives from bodily sensations.

This confused knowledge is what characterises the imagination. In this sense, we imagine the sun to be in close proximity to us, because our senses are strongly affected by the rays of the sun. The mind, by representing bodily affects, sees the sun to be in the vicinity of the earth. This representation does not yield knowledge of the truth but, as Galileo showed, turns out to be a fiction: 'For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun' (E IIP35). Spinoza does not berate us for our inadequacy; inadequacy here describes our proneness to believe representations or fictions to be true. On the contrary, he understands our representational dilemmas, writing that we 'can hardly avoid this, because [we] are continually affected by external bodies' (E IIP47). The point here is that we need to be aware that our knowledge derives from bodily inputs and represents our sense of being affected by external bodies. This awareness characterises reason; it is the mind's mindfulness. Reason is the mind's mindfulness of its embodiment and, consequently, its imaginative tendencies. It puts our place in the universe in

perspective. The cosmos is no longer anthropocentric and we are no longer its centre. Spinoza set out to make us love God or nature intellectually: to make us see how we are a small but significant part of the vast and, to us, in its totality, incomprehensible universe.

Nietzsche is not so much concerned with Spinoza's ethical and social thought as with the epistemological implications of a Spinozist critique of goal and God. What are the repercussions for our understanding of our cognitive powers, if we are only a small part of an infinite and impersonal universe which Spinoza calls *Deus sive natura*? Modern science operates on the basis of the ceaselessly renewed testability and thus falsifiability and re-visibility of its findings. In this sense, it has incorporated Galileo's and Spinoza's demotion of the earth and humanity as the centre of the universe and all this implies for human omniscience. On the other hand, our age is an anthropocene age and it is one that has been shaped by scientific discoveries for which Galileo and Spinoza have prepared the intellectual ground. How can we explain this discrepancy?

The welding together of our planet with the industrial waste of humanity (plastic in the sea and so forth) has to do not so much with the practice of science as with the ecological consequences of an ever-growing market economy based on consumption. Slavoj Žižek has famously called Deleuze 'the ideologist of late capitalism' (Žižek 2003: 184). Deleuze's Nietzschean idea of the eternal return finds a striking equivalent in the material sphere of infinite serialised production. Branding depends on the repetition, not of the same, but of the slightly different (in this way, the advertising industry reinvents branded products within a repetitive or serialised framework where the same forms become repeated in infinite variations). The basis of brand attachment is an affirmation of our worth and value which we attach to the brand and which we hope to see eternally retuned to us with each purchase of the product. The point of Nietzsche's eternal returns is, indeed, the immanent affirmation of humanity's fate – *amor fati* – in the face of a deserted transcendent realm which traditionally provided such affirmation from above.

Nietzsche doubts whether we can be satisfied with Spinoza's, Galileo's and Darwin's demotion of our cognitive status from image of God to embodied part of the natural world. This may explain why he introduced the notion of the eternal return: to confirm rather than to question humanity's grandeur. As Nehemas has shown, Nietzsche equates life with literature. Such conception of life as repetition of literature – and vice versa, of literature as representation of life – is quite problematic. In Nietzsche's case, difficulties are compounded by the

fact that a traditional understanding of literature as harmonious, coherent and whole underlies his concept of the eternal return. Nehemas has critiqued the internal coherence of Nietzsche's equation of literature and life as follows:

And once we admit contents, we admit conflicts. What we think, want, and do is seldom if ever a coherent collection. Our thoughts contradict one another and contrast with our desires, which are themselves inconsistent and are in turn belied by our actions. The unity of the self, which Nietzsche identifies with this collection, is thus seriously undermined. (Nehemas 1985: 180)

Nietzsche's reading of life as literature is itself a fiction.

Whereas Spinoza critiques the fictitiousness that shapes aspects of our lives, Nietzsche's 'eternal return' encourages us to celebrate our lives as fictions: as stylised harmonisations or even deifications of our humanity. The point of Spinoza's critique of revelation is precisely to question this equation of life with an idealised concept of nature or God. So we can now come to see how Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's eternal return fits into his attempt to submerge Spinoza's mind-body parallelism in Kantian and post-Kantian idealism. This combination eventuates in Nietzsche's eternal return, where we affirm what is and what has been and eagerly await its repetition with different internal constitutions. The primacy of Deleuze's idea of repetition sacrifices Spinoza's embodiment as ground of mental information to the Heideggerian thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) of the groundless as it separates memory from ideas. Deleuze's repetition does its work within a philosophical system 'where the ground was abolished in groundlessness, the Ideas were separated from the forms of memory, and the displacement and disguise of repetition engaged divergence and decentring, the powers of difference' (Deleuze 2004: 364). The separation of memory from the idea which is repetition brings to the fore a certain lack of remembrance which enables the serialised differences of Deleuze's philosophical system. His is a repetition out of amnesia:

one repeats because one does not know, because one does not remember, etc: or because one is not capable of performing the action (whether this action remains to be performed or is already performed). 'One' therefore signifies here the unconscious of the Id as the first power of repetition. (Deleuze 2004: 368)

The driving force behind difference is the Freudian dialectic of disavowal or repression – the repression of a memory – and repetition. Deleuze discusses Freud with specific reference to the role of repetition and difference in the death drive:

The turning point of Freudianism appears in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the death instinct is discovered, not in connection with the destructive tendencies, not in connection with aggressivity, but as a result of a direct consideration of repetition phenomena. (Deleuze 2004: 18)

By 'death drive', Freud does not understand the state of being dead but the wish to be so. This wish for the restfulness associated with death is part of Freud's pleasure principle, which drives us to repeat actions in different contexts and times that bring about states of rest and certainty. According to Žižek's recent interpretation, Freud's term denotes the uncanny persistence, not of death, but of life:

The paradox of the Freudian death drive is therefore that it is Freud's name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny *excess* of life, for an 'undead' urge that persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. (Žižek 2006: 245)

Emotions are highly ambivalent and the desire to be dead is no exception, for what drives such desire is the fearful wish not ever to reach the object of desire: death.

On an ontogenetic as well as a polygenetic level, we keep repeating certain forms of action through which we attempt to increase our sense of certainty, rest, respect and security, which makes us feel at home in the world. Deleuze's notion of the simulacrum derives from Freud's understanding of fantasy which determines our psychology (not only the death drive but also the Oedipus complex):

A decisive moment in psychoanalysis occurred when Freud gave up, in certain respects, the hypothesis of real childhood events, which would have played the part of ultimate disguised terms, in order to substitute the power of fantasy which is immersed in the death instinct, where everything is already masked and disguised. In short, repetition is in its essence symbolic; symbols or simulacra are the letter of repetition itself. (Deleuze 2004: 19)

Here we reach the point where Nietzsche's notion of life as literature comes fully to inform Deleuze's idea of repetition.

What is repeated in ever-different shapes and forms is not the memory of something that actually took place but a certain kind of fiction: in short, an imagined storyline or literature (the Oedipus complex or the primeval scene where the sons kill the alpha-male father figure). This is why literature, theatre and cinema play such an important role in Deleuze's work. Through Nietzsche's fascination with tragedy, Aristotle's *Poetics* shapes Deleuze's notion of the non-identical action of repetition that informs the world of theatre: 'play it and repeat it until the acute moment that Aristotle called "recognition"' (Deleuze 2004:

17). By repeating the actions in a different context, we come to realise their signification and recognise their psychic meaning. This is Freud's approach to repetition and Deleuze describes it as follows: 'If repetition makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also frees us, testifying in both cases to its "demonic" power. All cure is a voyage to the bottom of repetition' (Deleuze 2004: 21). Deleuze does not, however, describe the ways in which such repetition of fantasy may free us.

According to Freud, the awareness of what we are repeating frees us from future repetitions. In this way, the re-enactment of the primal scene in *Moses and Monotheism* – where the Jews repeat the fantasy of the primal scene by killing their father figure, Moses (which is, of course, itself a fantasy) – frees the Jews from future repetition of such violence in different social, historical and political contexts. This moment of the breakaway from repetition is missing in Deleuze's philosophical system, because it is founded on the idea of repetition and thus cannot free itself from it. Instead, his philosophy relies on an infinite series of non-identical repetitions of simulacra which, as we have seen, are fantasies, storylines: in short, literature. Deleuze has banished one of form of imagination – the concept of representation – from the truth of his idea of repetition. Yet, as we have seen, the substance of repetition is itself imaginative: simulacra, fantasy, art and literature. In Nietzsche's fashion, life turns out to be literature. This is where Deleuze diverges from Spinoza's account of the imagination. Spinoza does not attempt to exclude the imagination from our lives, because this would be an impossible undertaking (given that we do not live an affect-less, disembodied sphere). He does, however, admonish us to be mindful of our mind's exposure to the misleading input of bodily sensations which gives rise to fictions of grandeur or fantasies of destruction. This mindfulness constitutes his ethics. Rather than abstract and superimposed concepts of good and evil, Spinoza's ethics of mindfulness is context-specific and requires ever-renewed awareness, as well as alertness in particular situations which vary according to a given time and space. Spinoza's ethics admonishes us to see our self-interest as bound up with that of others. Fantasies of one's superiority over others are harmful to the self, because the self relies on the communal in the same way in which the communal depends on the self. This mutual dependence is part of our embodied constitution, which is one of disease, neediness and mortality. In order to avoid harm and to alleviate the prospect of illness and death, we have to be mindful of re-enacting certain fantasies of immortality, predominance and auto-immunity. Whereas Deleuze's philosophy celebrates the repetition of various simulacra, Spinoza's (as well as Freud's) ethics attempts to break the circle of this and similar repetitions.

While Deleuze engages with Spinoza's critique of concepts (representation) as fiction, Deleuze himself clings to a fiction (repetition of simulacra) which he, in Nietzschean fashion, attempts to equate with everyday life: 'For there is no other aesthetic problem than that of the insertion of art into everyday life' (Deleuze 2004: 365). Developing and radicalising Deleuze, Rancière has recently described this as the aesthetic turn, which he distinguishes from the ethical turn that characterises the work of Derrida (Rancière 2010: 45–61). Rancière evokes Deleuze's Heideggerian notion of 'groundlessness' (Deleuze 2004: 364) when he attempts to do away with the ground of ethics in Spinoza's and Derrida's work. As I have shown elsewhere (Mack 2010), in different ways, the ground of ethics in Spinoza's and Derrida's thought is that of self and other. In contrast to Derrida, Spinoza focuses on the preservation of selfhoods (*conatus*) and it is this preservation that depends on that of others. Derrida's ethics criticises the political prioritisation of the self over and above the other. In Rancière's aesthetic turn, we have lost all forms of differentiation between self and other, because otherness is the principle of democratic politics:

Derrida argues that [...] democracy still holds fast to the same unexamined power of the *autos* or *self*. In a word, democracy lacks its Other, which can only come to it from the outside. Derrida thus set out to break with the circle of the *self* by weaving a thread from the pure receptivity of the *khora* to the other, or the *newcomer*, whose inclusion defines the horizon of a 'democracy to come'. My objection to this is very simple: otherness does not come to politics from the outside, for the reason that it already has its own otherness, its own principle of heterogeneity. (Rancière 2010: 53)

That democracy has its own principle of heterogeneity is true within an ideational context (à la Deleuze) but the actual politics of it may be quite different from its idea. Literature focuses on the ethical negotiation between ideas and the messiness of their performance in the embodied and thus affect-ridden context that shapes our actual lives. Rather than repeating various ideas (that of Rancière's groundless form of democratic equality or Deleuze's repetition of simulacra), literature and art change the way we think about the potentiality of ideas and the particular context in which various ideas or scientific discoveries are applied and played out. Here I have begun to delineate an alternative account of the imagination out of Spinoza's critique of representation. By focusing on the idea and by conflating the work of the imagination with that of representation, Deleuze perpetuates a mimetic account of literature from his perspective of philosophy. What I call the ethics of literature establishes the radical difference of creativity, which is not so much ideational but performative – in short, yet another shift of Spinoza's *conatus*.

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