

# **Variations of Immanence**

*Spinoza, Deleuze and a metaphysics of immanence.*

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# Abstract

The present thesis analyses the specific philosophies of Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, more specifically the way in which both thinkers attempted to establish immanent metaphysics. The purpose of the work is not to compare both authors, but to see the key elements of the common project they share. *To summarize, the present thesis seeks to elucidate the structure of something like an immanent metaphysics through a careful reading of Spinoza and Deleuze.* We first attempt to clarify the relation both authors entertain with metaphysics, then we dedicate a chapter on each philosopher in order to disclose the specific systems they created. The conclusion we reach is the following: while Deleuze's philosophy might lack some of the insights of Spinoza's own, both authors are able to produce a metaphysics of pure immanence through a power ontology focused on the notion of *potentia*.

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# List of Abbreviations

When referencing Deleuze and Spinoza, we will use the following system of abbreviations:

## *Spinoza's Works<sup>1</sup>*

- *MT: Metaphysical Thought*
- *ST: Short Treatise*
- *TdIE: Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect*
- *TTP: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*
- *L: Letters*
- *Spinoza's Ethics: E Part, Definition/Axiom/Proposition/Scholium/Corollary.* In the case of a preface, we will simply indicate the part which it concerns.

## *Deleuze's Works*

- *SPE: Spinoza et le Problème de l'Expression*
- *EPS : Expressionism in Philosophy : Spinoza*
- *DR: Différence et répétition*
- *DReng: Difference and Repetition*
- *LS: Logique du Sens*
- *LSeng: Logic of Sense*
- *PLB: Le Pli, Leibniz, et le Baroque*
- *FLB : The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*
- *CC: Critique et Clinique*
- *ECC: Essays Critical and Clinical*
- *DRF: Deux Régimes de Fous*
- *TRM : Two Regimes of Madness*
- *LAT: Lettres et Autres Textes*

## *Deleuze and Guattari's Works*

- *AO: L'Anti-Oedipe*
- *AOeng : Anti-Oedipus*
- *MP: Mille Plateaux*
- *ATP: A Thousand Plateaus*
- *QP: Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*
- *WP: What is Philosophy?*

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes will be referenced according to Curley's chapters and paragraph numeration.

# Introduction

## A Common Ground

Addressing a specific philosopher is always addressing the specific problems the said philosopher tries to solve. Delving into his or her works is diving into different questions, finding the sources of those problems, in order to finally arrive at the solutions — understanding how they are generated by the very problems that a philosopher strives to address. It is often the case that those are not new, and that a predecessor becomes an inspiration, or at least the glimpse of hope that there is a way out of the deadlocks of certain problems. In this sense, the study of a philosopher cannot be done without understanding the questions, problems, but also the inspiration that propel one's thought into novel and original paths.

This way of considering the study of philosophy should be understood as the inspiration of the present thesis. Accordingly, philosophy is a movement of questioning, of problematizing, and of creating novel solutions, while accepting the guidance of past intellectuals, who often dealt with the same questions and problems. Repeating the same questions, repeating the formulation of the same problems: those are not lack of originality or initiative, but a mark of seriousness regarding the unfolding of philosophy through the ages. *Repetition*, thus understood, is the proof that something remains to be done, that something is not yet solved: it is the sign that philosophy still has a reason to be.

In the present thesis, we would like to approach the problem of metaphysics, as developed by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, according to this movement of

philosophical repetition, more specifically concerning the repetition of Baruch Spinoza's philosophy. We think Deleuze cannot be understood properly without understanding the problems he addresses, but also without understanding his relationship with the tradition that precedes him. In other words, the philosophy of Deleuze must be grasped in relation with a philosophical past that allows him to develop a new philosophy, while repeating the questions and problems that were proposed and developed by his predecessors. Deleuze has consistently engaged with various figures in the history of philosophy throughout his writings, including Hume (1953), Nietzsche (1962 and 1965), Kant (1963), Bergson (1966), and later on with Foucault (1986), Leibniz (1988) and Châtelet (1988). He also examined the works of such artists as Proust, Samuel Beckett, Kafka, Bacon, etc. As such, even though his secondary doctoral thesis was concerned with Spinoza and the problem of expression, one would be hard pressed to contend that his rapport to him is a closer, indeed more intimate one. Yet this is the very intuition of this thesis: Deleuze's philosophy, his metaphysics more precisely, can only be understood through a Spinozian<sup>2</sup> lens. Although he has been inspired by many philosophers, the Spinozian impetus is a more vital one, so much so that — and this shall be our claim — *his attempt at a metaphysics of immanence cannot be understood without reference to Spinoza's own efforts*. We do think that such an effort corresponds to the constant rejection of any form of transcendence, and the establishment of a philosophy that is relying solely on immanence — an accusation which

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis, we will use the term 'Spinozian' when talking about Spinoza's philosophy in its less traditional interpretation, or, if one allows us the phrase, in its more creative aspect. We decided on this terminology following Negri's own in *The Savage Anomaly*, where he reserves the term 'Spinozism' for dogmatic reading of Spinoza, viz., readings that tend to reduce his thought to either a pantheism or monism that dominated most of the tradition. Although we do not agree with the totality of Negri's own take on Spinoza, we think that this terminological distinction has the benefit of separating ourselves from dominant interpretations.



was made against Spinoza throughout the ages. If this is the case — i.e. that Deleuzian thought is infused with Spinozian immanent philosophy —, we cannot start the present thesis without explaining why we think that Deleuze’s philosophy, and more precisely his metaphysics, should be considered from a Spinozian perspective.

First and foremost, we cannot help but notice, as mentioned, that Deleuze chose Spinoza as the subject-matter of his secondary thesis, and wrote another book on the same philosopher in 1981 (*Spinoza: Philosophie Pratique*). Both texts changed the landscape of Spinoza studies, because they focused on themes less discussed (radical immanence, the notion of expression, the practical aspect of the Spinozian project, etc.) Then, he spent a whole semester in Vincennes teaching Spinoza’s philosophy (from December 1980 to March 1981), focusing on the refusal of transcendent moral values in the ethical aspect of Spinoza’s thought. Furthermore, Spinoza holds a very important place in Deleuze and Guattari’s collaborations: *Anti-Oedipe* claims that Spinoza formulated once and for all the only political question (*AO* 36-7), *Milles Plateaux* claims that the Body-without-Organs<sup>3</sup> is what Spinoza’s *Ethics* is really about, and also relies heavily on Spinoza in the account of becomings. More importantly, Spinoza is portrayed as the ultimate philosopher in their last collaboration: *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* All of those themes, tackled through what some could consider mere textual analysis, are also at the core of the Deleuzian project. The refusal of transcendence, the logic of expression developed in *Logique du Sens*, the appraisal of pure immanence in his collaborations with Guattari... all of those might be

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<sup>3</sup> Which stands for Deleuze and Guattari conception of the body as a plane of intensity, that is, a body that is no longer understood as an organism, or organized entity, but as a space on which organs are inlets of power, able to be transformed according to the encounters one has. This superficial definition should suffice us for now. The Body-without-Organs is a concept that exceeds by far the scope of the present thesis.

original Deleuzian developments, but they also testify to the influence that Spinoza always had on Deleuze. Overall, we can already see that Spinoza's shadow hovers above his works, and that his presence becomes less and less spectral the more Deleuze matures in his own philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

In agreement with de Beistegui, we see the last collaboration with Guattari as a work of maturity, not only in the sense that it came late in his career, but also because it is a retrospective work:

[*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*] is a text in which uniquely and retrospectively Deleuze tries to identify the driving force (the source) behind his thought as a whole. This is a text of maturity in the strongest and best sense of the word, that is, a crucial testimony—a philosophical testament almost—in which, among other things, Deleuze is concerned to identify the nature and ultimate significance of the enterprise he has been involved in all his life. (de Beistegui 80)

Following this, it might be better to understand the question that stands for the title of the work to be a reflexive one for both authors. 'What is philosophy?': the question is an inquiry into the depths of Deleuze's own philosophical journey, one which attempts to define what the main impetus of a philosopher's work is, when one can look back and to see the development that took place over time. If this claim by de Beistegui is right, it means that when Deleuze and Guattari argue that Spinoza is the ultimate philosopher, both indicate that Spinozian philosophy is the one that can answer the question of the two mature authors. Philosophy, for both Deleuze and Guattari, is fully expressed in Spinoza's philosophy of immanence.

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<sup>4</sup> Notably the last essay of Deleuze's final work, *Critique et Clinique* is dedicated to a new reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*; and the last known essay written by the French philosopher — "L'immanence: Une Vie"—claims to find the proper conception of immanence in Spinoza's philosophy.

We can support this reading with two other works: Deleuze's last complete work, *Critique et Clinique*, and his last known essay — "L'immanence : Une Vie", published a few months before his death. If *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* claims that Spinoza is the "Prince of philosophers" or that he is the "infinite becoming-philosopher" (QP 51, 62), thus revealing the importance Spinoza is supposed to hold in the philosophical tradition *per se*, the two other works we consider here also testify to the fact that Deleuze became more and more aware of his own indebtedness to Spinoza towards the end of his career. The last essay of *Critique et Clinique* (1993), entitled "Spinoza et les trois 'Éthiques'", is Deleuze's last attempt to explain the structure of Spinoza's *Ethics*, but from a novel point of view. This essay, written so late in his life, shows us that Deleuze never arrived at a final position on Spinoza, as if the development of his own philosophy was always parallel to a development of his take on the Dutch author. It is known that Deleuze's early monographs were far from being exact readings of philosophers, but closer to a development of his own philosophy through encounters with masters of the past: "Even though Deleuze's early monographs serve as excellent introductions, they never provide a comprehensive summary of a philosopher's work; instead, Deleuze selects the specific aspects of a philosopher's thought that make a positive contribution to his own project at that point." (Hardt xix) If we agree with Hardt's opinion concerning the early monographs (even the ones on Spinoza), we must disagree with him concerning the late essay dedicated to Spinoza and Spinozian thought. In "Spinoza et les trois 'Éthiques'", Deleuze interprets Spinozian philosophy with concepts used in painting and with notions of becomings — themes that are of great importance in Deleuze's own mature work. It is as if after working with past masters to develop his thought, Deleuze senses the need to go back to Spinoza

once his own philosophy reaches its final stage. In this essay, Deleuze makes slight modifications to the way in which he was reading Spinoza: in the early monographs, he insisted on the fact that *Ethics* was twofold, and suddenly, he adds the new thesis that *Ethics* is actually a threefold book, which shows that until the end, Deleuze was still struggling with Spinoza, still learning *with* him.

If this is true of the conclusion of *Critique et Clinique*, the last essay published by Deleuze is even more Spinozian. In “L’Immanence : une vie...”, he elaborates what a few commentators consider to be the final presentation of his philosophy, the ultimate philosophical achievement of Deleuze (see Grosz 130-168 or Smith 189-221). In this last philosophical piece, Deleuze claims that his conception of Life “[reintroduces] Spinozism into the most elemental operation of philosophy”<sup>5</sup> (*TRM* 386), hence strongly affirming that his philosophy is an attempt to philosophize in a Spinozian fashion. Those works of maturity present a common thread: Spinoza is discovered as not only a guide, or a moment of Deleuze’s philosophy, but as the driving force, what was always at play in Deleuzian thought. The present thesis can thus be seen as taking up the challenge posed by de Beistegui:

Deleuzian thought can be seen as an effort to realize immanence after Spinoza. [...] We would need to reveal [Deleuze’s] Spinozism not just through his interpretation of Spinoza [...], but through a close examination of his most significant texts, from *Difference and Repetition* (1968) to *Logic of Sense* (1969), *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). (de Beistegui 98-9)

If de Beistegui poses this challenge as a way to better understand Deleuze, we think the question must still be reformulated. The question is not about the nature of Deleuze’s

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<sup>5</sup>“(...) réintroduit le spinozisme au plus profond de l’opération philosophique” (*DRF* 361)

Spinozism, but about the element of Spinoza's thought that he repeats. This slight reformulation moves away from de Beistegui's thesis, because we are not attempting to understand Deleuze, but to understand the repeated element, that is, the common ground of Deleuze and Spinoza. Phrased otherwise, we could say that the importance of the 'repeated element' is that it moves away from the temptation to see Spinoza as a mere step in the development of Deleuze's thought and allows us to understand Spinoza *and* Deleuze's projects in a new light.

What this thesis claims to accomplish is not a comparative reading of Spinoza's and Deleuze's philosophies, but an analysis of how Deleuze's philosophy draws from Spinoza's conceptual apparatus in order to develop a metaphysics that can be developed outside of any need for transcendence. What does Deleuze mean when he claims that his philosophy is an attempt to reintroduce Spinoza at the heart of philosophy? We think that this question is the same as: what is the relation between immanence and the possibility of new metaphysics? The answer, that will be developed throughout the present thesis, is the following: repeating the Spinozian philosophical impetus entails to see the reality in a self-developing motion, as the unfolding of one single substance, or plane of reality, that must be understood solely through itself. Against forms of metaphysics that rely on transcendence, Spinoza, and Deleuze after him, sought to present a conception of the world that focuses on the creative power immanent to reality itself.

In order to address this question, we will first proceed to a careful analysis of the relation between Spinoza, Deleuze and metaphysics. The term 'metaphysics' has fallen into dismay in the contemporary philosophical scene, and it might seem surprising to some that we associate thinkers of immanence such as Spinoza and Deleuze with metaphysics. There is

a tendency to associate — if not conflate—transcendence and metaphysics, and so claiming to establish a metaphysics of immanence seems contradictory. Our first chapter will try to move away from this problematic, making clear that Spinoza and Deleuze should be considered as metaphysicians. Understanding how metaphysics relate to our conception of reality, to the way in which we understand reality as such, will help us to see how the notion of immanence brings forth a perspective that is different from transcendent accounts, since reality must be understood solely through itself if it is to be purely immanent. As such, this first chapter will also contain a quick presentation of Spinoza’s vocabulary, in order to ground the reader into the philosophical atmosphere of the thesis.

The second chapter will focus on Deleuze’s philosophy, mostly the way in which he addresses metaphysics according to a *process of individuation*. The purpose of this chapter will be to present Deleuze’s own solutions to the problem brought forth by metaphysics. As such, the point is to ground ourselves into the specific structure of a metaphysics of immanence, against other metaphysics of transcendence. Deleuzian philosophy presents an account of genesis that is novel, one in which individuals are not reproduction of forms, or concepts. The *process of individuation* developed by the French philosopher seeks to elaborate an immanent account of the production of beings. Hence, our first step will be to understand what is at play in the ‘pure metaphysics’ of Deleuze.

This analysis will show that this project of a new metaphysics depends on an important aspect of Spinoza’s own system: an immanent ontology. The latter does not correspond to any form of mysticism, but instead is an affirmation of individuals as specific ways of being. In other words, if the genesis of individuals is dependent on a new ontology, it is because we need a new way to consider the relation between beings and Being. This is

where we will analyze in more detail the debt Deleuze bears to Spinoza, the debt of an immanent ontology that refuses any transcendence. The last chapter will show how Deleuze's own solutions to metaphysical problems — problems that pertain to the nature of reality, e.g. causality, genesis, knowledge of the world, the divine, etc. — are to be understood according to a Spinozian ontology. The importance of ontology regarding the metaphysical project will be explained there. Quickly, we can already indicate that the main aspect of the Spinozian ontology is the conception of reality as *potentia*, or power, which gives us a reality that is creative and constantly unfolding. We will also prove our claim that Deleuze's own metaphysics is a repetition of Spinoza's metaphysical impetus. The objective of this final chapter will be to show that both authors are proposing a new conception of reality that stems from a common ground, i.e. immanence, and that this common ground is also expressed through both authors understanding of *potentia*.

The general structure of the thesis could be summarized as follow: (i) a presentation of metaphysics in general, followed by the specific case of Spinoza's philosophy, which we consider to be Deleuze's inspiration; (ii) an analysis of the way in which Deleuze develops his own metaphysics through individuation; (iii) the exploration of the Spinozian ontology, which we will show to be the repeated element. Far from presenting Deleuze as a new Spinoza, or Spinoza as a proto-Deleuze, we want to show that they both stand on the same ground, repeating the same desire: a metaphysics of pure immanence.

# I

## Against the Grain: The Problem of Metaphysics

### *Li—Who is a metaphysician?*

Our effort here will be to limit our interpretation to the metaphysical thought of Spinoza and Deleuze. Putting away the ethical and political aspects of their respective philosophies, we consider that metaphysics reveals more clearly the ground of both philosophies. Indeed, we consider metaphysics as the Ancients did, that is, as first philosophy. It entails that the task of metaphysics is to address the way in which one conceives reality to be in the first place.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of the present work, we do think the metaphysical aspect of both systems must be addressed through the more specific question of immanence *versus* transcendence. Indeed, if de Beistegui claims that Deleuze's philosophy is an attempt to achieve immanence after Spinoza, the metaphysics that allows such an enterprise must be one in which reality shows itself as immanent and without transcendence. Of course, immanence comes with ethical and political consequences — we can think here of conceptions of authority, or how one should consider the other/Other —, but those implications follow from the way one conceives reality.

If reality is considered to be a form of pure immanence, it means that everything we encounter and experience, even the divine, cannot be found in an other-worldly kind of experience. Immanence entails a community of everything there is. Transcendence, on the

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<sup>6</sup> We will explain that claim further in the following few pages.



other hand, supposes that something lies outside, that there is a gap between an entity —be it divine or intellectual— and existence as we know it. By existence, we mean what is encountered in the material and changing world in which we live; maybe it would help to really understand the logic of transcendence as one that posits a gap between the world (mortal, ephemeral, ever-changing, etc.), and a certain ‘outside’ to the world (eternal, identical, immutable, etc.) Immanence refuses the possibility of this ‘outside’, where transcendence strives to maintain it, and even to explain the world with the help of the transcendent reality.

The difficulty of the challenge we try to address here consists in showing how, metaphysically, Spinoza sought to elaborate a philosophy grounded in immanence, and how Deleuze considered this project seriously and drew from it whilst trying to rearticulate it in new terms, thus, ‘reintroducing Spinozian thought’ at the heart of philosophy. In other words, and at the risk of repeating ourselves, Deleuzian metaphysics must be understood according to a Spinozian metaphysics of immanence.

At the outset, we need to address a difficulty that pertains to the place of Deleuze within the metaphysical tradition: is Deleuze even doing metaphysics? In the early works, Deleuze is very critical of what he considers to be the metaphysical tradition.<sup>7</sup> In *Logique du Sens*, for example, he claims that metaphysics consists in the establishment of transcendent essences (*LS* 128), and often the theme of the ‘reversal of Platonism’, dominant in

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<sup>7</sup> We would like to stress out here that for the rest of the thesis, we will sometimes have to refer to the ‘metaphysical tradition’ as a monolithic block, because this is a strategy adopted by Deleuze himself. We are aware that the tradition is more complex and subtle than the label ‘metaphysics of transcendence’ that is often used by Deleuze and other Deleuzian thinkers, and we recognize that the present thesis does not do justice to the complexity of numerous metaphysicians. The read must bear in mind that our generalizations are often taken from Deleuze’s own views, and do not always reflect ours.

*Différence et Répétition* and *Logique du Sens*, seems to proclaim the death of any form of transcendence, be it in Ideas, Forms, Categories; this criticism comes with a criticism of the metaphysics that are grounded in transcendence. As we explained earlier, we have a tendency to conflate transcendence and metaphysics, since the dominant metaphysicians used transcendent forms throughout their system. Hence, criticism of transcendence can appear to be a criticism of metaphysics. This, however, is not the case. A number of commentators, however, insists that Deleuze is a metaphysician. Michael Hardt, in *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, states: “Deleuze does not announce the end of metaphysics, but on the contrary seeks to rediscover the most coherent and lucid plane of metaphysical thought”. (Hardt xix); Daniel W. Smith, in his *Essays on Deleuze* claims that “*Difference and Repetition* is an experiment in metaphysics”, and in another essay found in the same book that Deleuze’s conceptual apparatus is grounded in “a *metaphysics* of difference”. (Smith 38, 235) According to those accounts, it does seem like Deleuze is a metaphysician, and we think that those commentators who see in Deleuzian thought a metaphysics are closer to the spirit of Deleuze himself.

Indeed, responding Arnaud Villani — a former student writing a book on his thought and asking him whether he was “a non-metaphysical philosopher” —, declares the following: “No, I consider myself to be a pure metaphysician”.<sup>8</sup> (*LAT 78*, our translation) We think that it cannot be clearer: Deleuze does metaphysics, and not a philosophy that seeks to move beyond metaphysics, in the wake of the ‘death of metaphysics’ that is in vogue amongst his contemporaries. In fact, in *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie*, Guattari and

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<sup>8</sup> “Êtes-vous un philosophe non-métaphysicien?": “Non, je me sens pur métaphysicien.” (*LAT 78*)

him declare openly that they think such discourses, present in our day and age concerning the ‘death of metaphysics’ or the ‘overcoming of philosophy’ are vacuous: “In any case, the death of metaphysics or the overcoming of philosophy has never been a problem for us: it is just tiresome, idle chatter”.<sup>9</sup> (WP 9) We thus feel confident that Deleuzian philosophy is a metaphysics.

### ***Lii—Metaphysics as First Philosophy***

We cannot fully understand our claim about the metaphysical aspect of Deleuze’s thought if we do not define, first, what is to be understood by metaphysics. After all, Deleuze considered himself a ‘pure metaphysician’, which is an ambiguous claim knowing how complex the metaphysical tradition is. Moreover, if our goal is to show that Deleuze repeats an element of Spinoza’s philosophy, a definition a metaphysics will also allow us to see how Spinozian philosophy also bears the title of metaphysics. As we already hinted at, what is common to both authors is their desire to produce a metaphysics of *immanence*, which entails that it stands against a metaphysics of *transcendence*. The first question we need to address, in order to arrive at a definition of metaphysics, is thus the problem of transcendence when considering metaphysics.

This problem is inherent in Deleuze’s desire for a renewal of metaphysics. One could suppose that Deleuze, in his refusal of the end of metaphysics, was mostly addressing the problems that follow from what is called, in the literature, ‘onto-theology’. According to this conception, metaphysics always comes with a forgetting, that is the forgetting of the

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<sup>9</sup> “En tout cas, nous n’avons jamais eu de problème concernant la mort de la métaphysique ou le dépassement de la philosophie: ce sont d’inutiles, de pénibles radotages.” (QP 14)

difference between beings and Being. In other words, metaphysics is always somehow related to the forgetting of our own individual existence, and focuses on the whole of reality, as if the ‘whole of reality’ was an extra-worldly concept, hence remaining unable to address our current earthly issues. ‘Onto-theology’, in that sense, means that we are considering only the nature of Being as such and are attempting to explain existence — as a something experience in the everyday life — according to this transcendent concept. As we hinted at earlier, it implies that the conceptual status of Being lies outside of the worldly existence, and thus has a different ontological status. It implies that metaphysics — when understood as onto-theology — grasps reality as a whole in order to understand individual entities. As such, the whole *transcends* individuals, and if one only accepts the onto-theological definition of metaphysics, one conflates metaphysics and transcendence. The end of metaphysics, or its overcoming, thus consists in focusing on individual experiences, and not on the whole anymore. It comes with a refusal of onto-theology as the undeniable essence of metaphysics.

Could we, however, conceive another interpretation of metaphysics, one that would not lead us in the deadlock of so-called onto-theology? In other words, is metaphysics really condemned to deal only with transcendent concepts? Of course, such a query far extends beyond the scope of this thesis. We could however hint at a return to the original meaning of metaphysics as necessary in order to elucidate what Deleuze means by the expression, ‘pure metaphysician’. Aristotle, in *Metaphysics*, argues that metaphysics is *first philosophy*, that is, a form of knowledge that “deal[s] with the first causes and the principles of things” (Aristotle 981b25) It is called first philosophy, because it is concerned with the first principles, that is, the way in which things are, come to be, and function — in a primordial

way. Later in the book, Aristotle will describe in a different way the purpose of metaphysics:

There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this by virtue of its own nature. [...] Now since we are seeking the first principles and the highest causes, clearly there must be some thing to which these belong in virtue of its own nature. If then those who sought the elements of existing things were seeking these same principles, it is necessary that the elements must be elements of being not by accident but just because it *is* being. Therefore it is of being as being that we also must grasp the first causes. (Aristotle 1003a15-30)

In this description, it does seem like Aristotle presents a definition of metaphysics that is not grounded in overlooking individual entities, but that seeks, on the contrary, to understand what pertains to them *as* existing. Previous philosophers, according to Aristotle in this passage, were not considering elements as accidental things, that is as constituents that had to be brought into existence: they were considering those elements as the principles of existence itself, as what made entities existing. In other words, metaphysics, as concerned with first principles, is not only an account of genesis, but also an account of how things function as long as they exist. In other words, the principles that animates them are principles that pertain to existence *per se*.

The phrase ‘being as being’ often formulated as ‘being *qua* being’ is the ground of metaphysics, not because it ignores individuals for the sake of the whole, but because it declares that metaphysics is a science that wants to know what pertains to existence in its bare form, before even being manifested in specific entities. In *De Anima*, he even specifies that the role of the first philosopher (i.e. the metaphysician) is to search for principles that do not need to be abstracted from reality (e.g. numbers and geometrical forms), but that are still separable from matter and individuals —viz. principles that are *first* because they can

be considered in themselves, without any relation or risk of confusion with actual existing beings. Indeed:

the natural scientist is concerned with all those things which are the functions and affections of this sort of body and of this sort of matter. Someone else deals with things not of this sort, perhaps some of them concern some craftsman or other, for example, a carpenter or a doctor; but among affections which are not separable, some, in so far as they are not affections of this sort of body and are from abstraction, concern the mathematician, and others, the separate ones, the first philosopher. (*De Anima* 403b 10-15)

In his technical language, Aristotle argues that first philosophy is not something akin to natural science, because it considers principles that are independent, presiding to the nature of any entity. First principles, then, are not to be confused with entities, because they precede them, pulse through them in order to animate them, like a constant heartbeat, and follow their own laws. What we gather from this is that the original meaning of metaphysics does not entail a privileged relation with transcendence. Metaphysics as the science of first principles is the knowledge of what pertains to existence as such, that is, to what pertains to reality in its constitutive aspect. Metaphysics, thus understood, is an account of reality in its unfolding.

From what we argued so far, we can understand that Deleuze, by declaring himself a metaphysician, is considering being *qua* being, and so his metaphysical system must be understood also as an ontology. This is also in accordance with Spinoza's own views on metaphysics. In the Appendix to *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*, one of the only works published in his lifetime, Spinoza wrote "Metaphysical Thoughts", a short treatise in which his "intention [...] is only to explain the more obscure things which are commonly treated by Writers on Metaphysics." (*MT* 299) In the introductory paragraph, he claims that what he considers to be the "general part of Metaphysics" consist in what concerns "Being

and its Affections”. (MT 299) Spinoza addresses, in those thoughts, the general part of metaphysics, which is deemed to be made of the ‘most obscure things’. Those things are the notion of Being, and its affections. By affections, we should simply understand a modification, or a way in which pure Being is determined in a specific way. An entity — a *being* — is thus understood to be an affection of *Being*. In a few pages, Spinoza considers the issue of real and fictitious beings, beings of reason, being of essence, existence, ideas, and so on. Those, we think, should be what he calls ‘affections of Being’, because they are ways in which we encounter Being, in a specific and determinate way. Now, Being itself has a specific definition in this early work of the Dutch philosopher: “Let us begin, therefore, with Being, by which I understand *Whatever, when it is clearly and distinctly perceived, we find to exist necessarily, or at least to be able to exist.*” (MT 299) The definition is large: whatever exists, or can exist, is understood as Being. Being is thus not a transcendent concept, but the pulse of reality as it is within specific entities and things. If we understand those few first paragraphs, we arrive at the following conclusion: metaphysics, for Spinoza, consists in the study of everything that is, or that has the capacity to be —the study of being *qua* being through the study of the particular entities that exist.<sup>10</sup>

We are not that far from Aristotle’s claim that metaphysics is concerned with the principles of being *qua* being, but at the same time, we are, with Spinoza, already moving away from what some consider to be the ‘forgetful’, or onto-theological, side of

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<sup>10</sup> We are aware that the summary of this definition of Being is far from being satisfactory. We do not have the space to develop further the analysis of Being proposed by Spinoza in this early work. We think, however, that it should become clearer when we will explain what is to be understood by Substance.

metaphysical inquiry. Metaphysics is not the consideration of pure being, without any consideration for entities: metaphysics is the study of Being as it unfolds in entities.

At this point of our inquiry, we think it is necessary to take a pause, and reassure the reader that we are aware that the ‘forgetting’ of onto-theology is far from being an adequate label for the whole of the metaphysical tradition. The way in which metaphysics developed through the ages cannot be reduced to a single movement that would have been followed blindly by all the philosophers, and it would be possible to see how the desire to establish a metaphysics of immanence finds resonance with other philosophical systems that still maintain a relation with transcendence. It does seem, however, that both Spinoza and Deleuze, and their commentators, have a tendency to reduce the tradition to a set of principles or tenets that they argue are shared by most of the philosophers they oppose.

In order to precise our argument, we would like to refer to Jonathan I. Israel’s work on the history of radical philosophy within the Enlightenment, where he presents a more nuanced version of the tradition opposed by Spinoza and other radical thinkers. In *Radical Enlightenment*, Israel argues early on that it would be wrong to say that all philosophy preceding Descartes and Cartesian philosophy was a solid monolith, but he still maintains that there were at least a few tenets and principles that were agreed on. Or, to phrase it otherwise, it is possible to see a common way of seeing what philosophy should look like, even though there are massive disagreements between the different authors. Here is Israel’s presentation of the situation that is specific to the period of the Enlightenment:

Hence, while scholastic Aristotelianism in the seventeenth century was by no means either entirely uniform, nor as inflexible and unwilling to debate the new mechanistic theories as it sometimes implied, it was nevertheless, in both Catholic and Protestant lands, throughout Europe until the 1650s overwhelmingly *philosophia recepta*, the officially and ecclesiastically



sanctioned philosophy prevailing in the universities and academies, and dominating philosophical and scientific discourse and textbooks. (Israel 16)

We would like to advocate a similar case for the present thesis: we are aware that the metaphysical tradition is way more nuanced than a simple ‘onto-theology’, or even to a tradition that is solely versed in transcendence; but we do think that what both Spinoza and Deleuze are working against is a discourse that is — or was — dominant and officially accepted as sound and certain. There is thus a case to make that their war on transcendence, which can end up taking up the strategy to build easy generalizations concerning the tradition, is actually an attempt to shake and disturb a way of thinking that seems to have become common knowledge and common sense.

Therefore, if our basic assumption is right when saying that Deleuze is trying to rearticulate Spinozian philosophy, we must assume that his intention will be to see metaphysics as the study of entities, not as lesser form of Being, but as determinate and specific expressions of Being. Phrased otherwise, Spinoza’s metaphysics is not one in which there is an overlooking of specific entities for the sake of an understanding of the concept of Being, as if this concept had an existence in an external realm: entities are animated, empowered, with the power of existence itself, and so there is no gap of transcendence between Being and beings. Hence, the metaphysics of immanence is against the tradition, if by tradition is understood an observable tendency to rely heavily on transcendence in metaphysics.

This hypothesis is confirmed by Smith, who claims that Deleuze sought to answer this question: “How can thought leave this meagre sphere of the possible in order to think the real, that is, to think existence itself, to think existing things[?]” (Smith 72) What is at play

in this question, is a deeply Spinozian question, or a reformulation of Spinoza's definition of Being: the metaphysical impetus of Deleuzian thought is to think existence as such, existence *qua* existence, and this entails real things, and not merely possible things. Smith offers a clear example of what we should understand by the word 'possibility' in Deleuze's philosophy:

By itself, thought has no means of distinguishing between the possible and the real. I can have a concept of 100 dollars in my mind, and while it may be important to me practically whether or not I actually have 100 dollars in my pocket, the existence of the 100 dollars in reality changes nothing from the point of view of the concept: that is, from the viewpoint of pure thought. The position of the real is *outside the concept*; the existing thing is external to the concept. (Smith 72)

Reality, then, cannot be what is merely possible, that is what can be only conceptualized and imagined: reality must be understood as what exists, viz. a determinate and specific way in which existence is experienced by us. It means that an idea has a specific existence, and similarly a physical entity has one. In other words, metaphysics cannot be merely concerned with concepts as if they were transcendent to existence, but their own existence must be accounted for through the analysis of first principles.

The existence of concepts must also be part of a metaphysical inquiry, since they are affections of Being. Thinking existence itself, then, means that we are attentive to the way in which things are. Unsurprisingly, we find a strong resonance with Spinoza's "Metaphysical Thoughts", where he states that we are wrong to divide Being between real beings and beings of reason, the latter being any thought we use in order to "*retain, explain, and imagine* [more easily] the things we have understood." (MT 300) Said otherwise, Spinoza does not think we are right to say that Being is divided between concepts of thought which are only logical and conceptual, and real beings (which exists and can exist). Thus,

it is argued that philosophers who “judge the things from the words, not the words from the things” are source of many errors, because they try to explain existence according to a certain transcendence of the concepts, which are supposed to pre-exist to reality. In other words, they argue that first principles should be found outside of our experienced reality, and attempt to explain the world according to what lies outside of it. From a metaphysical standpoint, Spinoza’s criticism entails that first principles do not have an other-worldly existence, as if they were to be found outside of the material world, but should be found in the very change and ephemeral status of our reality. In other words, Spinoza refuses the claim that is sometimes made that first principles enjoy a form of existence that would be different from the one material and empirical objects enjoy. One of the tenets of Spinozian metaphysics, as if often pointed out, is the fact that there is only one realm of existence, one reality, and so one cannot rely on any conceptual apparatus that would partake in a form of existence that is *qualitatively* different from the one of the empirical reality which we experience.

In summary, by metaphysics we understand the study of first principles, viz. the status of reality as it is in itself. Being should not be understood here as a merely conceptual tool, that is ultimately transcendent to existing things: Being is the character of everything that is, or as the capacity to be. To put it otherwise, Being is existence itself, not the sum of all existing beings, but something more akin to the life<sup>11</sup> in them. Spinoza and Deleuze argue that this study should consider existence itself, as it is in existing things. The first principles cannot be merely logical, nor can they transcend the reality in which we live. Achieving

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<sup>11</sup> We invite the reader to remember this, since it will become crucial in the next part of the present chapter.

immanence after Spinoza means affirming the metaphysics he already elaborated, which is a consideration of existence itself and the way in which it is affected in existing things. Hence, our task will be to show how Deleuze's own metaphysics embraces, in a unique and novel way, the immanence developed by the Dutch philosopher.

### ***I.ii—Immersing Ourselves: Learning the Language***

If our hypothesis is accurate, Deleuzian philosophy cannot be understood without a proper understanding of the basic concepts at play in Spinoza's metaphysics. In our attempt to explain how Deleuze should be considered as a metaphysician, we have to stress out the specific structure a metaphysic of immanence has. As we saw in the criticism proposed by onto-theology, the problem of traditional metaphysics is that it overlooks individual entities. 'Onto-theological' metaphysics is considered to rely on transcendent terms in order to explain reality. Spinoza and Deleuze do not refuse metaphysics, but they do refuse transcendence. In order to make this claim clearer, we would like to explore Spinoza's own position, since our thesis is that Deleuze repeats elements that were first brought to light in Spinoza's philosophy. By doing so, we think the reader will be able to see how a metaphysics of immanence is possible, through the specific conception of reality it entails.

Spinoza's metaphysical position may be succinctly framed as follows: One single substance produces an infinite quantity of modes through an infinite quantity of attributes.<sup>12</sup> One can see, however, how those terms need to be explained further: the difficulty of reading Spinoza's philosophy might come from how simple it seems, but how ambiguous every term is. 'Substance', to take only this one, is a notion that has a long history in

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<sup>12</sup> This summary follows from the definitions and axioms of the first part of *Ethics*.

philosophy. Aristotle used it in his own ontology, Descartes' use of it comes from a long Christian tradition, and Hegel also changed our perspective on the term. Amidst all those interpretations, it becomes difficult to know exactly what Spinoza understood as substance. The same analysis could be done regarding 'Attributes' or even 'Modes'.

Another difficulty comes from the way Spinoza was received, in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany: as a pantheist, a monist, an atheist; subsequently, in the 1960s, French philosophers reinterpreted Spinoza as a materialist (e.g. Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, Matheron).<sup>13</sup> Through those different interpretations, the figure of Spinoza became quasi-mythical, to a point where we almost forget what the text itself is saying. This forgetting of the text, or the moving away from the text, however, can seem justified: the structure and style of *Ethics* is obscure, proceeding with a geometrical method and written as if the author was writing from a detached perspective on the world. Elizabeth Grosz presents it as the "stranger and more perplexing book in the history of philosophy" (Grosz 58), and Althusser, describes his first encounter with the work in the following words: "I discovered in him first an astonishing contradiction: this man who reasons *more geometrico* through definitions, axioms, theorems, corollaries, lemmas, and deductions —therefore, in the most 'dogmatic' way in the world —was in fact an incomparable liberator of the mind."<sup>14</sup> (Althusser1997 4) Althusser's reaction could be rephrased within our own project: how can

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<sup>13</sup> For an interesting historical account of Spinoza's reception in different countries and era, see Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II: The Adventures of Immanence*.

<sup>14</sup> "J'y découvris d'abord une étonnante contradiction: cet homme qui raisonne *more geometrico* par définitions, axiomes, théorèmes, corollaires, lemmes et déductions, donc de la façon la plus 'dogmatique' du monde, était en fait un libérateur incomparable de l'esprit." (Althusser1993 76)

Spinoza's philosophy, one that uses a terminology that refers to the previous metaphysical tradition, avoid the mistakes made in the past by metaphysicians?

If we take Deleuze and Guattari's claim seriously, and assume that philosophy consists in the creation of concepts (see *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*, Ch.I), then we can only say that it is impossible to understand properly a given philosophical system without understanding the specific concepts that are created within it. In other words, we cannot claim to understand Spinozian thought, and Deleuze's own Spinozian drive, without first understanding the concepts articulated by Spinoza.

Going back to our summary of Spinoza's philosophy, we can see that there are 3 terms we need to explain: (a) Substance, (b) Attributes, (c) Modes. To be clear: we are not attempting to provide a detailed summary of Spinoza's system, but are trying to establish the common ground on which Spinoza and Deleuze stand. Methodologically, it implies that we are not relying on traditional scholars versed into Spinoza, but on interpreters and philosophers who are working on the themes we think are also present in Deleuzian thought. We are aware that those interpretations might not be the most scholarly, but we do think they highlights the features we find common to Spinoza and Deleuze. Our following analysis of Spinozian should thus be considered as an attempt to ground further the importance of immanence regarding both authors.

(a) "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed." (EI D3) One could see in this presentation of substance a Cartesian influence,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For example, in 'Secondes réponses', in *Méditations métaphysiques*, Descartes explains that a substance is whatever is in itself, or which we conceive things to be in. In other words, a substance is the *substratum* of

but what intrigues us here is the twofold aspect of the definition: substance is that which *is* in itself, and is *conceived* through itself. In other words, substance must be considered without any reliance on something outside of it. It is a perfect state of immanence, because there is nothing that can be outside of it. Substance, in other words, is the immanent ground of Spinoza's philosophy. This is confirmed in the first eleven propositions of *Ethics*, where Spinoza meticulously reaches the conclusion that the only appropriate conception of substance that we can have must be reached through substance itself, and never according to forms, ideas, or categories that would lie outside of it. Spinoza proceeds carefully, because if one does not understand how substance is totally understood through itself, and so self-produced and self-caused, one could still attempt to describe reality according to terms and concepts that stand outside of it. The refusal of a metaphysics relying on transcendence comes with an embrace of substance as all there is. Our understanding of substance is thus the following: that substance is total immanence, the cause of itself that posits reality as a whole that is self-produced, i.e. *causa sui*. Let us explain.

First of all, if substance is that which is in itself and conceived through itself, three axioms of the first part of *Ethics* already hint at the impossibility that substance was created by something external: "Whatever is, is either in itself or in another" (A1), "What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself" (A2) and "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause." (A4) From those three axioms, we can deduce that substance being in itself, and understood through itself cannot be produced by anything else, since if it were so, we would have to understand substance

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everything, and so is only in itself, and everything else is in it. (c.f. *Méditations métaphysiques* 'Secondes réponses' AT, IX, 125)

through the knowledge of its cause, which is the content of *EIP6*: “One substance cannot be produced by another substance”. Already, we can describe the concept as follows: a substance is something that is totally immanent, meaning that it exists *in itself*, and is conceived through itself, and thus cannot be produced by anything else that would explain it.

This conclusion entails that substance causes itself, or is *causa sui*. This is the case because if substance cannot be caused by anything, that is, cannot be produced by anything else, it must be caused by itself. Phrased otherwise, if knowledge of something always involves the knowledge of its cause, the only way in which we can know what substance is, is through itself, and so through the knowledge of substance as its own cause.

*Causa sui* is not a characteristic of substance, but its nature: it is that which cannot be conceived through anything else, hence what cannot be caused by anything else. For the Dutch author, the status of substance as *causa sui* means that there is a reality in which everything is, and which cannot be understood through qualities and properties that are merely accidental. This is why the eleven first propositions of *Ethics* are a careful demonstration of the unicity of substance: if it were possible to conceive many substances, then it would be possible to conceive substance as possessing one single quality. If this were the case, however, we would have to find a cause for the division of all those substances. Spinoza solves this difficulty by claiming that we experience only one single reality, and so there must be one single substance that produces this reality, —i.e. a substance that produces itself. Having caused itself, a substance brings itself into being, and so is conceived as pure immanence. It is not uncaused, but constantly causing itself, actively existing. This is why the very first definition of *Ethics* states: “By cause of itself



[*causa sui*] I understand that whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.” (EID1)

We will focus in another chapter on the notion of essence in Spinoza’s philosophy, but for now it should be understood as it is presented in the rephrasing of the first part of the definition: essence is what is necessarily conceived when thinking about something. As Spinoza says it later in Ethics: “I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is also necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily also taken away; or that without which the things can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” (EII D2) With this in mind, we can make the following claim: substance=existence. In other words, substance is that which exists necessarily, that which is necessarily and actively existing. We thus understand ‘to be’ as hiding the active aspect of ‘existence’. That which necessarily existsthat Being should be understood in Spinoza’s philosophy as the force of existence itself, that which cannot be understood as not existing, because it causes its own existence.

It is helpful at this point to turn towards Antonio Negri’s interpretation of substance in *The Savage Anomaly*, since it insists strongly on the importance of the seeing substance as existence. According to his reading: “Existence, as such, does not demand definition. It is the spontaneity of being.” (Negri 45) If this is the case, why does Spinoza go through so much trouble to define substance, which we equate with existence as such?

[E]xistence is always qualified, and every existence is essential; every existence exists, that is, as essence. [...] This given complex of being is the element in which we live, the fabric from which all is woven. But it is impossible to conceive everything in an indeterminate way when every moment of existence is entirely determinate. (Negri 45)

Negri's analysis brings to light the problem of existence: if it is the spontaneity of being, that which is immediate and always experienced by us in a non-reflexive way, at the same time, every form of existence we encounter is always the existence of something determinate. Smith's point concerning Deleuze's attempt to think existence itself comes in handy here: concepts lack existence, because they are deemed to have a mere logical status. Spinoza presents here, through Negri's interpretation, an early version of the Deleuzian desire to think existence: existence is not a mere predicate, meaning that concepts have a certain priority over real existing beings.

Existence is always encountered in specific and determined ways, which entails that concepts exist, things exist, and whatever we conceive, or experience, is a determined and specific form of existence. To phrase it in a more dramatic way: if existence was merely a predicate, it would mean that there would be a certain transcendence of the conceptual realm over the empirical one. Existence might be the spontaneity of being, meaning that it might be the immediate product of being as such, but this spontaneity always appears to us as determined. And yet, Spinoza wants us to consider substance as that which essentially exists — that is, as that which is the sheer power of existing. We are not considering existence as a necessary property of substance. If we remember the first definition of *Ethics*, existence follows necessarily from the notion of substance as conceived through itself, because it means that it cannot be conceived according to something external to it, so something having an existence outside of it. The equation substance=existence is not a repetition of the ontological proof of God, in which God's essence is existence. The equation simply means that since substance cannot be understood through another idea, and

hence cannot be understood according to an *existing idea or concept*, substance exists in itself and through itself alone — it is existence in its purest form.

Following Negri's insightful interpretation, substance is not pure existence as totally indeterminate, but as totally determinate: substance is existence as such, as it is present in every determination: "Determining existence as totality means conceiving its infinity, a determinate and positive infinity, which is precisely the totality. On higher ontological level, [...] existence is the spontaneity of being considered as totality." (Negri 45) What Negri sustains in his reading is that substance is the determination of existence as a totality, that is, as the totality of all that exists. By totality, Spinoza entails that nothing lies outside of it, and so that substance is the whole of reality as it is, and as it will become. This is what the first axiom of book I makes clear: "Whatever is, is either in itself or in another" entails that whatever is, is either in substance or is substance. Following Negri's phrasing, it means that we cannot conceive of existence as this pure spontaneity that is undetermined, but we need to conceive it as that which is always at play in every determined form, and that is itself determined as existing. Said otherwise, by saying that substance is *causa sui*, Spinoza grounds his metaphysics in existence, and not in an abstract transcendent concept of Being. His ontological ground is purely immanent, and everything that exists in determinate and specific way is within it (*EI A1*).

We would be wrong, however, to think that this means that substance is only the sum of all there is. Substance is the *cause of itself*, and so cannot be constituted by adding all of the existents together. Substance, as *causa sui*, is first and foremost a cause, a production. We do not reach an understanding of substance through the taking away of everything else, but through a positive affirmation of existence as production, as cause. This is why we

might be better to conceive of substance not as something neutral, or indifferent, but more as a life force, as that which is cause of the existence of every single entity we encounter. Phrased this way, substance's essence might be less existence than the power to exist. Elizabeth Grosz presents it as a "singular binding force that connects things, no matter how small or disconnected in space and time they might be, for every thing participates in and is a part of a complex totality." (Grosz *Incorporeal* 59) Phrased in this way, we can understand the positivity, or affirmative, aspect of substance, as this raw power, this life force that is known through its creativity and production, and not through an abstraction from the material world.

Too often do we have the feeling, when reading Spinoza, that substance is this frozen form of being, something that simply is, and remains the same, being perfectly undetermined and subsisting in itself. As Hegel claims in *Science of Logic*, Spinozian substance appears as "the total void of internal determinateness" (Hegel 87:21.101), or "a sinking of all content into an only formal unity void of content" (Hegel 284:21.325); but this is to mistake the important aspect highlighted by Negri and Grosz, namely that substance is existence as it is in every entity, and not something standing outside, independent. Moreover, the 'void of internal determinateness' forgets the fact that substance is *causa sui*, and thus always determined to exist by itself, and never forced by something external. With our interpretation that substance is Being, understood as the power of existence, what we claim is that any interpretation that isolates substance as something totally independent and undetermined is mistaken. Following Negri's analysis: "Every sign of abstraction is taken away; the category of being is the substance, the substance is unique, it is reality. It is neither above nor below reality, it is all reality. [...]"

Absolute being is the surface of the world.” (Negri 52) As radical as it seems, all of reality needs to be understood as causing itself, and thus being an effect of itself. Once more, a radical immanence is posited as the status of substance — and reality.

Our interpretation might find its ultimate expression in Spinoza’s own words: “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived” (EI P14), “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God”(P15), “God is the efficient cause of all things” (P16C1), “God is a cause through himself and not an accidental cause” (P16C2) and “God acts from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one.” (P17) Through all of those statements, Spinoza clearly states that by substance we mean the whole of reality, but not as if we were looking at the mere sum of all entities. If “God acts from the laws of his nature alone”, it entails that the first principles sought by metaphysical inquiry must be the laws of his nature. If God is the only substance, then we need to understand that by God, we mean existence itself, or the ‘binding force’ Grosz talks about.<sup>16</sup> This is further confirmed by the two statements on divine causality: being efficient cause and cause through himself, we need to understand everything produced by God as *produced within God*, and not in something external to him. Furthermore, if the knowledge of an effect always implies the knowledge of the cause (EI A4), then it entails that we can never truly understand, or consider, entities without at the same time understanding how they are simultaneously *in* God and caused by him.

In other words, we need to understand that the whole of reality is a production, a manifestation, and an affirmation of God’s essence, i.e. existence in its affirmation, that is,

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<sup>16</sup> We need to take this statement for granted for now, because the argument concerning the existence of only one substance depends on the notion of attributes.

a creative power. Indeed, in the Explanation following *EI D6*, i.e. the definition of God, Spinoza specifies what he understands by God as “a being absolutely infinite” (*EI D6*): “if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.” This precision discloses an important aspect of the claim that God’s essence is existence: ‘existence’ should be understood as affirmation of a given essence. Indeed, if anything that is affirmative (viz. lacking negation) pertains to the essence of God, and if essence is that which cannot be taken away without taking away the thing considered, we need to assume that anything that is conceived positively, that is, as not involving negation, exists. Of course, this take on existence is broad, and extends the term to things such as essences, ideas, concepts, etc., but we think that this is exactly Spinoza’s point: whatever takes place within reality, and has a positive determination, exists, and hence follows from the nature of substance. Everything that exists should be understood according to what it is, and not according to what it lacks when comparing it with ideas and concepts. As such, the claim that God’s essence is existence means that God’s essence is self-affirmation through the production of all the determinate forms of existence we encounter.

All in all, Spinoza’s conception of Substance, as *causa sui*, is an affirmation that the reality in which we are is not organized by anything external, but is self-produced, following laws immanent to itself. The famous *Deus sive Natura* (*EIV Pref.*) entails that by substance, or God, or Nature, we always mean the same thing, that is the totality of all that exists, the forces that produces it and the forces that are at play within reality. This is how we should read the word ‘substance’ from now on.

(b) “By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.” (*EI D4*) With the notion of attributes, Spinoza tries to show that there is only

one substance, and that we cannot conceive different substances of different attributes, as Descartes did. In other words, the whole problematic of the attributes consists in saying that when we talk about *res extensa* (matter) or *res cogitans* (thought), we are not talking about two different ontological realities, but about one single reality, that must be conceived as expressed in different ways. If we already saw that there is only one substance, and that this substance is God, it is not clear yet how Spinoza can defend that claim.

Spinoza arrives at the unicity of substance by working through the possibility of many single-attribute substances. In order to follow Spinoza's argument, we need to carefully read again the definition of an attribute: it is what "the intellect *perceives* of a substance, as *constituting its essence*." There are two steps in the definition: (i) the intellect is what *perceives* an attribute, and (ii) attributes are the essential constituents of a substance.

(i) The problematic aspect of the first step is that it seems to give a priority to the intellect whenever we are talking about the attributes. Historically, this has given rise to an idealist conception of the attributes, in which substance is essentially determined by an intellect that considers it.<sup>17</sup> Pierre Macherey, however, shows clearly in *Hegel ou Spinoza* that the idealist conception misses an important distinction made by Spinoza himself: the intellect *perceives* the attributes, but does not *conceive* them. In other words, we cannot say that the

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<sup>17</sup> Hardt presents an insightful analysis of this problematic (c.f. Hardt 74-85), which goes beyond the scope of the present thesis. It is helpful, however, to read his presentation of the issue: "The real danger [...] is that the attribute of thought be given a priority over the body. This intellectualist conception of ontology [...] would subordinate any material and corporeal conception of being to the intellectual realm." (Hardt 80) We can see how this would reinject some subjective transcendence in Spinozian thought. This danger comes from a certain reading of Spinoza, which was notably dominant amongst idealist philosophers in Germany: "The idealist or subjectivist interpretation defines the attribute primarily as a form of knowledge, and not as a form of being." (Hardt 75) Hardt mostly focuses on Deleuze's own interpretation which moves away from this danger, and we would suggest to the readers that might be interested in the topic to read the few pages addressing the issue.

attributes are subjective determinations of substance: they are essential constituents of substance, pertaining the substance as it is in itself. As Macherey indicates, Spinoza has a very specific use of the term ‘perception of the intellect’: “the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object.” (EII D3Exp.) With this precision in mind, we need to understand the first step of the definition of an attribute as something of substance which *acts* on the intellect.

(ii) This action of the attribute, however, does not mean that substance shows itself in a certain way to the intellect. In other words, an attribute is not a representation of substance:

attributes are neither ‘active’ representations nor ‘passive’ representations, images, nor even ideas of the intellect or in the intellect; the attributes are not in the intellect, as forms through which the latter would apprehend them, objectively or not, a content given in substance, but they are in substance itself, whose essences they constitute.<sup>18</sup> (Macherey2011 88)

Attributes, then, are not what we could call categories of the understanding (in a Kantian sense) or representations of God: they are the fabric of reality itself. When Spinoza says that the attributes are what we perceive as constituting the essence of a substance, we need to remember that since substance is *causa sui*, it cannot be brought into existence by anything except its own power. In other words, the essence of substance is existence (EI DI & P7), and so the attributes are constituents of existence itself. Phrased even more simply: by attributes, we have to understand an aspect of existence without which existence would not be what it is.

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<sup>18</sup> “ils ne sont pas des représentations, des images, ni même des idées de l’entendement ou dans l’entendement : les attributs ne sont pas dans l’entendement, comme des formes par lesquelles celui-ci appréhenderait, objectivement ou non, un contenu donné de la substance; mais ils sont dans la substance elle-même dont ils constituent les essences.” (Macherey1979 110)



If we relate this to our own experience, we can understand better why Spinoza will say that attributes known to us are thought (*res cogitans*) and extension (*res extensa*): it is simply because our experience of reality is always an experience through thought and extension. In a letter to his friend Oldenburg, Spinoza writes: “By attribute I understand whatever is conceived through itself and in itself, so that its concept does not involve the concept of another thing. For example, Extension is conceived through itself and in itself, but motion is not. For it is conceived in another and its concept involves extension.” (L2 to Oldenburg) In this definition, the closeness of substance and attribute is evident: substance is what is conceived through itself (*EI D3*), and so is an attribute. The example of the case of extension shows that extension is not any specific material thing, but the existence of matter as such. If an attribute is defined here in the same way a substance is, it is because an attribute should not be conceived as something distinct, or a representation, of substance: it is an essential aspect of substance as such — or a constituent of reality itself.

With this understanding of the definition, we can counter-argue once more the reading of Spinoza’s substance as undetermined. On the contrary, it is totally determined through its attributes. Substance is extension and is also thought: it is not a mere abstract concept that would simply be pure being without determinations, but it determines itself through the attributes that constitute it. In other words, the progression of the first few propositions of *Ethics* should be seen as substance constituting itself through its attributes, and not simply the rejection of the possibility of having many substances. Deleuze, Macherey and Negri all argue in the same way: “the *Ethics* does not ‘begin’ with God, but it ends there,

or at least it arrives there, after a whole series of demonstrations”.<sup>19</sup> (Macherey2011 92)

Spinoza’s God is not a religious entity, but the one substance as an absolutely infinite being, i.e. reality in its affirmative, i.e. creative, power. Claiming that the *Ethics* does not start with God, that is, with a divine creator that gives us reality, but ends with it, entails that Spinoza does a metaphysics that presents an account of the genesis of reality, because it does not suppose it as already given and whole. Substance, or God, or Nature, are not given as already known, but are slowly built out of themselves.

With this in mind, it is possible to better understand the argument Spinoza makes against any form of dualism, that is against the claim that thought and extension are two independent substances of a single attribute each. The argument should not strike us as too complex if we remember that by attributes, we mean an essential constituent of substance.

First of all, it would be impossible to conceive two substances of the same attribute, because it would be impossible to distinguish between them (*EIP5*). Indeed, if each attribute needs to be conceived through itself alone (as we saw in L2 to Oldenburg), and if an attribute constitutes the essence of a substance, then by conceiving the attribute in itself, we would not be able to distinguish between two substances. In other words, difference between attributes should not be seen as a numerical distinction, but as a formal distinction. If this is the case, then it is totally possible to imagine a substance possessing many attributes, because attributes are constituents, i.e. what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance. Having more than one attribute means that one substance can be understood in itself, as existing, not only in thought, but also in thought and extension.

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<sup>19</sup> “*l’Éthique* ne ‘commence’ pas par Dieu, mais elle y aboutit, ou au moins elle y parvient, après toute une suite de démonstrations.” (Macherey1979 114)

This is a very realist claim: is not reality constituted of both an experience of extension and an experience of thought? Even if we conceive those two aspects in themselves, we are still talking about the same reality. Spinoza even makes this a proposition: “The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belongs to it.” (EIP9) If reality is characterized by an affirmative power, could we not say that the more attributes — or essential constituents — a thing has makes it more positive, more present? For example, Spinoza will argue, in many places, that the feebleness of imagination comes from the fact that it takes place only within one attribute —i.e. thought—, and thus does not have the strength of the experience of something that is in extension *and* in thought.

The definition of God as “a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence” (EI D6) thus makes sense: if God — or substance — is an absolutely infinite being, it follows that it must possess an infinity of attributes, because it cannot lack anything. If there was an attribute that could be conceived as not expressing the essence of substance, it entails that reality, as we experience it, would be lacking something, and hence would not be positive, in the sense that it would always be lacking something, thus supposing something outside of it. God is the only substance, not because it represents the monotheistic divinity, but because it is reality itself, i.e. existence in its self-affirmation, its fullness and lack of negation.

The role of the attributes, as highlighted by Negri (Negri 59), is short-lived: it serves a constitutive purpose. With the attributes, Spinoza can argue against dualism, because he shows that reality is still one even if constituted by many attributes. In fact, the more attributes reality has, the more powerful it is, and thus the more absolutely infinite it must

be considered. The example of extension given in the Letter 2 to Oldenburg should guide us in our understanding of the word: extension can only be conceived by itself, producing laws that are only explainable and experienced in and by extension itself; *res cogitans* follows the same logic. Without the attributes, substance appears to be a mere formal totality, without any specific content—it is a mere abstraction. With the attributes, Spinoza is able to show that far from being something abstract, substance is self-affirmative and expresses itself in every experience we have—thus solidifying the claim that existence is an affirmative power.

(c) With this in mind, we reach the final step of Spinoza’s system, where we leave the seemingly abstract notions and reach beings, i.e. Being in its specific determinations. This last level corresponds to what we saw earlier as the ‘affections of Being’. “By mode [*modum*] I understand the affections of a substance, *or* that which is in another through which it is also conceived.” (*EI D5*) It is often on this particular notion that some readers might be finding Spinoza’s philosophy as denying any real determination to individuals. As the argument goes, if substance is what is in itself, and is reality—as we already explained—, then a mode, as an affection of a substance, seems to be a mere modification of reality. In other words, it can be possible to read the word “mode” as establishing a mystical vision of the world where there is only one real thing, and mere ephemeral modifications of that real thing. We do think, however, that such a reading is reductive, and misses the argument established earlier concerning the nature of substance.

A mode is not something that should be seen as a mere modification, but is a way of existing, a specific way to exist. In that sense, every entity should be understood as a way in which it is possible to exist, as something actual that expresses life itself. This reading

follows from the claim we analyzed earlier that existence is always determined, and is expressed in manifold determined forms: modes are indeed constituted by the world, and are produced by substance, but they still have specificities that are their own, are unique, and those specificities are positive affirmation of their unique existence. In other words, we do think that Spinoza's characterization of beings as 'modes' is the path towards a conception of individuals as empowered by the very creative power of life itself. In other words, seeing individuals as modes is seeing them as inlets of power.

Thus, when Spinoza says that the only things that exist in reality are substances and their modes (*EIP4Dem.*), what he means is that reality is made of nothing but existence *per se* and the ways in which we encounter existence. If we consider Negri's analysis once again, we can see how this was already present in his first presentation: we never encounter in existence things that are undetermined, but only specific forms of existence. Substance should not be considered independent from the modes, but should be considered as producing an infinite amount of *ways [modi]* in which existence *is*. Phrased otherwise, substance is not a conceptual tool that remains outside of reality —a sort of being that would be different from everything we encounter. It is not the correlative of concepts such as the World or the Whole. As we already saw, Spinoza does not claim that substance, or God, should be understood as the sum of all there is, but as the 'binding force', the life that is expressed through everything.

Hence, when claiming that substance is a productive power, what we mean is that there is no way to consider substance without considering modes, that is, specific and determinate beings. Deleuze insists a lot on the importance of seeing modes as ways of being, as manners in which existence is experienced: "The existent, it is a way of being, you are ways

of being, that's it! You are not persons, you are ways of being, you are modes."<sup>20</sup> (Lecture on Spinoza 02/12/80, our translation) We take this to mean that in order to move away from interpretations where modes are seen as mere appearances of the one real thing, Deleuze prefers to focus on the unique features of each modes we encounter. When we speak about a 'way of living', we talk about principles that are followed by a certain individual, about directions they take, follow, about the specific gestures they pose, etc. This is what we should understand by a mode, if we are to proceed to a analysis of the specific element of Spinozian philosophy repeated by Deleuze: a specific manner or way of existing, according to principles that are immanent to existence itself.

*Substance, or pure ontological immanence; attribute, or constituent aspect of reality; mode, or way of being:* the basic structure of Spinoza's philosophy speaks of existence in a totally immanent way. In other words, his project is to articulate the principles that ground existence, but from existence itself. This is why his metaphysics is *immanent*, i.e. it considers substance as being at work through every entity, thus being in a constant process of creation and production. Substance is never 'outside', or in another plane of existence: it is present in every entity, every encounter, every particle. It is every entity, every encounter, every particle: reality is one single plane, or surface, that is expressed by every single being.

If this is the language developed by Spinoza, what about Deleuze? One barely sees the language of modes, or the language of substance in Deleuze: they are present when he speaks explicitly about Spinoza, but otherwise the terminology is entirely different. Is it

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<sup>20</sup> "L'étant, c'est la manière d'être, vous êtes des manières d'être, c'est bien ça! Vous n'êtes pas des personnes, vous êtes des manières d'être, vous êtes des modes."

because Deleuze seeks to hide his dependency on Spinozian philosophy? Or is it for another reason?

Deleuze appears to be an original philosopher, with an original philosophy, and if he is indeed influenced by Spinoza, one cannot say that he is merely doing over what his predecessor accomplished. Using the metaphysical impetus of Spinozian thought, Deleuze develops new concepts, that are tainted by the Spinozian vocabulary. The rest of the thesis will seek to elaborate those parallels, showing that Deleuze's conceptual apparatus is a reworking of Spinoza's, not a mere reformulation, but also a transformation. The former moves away from the scholastic language used by Spinoza. Deleuze takes further the claim that modes are ways of existing, and he focuses on individuals so as to establish a metaphysics that can explain the creation of specific individuals. Repeating the essential proposition that Being is not to be understood as transcendent, but as the life-force that pulses through every existent, Deleuze presents Being as a process that produces individuals, and that continues to be at play in them through their individual becomings. To repeat our main interrogation: what does it mean to make a metaphysics of immanence? It means affirming existence, and everything produced by it.

# II

## Genesis

### *II.i—Preamble: First Principles*

We would like to start the present chapter with a reminder: Aristotle gave, in *Metaphysics*, an example of what could be called ‘first principles’ (c.f. Aristotle 1003a15-30). The pre-Socratics sought to explain the structure of being *qua* being with recourse to the elements. Those, he argues, were not supposed to be accidental causes of everything, but were the fabric or reality itself. In other words, the elements were called ‘first principles’ because they were what was producing existing things *as existing*, viz. they were the cause of reality itself. First principles are the ground of existence, what makes it possible as such. Elements, in the example given, were not considered in the same way that we consider bones and flesh when talking about what makes up animals: they were deemed to be the cause of bones, flesh; the cause of matter itself. First principles cannot be taken to work like other constituents of entities, because they are the causes of those constituents in the first place.

With this reminder, we arrive at the realization that if Deleuze is truly doing metaphysics, his system must have an account of genesis, based on first principles. What would those principles be? How are they different from the accounts given in the metaphysical tradition before him? According to Deleuze, the problem faced with any philosophy wanting to establish a ground, i.e. to make an account of the conditions of reality, is the fact that they usually end up with a binary opposition:



What is common to metaphysics and transcendental philosophy is, above all, this alternative which they both impose on us: *either* an undifferentiated ground, a groundlessness, formless nonbeing, or an abyss without differences and without properties, *or* a supremely individuated Being and an intensely personalized Form. Without this Being or this form, you will have only chaos. ... In other words, metaphysics and transcendental philosophy reach an agreement to think about *those determinable singularities only which are already imprisoned inside a supreme Self or a superior I.*<sup>21</sup> (LSeng 105-6)

Chaos or order, nonbeing or a Being that is a superior individual, or form of individuality: those are the choices offered by classical metaphysics and transcendental philosophy. To escape chaos, those philosophies either erected a God, or a form of entity that would order it. If we look attentively at Deleuze's criticism, what remains intriguing is the last statement, i.e. that metaphysics and transcendental philosophy 'think about *those determinable singularities only which are already imprisoned inside a supreme Self or a superior I*': here seems to lay the core of the whole criticism. Deleuze denounces the way in which first principles are never truly first in the tradition: the only way to order the chaos—called by Deleuze 'undifferentiated ground', 'groundlessness', 'non-being'—is to appeal to a form of individuality that would organize the world, as a God from the outside.

Levi R. Bryant explains this Deleuzian criticism in the following way:

Deleuze seems to locate the assumption of a finite perspective at the center of both metaphysics and transcendental philosophy which privileges the primacy of the individuated subject as the condition for individuated Being in general. As a result, the productive power of Being or the structure of possibility is illegitimately restricted to the subject. (Bryant 36)

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<sup>21</sup> "Ce qui est commun à la métaphysique et à la philosophie transcendantale, c'est d'abord cette alternative qu'elles nous imposent: ou bien un fond indifférencié, sans-fond, non-être informe, abîme sans différences et sans propriétés –ou bien un Être souverainement individué, une Forme fortement personnalisée. Hors de cet Être ou de cette Forme, vous n'aurez que le chaos... En d'autres termes, la métaphysique et la philosophie transcendantale s'entendent pour ne concevoir de *singularités déterminables que déjà emprisonnées dans un Moi suprême ou un Je supérieur*" (LS 129)

The problem of metaphysics and transcendental philosophy is the ‘primacy of the individuated subject’, which simply means that the principles deemed first are in fact derived from our own perspective. Even though we can see that this claim is reductive of the complexity and nuances of a whole tradition of metaphysics, we ask the reader to bear in mind the precision made earlier concerning the specific strategy of considering the tradition in such a way. Moreover, we have our own doubts concerning Bryant’s, and Deleuze’s, reading of metaphysics, but we feel that it is necessary to specify here the specific criticism voiced by Deleuzians.

If we are to talk about first principles as they pertain to being *qua* being, the conditions cannot be condition of human experience alone, nor anything that would be an extrapolation of human subjectivity. One of Spinoza’s constant criticism of other philosophers is that they attribute to God human characteristics, or that they anthropomorphize Nature (c.f. *EI App.*), thus failing to account for reality as it is in itself. First principles, the subject-matter of metaphysics, need to be the conditions of reality itself, thus explaining the genesis of everything there is, including the form of individuality itself.

The present chapter will thus attempt to show what Deleuze understands by an account of genesis that would go beyond an individuated perspective. As he states with Guattari, in *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*: “The first principle of philosophy is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained.”<sup>22</sup> (*WP 7*) This claim summarizes the objective of Deleuzian metaphysics, i.e. to make an account of genesis, and to show that a truly metaphysical standpoint is one in which we grasp things in their creation—in their

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<sup>22</sup> “Le premier principe de la philosophie est que les Universaux n’expliquent rien, ils doivent être eux-mêmes expliqués” (*QP 12*).

genesis— and not how we try to explain them according to external concepts. The metaphysical standpoint advocated by Deleuze strives to disclose the unfolding of Being as it takes place within individuals. The conditions of reality must be shown to be in the production of things, and not merely in the way we experience them. They must come from an immanent conception of reality, if Deleuze is to achieve his attempt at a Spinozian form of metaphysics. Hence, through an analysis of the Deleuzian conception of genesis, we should get closer to a metaphysics of immanence.

## ***II.ii—Adventures of Singularities***

### *(ii.a) Metaphysics is Impersonal*<sup>23</sup>

The problem with transcendental accounts, according to Deleuze, was already highlighted in the previous pages: more often than not, those accounts are not going far enough, and end up extrapolating conditions of reality from the empirical experience of the experiencing subject. To say it differently: the conditions are not truly primordial, since they are derived from what is supposed to be grounded. “In other words, the conditions are supposed to account for the possibility of truth within experience, yet the conditions themselves get their justification insofar as experience is taken to be true.” (Bryant 32) For Deleuze, this is tantamount to saying that the transcendental is not transcendental enough, since the conditions of experience are trapped within a vicious circle that is unable to show the genesis of experience in the first place. To rephrase Bryant’s interpretation: it is only if

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<sup>23</sup> We are highly indebted for this section to Bryant’s *Difference and Givenness*, which is a thorough analysis of Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism. We think it is a work that highlights the specificities of Deleuze’s philosophy regarding its transcendental aspect, which is often lacking in secondary literature.

we assume that our experience is true that the conditions can be considered also true. Smith explains how this is the case with the particular case of Kantian philosophy:

Kant had assumed that there are *a priori* ‘facts’ of reason (knowledge, morality), and then sought the condition of possibility of these facts in the transcendental, thereby ‘tracing’ the transcendental off the empirical and thinking the condition in the image of the conditioned. [...] [I]t was illegitimate for Kant simply to *assume* these supposed facts; rather, in order to truly fulfill the ambitions of his critical project, Kant would have to show how they were *engendered* immanently from reason as the necessary modes of its manifestation. A method of *genesis*, in short, had to replace the simple method of *conditioning*. (Smith 238)

As Smith indicates, a fully transcendental account — in the Deleuzian sense — would have to explain the conditions of experience according to the way in which they are generated. It is not enough to explain what we can know, how we know, and the limits of knowledge: we have to witness the birth of knowledge itself, and how the specific characteristic of that aspect of our experience is generated within reality. Explaining how knowledge is generated immanently from the nature of reason itself means that we are not content with a mere account of the ‘conditions of *our* understanding’, but that we want the conditions that allow for the birth of knowledge within reason itself, out of reason. In other words, what we saw earlier as the problem of the primacy of the individuated subject takes on a more precise meaning: insofar as transcendental philosophy focuses on the conditions of a specific kind of experience, it is unable to reach the conditions of being *qua* being, and can only remain trapped within a limited perspective.

In order to produce a truly transcendental account, Deleuze argues that we need to see the transcendental realm as *impersonal*, that is, as beyond the limited perspective of an already individuated form of subjectivity. The argument can be thus summarized: as long as we consider reality from the perspective of a Self or a Person, we can only give an

account of the conditions of experience particular to that Self or that Person; in order to reach being *qua* being, we need to show how those individuated perspectives are generated in the first place. Impersonal means that the conditions of reality are not understood according to a form of individuality, nor are they pertaining to a form of consciousness.

According to Bryant's reading: "Deleuze is asking how it is possible for forms of intuition or sensibility to be produced. However, [...] this production is not the work of a sovereign subject, but is a production that occurs at the level of being itself." (Bryant 9) This passage highlights the impersonal aspect of Deleuze's transcendental project: the conditions of reality, that is, first principles, are found at the level of Being itself, and any form of subjectivity should be seen as a product of those first principles, and not as a sufficient ground.

When Deleuze says that his form of transcendental thought is a 'transcendental empiricism', he means that it allows for an experience of the conditions of reality themselves, a form of experience that is not conditioned by structures of a conscious mind, but an experience of Being in its unfolding, in its productive aspect. This might be why he talks about a transcendental 'field': a field in the sense that it is an open plane of reality that is not limited or restricted by a given perspective.

What is a transcendental field? It can be distinguished from experience, to the extent that it does not refer to any object nor belong to any subject (empirical representation). It is thus given as pure a-subjective stream of consciousness, as pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, or as the qualitative duration of consciousness without a self. One may find it odd that the transcendental be defined by such immediate givens, but transcendental empiricism is the term I

will use to distinguish it from everything that makes up the world of subject and object.<sup>24</sup> (*TRM* 384)

This passage of “L’immanence: une vie...” (*DRF* 359-363) indicates the extent to which one must go in order to reach the truly transcendental: as long as we are speaking of subject and object—be it the transcendental forms of subjectivity and objectivity—we are deriving conditions from empirical experience.

The subject-object relation is always already conditioned and must itself be produced. Deleuze presents the field as a pure stream of consciousness. We interpret such a determination according to the literary movement of the same name: stream of consciousness literature presents the world as a constant unfolding, where the subject is not a ground for stability, but lost in all the affections it experiences. Far from following already travelled paths, the stream of consciousness author writes immanently. For example, Virginia Woolf creates characters that are often feeling out of themselves, that seem to go beyond—or below—the subject-object framework. Her characters are not invariant, and are described in the same way one would described a scene from a film, or a journey. The following passage from *Mrs. Dalloway* expresses what we think stream of consciousness is, namely the point where experiencing the world is not anymore something happening from the standpoint of an individual, but where reality opens itself to a flow of unrestrained becoming:

She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a

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<sup>24</sup> “Qu’est-ce qu’un champ transcendantal? Il se distingue de l’expérience, en tant qu’il ne renvoie pas à un objet ni n’appartient à un sujet (représentation empirique). Aussi se présente-t-il comme pur courant de conscience a-subjectif, conscience pré-réflexive impersonnelle, durée qualitative de la conscience sans moi. Il peut paraître curieux que le transcendantal se définisse par de telles données immédiates : on parlera d’empirisme transcendantal, par opposition à tout ce qui fait le monde du sujet de l’objet.” (*DRF* 359)

perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of her being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. [...] She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that. (Woolf 7)

In those few lines, there is a sense in which Clarissa Dalloway, Peter, and even the city of London, are not fixed entities anymore. Woolf presents us an experience of reality where individuals are fluid, open to change: worlds in themselves. Feeling at the same time aged and young, being absorbed by the movements of the cabs and the activity of the city, slicing through everything: those are experiences that are not within a subject-object structure, but where the limit between both is invisible. When Deleuze says that the transcendental field happens at the level of Being itself, and that it is an ‘a-subjective stream of consciousness’, we think he describes an experience of reality that is akin to Clarissa Dalloway’s experience of reality as devoid of fixed identity, as the experience of being unable to say of anyone that ‘they were this or were that’.

To unpack Deleuze’s complex terminology, we should remember what Bryant said concerning the transcendental thinking that seeks the conditions that are at play at the level of Being itself. If the transcendental field is like a a-subjective, pre-reflexive, and self-less stream of consciousness, it is because it corresponds to the unfolding of reality itself. It is akin to Spinoza’s notion of substance, which is *causa sui* and so cause of everything there is in and through itself.

The conditions of reality are not to be found in an individuated subject, or object, but within the process of production of reality itself, before the formation of any individual. Explained this way, the transcendental field should be understood as the unfolding of Being

itself, which does not merely condition existence, but generates it in and through itself. “Being creates, we are part of that creation. Being is not, for Deleuze, our creation. [...] The thought involved in the production of intuition is *not the thought of a subject* but is thought that unfolds on the part of being itself.” (Bryant 12) Since Being is not a transcendent form, but existence in its productive impulse, Being creates. As existents, or beings, we are part of that creation.

We do not create Being, according to transcendental empiricism, but are created in and through it. This allows us to reach the final conclusion, which is a rephrasing of Deleuze’s own description of the transcendental field: intuitions, concepts, subjects, objects, etc. are all product of a genesis, the genesis of Being itself. Our intuitions might be the conditions of our experience, but their production can also be experienced in the transcendental field. This is why Deleuze, in *Différence et répétition*, insists on the fact that we have to reach the limits of each faculty, in order to understand what generates it (c.f. *DR* 182). Sensibility, for example, is produced through the encounter with what can only be sensed; thought is generated through an encounter with what can only be thought, etc. Phrased otherwise, this means that it is not sufficient to say that transcendental subject possesses *a priori* concepts that makes a certain kind of experience possible: one has to explain how those concepts are generated, how they come to be, and the experience they make possible is itself made possible, on a deeper level, by the flux of Being itself.

The question that arises then, is the following: if there is no subject, nor object, in the transcendental field —if it is an impersonal stream of ‘consciousness’—, what is exactly is experienced in transcendental empiricism? What are the genetic factors at play at the level of Being itself?



*(ii.b) Impersonal is Singular*

To answer our question, we have to understand the relation between transcendental empiricism and individuation—which Bryant sees as a key aspect of Deleuze’s philosophy (c.f. Bryant 38). It seems fair to suppose that if the transcendental field is impersonal, we must conceive that field as that which precedes individuals. This is also working with the thesis that the transcendental field corresponds to the unfolding of Being itself, and so cannot be understood in terms of already formed objects and subjects.

The question could then be rephrased in the following way: if the transcendental field is the place where Deleuze develops his theory of first principles, what are those principles? Deleuze’s answer is the following: “Only when the world, teeming with anonymous and nomadic, impersonal and pre-individual singularities, opens up, do we tread at last on the field of the transcendental.”<sup>25</sup> (*LSeng* 103) The transcendental field, then, is where one experiences *singularities*, and not individuals.

The distinction is important: singularities are pre-individual, which should be understood according to the logic of first principles: they are prior to individuals in a logical way, i.e. they are the fabric of individuals, and of everything there is. In *Différence et répétition*, Deleuze says that we should not understand by individuating factors

individuals constituted in experience, but that which acts in them as a transcendental principle: as a plastic, anarchic and nomadic principle, contemporaneous with the process of individuation, no less capable of dissolving and destroying individuals than of constituting them temporarily;

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<sup>25</sup> “Quand s’ouvre le monde fourmillant des singularités anonymes et nomades, impersonnelles, pré-individuelles, nous foulons enfin le champ du transcendantal.” (*LS* 125)

intrinsic modalities of being, passing from one ‘individual’ to another, circulating and communicating underneath matters and forms.<sup>26</sup> (*DReng* 38)

Singularities are not what we encounter in our everyday experience, but what constitutes reality as it is. The fact that Deleuze specifies that singularities are ‘that which acts’ in individuals as the conditions of their temporal existence should strike us as the defining aspect of singularities: they are the fabric of reality, of every entity, without being individuated themselves. Deleuze remains vague regarding what exactly a singularity is, but he hints at the end of the passage that they circulate between the different individuals, which we interpret as meaning that singularities are better understood as forces and tendencies that affect the individuals. A singularity can constitute and dissolve an individual, in the same way certain food can enhance our forces, or provoke an allergic reaction. Overall, from a metaphysical standpoint, it entails that the way in which reality constitutes itself is not teleological, or willed by a Supreme I: it is the tendencies and forces already present in the world that modifies the landscape of Being. This is how we understand the phrase ‘intrinsic modalities of being’: singularities are not ‘things’, but vectors, tendencies, what modifies reality from the inside. It maintains a certain chaos (anarchy), against what Deleuze saw as the overly organizing aspect of certain metaphysical systems.

It might help to consider the example of DNA: everything that exists is made of DNA, and so the chemical structure is the condition of everything there is. When we encounter

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<sup>26</sup> “nous n’entendons certes pas par ceux-ci des individus constitués dans l’expérience, mais ce qui agit en eux comme principe transcendantal, comme principe plastique, anarchique et nomade, contemporain du processus d’individuation, et qui n’est pas moins capable de dissoudre et de détruire les individus que de les constituer temporairement : modalités intrinsèques de l’être, passant d’un ‘individu’ à un autre, circulant et communicant sous les formes et les matières.” (*DR* 56)

an entity, however, it would be against our experience if we said that we only encounter DNA: we experience a face, flesh, organs, colors, etc. Still, DNA is *virtually* present in all of those things, constituting them —coding them. Understood in this sense, DNA is pre-individual, and impersonal, because it is the structure virtually present in everything, differing from everything it constitutes, having a status of its own, independent of any individuated or personal experiencer. At the same time, the same DNA that constitutes an individual might code its future undoing (e.g. hereditary illnesses). DNA indicates possible tendencies, possible transformations, to the point where spontaneous mutations are surprising, but immanently determined by the force already present in the chemical structure. In this sense, the status of the impersonal is not as abstract as it first appears: it is like a code, that has a virtual presence in everything that is individual. The impersonal, or pre-individual, *individuates*. It can be experienced in the transcendental field as that which generates experiences through specific encounters.

To understand what a singularity is, is to understand what exactly Deleuze tries to propose as being the true conditions of reality. In the passage quoted earlier, Deleuze considers singularities to be falling under specific characteristics: they are ( $\alpha$ ) *nomadic*, against what he considers to be *sedentary* conceptions, and ( $\beta$ ) they are neither personal, nor individual, but *singular*. Those two terms need to be further explained.

( $\alpha$ ) Deleuze considers ‘nomadic singularities’ to be opposed both to the sedentary conception of the self and the individuality of God as a ground for reality. Deleuze’s concept of the nomad is mostly dominant in his political thinking,<sup>27</sup> used in contemporary

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<sup>27</sup> Specifically in *Mille Plateaux*, where there are two plateaus called “Traité de Nomadologie”. Cf. *Milles Plateaux* Pl.12-13.

philosophy for its subversive character.<sup>28</sup> This said, nomadism far extends beyond the political realm. *Logique du Sens* makes use of nomadism mostly in relation to singularities and a different approach to metaphysics as such. In a note to the Italian edition of the book, Deleuze admits that *Logique du Sens* was an attempt to make philosophy in a new way, to adopt a new epistemological attitude that would allow to achieve the project started in *Différence et répétition* (c.f. *DRF* 58-60), and so, the figure of the nomad appears as a different epistemological standpoint, one that takes a stance against the problems Deleuze considers to be ‘sedentary’. Moreover, the political use of nomadism, in *Milles Plateaux* for instance, shows that it is also an ethical stance. All of this could be rephrased within the scope of our current project: nomadism consists in a different relation to the transcendental, one that allows to consider Being itself in its immanent unfolding, and so strives to change our epistemological and ethical stance towards reality.<sup>29</sup>

The nomad is a figure opposed to forms of individuality, viz. superior Self or Supreme I. Those forms entail a limited experience of reality, one that can only be conceived according to assumed limits. We are using the terminology of ‘concepts’, ‘conception’, or ‘conceiving’ here, because according to Deleuze, concepts are the way in which we try to solve the problematic aspect of reality. If we conceive reality as delimited, or organized, by a Supreme I, the problems of our experience (change, becoming, immutability, illusions, etc.) can find an explanation within this principle of organization. If, on the contrary, we

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<sup>28</sup> For an especially interesting development of nomadism as a subversive way of thinking, see Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*.

<sup>29</sup> Some readers might find it interesting to notice that Deleuze’s nomadism plays a role similar to Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which was an attempt to simultaneously change our epistemological and ethical stance regarding reality. We ask the reader to remain patient, since we will approach this aspect of Spinoza’s philosophy in the next chapter.

conceive reality to be anarchic and teeming with tendencies following their own laws, the solutions to our problems are not the same. In other words, the language of ‘concepts’, in Deleuzian thought, always indicates a certain matrix that potentially gives us solutions to the problems of our experience. Concepts are always created in order to reframe problems, and this is why the language of ‘concepts’ finds a unorthodox use within Deleuze’s thought.

Hence, a ‘nomad singularity’ is opposed to restricted conceptions of reality, and on the contrary, opens up the world to the flux of the transcendental field. “These are nomadic singularities which are no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being (the notorious immutability of God), nor inside the sedentary boundaries of the finite subject (the notorious limits of knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> (*LSeng* 107) The divine immutability or the limits of knowledge in a given subject are considered to be marks of sedentarism, because they are characteristic of an organization of experience according to limited and already specified criteria.

In *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze writes: “[t]he nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited”<sup>31</sup> (*ATP* 382), a crucial remark in order to understand what is meant by nomadism in the case of the transcendental field. The sedentary effort is to make the territory —i.e. the space and time of experience— recognizable, limited, totalized in a way that can be identified by the forms of individuality that are criticized here. The limits of knowledge, for example by the categories of the understanding, partition experience under known boundaries shared by everyone. Experience becomes assumed as something that has to fall

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<sup>30</sup> “Des singularités nomades qui ne sont plus emprisonnées dans l’individualité fixe de l’Être infini (la fameuse immuabilité de Dieu) ni dans les bornes sédentaires du sujet fini (les fameuses limites de la connaissance).” (*LS* 130)

<sup>31</sup> “Le nomade, l’espace nomade, est localisé, non pas délimité” (*MP* 474)

within those categories, and the transcendental understood in a sedentary fashion acts as the principles of division. A restricted experience: that could be a way to describe the type of experience Deleuze is against; restricted through the primacy of subjectivity, that is, through the incapacity to reach a metaphysics that is not traced off our actual experience.

Experience is ‘delimited’ because it is only allowed within pre-determined borders, in a determinate space that is not open to change.

From the vantage of the senses, of empirical flux, it is the Self or Person, which is individuated, that maintains itself in its identity through the power and structure of its thought, and which thus represents an island of order within chaos. [...] For this reason, the Self or Person which is treated as invariant comes to be understood as the condition under which Being is individuated, whether it be in the form of God bestowing essences or a transcendental subject organizing experience. (Bryant 37)

As Bryant shows, the problem with a metaphysical or transcendental account of reality as grounded in an already individuated form is that it is unable to account for *individuation*, because it organizes everything according to the fixed limits of an individuated being.

The nomad does understand space as organized. For her, the desert—to use Deleuze’s own example—is an open space that is not defined by boundaries or limits. That is not to say that the nomad is unaware of specific places or points in space, like an oasis or a mountain, but those have a different signification.

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). [...] [A]lthough the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay.<sup>32</sup> (ATP 380)

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<sup>32</sup> “Le nomade a un territoire, il suit des trajets coutumiers, il va d’un point à l’autre, il n’ignore pas les points (point d’eau, d’habitation, d’assemblée, etc.) [...] [M]ême si les points déterminent les trajets, ils sont strictement subordonnés aux trajets qu’ils déterminent, à l’inverse de ce qui se passe chez le sédentaire. Le point d’eau n’est que pour être quitté, et tout point est un relais et n’existe que comme relais.” (MP 471)

As this passage highlights, those specific points —as points on a map— are not inexistent in the nomadic life, but neither are they boundaries or limits. They are resting areas, moments of repose before starting to travel again. The oasis becomes a relay, because it is situated in-between two journeys. The sedentary, on the other hand, sees the journey as the in-between of two points. The oasis or the mountain are fixed places, delimiting the territory in which it is possible to travel. It does not mean that the sedentary denies the existence of anything outside of the fixed boundaries of experience: but she claims that what is outside of the restricted space of experience cannot be known. Beyond the mountains, the walls, the river and other landmarks lie the vast openness of the unknowable. For the nomadic way of life, however, every limit is only a relay, leading to more travels. If we consider Deleuze's claim that nomadic space is localized and not delimited, what we should understand now is that the nomadic space is working according to specific points and places, but those are not limits.

It might help here to think of the way in which we experience the world. Most of the time, we tend to work according to patterns of recognition, which means that we refer to our known experience in order to identify things around us. When we see a friend, we say 'Hi Erin', and when we see a table, we can point to it and identify it by name. All of those instances can take place because of habits, and because of the concepts we have. Of course, those elements are also conditioned by spatial, cultural and historical context in which we find ourselves; but those conditions can sometime become 'unconscious', in such a way that we take them to be universal structures of our subjectivity. If we limit our experience to those instances, we are always within what Deleuze calls the 'sedentary' way of thinking: our experience is a territory already known and divided according to known principles and

categories. Outside of those categories, experience is deemed unknowable, or explainable according to the categories and concepts normally used (as when boundaries are pushed forward in the case of spatial territories).

The metaphysical attitude that follows from such a sedentary understanding of reality will naturally have a tendency to think entities according to fixed concepts, in the same way the sedentary sees space as being delimited by static limits. In this sense, if we understand first principles to be fixed limits, or even fixed concepts, we might be tempted to say that the first principles are not to be found within the changing and ephemeral aspect of our experience, but are to be found outside of this constant movement and becoming of reality. We can thus see why Deleuze is so keen on refusing sedentary attitudes: because it is a slippery slope towards transcendence.

Nomadism changes the attitude towards this use of thought: what if the categories were resting points, relays, and not limits? What if when we encounter something new, we should open the use of the categories trying to see where they could take us if we consider them only as resting areas of our thoughts? This is the project of nomadism when related to thought: not seeing individuals, or limits, as delimitation, but as relays, moments in a journey. If first principles, or singularities, are nomadic, they are not fixed, outside of the world, but the actors of change, the very tendencies that are changing the world. In other words, we might strive to become more nomadic as individuals, but only because Deleuze claims that reality itself is populated by nomadic singularities.

Ontologically speaking, nomadism considers entities to be immanent products of Being, moments in the unfolding of the transcendental field. Concepts are not eternal or partitioning the 'territory' of experience, but are created through the encounters. When



something new, radically new—in the sense that it puts into question our usual way of thinking—is encountered, we should look at it not as something to be ‘colonized’ (to use the sedentary language), but something that can provoke a new travel, unleash new powers of thought. Deleuze considers this to be the ‘adventures of thought’ (see *DR* Ch. III), where thinking is not limited to known or knowable experiences, but something nomadic, in the sense that it travels, goes into journeys in order to find new relays.

Deleuze’s use of the term should be clearer by now: nomadism, as an epistemological attitude, means a relation to our experience that is not already delimited or enclosed within fixed categories, but one that sees those categories as moments, relays. The nomad is not supposed to be an historical figure that Deleuze romanticizes: it is a philosophical one. Deleuze’s nomads are challenging the way in which we think in the everyday life, and as such, they are criticizing the limits we impose on ourselves, or that we think define us. The figure of the nomad is the figure of a philosophical attitude that refuses to partition experience according to a set of principles, and accepts, instead, the experience of new encounters as the possibility to unfold new possibilities of thought, and of life. To a certain extent, it opposes any form of closure of experience, promoting, rather, a philosophy of difference. It is against the thought that philosophy should build systems that are closed, claiming a sort of independence from the rest of our experience. Nomadism as philosophy entails following the first principles as they generate new entities and situations—in every aspect of existence. If we did focus on the epistemological consequences, one can still have a sense of how changing our understanding of the structure—for lack of a better term—of individuals and concepts will influence all aspects of one’s experience. Nomadism is the

attitude that leaves the sedentary territory of experience in order to tread the transcendental field, the stream in which one is not a subject anymore, but an expression of Being itself.

We find here a closeness with Spinozian thought. In order to see it, we need to reposition our inquiry into nomadism into the consideration of *singularities*: as presented earlier, it is the singularities that are nomadic. To phrase it simply: if we can adopt a nomadic attitude regarding concepts and individuals, it is because everything is individuated by nomadic tendencies, or singularities. Even though we will explore this issue in more details later on, it might help to explain the nomadism of singularities with Spinoza's definition of an individual.

For Spinoza, an individual is always a multiplicity, that is, the coming together of many individuals in order to form another one (c.f. *EIIP13Sc.L3A*"Def). An individual always being a multiplicity, it is composed of many entities each following their own tendencies. In a letter to a friend (c.f. L32 to Oldenburg), Spinoza explains that we can consider blood as an 'individual', but that we could also divide it into the different component of blood. The red globules and the white ones each possess their own functions, but also their own set of powers—that we could also call 'tendencies'. In the case of an autoimmune illness, one of the components of the blood starts undoing the 'individual', and starts following its own dictates. This one example should help us to understand how, for Deleuze, individuals are relays or forks in the road: because, as in Spinoza's case, he considers entities to be multiplicities, multitude of tendencies and powers.

Nomadism applies to singularities, because they are first principles, and so must be elements of genesis, elements of production, and not elements of delimitations. In *Logique du Sens*, Deleuze presents the notion of a singularity in the following way: "free,

anonymous, and nomadic singularity which traverses men as well as plants and animals independently of the matter of their individuation and the forms of their personality”<sup>33</sup> (*LSeng* 107) This passage can only make sense if we consider how the nomad is not defined by a specific territory, or by limits that are proper to a species in particular. In other words, the nomad is not characterized by certain limits or capacities, but by the way in which it stops in certain points, and then travels away. The nomad is impersonal, in the sense that Clarissa Dalloway felt that she could not point out exactly what someone is or was: it is not an impersonality in the sense of a neutrality, but in the sense that one is not restricted anymore, but open to the flux of Being. When Deleuze says that nomadic singularities are present in plants, animals and human beings, what he means is that as a nomad, there is no specific identity we can give to a singularity, as it was the case in the example of DNA we used earlier: it constitutes everything, but is not specific to any species. It should be considered as something that is a first principle in the most basic sense of the phrase: it stops at certain relays, meets other singularities in some ‘oasis’, but is not in itself part of a species or specific to a given individual. It is defined by its capacity to be in-between, to stop at some places and points, and then to embrace a new path, a new journey. If the transcendental field is composed, or filled, with nomadic singularities, it means that they are not partitioned, or working within any specific delimitations: they are to be found within specific individuals, but they are there as if resting, ready to be released into new travels and new paths. This is in total accordance with Aristotle’s criterion of principles that are

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<sup>33</sup> “libre, anonyme et nomade qui parcourt aussi bien les hommes, les plantes et les animaux indépendamment des matières de leur individuation et des formes de leur personnalité” (*LS* 131).

principles of being *qua* being, that is not principle peculiar to a few individuals, but to everything that exists, as it exists.

(β) We have now to address the more technical part of the process of individuality, which necessitates an analysis of Deleuze's reading of Leibniz. Once more, we would like to remind the reader that far from focusing on the accuracy of Deleuze's reading, what we try to see here is the use Deleuze makes of another philosopher's conceptual framework. Moreover, the interest in Leibniz makes us wonder if there is not, in the process of individuation, a distance between Spinoza and Deleuze, since Leibniz saw himself as moving beyond Spinozism.

Deleuze's reading of Leibniz might sound anachronistic when tackling the question of a transcendental field, but it is important to understand that for the French philosopher, Leibnizian thought proposes a way out of the mere conditioning of transcendental thought, and hence the possibility of a new metaphysical framework.<sup>34</sup> Leibniz, Deleuze argues, offers a novel way to consider individuals: instead of making use of species and other general concepts, he develops a method to understand individuals themselves in their difference and unicity. In other words, instead of understanding individual A as a representant of species X, Deleuze sees in Leibniz the possibility to understand individual

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<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of the essay entitled 'Leibniz', in *Essays on Deleuze*, Daniel W. Smith explains that this philosophical attempt to complete, or justify, Kantian philosophy comes from Maimon's influence on Deleuze. Since a study of the relation between Kant and Deleuze is beyond the scope of the present thesis, it might help to keep in mind that Deleuze's follows Maimon's insight: "Following Salomon Maimon, Deleuze had argued that, in order for Kant's critical philosophy to achieve its own aim, a viewpoint of *internal genesis* needed to be substituted for Kant's principle of *external conditioning*." (Smith 43) This is, according to Deleuze, what justifies a return to Leibniz: "Or faire ça c'est faire un retour à Leibniz. Mais sur d'autres bases que celles de Leibniz. Tous les éléments pour faire une genèse telle que les post-kantiens la réclame, tous les éléments sont virtuellement dans Leibniz." (20/05/80) This should be kept in mind.

A in itself. Deleuze finds in Leibniz a methodology that allows him to think existent themselves.

To clarify, it is helpful to consider Leibniz's example of Adam: Adam is not understood according to the concept of 'Man' or even 'Human', but according to the *singularities* that make him unique. "To sin" is one of those characteristic, but we could also add "To be the first man" or "To give birth to a woman out of his ribs". All of those are what Deleuze calls 'singularities'. Smith explains singularity in the following way:

In logic, the notion of the 'singular' has long been understood in relation to the 'universal.' In mathematics, however, the singular is related to a very different set of notions: the singular is distinguished from or opposed to the regular; the singular is what escapes the regularity of the rule. More importantly, mathematics distinguishes between singular points that are remarkable and those that are ordinary. Geometrical figures, for instance, can be classified by the types of singular points that determine them. A square has four singular points, its four corners, and an infinity of ordinary point that compose each side of the square[.] (Smith 55)

The clarity of Smith's explanation resides in the fact that he qualifies a singularity as what is something *remarkable*. If Deleuze claims that he can establish a metaphysics that can think entities in themselves, then the notion of 'remarkability' helps to highlights the differences between entities, and might also help to resist the temptation to subsume many individuals under a general concept.

The theory of singularities, as developed by Leibniz, is crucial in Deleuze's theory of individuation. If an individual is always the product of the encounter between remarkable points, it entails that the transcendental field is akin to a chaotic, open space of experimentation, where beings are created out of colliding points. Leibniz's own theory of singularity was dependent on the theological thought that God was the one choosing which singularity would be actualized, but Deleuze refuses this reliance on a transcendent Being,

and unleashes the creative power of Being itself. In other words, the transcendental field is a flux of singularities. This flux might be better characterized by a plane where individuals are bundles of tendencies and forces that can be enhanced or diminished. We already to such a thing on a regular basis: we characterize our friends by the specific things they can or cannot do (e.g. Peter is allergic to nuts, Claire can dance, etc.). Those capacities are not properly theirs: anyone can be allergic to nuts or able to effectuate a few dance moves; but when we have to think about those individuals that are in our lives, we can start picturing all those powers they have. It does seem that those powers, those ‘tendencies’ or ‘forces’, are what Deleuze would consider to be impersonal singularities:

This is why Deleuze will also precise later that “[The I and the self] must be replaced [...] in and by individuation, in the direction of the individuating factors [...]. What cannot be replaced is individuation itself. Beyond the self and the I we find not the impersonal but the individual and its factors, individuation and its fields, individuality and its pre-individual singularities.”<sup>35</sup> (*DReng* 258) When Clarissa Dalloway experiences the street of London, her own personality is overcome, and she experiences the city in its exuberant life, in its becoming and development. Reality is not anymore restrained by the specific limits of one’s perspective, but becomes a space of experimentation, the place where one can try to encounter new singularities, that is, new and novel ways to express the forces already at play within reality. When the individual is no more a Self or an I, what we have is a multiplicity of singularities, a fluid entity in becoming.

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<sup>35</sup> “[Le Je et le moi] doivent être dépassés, [...] par et dans l’individuation, vers les facteurs individuels [...]. L’indépassable, c’est l’individuation même. Au-delà du moi et du Je, il y a non pas l’impersonnel, mais l’individu et ses facteurs, l’individuation et ses champs, l’individualité et ses singularités.” (DR 332)

Transcendental empiricism, in this sense, is the experience of the immanent production of Being, of the way in which individuals are actualization of singularities, how those singularities are themselves open to new connexions through new encounters. The nomadism associated with such a transcendental philosophy is one that allows for new experiences, for an experience of Being as *individuating*, and not as *individuated*. The individual that stands in front of us is not a recognized, fixed entity, but a relay in the transcendental field, a multitude of possible becomings. Each entity is teeming with multiple forces and tendencies that are only waiting the proper encounter to be unleashed. The cancerous powers of the lungs' cells are waiting for the first cigarette; the schizophrenic power of the neurones is waiting for the first magic mushroom; the poetic genius is waiting for a passerby in Paris: conceiving reality as *individuating* means conceiving reality in its constant unfolding and production, and less as a set of already produced entities. In other words, when one sees reality as a constant production, one ceases to see the mere products, and finally sees how every entity is expressing the power of reality itself.

### ***II.iii—Towards Immanence***

Deleuze proposes to see individuals in their unicity, and in order to do so, he develops a technical language that is oftentimes obscure and vague. When we began the present chapter, words like 'singularities' and 'nomads' carried close to no philosophical meaning; now, they seem to be at the basis of Deleuze's metaphysics. For more clarity, we should make sure to understand this basis.

Singularities are remarkable characteristics that are expressed by individuals; as such, they are akin to tendencies or forces that can be enacted by the entities we encounter. Those singularities are ‘nomadic’, because they are not fixed and eternally the same: they are in movement, can be enhanced by new experiences, or hindered by dangerous encounters. Deleuze wants us to think of reality in this almost chaotic way: as if the transcendental field is an open space on which nomadic paths are traced. Individuals are relays, able to make new connections that depends on their specific singularities. As such, they should be conceived not as created entities, distinct from the creator, but expressions of Being, still holding the creative power to become different. As it was the case with Spinozian modes, they are multiplicities composed of many entities, each able to follow their own paths in some occasions.

Immanence and individuation are connected thus together in the logic of expression. Describing the experience of a frightened face, Deleuze says that what is experienced is the possibility of being afraid, of something terrifying, but as implicit in the face, and not experienced directly by us.

A frightened countenance is the expression of a frightening possible world, or of something frightening in the world —something I do not yet see. Let it be understood that the possible is not here an abstract category designating something which does not exist: the expressed possible world certainly exists, but it does not exist (actually) outside of that which expresses it. The terrified countenance bears no resemblance to the terrifying thing. It implicates it, it envelops it as something else.<sup>36</sup> (*LSeng* 307)

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<sup>36</sup> “Un visage effrayé, c’est l’expression d’un monde possible effrayant, ou de quelque chose d’effrayant dans le monde, que je ne vois pas encore. Comprenons que le possible n’est pas ici une catégorie abstraite désignant quelque chose qui n’existe pas : le monde possible exprimé existe parfaitement, mais il n’existe pas (actuellement) hors de ce qui l’exprime. Le visage terrifié ne ressemble pas à la chose terrifiante, il l’implique, il l’enveloppe comme quelque chose d’autre”. (*LS* 357)



The first part of the passage is clear: a frightened face discloses the possibility of something frightening, that we are not experiencing yet. What is interesting, for our present purpose, is the second half of the explanation: the possible should not be understood as what we usually call ‘a possibility’, viz. something that might or might not happen. The possible, in the notion of ‘the Other as a possible world’ should be considered as something real, but not actual.

In the example given by Deleuze, the frightened countenance expresses something terrifying —something that we do not experience ourselves, but that is nonetheless real. The expression in the face of the Other that faces us is produced through her encounter with something terrifying, and so the ‘possible world’ she implicates is not immediately accessible to us, but is producing her specific countenance, immanently. We could imagine the following scenario: in a film, there is a close-up on a frightening face. We do not see what is producing the fear, but we still experience the fear through the contortion of the face. There is a whole process that produces the expression, and such a process is what Deleuze calls a possible world: “When I, in turn and for my part, grasp the reality of what the Other was expressing, I do nothing but explicate the Other, as I develop and realize the corresponding world. [...] The other is the existence of the encompassed possible. [...] The self is the development and the explication of what is possible, the process of its realization in the actual.”<sup>37</sup> (*LSeng* 307) We might understand better how Deleuze develops a new conception of reality, in which individuals are worlds in themselves. As he says, the self

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<sup>37</sup> “Quand je saisis à mon tour et pour mon compte la réalité de ce qu’autrui exprimait, je ne fais rien qu’expliquer autrui, développer et réaliser le monde possible correspondant. [...] Autrui, c’est l’existence du possible enveloppé. [...] Le moi, c’est le développement, l’explication des possibles, leur processus de réalisation dans l’actuel.” (*LS* 357)

should be understood as the explication —that is the unfolding—of the encounters it experiences, of the individuating factors that constitutes it. Saying that the Other is an encompassed world means that another entity is a multiplicity, a being produced immanently by all the events that happen in one life.

This is a constant theme in Deleuze’s writings: the Other as a world, as a sign that expresses all the individuating factors. In *Anti-Oedipe*, for example, he claims that we never love other individuals, but always other worlds: “we always make love with worlds. And our love addresses itself to this libidinal property of our lover, to either close himself off or open up to more spacious worlds, to masses and large aggregates.”<sup>38</sup> (*AOeng* 294) This might be better developed in *Mille Plateaux*, where loving is described as grasping the specific singularities of an individual, and composing oneself with them:

What does it mean to love somebody? It is always to seize that person in a mass, extract him or her from a group, however small, in which he or she participates, whether it be through the family only or through something else; then to find that person's own packs, the multiplicities he or she encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature. To join them to mine, to make them penetrate mine, and for me to penetrate the other person's. Heavenly nuptials, multiplicities of multiplicities.<sup>39</sup> (*ATP* 35)

All of those passages highlight the importance of the process of individuation in Deleuze: it is a way on considering individuals as created and in constant creation, not as subject choosing to create, but as involving the creative power of Being itself. The moment we stop

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<sup>38</sup> “c'est toujours avec des mondes que nous faisons l'amour. Et notre amour s'adresse à cette propriété libidinale de l'être aimé, de se refermer ou de s'ouvrir sur des mondes plus vastes, masses et grands ensembles.” (*AO* 349)

<sup>39</sup> “Que veut dire aimer quelqu'un ? Toujours le saisir dans une masse, l'extraire d'un groupe, même restreint, auquel il participe, ne serait-ce que par sa famille ou par autre chose ; et puis chercher ses propres meutes, les multiplicités qu'il enferme en lui, et qui sont peut-être d'une tout autre nature. Les joindre aux miennes, les faire pénétrer dans les miennes, et pénétrer les siennes. Célestes épousailles, multiplicités de multiplicités.” (*MP* 49)

subsuming individuals under concepts, and start to look at them as multiplicity of singularities, nomadic entities, we are approaching a vision of reality that is close that the way Grosz described Spinoza's substance: reality as a creative force that finds specific determinations through the multitude of entities that each expresses reality in unique ways. Loving someone, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is joining ourselves to the other in a nomadic way, that is, opening our own individuality to the possibilities encompassed by the Other we love.

In *Différence et répétition*, Deleuze explains that if we push this logic to a certain extent, everything we encounter is an encompassed world: “when we consider the body of another as an object, its ears and eyes as anatomical pieces, we do not remove all expressivity from them even though we simplify in the extreme the world they express: the eye is an implicated light or the expression of a possible light, while the ear is that of a possible sound.”<sup>40</sup> (*DReng* 260) Within such a metaphysical framework, every single entity should be conceived as a dynamic product of Being, as trajectory in an open space. Entities are considered according to the possibilities —the possible encounters— they can realize immanently. The ear as a possible sound makes this very clear. What is an ear? It is the explication of a sound.

We are reminded here of one of Spinoza's ‘challenge’ which is so important to Deleuze: “However, nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being

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<sup>40</sup> “lorsque nous considérons le corps d'autrui comme un objet, ses oreilles et ses yeux comme des pièces anatomiques, nous ne leur ôtons pas toute expressivité, bien que nous simplifions à l'extrême le monde qu'ils expriment : l'œil est une lumière impliquée, l'œil est l'expression d'une lumière possible, l'oreille, d'un son possible.” (*DR* 33)

determined by the mind, solely from the laws of its nature in so far as it is considered as corporeal.” (EIII P2 Sc.) The proper understanding of a body, for Spinoza, is the understanding of what it can do ‘solely from the laws of its nature’, which means, immanently, without recourse to an external explanation. Similarly, Spinoza’s theory of the individual, that we presented superficially earlier, is also developed along similar lines:

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body *or* Individual, which is distinguished from the other by this union of bodies. (EII P13 Sc.Def.)

Following Spinoza’s terms, an individual is a multiplicity that acts as one single cause, meaning that as long as those bodies act together as one cause, they are considered to be individuals, but also that every individual is possibly a body composing another individual. We can think here about how individuals compose together society, and how from the standpoint of society, each individual is only a part, but even biologically speaking, it is true that cells can be considered individuals when examined in themselves, while they are also considered as part when we examine an organism. The underlying implication of Spinoza’s claim is also that if the multiple entities composing an individual stop working together, they dissolve the ‘bigger’ individual and each start following their own journeys.

This is where we see Spinoza closeness to Deleuze regarding individuation: for both authors, what matters are the specific *powers* actualized by unique entities. Individuals are always expressing the world in which they live, and what this environment is giving them. Commentators of Spinoza have noticed this particularity of Spinozian theory. Balibar, to name only one, develops a theory of the *transindividual*, which is deemed to capture the

importance of multiplicity and expression in Spinoza's theory of individuation: "To say that an individual keeps existing is tantamount to saying that it is regenerated or reproduced. An isolated individual, having no 'exchange' with the environment, would not be regenerated, therefore it would not exist." (Balibar 18) Balibar's concept, in other words, is one that asks to see an individual as the meeting point of different entities and events. The individual is maintained by the forces that constitute it, but it is also able to achieve great many things following from the specific bodies —or singularities if one is Deleuzian— that constitute her.

All in all, it does seem that the requisite for a metaphysics of immanence is a reconfiguration of the status of the individual. In order to find first principles that follows immanently from the nature of Being, Deleuze had to think the transcendental as a transcendental field, an open space where individuating factors follow their own paths, creating individuals out of specific encounters. Nomadic, the status of the individual is now opened to the creativity of Being itself. Losing the status of subject or object, entities are now expressions of Being itself —which is to say that entities are now unique expressions of tendencies and forces already present in reality. *We can safely claim that individuals are, for both Spinoza and Deleuze, relays for new individuations, new development, new becomings.* Both philosophers have a *nomadic* theory of individuation grounded in an immanent conception of Being —which has yet to be explained further.

# III

## Immanence

### *III.i—Empiricism; the New Perspective*

The point that we reached at the end of the last chapter seems to lead us to a change of perspective. Indeed, the process of individuation presented by Deleuze was an attempt to challenge the positions of previous metaphysics in order to find adequate first principles of being *qua* being. The process of individuation was at the same time a critical stance, a creative one through the development of a nomadic subjectivity, and the reconfiguration of the proper philosophical attitude. Overall, we can see that Deleuze's philosophy gives us an alternative to what he considers to be the dominating discourse in metaphysics. Deleuze offers a metaphysics of immanence, where reality is experience in its creativity and unfolding.

Towards the end of our inquiry, we also realized how this conception of metaphysics had strong connections with Spinoza's own conception of the individual. Deleuze's development of nomadism seems to push further Spinoza's conception of the individual as a multiplicity of bodies, but it is also, first and foremost, developed with a Spinozian conception of immanence as a background. Indeed, Deleuze, in a comment to the translator for *Spinoza et le Problème de l'Expression*, claimed that if individuation was not developed extensively by Spinoza, it is the thought of immanence that allows for a novel conception of reality:

What interested me most in Spinoza wasn't his Substance, but the composition of finite modes. [...] What I needed was both (1) the expressive character of

particular individuals, and (2) and immanence of being. Leibniz, in a way, goes further than Spinoza on the first point. But on the second, Spinoza stands alone. One finds it only in him. This is why I consider myself a Spinozist, rather than a Leibnizian, although I owe a lot to Leibniz. (*EPS* 10)

Hence, if we concluded that Spinoza's individual is better understood in terms of nomadic singularities, we still have to see how it is his own conception of immanence that allows Deleuze to develop his metaphysics. In other words, we reach here the pivotal point of our inquiry: the Spinozian ground of a metaphysics of immanence.

At this point, it is worth further unpacking Deleuze's position on metaphysics, since a reconfiguration of metaphysics comes with a different philosophical perspective. We saw how he developed a new conception of reality through the creation of what he called the transcendental field, but this creation depends on a specific philosophical attitude. Deleuze claims that he is an empiricist, because empiricism, according to him, allows one to consider reality in its unfolding, in its individuating aspect. Žižek describes Deleuze's philosophical standpoint in the following way:

It can easily be shown that what he defines as the proper conceptual work of philosophy (or, at a different level, the work of art) undermines *both* our immersion into the life-world *and* our position of abstract observers of reality. When a philosopher produces a new concept, or when an artist renders an affect in a new way, liberated from the closed circle of a subjectivity situated in a given positive reality, he shatters our immersion in the habitual life-world as well as our safe position as the observer of reality. We lose our position of objective observers; we are forced to admit that new concepts or works of art are the outcome of our engaged production. Yet, in the same gesture, philosophy or art also undermines our immersion in the habitus of a particular life-world. (Žižek 26)

One can see in this passage how Deleuze's empiricism goes against the perspective of a metaphysics grounded solely in contemplation ("objective observers"), but also against the phenomenological subject ("immersion into the life-world"). If philosophy, in the

Deleuzian perspective, is the production of concepts, it is because it follows the processes of individuation, sees how different encounters produce different things, and thus refuses to organize reality in a fixed way.

As Žižek highlights, Deleuzian philosophy is closer to the work of an artist who conveys emotions and events in new ways, trying to illustrate what is really at play in them. Art is not a simple reproduction, but a *production*. “Art, Deleuze argues, is essentially productive; the work of art is a machine for producing or generating certain effects, certain signs, by determinable procedures.” (Smith 197) Without delving into Deleuze’s aesthetics—which is a very complex topic exceeding the reach of the present thesis—, what we want to stress out in Žižek’s comparison is how art and philosophy are both conceived as productive activities, and not *reproductive* ones. When a painter attempts to depict fear, what is really depicted is fear in its individuation: it makes the observer experience fear in a way that is independent from a fearful event, because what is produced is fear itself. As Daniel Smith explains in his analysis of Deleuze’s aesthetics, what Deleuze considers to be at the heart of art is never representation, but expression.

Expression, as it will become clear later in the present chapter, has a very specific meaning for Deleuze. For now, it suffices to say that expression is opposed to representation, in that it does not reproduce something external, but produces specific signs that remain immanent to the work. Describing Francis Bacon’s painting of a scream, Smith claims that what is truly painted is not someone screaming, but the forces that produce something as ‘a scream’. “His aim is not to paint the visible horrors of the world before which one screams, [Bacon] says, but rather the *intensive* forces that produce the scream, that convulse the body so as to create a screaming mouth; the violence of a horrible



spectacle must be renounced in order to attain the violence of sensation.” (Smith 99-100)

Thus explained, we can understand Žižek’s comparison between concepts and artworks better: if the artwork is meant to express the invisible forces that produce a sensation, without representing explicitly the cause of such a sensation (e.g. a horrible event, the face of a loved one, a sad encounter, etc.), the concept similarly expresses invisible forces that are immanent to reality. Representation makes a copy of something that remains external—the original; expression, on the other hand, strives to disclose the productive aspect of an entity. Representation, in Deleuze’s philosophy, is associated with transcendence, where expression follows the path of immanence. In the example given by Smith, representation would copy the frightened face as it really is, maybe including the fearful event in order to make a perfect image of the scene.

Expression, on the other hand, conveys the forces that creates the frightened countenance: a work is expressive when it does not copy a scene, but makes an emotion experienced through the production of that very emotion. Smith, in another essay, paraphrases the painter Cézanne in order to make this point even clearer:

Cézanne spoke of the need always to paint at close range, no longer to see the what field, to be too close to is, to lose oneself in the landscape, without landmarks, to the point where one no longer sees forms or even matters, but only forces, densities, intensities: the forces of folding in a mountain, the forces of germination in an apple, the thermal and magnetic forces of a landscape. (Smith 207)

The goal is not to make the forces appear, so that we can see them as a subject, but that we come to experience the world in its individuation. In other words, the productive aspect of the work of art is to make us experience the process of individuation itself. Deleuze claims that we should see philosophy under the same light: not creating concepts that would help

us to explain reality as if reality was a copy of originals, but as expressing Being in its unfolding.

Reality, then, is less grasped by observation than by experimentation. This might be where empiricism takes on its full force:

Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. [...] [P]recisely [it] treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now [...]. Only an empiricist could say: concepts are indeed things, but things in their free and wild state, beyond ‘anthropological predicates’.<sup>41</sup> (*DReng* xx-xxi)

This description of empiricism echoes Žižek’s claim that the philosophical attitude of Deleuze is opposed to the habits of the everyday life (i.e. the life-world): indeed, empiricism is beyond ‘anthropological predicates’, which implies that it is beyond the immersion in a pattern of recognition. What we mean is that if we saw in the previous chapter that Deleuze’s criticism of transcendental thought was that it was too often restrained to a human perspective, empiricism, in the Deleuzian perspective, apprehends things as they are in themselves, beyond a recognition that would be typically human. Recognition is thus grasping something habitual, or already known, in a thing we encountered—it is always an interpretation of the world that is conditioned by *a priori* structures. ‘Empiricism’ cannot be reduced to the collection of sense-data by a passive subject, because this would still presuppose an immersion in the subjectivity of an already

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<sup>41</sup> “L’empirisme n’est nullement une réaction contre les concepts, ni un simple appel à l’expérience vécue. Il entreprend au contraire la plus folle création de concepts qu’on ait jamais vue ou entendue. [...] Mais précisément, il traite le concept comme l’objet d’une rencontre, comme un ici-maintenant [...]. Il n’y a que l’empiriste qui puisse dire : les concepts sont les choses mêmes, mais les choses à l’état libre et sauvage, au-delà des ‘prédicats anthropologiques’.” (*DR* 3)

individuated subject. Deleuze's empiricism considers concepts to be created out of encounters—in a nomadic way.

Thus, Deleuze considers his empiricism to be a *transcendental* empiricism, because it does not refer to an already constituted subject and its passivity in front of sensory experience but refers to the genesis of reality—at the level of being itself—in an empiricist way. If we analyzed extensively Deleuze's conception of the transcendental aspect of his thought, we also have to focus on the *empiricist* aspect. It is important to understand that the question of empiricism is not a question that can be avoided in a serious study of Deleuze's philosophy: empiricism is a philosophical stance that determines the status of the philosopher regarding reality. Transcendental idealism claims that ideal structures condition our experience of reality; transcendental *empiricism* should also be able to make a claim regarding our experience of reality, a claim that does not rely on structures of the mind, but on reality itself—in its 'free and wild state'. *Hence, when we inquire about the specific aspect of Deleuze's empiricism, we inquire about the way in which a philosopher elaborating a metaphysics of immanence considers reality.*

Deleuze insists on the distinction between the kind of empiricism that depends on the *empirical* and the one that takes place at a *transcendental* level. If the distinction is so important, it is because, as we saw, transcendental thought too often traced its structures off the empirical. The Deleuzian form of empiricism must thus be able to apprehend reality in its genesis, before or beyond the subject-object form of relation that qualifies our empirical experience. As he explains:

“Transcendental empiricism is meaningless indeed unless its conditions are specified. But the transcendental ‘field’ must not be copied from the empirical [...]. It must be explored on its own terms: ‘experienced’ or ‘attempted’ (but it

is a very particular type of experience). This is the type of experience that enables the discovery of multiplicities, as well as an exercise of thought [as a creative activity].”<sup>42</sup> (*TRM* 362)

If we remember what we saw in the previous chapter, the transcendental field cannot be based on any form of individuality, since it is a field that generates reality as it is. The transcendental field, as we saw, is populated with forces and tendencies, that can bundle and generate individuals. Those singularities are thus the first principles, the fabric of reality, the conditions of reality. The empiricism that corresponds to such a transcendental field is thus not the empiricism of a subject<sup>43</sup>—be it observer or immersed in the life-world—, but is an *impersonal* empiricism, the experience of Being as a process of production, as a flux of singularities.

Simply said, the usual understanding of ‘empiricism’ does not correspond to Deleuze’s own take on it. Deleuzian empiricism corresponds to the constitution of reality as a process. A ‘transcendental empiricism’ would thus correspond to an experience of the process of reality, that is, an experience of what gives the empirical reality. This is why, in the preface to the American edition of *Dialogues*, Deleuze specifies that his interpretation of empiricism, as a philosophical attitude, is grounded in ‘creativity’, or the emergence of novelty and in the production of new concepts arising from problematic state of affairs (*DRF* 284).

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<sup>42</sup> “Empirisme transcendantal ne veut effectivement rien dire si l’on ne précise pas les conditions. Le ‘champ’ transcendantal ne doit pas être décalqué de l’empirique [...] : il doit à ce titre être exploré pour son compte, donc ‘expérimenté’ (mais d’un type d’expérience très particulier). C’est ce type d’expérience qui permet de découvrir les multiplicités, mais aussi l’exercice de la pensée [comme activité créatrice].” (*DRF* 339)

<sup>43</sup> We are aware that such a claim might seem problematic from an ethical and moral perspective. How are we to consider responsibility if individuals are conceived as variant multiplicities? Since we mostly focus on the metaphysical and ontological aspect of Spinoza and Deleuze’s thoughts, we do not have the sufficient space to tackle the more practical issues. We do, however, recommend Moira Gatens’ essay on the topic: “Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power” in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, pp. 162-188.

As in the case of the painting of the scream, the concepts produced by transcendental empiricism are expression of the forces that constitute them. In other words, transcendental empiricism plunges the philosopher into a state of immanence in the flux of things, since what it seeks is an experience of the process of Being. He explains the method of such an empiricism in the following way:

for so-called rationalist philosophers, abstraction is responsible for explanation, the abstract is realized in the concrete. They speak of abstractions such as the One, the Whole, the Subject, etc., and seek the processes through which these abstractions are embodied in a world made to conform to their requirements[.] [...] Empiricism starts with an entirely different assessment: analyzing states of things so as to bring out previously nonexistent concepts from them. The states of things are not unities or totalities, but multiplicities.<sup>44</sup> (*TRM* 42)

The empiricist standpoint extracts concepts from the state of things, which are always given as multiplicities. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, the process of individuation entails that individuals are the meeting point of pre-individual singularities, and so an individual is always constituted by a multiplicity of singularities. If abstractions fail to explain reality, it is because they try to subsume multiplicities under unities that are supposed to pre-exist to reality.

It is important, however, to mention an aspect of Deleuze's thought that can often be forgotten: Deleuze does not deny that we use abstractions, concepts, and universal notions in our experience of reality. As Bryant highlights:

Deleuze is quite happy to say that representation, identity, and recognition are real phenomena of our experience. We recognize things. We identify things. We represent things. [...] The problem, rather, is what emerges when

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<sup>44</sup> “dans les philosophies dites rationalistes, c'est l'abstrait qui est chargé d'expliquer, et c'est lui qui se réalise dans le concret. On parle d'abstractions telles que l'Un, le Tout, le Sujet, et l'on cherche par quel processus ils s'incarnent dans un monde qu'ils rendent conforme à leur exigences [.] [...] L'empirisme part d'une toute autre évaluation : analyser les états de choses, de telle manière qu'on puisse en dégager des concepts non préexistants. C'est que les états de choses ne sont ni des unités ni des totalités, mais des multiplicités.” (*DRF* 284)

representation and identity are taken as metaphysically or epistemically primitive terms upon which the questions of philosophy are posed. (Bryant 5)

The problem with rational philosophy, Deleuze argues, is that it tries to explain multiplicities (state of things) according to unities (concepts), where we should understand, according to empiricism, that unities are in fact created out of the encounter of many singularities. Those singularities work together, as one cause —as Spinoza says.

Deleuzian empiricism allows an experience of reality, or Being, in its creative process: it supposes a different ontological conception, where Being is conceived as a process of production. The fact that any entity is thought of as a multiplicity that remains open to change, and that this capacity to change is seen as an expression of Being, and not as a defect, is a key factor of a metaphysics of immanence.

### ***III.ii—Spinoza and Empiricism***

We might encounter a difficulty here: if it is the case that Deleuze claims that he is following an empiricist methodology, how can we prove that he is following the impetus of Spinoza's philosophy? How can we connect together a philosopher who refuses the tenets of rationalism with another who is deemed one of the most radical rationalists? Some could say that it would be better to seek a link between Deleuze's early interest in Hume, or in his late interest in Whitehead, but one passage of his early book on Spinoza seems to justify our present inquiry:

Spinoza's inspiration is [...] profoundly empiricist. One is always surprised by the diverse inspirations of empiricists and rationalists. One group is surprised by what fails to surprise the others. If we listen to the rationalists, truth and freedom are, above all, rights; they wonder how we can lose these rights, fall into error or lose our liberty. [...] From an empiricist viewpoint everything is inverted: what is surprising is that men sometimes manage to understand truth,

sometimes manage to understand one another, sometimes manage to free themselves from what fetters them. (*EPS* 149)<sup>45</sup>

If rationalism considers ‘freedom and truth’ to be rights [*droits*], it is because they are considered to be concepts that organize and partition reality. In that sense, human beings, understood as rational beings, are always considered according to their rationality, and how they fail to live up to the standard that is already established for them. The rationalist standpoint, thus understood, considers entities as fallen and attempting to live up to certain expectations. This is why, Deleuze claims, the rationalist tradition finds very helpful the Adamic narrative (c.f. *SPE* 134), according to which humanity is a fallen form of the first human, that was free and blessed. The particular form of empiricism embraced by Deleuze, on the contrary, refuses to analyze reality according to pre-given concepts: human beings, for example, are sometimes free, and this ‘sometimes’ is the interesting aspect. Here, we find again Deleuze’s praise of empiricism as following the lines of development and becoming of entities, and not considering them according to an already-given conceptual framework.

If Spinoza has an empiricist inspiration, it is because he seeks to explain the conditions according to which it is possible to reach a certain form of freedom, one that does not correspond to the usual definition of freedom. [A] *In other words, Spinoza’s philosophy shares with Deleuze a similar aversion for any transcendence of the concepts. The*

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<sup>45</sup> “l’inspiration spinoziste est profondément empiriste. Il est toujours frappant de constater la différence d’inspiration entre les empiristes et les rationalistes. Les uns s’étonnent de ce qui n’étonne pas les autres. À entendre les rationalistes, la vérité et la liberté sont avant tout des droits; ils se demandent comment nous pouvons déchoir de ses droits, tomber dans l’erreur ou perdre la liberté. [...] Dans une perspective empiriste, tout est renversé : l’étonnant, c’est que les hommes arrivent parfois à comprendre le vrai, parfois à se comprendre entre eux, parfois à se libérer de ce qui les enchaîne.” (*SPE* 134)

*empiricist claim that concepts should not be assumed as organizing reality, is thus common to both philosophers.*

We can take as an example Spinoza's take on human bondage in the preface to the fourth part of *Ethics*: in this section, he shows that the concept of 'human nature' should serve as an approximation of what human beings can do and become, but not as a first principle that creates the individuals we are. Indeed:

Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking, i.e. notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another. This is why I said above (IIID6) that by reality and perfection I understand the same thing. For we are accustomed to refer all individuals in Nature to one genus, which is called the most general, i.e., to the notion of being, which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature. Insofar as we refer all individuals in Nature to this genus, compare them to one another, and in that some have more being, *or* reality, than others, we say that some are more perfect than others. And insofar as we attribute something to them that involves negation, like a limit, an end, lack of power, etc., we call them imperfect, because they do not affect our Mind as much as those we call perfect, and not because something is lacking in them which is theirs, or because Nature has sinned. *For nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of their efficient cause. And whatever follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause happens necessarily.* (EIV Pref., emphasis ours.)

In the emphasized part of this passage, Spinoza clearly states that what really matters, when trying to form the concept of a thing, is what follows from its nature, which is the same as that which follows 'from the necessity of its efficient cause'. Concepts such as 'human nature', understood in a general way, are only works of imagination that are helpful when trying to compare entities, but they are not concepts which explain or give us complete knowledge of entities. In fact, Spinoza wants the reader to see that if we can call something more or less perfect, it is only because of the intensity in which it affects our mind, and not because of a divine plan.



This empiricist refusal of transcendence is echoed in a late essay by Deleuze —i.e. “Pour en finir avec le jugement” in *Critique et Clinique*— where he explains his own philosophical method as one that strives to do away with ‘judgment’, which consists in dividing and categorizing reality according to already established criteria. Deleuze claims that when one judges, one uses categories and concepts that are already known, and that allow to recognize something as perfect or imperfect. To take back Spinoza’s argument, judging consists in comparing entities with the use of a general concept that represents a set of similar entities. When we use the concept of ‘human’ to describe an entity, what we actually do, according to Spinoza, is a comparison between the entity standing in front of us and an idea of what a human corresponds to. It might be easier to understand by ‘general concept’, in the context of judgment, an ‘exemplar’, that is, an ideal that similar entities strive to reproduce.

Claiming that something is ‘better’ or ‘lesser’ is judging, because it is using a transcendent ideal in order to make sense of our experience. According to Smith: “Judgment [...] operates with pre-existing criteria that can never apprehend the creation of the new, and what is of value can only come into existence by ‘defying judgment’.” (Smith 221) As we already saw, the core of empiricism —and philosophy—consists, for Deleuze, in the creative process, in the encounter with the new, with what appears as a problem that needs a concept to be expressed.

To end judgment means to end the use of transcendence as a philosophical method, and to let things express themselves in an immanent way, that is, following the principles of empiricism we already described. “Life does not function in Deleuze’s philosophy as a transcendent principle of judgment but as an immanent process of production or creation;

it is neither an origin nor a goal, neither an *arche* nor a *telos*, but a pure process that always operates in the middle, *au milieu*, and proceeds by means of experimentations and unforeseen becomings.” (Smith 221) As we already saw in relation to the process of individuation, the metaphysics proposed by Deleuze is not already organized, or functioning according to a set of principles that are transcendent to the world: individuals are produced through encounters, and so the thought of an already determined end is necessarily false. Defying judgment is what Deleuze means when he claims that empiricism is open to novelty and creativeness. Life as a process without a determined end is directly related to Spinoza’s criticism of a form of thinking that would presuppose a divine plan (c.f. *EI App.*).<sup>46</sup>

It might seem, however, that such an openness to novelty opens us to chaos, or even to a form of thinking that takes away any possibility of making statements regarding the reality that surrounds us. It does seem that it makes our experience of reality unstable, unsure, and ultimately impossible to live in. Deleuze, however, is fully aware of such criticism, and makes sure that we understand that doing away with judgment, or transcendence, is not taking away any form of knowledge, but is allowing for a new form of knowledge, one that takes place at the level of Being itself:

What disturbed us was that in renouncing judgment we had the impression of depriving ourselves of any means of distinguishing between existing beings, between modes of existence, as if everything were now of equal value. But is it not rather judgment that presupposes pre-existing criteria (higher values), criteria that preexist for all time (to the infinity of time), so that it can neither

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<sup>46</sup> More about this criticism later in the present chapter.

apprehend what is new in an existing being nor even sense the creation of a mode of existence? (*ECC* 134-135)<sup>47</sup>

We see in the concluding part of the passage that what is key in Deleuze's metaphysics is the fact that through a process of individuation that is not dependent on reproduction of transcendent exemplars, there is a constant production of novelty, one that asks of the mode to draw forces out of itself, in order to create itself through the forces and singularities that are already at play within it. This production of novelty is not something we add to reality, but the movement of Being itself. As we saw earlier, Bryant says that Being is creation, and we are part of this creation (c.f. Bryant 12). Our thought can also follow this creative movement if it does away with pre-existing concepts. Interestingly enough, he claims that Spinoza is the one who declared the death of judgment (*CC* 158), since he opposed to any form of transcendence, refusing to explain anything except through the causal chain that creates them, thus relying on an immanent conception of reality. In other words, 'to end with judgment' comes with an embrace of an immanent conception of the world, and only then does it become possible to consider individuals according to the series and singularities that compose them.

This is where we think the turn towards Spinoza is necessary. If immanence is given an ontological status, that is, if immanence is the only way in which we can consider Being in relation to beings, then the metaphysics that follows must necessarily do away with any form of transcendence. The repetition of Spinoza is not attained through copying his

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<sup>47</sup> "Ce qui nous gênait, c'était qu'en renonçant au jugement nous avions l'impression de nous priver de tout moyen de faire des différences entre existants, entre modes d'existence, comme si tout se valait dès lors. Mais n'est-ce pas plutôt le jugement qui suppose des critères préexistants (valeurs supérieures), et préexistant de tout temps (à l'infini du temps), de telle manière qu'il ne peut appréhender ce qu'il y a de nouveau dans un existant, ni même pressentir la création d'un mode d'existence?" (*CC* 168)

system. Deleuze does not *reproduce* Spinoza's philosophy: he produces a properly Deleuzian line of thought, one that *expresses* the forces at play in Spinozian thought. The repetition of Spinoza happens through the development of immanence as an ontological standpoint. As such, our present claim may be stated as follows: it is impossible to appreciate the novelty brought by Deleuze's own metaphysics if we do not understand the role that immanence must play at the level of ontology; and this is only possible if we make a thorough analysis of Spinoza's own ontology one that is considered, by Deleuze and Guattari, to be "le vertige de l'immanence" (QP 52).

### ***III.iii—The Intellectual Side of Causality***

#### *(iii.a) Knowledge by the Cause: Spiritual Automatism*

If an ontology of immanence is necessary for a metaphysics of immanence, it is because if the latter is concerned with first principles of being *qua* being, the former is a theory of Being and beings. In other words, it would be difficult to conceive of a metaphysics that would not be based on a few ontological assumptions. In order to produce a metaphysics that would correspond to the empiricist perspective we analyzed, Spinoza will have to explain the difference between Being and beings without any recourse to transcendence. How he does so is hence crucial for our present inquiry.

Before delving into a reading of Spinoza's works, we would like to make a methodological remark. A difficulty we face when trying to explain the relationship between Spinoza and Deleuze is the fact that the latter is a very acute commentator of the former, which entails that we can appear to explain Deleuze with Spinoza, and then explain

the latter with the help of the former. The monographs Deleuze wrote on the Dutch thinker are recognized as amongst the best books on Spinozian thought, and we do embrace a lot of his interpretations. Thus, our reliance on Deleuze's reading, in the following pages, should not be seen as an explanation of Deleuze's thought, but as a commentary on Spinoza. We are still aware of Michael Hardt's comment concerning the distance there is often between Deleuze and the major philosophers he is analysing, but we think we were careful to use passages that are closer to Spinozian thought than Deleuzian one. When we will refer to Deleuzian thought, we will try to make sure the reader understands that we are entering a different philosophical realm.

According to Deleuze's reading: "L'ontologie de Spinoza est dominée par les notions de *cause de soi, en soi et par soi*."<sup>48</sup> (*SPE* 146-7) Thus, to understand how Spinoza produces an ontology that is radically immanent, we have to understand what is the form of causality that he embraces. In order to do so, it might be helpful to take a detour through Spinoza's epistemological theory, since it is one dependent on 'knowledge by the cause'. Knowledge by the cause is not a novelty in philosophy. Deleuze is keen to explain that Descartes proceeded in the same way (c.f. *SPE* 147), and Spinoza himself admits that this method of acquiring adequate ideas was already present in the philosophy of the 'Ancients': "This is the same as the ancients said, i.e., that true knowledge proceeds from cause to effect — except that so far as I know they never conceived the soul (as we do here) as acting according to certain laws, like a spiritual automaton." (*TdIE* §85) Spinoza's criticism highlights a flaw in his predecessors' systems: epistemologically, it is accurate to claim that

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<sup>48</sup> "Spinoza's ontology is dominated by the notions of a *cause of itself, in itself and through itself*." (*EPS* 162)

true knowledge is synthetic —viz. that it proceeds from cause to effect —, but in itself, it is not sufficient. The true power of synthetic knowledge appears when knowledge is understood to follow from laws immanent to the soul itself. In other words, if the only adequate form of knowledge depends on causality, it must also be understood according to a character of immanence if we want to unleash its full potential. A detour through Spinoza's epistemology brings us closer to the importance and radicality of immanence in his philosophy.

The *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is very useful for such an endeavor, because it stands for Spinoza's attempt at a *Discourse on Method* (c.f. Curley 3). A remarkable aspect of the work is Spinoza's devaluation of a method that would limit in any way our knowledge with pre-given principles, or even that would guide our intellectual endeavour as if from the outside. As Pierre Macherey contends, method, in the Spinozian sense, can only be explained after we already have a true idea:

Reflecting on an already effective knowledge after the fact, method is nothing more than an empirical inventory of procedures, outside all determinations of real causes that guide its functioning. This means in particular that method has lost the juridical function of guarantee that it is assigned in the Cartesian theory of knowledge; it no longer has the power to assign its originary conditions to truth, but it engages some of its properties after the fact, some aspects, moreover, in a manner that is isolated and arbitrary.<sup>49</sup> (Macherey2011 44)

Method, thus presented, is not something that must be prior to knowledge in order to guarantee our rightful use of reason. It is reflection on the way in which we actually know.

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<sup>49</sup> “Réfléchissant après coup sur une connaissance déjà effective, la méthode n'est qu'un recensement empirique de procédés, en dehors de toute détermination des causes réelles qui en dirigent le fonctionnement. Cela veut dire en particulier que la méthode a perdu la fonction juridique de garantie que lui assignait la théorie cartésienne de la connaissance : elle n'a plus le pouvoir d'assigner à la vérité ses conditions originaires, mais elle en dégage après coup quelques propriétés, quelques aspects, de manière d'ailleurs isolée et arbitraire.” (Macherey1979 57)

In other words, far from being a set of rules that we impose on ourselves in order to acquire true knowledge, a discourse on method, in the Spinozian sense, must be an analysis of the way in which we already acquire true ideas. It is an investigation into the power and capacities immanent to our own intellect. Indeed, Spinoza's claim might be surprising, but is well presented by Macherey: if we already acquire true ideas, before any set of guidelines, it is by analysing the properties of a true idea that we will be able to understand what principles immanent to the intellect allows the production of true ideas. In other words, the Spinozian method is an analysis of the laws immanent to the intellect that allows for a production of the truth.

We can now understand what is meant by 'spiritual automaton': the soul, or the intellect, is not something that is forced, as if from the outside, to conceive true and adequate ideas, but produces them following principles that are immanent to it. We might find here another connection with Deleuze: for both thinkers, the truth is not attained through representation or *reproduction*, but through a *production* immanent to reality itself. [B] *Spinoza and Deleuze both conceive the proper philosophical task to be a production of the truth according to principles and forces immanent to reality itself. They both stand against a representative form of thinking.*

Spinoza thus presents the purpose of a method:

Again, the Method must speak about Reasoning, or about the intellection; i.e., Method is not the reasoning itself by which we understand the causes of things, much less the understanding of the causes of things; it is understanding what a true idea is by distinguishing it from the rest of the perceptions; by investigating its nature, so that from that we may come to know our power of understanding and so restrain the mind that it understands, according to that standard. (*TdIE* §37)

Accordingly, knowledge by the cause is not a method, but an immanent characteristic of true ideas. A method is not a set of guidelines that allows one to reach true ideas, but it is a reflection on the actual power of the intellect, and how it comes to produce true ideas. We do not ‘know by the cause’ because it is the best way to reach the truth, but because this is the way in which truth is actually produced. The method is not a way to restrain and control our intellect, but a grasp of our actual process of intellection.

If a method allows us to distinguish a true from a false idea, the criterion must remain immanent to the intellect itself —this is implied in the fact that the soul is a ‘spiritual automaton’. As Spinoza says:

As for what constitutes the form of the true, it is certain that a true thought is distinguished from a false one not only by an extrinsic, but chiefly by an intrinsic denomination. For if some architect conceives a building in an orderly fashion, then although such a building never existed, and ever never will exist, still the thought of it is true, and the thought is the same, whether the building exists or not. (*TdIE* §69)

The truth of an idea might indeed be found in a correspondence to an object outside of the intellect, but Spinoza insists: this is not the crucial aspect of the truth. What is true is what is ‘conceived in an orderly fashion’, which we take to mean that it is conceived according to the laws that are producing the said object. In the case of the idea of the building, it is considered to be a true idea as long as the principles of architecture are respected, and the existence of the building does not influence at all the soundness of the principles as they stand in the intellect. Hence, a true idea is not one that *represents* an external object, but one that, when solely considered in itself, expresses all the properties of an entity.

This autonomy of the truth within the intellect explains why, towards the end of the *Treatise*, Spinoza will claim that the only true way to have adequate ideas is to proceed



through clear definitions, which should allow us to deduce all the properties of an entity without consideration for other entities that might efficiently cause it: “We require a concept, *or* definition, of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing’s properties can be deduced from it”. (*TdIE* §96.2) We find here the distinction between the exercise of thought as *representative*, and the exercise of thought as solely explained through its own laws. The truth of an idea does not rely on how well the intellect can *reproduce* the external world, but on how, in the attribute of thought, it can *produce* an idea, from its own power.

We find here an important aspect of the attributes in Spinoza’s philosophy: thought must be explained solely by thought, and the material world must also enjoy this autonomy. In other words, if a true idea does not reproduce the external world, it is because each attribute follows its own laws, and cannot affect the other ones. Knowledge by the cause is thus not the knowledge of what brings something into existence, but is knowledge through the laws that produces something. The cause of an idea are the laws that are immanent to thought itself, and so causality, epistemologically speaking, must be freed from its purely physical aspect.

### *(iii.b) Contra Idealism: One Substance*

The point we reached here could lead some readers astray, and could be interpreted as a form of idealism that would be present in Spinoza’s thought. Indeed, the claim that the process of intellection should be understood according to a ‘spiritual automatism’ seems to indicate that Spinoza considers ideas to have an autonomy that frees them from empirical existence, and thus lead us to a form a dualism that separates Extension and Thought.

Spinoza, however, cannot accept such a divide, and what prevents him from falling into a semblance of idealism is his theory of the attributes. As we already saw in our explanation of the term, attributes are essential components of reality, without which reality would not be what it is. As human beings, we experience two of those, namely Thought and Extension. Spinoza claims that the order of things in Extension is the same than the order of ideas in Thought (*EII P7*); and the reason for this claim is that if bodies are modes of Extension, ideas are modes of Thought that corresponds to bodies.

Let us explain this with the theory of human mind as develop by Spinoza in the second part of *Ethics*. First of all, he argues that the human mind is nothing but the idea of a body: “The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the Body, *or* a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and nothing else.” (*EII P13*) The human mind does not have a separated existence from the human body. We can only say that an entity has a mind (or a soul, according to the terminology of the *Short Treatise*) if the said entity has an *actually existing* body. Hence, our ideas might follow from the laws of our own intellect, but this intellect is a mode of Thought that corresponds to a mode in Extension. Hence: “The human Mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways”, because “nothing can happen in [the] body which is not perceived by the Mind.” (*EII P14&12*) In other words, the more a body can be affected, the more its mind will be able to produce ideas corresponding to the affection of the body.

This theory of intellection entails that far from being an idealism in which we can produce infinite ideas without any reliance on experience, Spinoza’s epistemology happens *at the same time* in Thought and Extension —both attributes being explained through laws

immanent to them. Hence, when we said earlier that ideas should be understood according to how strongly they affect the mind, it is because we form those ideas according to the way they affect our own bodies. If it is possible to imagine things, even though they are not actually present to us, it is because once we have experienced something external, we can recall the idea of that thing—but the idea can only arise in the first place because its equivalent in the attribute of Extension was once present to us. When we say that causality must be understood as not purely physical, it is because what causes an *idea* must be explained according to the attribute of Thought itself, where what causes a *body* must be explained according to the laws of the said body. Ideas are not copies of bodies, but the exact same mode, expressed in Thought. This is entailed in the fact that attributes are conceived through themselves, and not through another.

This claim follows from the unicity of Substance, that is, from the fact that reality cannot be considered as made up of different planes of reality. Reality must be explained according to a single causal order, which can be expressed in terms of ideas or in terms of bodies, but in the end both explanation refers to the productive power of Substance itself. Extension does not explain Thought, and neither is Thought explaining Extension. Both must be experienced in their own terms, tracing their own causal chains.

This is where we find an early trace of philosophical nomadism. If Deleuze claimed that reality should be conceived as a desert in which paths are traced immanently, it does seem that Spinoza develops such a theory through his insistence on explaining Thought or Extension in their own terms. Extension, for example, should not be organized, divided, limited, or partitioned, by our concepts and ideas, but should be experienced in and through itself. Our bodies are not as limited as we think, and once we conceive them in a nomadic

way, they are opened to new possibilities, new encounters. Nomadism, in this sense, consists in the refusal to explain reality as if from the outside, and to see how it organizes itself through its own causal process. Deleuze's transcendental philosophy refused, in a similar way, to give priority to concepts or structures of the mind, and, as we saw, the empiricism he develops considers the intellectual aspect of our experience in terms of experimentation. Our concepts and ideas are relays, and not fixed boundaries; our empirical experience is not pre-determined, but open to experimentation. [C] *Spinoza and Deleuze, in other words, share a nomadic conception of reality through their refusal to give an organizing priority to thought, and through the consideration of reality as a plane of experimentation.*

### *(iii.c) Feigning the Truth: Universals and Abstractions*

When exploring the nature of the human mind, Spinoza explains that the cause of the 'formal being' of ideas is not the perception of the object, but Substance when considered under the attribute of thought. Phrased otherwise, the cause of ideas might be, on a material level, the encounter with an entity, but on an ontological level, the cause of our ideas are the laws at play in reality itself, in the attribute of Thought: "The formal being of ideas admits God as a cause insofar as he is considered a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explained by any other attribute. I.e., ideas, both of God's attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, as their efficient cause, but God himself, insofar as he is a thinking thing." (EII P5) As Deleuze says:

The formal cause of an idea is never an abstract universal. Universals, whether genera or species, do indeed involve a power of imagination, but this power is reduced as we come to understand more and more things. The formal cause of

a true idea is our power of understanding; and the more things we understand, the less we form these fictions of genera and species. (*EPS* 161)<sup>50</sup>

What Deleuze means here is that as we can see in *EII P5*, the only way in which we can understand an idea is through the attribute of thought alone. Universals, genera and species are fictions that are produced by the intellect. Those fictions are not false, but since they depend on the capacity to imagine, they are not considered to lead to a true knowledge.

Indeed, the role of imagination is very complex in Spinoza's philosophy, and has been quite discussed in secondary literature (notably by Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd and Hasana Sharp). For our current inquiry, it suffices to point out that Spinoza ascribes an epistemological role to fictions. Indeed, imagination helps us to understand the world around us in a confused way. The more we know individual entities and the way in which they are individually caused, the less we need to understand them according to fictions. "Spinoza offers an account of 'fictions' as a way of knowing halfway, as it were, between truth and falsehood. Fictitious, or 'feigned' ideas are mixed methods of knowing. They partake of imagining; but, through being criticized by reason, they be a source of improved understanding." (Gatens&Lloyd 34) The general concepts we use to consider many similar entities are fictions, because they are created by us through the comparison of many individuals. They allow us to know each individual 'halfway', to borrow the expression used by Gatens and Lloyd. Once we understand that they are produced, we come to understand that the order and connections of ideas can be explained by laws immanent to thought itself, because those fictions are themselves the result of a power of our mind

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<sup>50</sup> "La cause formelle d'une idée n'est jamais un universel abstrait. Les universaux, genres ou espèces, renvoient bien à une puissance d'imaginer, mais cette puissance diminue au fur et à mesure que nous comprenons plus de choses. La cause formelle de l'idée vraie, c'est notre puissance de comprendre; et plus nous comprenons de choses, moins nous formons ces fictions de genres et d'espèces." (*SPE* 145-6)

(Gatens&Lloyd 34). It becomes less and less necessary to rely on abstractions, because our ideas are explained through the source of the laws of thought itself, i.e. Substance. Similarly, the order and connection of material things is explainable through the laws of extension alone, and so the proper causal explanation is not through a divine will or a certain pre-determined end that would organize the material realm, but according to the laws immanent to extension itself. Hence, the epistemological claim that knowledge by the cause entails knowledge of the immanent laws of thought *per se* implies the *ontological* claim that reality can only be known according to a logic of pure immanence.

If our own understanding of reality depends on the laws of mental reality, and the same stands for physical reality, then the metaphysics it produces is one that can only rely on immanence. Spinoza declares:

Hence, so long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, *or* the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone. And insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, the order of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of Extension alone. (EII P7Sc.)

If we remember that attributes are the ways in which substance, or Being, expresses itself, then we can understand this last passage in the following way: there is no predominance of an attribute over another, because the laws of each of them is immanent to the plane of reality they express, which entails that we cannot rely on any form of transcendence to explain reality (c.f. [A]).

The detour we took might seem long-winded, but it was necessary in order to realize how the idea of immanent causality is essential to the ‘vertigo of immanence’. Ultimately, Spinoza reaches the empiricist method by claiming that we should only derive our ideas from real beings, and never from concepts that are supposed to order reality: “it is necessary

for us always to deduce all our ideas from Physical things, *or* from real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another real being, in such a way that we do not pass over to abstractions and universals, neither inferring something real from them, nor inferring them from something real.” (*TdIE* §99)

There is no abstraction to make: every concept we arrive at should be produced according to the laws of thought, in the same way that every physical entity is created according to the laws of extension alone.

Abstractions are mostly passive, for Spinoza: they depend on an activity of the mind, but this activity is itself stimulated by a passivity in front of external entities. To say it otherwise, we imagine the concept of ‘Human’ or ‘Horse’ by abstracting common features of the individuals we subsume under those concepts. Those abstractions are dependent on how the external entities are affecting us, not on how they are produced in and through the laws of reality itself. Spinoza says it clearly:

it should be noted that these notions are not formed by all in the same way, but vary from one to another, in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by, and what the Mind imagines or recollects more easily. For example, those who have more often regarded men’s stature with wonder will understand by the word *man* an animal of erect stature. But those who have been accustomed to consider something else, will form another common image of men. (*EII* P40Sc1)

We actively produce ideas when we are aware of the fact that the truth it has is dependent on the laws of our mind, as a mode of Thought. In other words, we only go from one real being to another if we actively produce ideas out of the laws of Thought itself, which are to be understood as the laws of reality itself, expressed in and through a specific attribute (c.f. [C]) When Spinoza writes that we should be able to go from one real being to another one, it only means that we should be able to understand causality as that which follows

from the nature of an entity, and so understanding by the cause means understanding how the whole of reality is a constant process of production, going from one cause to another. We can conclude from this analysis of ‘knowledge by the cause’ that understanding causality as such is necessary in order to understand reality itself.

### ***III.iv—The Ontology of Immanent Causality***

#### *(iv.a) God: His Disappearance*

Causality must be redefined on an ontological level. Indeed, as we saw, the character of truth does not depend on correspondence, but on the adequate aspect of an idea. This seemingly subtle difference is of crucial importance, because it entails a shift in ontology. ‘Correspondence’ means that the mind apprehends something outside of itself, and must reproduce in the proper way what is external to it. ‘Adequation’, on the other hand, means that the mind is autonomous in the production of ideas, and so a true idea is not necessarily something that corresponds to how objects appear to us, but to how objects are in themselves, according to the laws and principles of mental reality (c.f. [B]). In other words, the Spinozian epistemological scheme is dependent on an ontology that cannot allow the presence of any form of transcendence, not even the transcendence of the subject to the object or of thought to physical reality (c.f. [A]). ‘Knowledge by the cause’, as we saw, is predicated upon laws immanent to reality, of the processes that are made possible by the principles ruling the unfolding of substance, and on a realization that we are ourselves products of those processes. Overall, we could say that the core of Spinoza’s ontology is



the fact that beings are all expressions of Being or, phrased in theological terms, that creatures are expressions of God

Spinozian thought, in that sense, asks for a reconfiguration of the role of God as an ontological figure. Indeed we could characterize Spinoza's effort as one of making God and Nature exchangeable terms. Of course, the question of the divine in Spinozian thought is the source of many disputes in the secondary literature and would deserve a whole work in order to navigate through the intricacies and subtleties that are present in the different interpretations Spinoza himself proposes. It does seem that on a political level, the role of God is not the same than on the metaphysical level, and only this problem would require a lot of time and dedication.<sup>51</sup> Since we are unable to explore in depth the issue of the divine, we would like to precise the angle of our analysis: we do think that the core of Spinoza's theory of the divine resides in his famous claim at the beginning of the fourth part of *Ethics* —*Deus, sive Natura*. (EIV Pref.) This expression entails that by God, Spinoza understands Nature, that is, reality itself. There is no distance between the existence of God and the existence of reality. Both terms refer to the same thing.

This is why the Appendix to the first part of *Ethics* focuses on moving away from a notion of God that would make him a Lord or Father of humankind:

“All the prejudice 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 some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God.” (EI App.)

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<sup>51</sup> See, for more detailed analysis, Leo Strauss' *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, and Yirmiyahu Yovel's *Spinoza and Other Heretics II: The Adventures of Immanence*

According to us, it is possible to consider Spinozian thought as always fighting the prejudice of God as a Lord and Father. The purpose of Spinoza is to show that God and Nature are the same —*Deus sive Natura*: “nature never becomes God [...] the first term is translated into and then displaced by the second. God disappears into nature.” (Montag 5) Hence, the divine is not the transcendent creator, but the process of creation itself as it happens in the everyday life.

This is explicit in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, where Spinoza explains very clearly what is to be understood by a ‘law of God’: “By *God’s guidance [Dei directionem]* I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, *or the connection of natural things [Naturae ordinem sive rerum naturalium concatenationem]*. [...] Therefore, whether we say that all things happened according to the laws of nature, or that they are ordered according to the decree and guidance of God, we say the same thing.” (*TTP* III, §7-8) If it is clear in this passage that the decrees of God are nothing but the laws of nature, it is not clear yet that God is immanent to the world. There is still the possibility that God created those laws as a ruler and imposed them on the world. This interpretation, however, is immediately made impossible by the author:

because the power of all natural things [*rerum omnium naturalium potentia*] is nothing by the power itself of God [*Dei potentia*], through which alone all things happened and are determined, from this it follows that whatever man, who is also a part of nature, provides for himself, as an aid to preserving his being, or self, it is the power of God [*divina potentia*] alone which provides these things for him, inasmuch as it acts either through human nature or through things outside human nature. (*TTP* III, §9)

It is in such passages that we can witness Spinoza’s radical philosophy of immanence: the divine power is not only dictating the eternal order of things, but is also at play in every single action an individual takes. Every change that happens in reality is expressing the

power of God, be it the crawling of a worm on the ground or the development of the most advanced form of technology. This is what the last part of the passage above explains: whether we consider human actions as determined through the will or as influenced by external factors, it is always the power of God that is at play. Phrased otherwise, there is no distinction between God's laws and the causal process that produces anything: as we have already seen, God, or Substance, must be understood as a life force that is at play in everything that exists, and this is also how we should consider God's decrees. They are not laws dictated by an other-worldly supreme will, they are not 'orders' to follow, but are the principles, forces, tendencies, and nomadic lines of development that are immanent to reality.

It might help here to review Spinoza's criticism of the Adamic tradition. As Deleuze explains, this is where we can find a clear empiricist inspiration, because Spinoza refuses to consider the original sin as a fall from grace, but mostly as a demonstration of the state of ignorance in which we are born, hence failing to grasp the true meaning of 'divine law'. The importance of this criticism relies on Spinoza's interpretation of divine power, which helps to understand the reconfiguration of divine laws. The criticism goes as follows:

So, for example, if God said to Adam that he willed him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Genesis 2:17], it would imply a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat of that tree. So it would be impossible for him to eat of it. That divine decree would have had to involve eternal necessity and truth. But since Scripture nevertheless relates that God did tell Adam not to eat of the tree, and that Adam nevertheless ate of the tree, we must say that God only revealed to Adam the evil which would necessarily befall him if he ate of that tree, but not the necessity of that evil's following. (*TTP* §26)

The passage highlights the distinction between the usual understanding of 'God's power', and the Spinozian one.

In the first case, power is understood as political power, that is, as the way in which a law is decided out of an act of will. The law is an order, but since it is a divine one, it would have to be a necessary and eternal order (if we remember here the passage quoted above in which God's decrees are considered to be necessary and eternal truths). According to that interpretation, human beings, and assumedly any other living thing, could oppose God's decree, and so could fail to live according to the right order of things. For Spinoza, if this were the case—that one could oppose God's decrees—it would be a proof of God's impotence, since it would entail that the creatures can go against the laws of the world, deemed eternally true and necessary. If we refuse this interpretation, as Spinoza does, we need to find a new meaning to the Adamic narrative, but one that would maintain the necessity and truth of the divine decrees.

Spinoza's interpretation is the following: if God did not give an *order* to Adam, he nevertheless revealed the *order* of things. The last sentence of the passage makes this explicit: God said that, following the *order* of nature, eating the apple would produce evil consequences for Adam, but he did not *order* Adam not to eat the apple because the latter would be punished by God otherwise. Maybe the example makes more sense if we consider the apple to be poisonous: God revealed to Adam the fact that the apple would affect the latter in a bad way, as much as ingesting arsenic would. In other words, the revelation made by God is a revelation of a divine law, but understood as a natural law: the coming together of Adam's organism and the apple will lead to a reaction that will undo some components of Adam's organism. It is as if the forbidden fruit was, in itself, incompatible with Adam. The results that follow from the ingestion of the apple are induced by this natural incompatibility. It is not a punishment.

An important distinction follows: eating the fruit was *bad*, but it was not *evil*. The couple ‘good and evil’ is not the same as ‘good and bad’:

*[I]n Nature there is no good and evil. [...] And when we have conceived an Idea of a perfect man in our intellect, that [Idea] could be a cause of our seeing (when we examine ourselves) whether we have any means of arriving at such a perfection. [...] I say, then, that I must conceive a perfect man, if I want to say anything regarding man’s good and evil. (ST II.IV §5&7)*

Something is considered good or evil depending how it helps or hinders our ability to reach the ideal or perfection that we ‘conceive’. ‘Good and bad’ [*bon ou mauvais*], on the contrary, are matter of taste, or to put it differently, ways in which we are feeling more or less empowered when considering only our own unique nature. When one eats something detrimental to her health, she qualifies it as bad [*mauvais*]. It can be considered evil, but only if she ascribes to it a transcendent value. In the Spinozian interpretation of the Adamic narrative, eating the apple is a bad event from the standpoint of Adam’s own organism, but that follows from chemical and biological laws, that is, principles that derives from the necessity of the apple’s and Adam’s constitution.

We find here a very empiricist attitude because divine laws are not to be found as decided from above, but in the things themselves, as they interact and develop through random encounters. There is no original ‘sin’, nor ‘sin’ in general: there are only bodies, their interactions and the composition or decomposition that follows from those encounters.

Without delving into the moral and political consequences of such an interpretation of ‘law’, we notice the way in which the epistemological scheme expounded earlier finds strength in this ontological aspect of divine laws and power. Laws are immanent to the world, they are the way in which things develop in their own terms. ‘Law’ loses its juridical

aspect and get closer to the scientific meaning, where its role is not to dictate, but to bring to the light the tendencies and causal processes constituting reality.

We find here a strong resonance with Deleuze's own desire to conceive a metaphysics of immanence, in which first principles and processes of individuation are immanent to reality, and not coming from a transcendent form of individuality. This anti-judicial interpretation of divine law is rephrased in Deleuzian philosophy through the opposition of forms of individuality as an organizing power. In this sense, both Spinoza and Deleuze consider that laws explain the way in which things are actually acting, and are not dictating it. We would like to call this the *empiricist interpretation of 'Law'*, common to both philosophers. [D] *The translation of God into reality (as Montag says) is common to both philosophers, and is part of their refusal of transcendence. Deus sive Natura entails the loss of the transcendent and organizing aspect of the laws, and their naturalization.*

*(iv.b) Divine power: Nature as potentia*

This first part of *Ethics*, which we could consider as the ontological part of the work<sup>52</sup>, ends with an analysis of God's power: ontology must be understood as the theory concerning the way in which things are, and following the passages analyzed above, anything that exists is an expression of divine power. In other words, substance should be understood in terms of power, as a force that produces an infinite quantity of different

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<sup>52</sup> One could divide *Ethics* five books according to what they consider: I. Ontology, II. Epistemology, III. Psychology, or Affective life, IV. Human Condition, V. Human Freedom. We are very indebted, for this division, to Macherey's own division of *Ethics* in his exhaustive analysis in five volumes, entitled *Introduction à L'Éthique de Spinoza*.

beings, all of which are different ways (*modus*) of expressing the said power. It is because his is a power ontology that Spinoza is able to produce an immanent ontology.

It might help here to disclose an important fact that does not transpire in English: the word ‘power’ can be written in two ways in Latin (*potentia* and *potestas*), which is also the case in other Indo-European languages. As Michael Hardt indicates in the translator’s preface to Negri’s *The Savage Anomaly*: “Whereas the Latin terms used by Spinoza, *potestas* and *potentia*, have distinct correlates in most European languages (*potere* and *potenza* in Italian, *pouvoir* et *puissance* in French, *Macht* and *Vermögen* in German), English provides only a single term, *power*.” (Hardt, in Negri xi) The distinction is important: *potestas* represents authority, a form of centralized force of organization; *potentia* means a ‘potential’, that is a force that is constitutive, coming from within and affirmative of something’s capacities.

If we go back to the Adamic narrative, in which the Fall is defined by Adam’s failure to obey God’s decrees, we can say that Adam fails to obey the laws established by God’s *potestas*. Adam feels dominated by God’s laws and decides to disobey them. If we understand ‘power’ in this sense, then we can see how God, Substance or Nature all have a transcendent status, since their dictates are not expressed in and through entities, but are closer to shaping them, as a sculptor would do. Those concepts take on the role of legislators and rulers who can judge and decide the fate of the world.

If, on the contrary, we consider power as *potentia*, then being ‘within God’s power’ does not entail that we are forced to obey him. It means that we necessarily follow his decrees, because those decrees are what produce us and the whole of reality: they are the structure of the world, the *potentia* of reality itself. The laws are immanent to existence itself. Adam

ate the apple because he could, but he got poisoned, because such was the *potentia* of the apple when ingested by Adam. God's revelation, if we understand power as *potentia*, is not an order, but the disclosure of a natural law, of tendencies present in the very constitution of the two entities at play. With such an understanding of power (as *potentia*), Spinoza will show that God is indeed an immanent cause, because he is not to be understood as a transcendent entity organizing reality, but as the pulse of reality itself.

This is what is affirmed in the *Ethics*. In the last few propositions of his ontological development, Spinoza makes three powerful statements: "God's power [*potentia*] is his essence itself", "Whatever we conceive to be in God's power [*potentia*], necessarily exists", and "Nothing exists from whose nature some effects does not follow." (*EI* P34-36) Let us proceed slowly through those three propositions, since we think they summarize Spinoza's specific power ontology. We hold that the focus of Spinozian ontology is to make us realize that individual entities are expressions of divine power (*potentia*). To put it otherwise, since all entities express the power of God, they explicate him, in the sense that they actualize the divine *potentia* in specific and determinate ways. There is no God or Being outside of reality. The end of the present section will thus seek to make this logic explicit.

The demonstration of the last proposition confirms this theory of expression: "Whatever exists expresses the nature, *or* essence of God in a certain and determinate way [...], i.e. (by P34), whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God [*Dei potentiam*], which is the cause of all things." (*EI* P36Dem.) Expression, following from this statement, depends on the causal relation between God and entities. If we remember our inquiry into Spinoza's epistemology, we see that this causal relation entails that God's power must be understood in an immanent way, that is, things are caused by



God's power because they follow necessarily from the nature of the said power. Hence, P35 claims that any existent is within God's power, not because God is the creator that has dominion over his creatures, but simply because according to the causal relation, each effect must be understood as following immanently from the essence of its cause. Anything is within God's power, because anything is caused (viz. follows) from his nature. As P34 states, God's essence is his power, and so we can conclude that everything is within God's power because everything follows from this power. This is why knowledge by the cause has ontological implication: any entity must, ultimately, be understood as a way of actualizing God's *potentia*, and without this causal relation we lack a true understanding of reality.

So far, however, Spinoza stays within a framework that is common to many philosophers in relation to the first cause: as a first cause, God is ultimately the first principle that dictates the order of things, somewhat like a demiurge. This is where, however, P36 takes on full strength: it is because 'whatever exists expresses the power of God' that whatever exists should be considered also as a cause, and not as a mere reproduction of an idea present in God's mind. The logic of expression entails that any entity should be seen as a cause, because it expresses God's own causal power, and so, as an inlet of power, is also endowed with a determinate *potentia*. Human beings, for example, are capable of many things, and are understood according to those specific powers. They are rational, or whatever we consider as defining their nature, because those capacities follow from their constitution. They are the *cause* of those, and are to be understood accordingly, but we need also to remember that as such, they express powers that are disclosing laws that are immanent to reality.

Any specific constitution is to be understood as following from the laws and principles of extension and thought, which are to be understood according to Substance as *causa sui*. This is why Spinoza claims, in the *TdIE*, that we do not need a specific starting point in order to reach the idea of God: any entity, as long as it is understood adequately, leads us to the grasping of Nature as expressing itself in all the entities that it produces. Any action, as we saw in the *Tractatus* expresses divine laws, because any action is actualizing those laws. Hence, with this last proposition, Spinoza makes sure that we never need anything outside of the experienced world in order to explain reality, because God, Nature or Substance, are all to be understood through the infinite ways in which different entities act, interact, and cause manifold things.

First principles are to be found immanently in everything there is, and so God should be considered as an immanent cause. If this seems strange, or even absurd, we can reach such a conclusion with the following reasoning: God is the cause of all things, and so anything following from his nature must be understood as an effect, that is explained by God's nature. P36 states that whatever exists is an expression of the power of God, but also a cause. Putting this proposition with P35, we need to consider each thing to be (a) an effect following from God's power and (b) the cause of the manifold of things. In other words, we can never consider the effect of anything without at the same time considering it to be an expression of God's nature, hence God is at the same time present in every cause, but also in every effect. This is the logic of immanent causality: the effect is never outside of God, substance or nature, because it always turns out to be the cause of something else.

Let us look at Spinoza's own proposition concerning the importance of the immanent causality of God: "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things." (*EI* P18)

The point is the following: we cannot consider that God is the cause of anything outside Him, but must be immanent to all His effects. This is proven in the following way:

Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by P15), and so (by P16C1) God is the cause of [all] things, which are in him. That is the first [thing to be proven]. And then outside God there can be no substance (by P14), i.e. (by D3), thing which is in itself outside God. That was the second. God, therefore, is the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things, q.e.d. (EI P18Dem.)

In order to understand this proposition, we need to understand the different steps Spinoza goes through: (a) there is only, in the world, substance and its affections, (b) if there is nothing outside God, then we cannot say that God causes things that are outside him, and so God is an immanent cause. This is further reinforced by the proposition cited by Spinoza: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes” (EI P16), which explains, in his corollaries, that God must be understood as the efficient cause of all things (C1), and that God can only be cause through himself, since there is nothing outside himself (C2). In the end, we understand how immanent causality is the affirmation of immanence: if there is nothing in the world but the one single infinite substance and its infinite modes, then we cannot conceive God producing beings in matter, as a sculptor would modify something outside herself. God must be seen to cause all the modes *through himself*, and also to cause them ‘from the necessity of his own nature’.

Now, the question of the nature of God appears, and here, Spinoza really establishes his immanent ontology: God must be understood as *causa sui*, which, in Spinozian ontology, is: “By cause of itself [*causa sui*] I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.” (EID1) God’s nature is

existence, and from that nature follows ‘infinitely many things in infinitely many modes’. In the end, what we have in this whole theory of immanent causality is a claim Deleuze makes crucial in his own reading of Spinoza: “God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself.” (EI P25Sc.) Through this set of arguments, Spinoza claims that we cannot think of God, or substance, as a cause that remains outside of its effects. If God is to be called cause of himself as he is called cause of all things, it is because it follows from the very existence of God that he produces many modes. Hence, by making God the immanent cause of all things, in the same sense that he is cause of himself, Spinoza attains pure immanence: Being cannot be differentiated from its own affections, because its own nature consist in the production of infinite ways of being.

Deleuze’s claim that this is Spinoza great achievement: that he transformed the *causa sui* into the logic of reality itself. *Causa sui*, for Spinoza, is the ground of reality itself, the way in which reality cannot be explained by any transcendent concept. If we want to truly achieve immanence, there is a need to change the logic of causality, in a way where the efficient cause needs to become also immanent cause. The change is radical, because, we tend to understand efficient causality as producing an effect that differs from its cause. In other words, we tend to see cause and effects as external to one another. The radicality of immanent causality, is that it claims that the cause produces an effect that is different in some way, but that remains within the cause. “An *immanent* cause [...] is a cause that not only remains within itself in order to produce, but one whose produced effect also remains within it.” (Smith 33) For Spinoza, God is cause of himself in the same way he is the cause of things, i.e. he produces himself and an infinity of things; he is cause in himself in the

twofold sense that he causes himself in himself, and that he causes things in himself; finally he is cause by himself, since there is nothing external to substance, and so all the *modus* that are produced are produced as expression of his own *potentia*. Reality is produced as it produces, the whole of reality is at the same time cause and effect of itself.

We reach here the final stage of the Spinozian inspiration: since God is translated into reality [D], the only way in which we can consider ontology is a status of expression. In other words, if we saw earlier that the distinction between expression and representation comes from the distinction between production and reproduction, it seems obvious to us that if we take away the transcendence of God, then reality does not become the *creation*, as separated, but becomes the *expression* of the *potentia* of Being. To rephrase Bryant's claim: Being expresses itself, and we are its expression. With Deleuze, the process of individuation became the way in which it was possible to consider individuals according to the specific possibilities (the specific world) they were expressing. As we explained towards the end of the previous chapter, the eye is a possible light, the ear a possible sound, the loved one a possible world: in every case, entities are understood according to the power, *potentia*, they express. The logic of expression is a logic of creativity, a logic of production. [E] *A power ontology, as an ontology grounded in potentia, is an expressive ontology, where beings are conceived as expressing the creative power of Being. The death of God, for Spinoza and Deleuze, is the death of transcendence, and the unleashing of an experimental freedom.* If we can say that both philosophers develop power ontology, we need to bear in mind that power is *potentia*, and not *potestas*.

# Conclusion

## Consequences of Immanence

We would like to conclude the present thesis with a final presentation of the philosophical connections between Spinoza and Deleuze. Once more, we want to highlight the salient point of our analysis: if Deleuze can claim to have a Spinozian inspiration, it is because he develops a metaphysics of immanence, the force of Spinoza's philosophy. Spinoza is not a proto-Deleuzian, nor is Deleuze a new Spinoza: both are original philosophers who tackle specific issues, but both also work according to a logic of ontological expression and immanent processes of individuation. In the end, what connects both authors is a common desire for thinking in a state of total immanence, without leaving any place to transcendence. This common desire is manifested through different points, which we highlighted in the previous chapter:

*[A] An anti-transcendence attitude that follows from an empiricist inspiration.*

*[B] A common conception of philosophy as creative, and so against representation.*

*[C] A anti-idealism that proposes an immanent conception of reality, better expressed through the nomadism proposed by Deleuze.*

*[D] The disappearance of God and the affirmation of reality as causa sui, that is, as determining its own laws.*

*[E] A power ontology based on potentia, that is an expressive ontology, where beings are expression of the infinite creative power of reality itself.*

Let us go through the argument once more, focusing a bit more on the expressive aspect of the ontology, which we think is the crux of the connection between the two philosophers.

With the process of individuation, we saw that Deleuze wants to elaborate first principles according to a logic that refuses any reliance on given form of transcendence. Entities are to be understood according to the causal process that produces them, that is, through the encounters that make them happen. In that sense, an individual is always the product of encounters, of coming together of many pre-individual characteristics that make them actual. This vision of reality entails that from a Deleuzian perspective, it makes no sense to talk about forms or ideas as shaping reality: the latter appears as chaotic, because it produces itself according to rules immanent to itself, and so never according to a plan or blueprint to follow. In other words, the ontology that follows from Deleuze's conception of individuation must be an ontology in which Being is *causa sui* in the same sense that it is cause of everything that exists –because that is the sole reality there is.

Strangely, it does seem that Spinoza articulated this very conception in his *Ethics*: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, *or* modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” (*EI* P25 Cor.) The relationship between Spinoza and Deleuze would hence lie in this similar conception of ontology: beings are expressions of Being, entailing that there is no gap between the productive power of Being and the beings that we encounter. Phrased otherwise, we can claim that Deleuze repeats the impulse of Spinozian immanence, but that this impulse can only be achieved if

we maintain a logic of expression that almost erases the distinction between Being and beings.<sup>53</sup>

What is the concept of expression? As we already saw, expression, on an ontological level, entails that God, or substance, remains present in the effects he produces. As a matter of fact, the logic of expression entails a triad: what expresses itself, the expression, and what is expressed. This triad should be understood according to the corollary of *EIP25*, where Spinoza explains that individual entities are expressions of God, expressions that take place through specific attributes. To move away from the jargon, we should say that entities are understood according to specific aspects of reality (e.g. Thought and Extension), but that in the end, they are always expressing reality itself in its productive power. With this logic, we see how Spinoza and Deleuze are producing a metaphysical scheme in which reality can only be explained with a form of superior empiricism, viz. the one we presented at the beginning of the present chapter. Both authors do not consider similar problems—for Deleuze, the main problem consists in our understanding of what an individual is, where Spinoza focuses mostly on the way in which we, human beings, can become increasingly free through a better understanding of the nature of reality—, but both authors use immanence through expression as a way to solve those problems that were made even more challenging in traditional metaphysics. The point of their empiricism is the same: explaining reality according to the processes that are always at play within it, never using forms or concepts that would lie outside of it. Hence, if Deleuze repeats Spinoza, it is because he also establishes a philosophical system that depends on an ontology that is both

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<sup>53</sup> This is also the hypothesis of de Beistegui, who claims: “according to Deleuze, the concept of expression is precisely the one that enables Spinoza to achieve the standpoint of absolute immanence.” (Beistegui 91)



expressive and immanent. The repetition is more in the spirit of the system than in the actual terms.

The relation between immanence and expression is the one at play within the complex logic of immanent causality. If individual entities are expressions of God, it means that their specific constitutions are unique ways in which reality actualizes itself. Expression, far from reducing individuals to the status of fleeting moment, highlights their uniqueness, and makes us realize that the only way to understand them is not through sets of concepts or categories that transcend reality and subsume many individuals under a single idea, but solely according to the causal process that makes them, and that also follows from their constitution. In both Spinoza and Deleuze's philosophy, the only things we can and should know about an individual derives from what they can do and what laws of nature flows through them. This is the essential aspect of a power ontology that focuses on *potentia*: beings are expression of the infinite *potentia* of reality itself, and should only be understood according to the specific power they actually express. Those capacities, those powers, are understood to be, at the same time, the essence of the entities, and powers of reality itself. When we claimed earlier that a mode was a way of Being, we should translate this phrasing in the language of power: a mode is a specific expression of the power of reality itself. Similarly, Deleuze's individuals are produced through the coming together of pre-individual singularities that can then be connected to other singularities, opening an experimental form of becoming that goes through the capacities one has to be a nomadic. In other words, both philosophers are able to think individuals, because they think them as specific ways in which reality expresses its own creativity.

As de Beistegui says concerning immanent causality: “the difference in essence between the cause and the effect will never be interpreted as degradation or a fall. From the point of view of immanence, the distinction of essence does not exclude, but implies an equality of being: it is the same being that remains within itself in the cause and in which the effect remains as something else.” (de Beistegui 93) In de Beistegui’s interpretation, this is presented as the fact that the difference between Being and beings is not a difference in existence, but a difference in essence. In other words, the ontological difference is not one between a superior form of existence (Being) and lower forms that only imitate the former (beings), but is a difference in the way of expressing existence *per se*. Following the logic that dominated most of traditional metaphysics, an entity participates in existence, meaning that existence does not pertain to its essence. “[T]o participate is to take part, but it is also to imitate. [...] If participation involves imitation, then there is the need for an artist who takes the Idea as his model. The role of the intermediary, whether artist or demon, is to force the sensible to *reproduce* the intelligible, but also to force the Idea to *be participated in* by something contrary to its own nature.” (de Beistegui 92) Being, as a transcendent concept, is imitated, which entails that individual entities merely copy a concept that is out of this plane of reality, a concept that they can only reproduce with the help of an intermediate actor. If Being is only participated in, it means that Being is transcendent to reality –which ultimately leads to obscurities and difficulties that brought the loss of hope in metaphysics.

Spinoza might maintain that individuals do not have existence as pertaining to their essence, but he nevertheless insists on the fact that God should not be conceived on a higher ontological plane. In fact, God should be conceived as the force that pulses within

everything that exists, be it essence or existent. This entails that God, as Being, is not participated in, nor is he the model of existence entities strive to imitate. In Spinoza's philosophy, the fact that God is the immanent cause of everything there is entails that God is the cause of the essences because they follow necessarily from his *potentia*. Essences are not ideas or concepts which God chooses as model for the creation of entities, nor are they the quiddities that are present only in his perfect understanding: essences are expressions of the power of God, structures that are developed following the laws of reality –the divine laws. Essences are not pure ideas: they are produced through the coming together of many pre-individual factors which then allow the power of substance to be actualized –and so expressed— in a specific and determinate way.

Deleuze sees the process of individuation in Spinoza as one that is internally determined, that is, still immanent to reality as it is. If God's essence is his own power, and if every mode is an expression of the power of God, we have to say that the essence of a mode is a degree of divine power –a specific degree of power. “[T]he reduction of creatures to the status of modes appears as the condition of their essence being a power, that is, of being an irreducible part of God's power. Thus modes are in their essence expressive: they express God's essence, each according to the degree of power that constitutes its essence.”<sup>54</sup>(*EPS* 199) The difference between an entity and another is not a difference in degrees of being, but in degrees of power. Any entity is an expression of the same ontological plane, of the same life pulsing in them; any entity is an inlet of power that can cause many effects, which

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<sup>54</sup> “[L]a réduction des créatures à l'état de modes apparaît comme la condition sous laquelle leur essence est puissance, c'est-à-dire partie irréductible de la puissance de Dieu. Ainsi les modes dans leur essence sont expressifs: ils expriment l'essence de Dieu, chacun selon le degré de puissance qui constitue son essence.” (*SPE* 181-2)

also causes many other things, and so on. The pure immanence thus presented does not drown the individual that are within it, reducing them to mere appearances: immanence restores their glory, it makes us understand how they must be understood in themselves, and not according to a set of concepts that would define their species or genera. “To apprehend something’s essence, one must grasp, concomitantly, its source of power and its singular constitution, which entails some sense of its particular limits. One must apprehend it as a modification of the infinite self-affirmation of nature and as differentiated from every other modification.” (Sharp2011b 109) Sharp illuminates here a point which was present in our presentation of Deleuze’s goal in his reconfiguration of metaphysics: the possibility of thinking existing beings themselves, and not only concepts that should encompass them. An essence, for Spinoza and Deleuze, is something singular, it is a modification—a *modus*, a way of being—of the power of reality that does not represent but expresses reality itself.

We reach here the last consequence of the Spinozian ontology, one which is directly related to Deleuze’s own: if substance is being, the power which any entity expresses in specific and determinate way, the ontological claim we must make is that Being is univocal. This proposition is at the center of Deleuze’s own metaphysics: “There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal”<sup>55</sup> (*DReng* 35) What Deleuze means is that any other form of ontology ends up losing the possibility of understanding Being, because it claims that there are different natures of Being. As we saw concerning causality, if we adopt either an equivocal or analogical ontology, we end up making it impossible to truly

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<sup>55</sup> “Il n’y a jamais eu qu’une proposition ontologique: l’Être est univoque.” (*DR* 52)

understand Being. Univocal ontology, on the other hand, gives us the means to apprehend entities according to what they really are:

the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself.<sup>56</sup> (*DReng* 36)

The argument Deleuze develops is already implied in the Spinozian ontology: any existent being a degree of divine *potentia*, all are different, uniquely different, but mostly, they are all expressing the same *potentia* in unique and different ways. Entities are not reduceable to one another, because each of them expresses a different degree, a different capacity to effectuate many things. As Sharp highlighted, a mode, in Spinoza's ontology, is a unique modification of nature, a unique and finite affirmation of the infinite power that flows from the nature of reality. When Deleuze affirms that Being is equal for everything that is unequal, this is in strong resonance with Sharp's analysis of Spinoza's system: "God's essence is not uniform. Rather, divine essence is a productive power that yields infinitely many singular variations, infinitely many unique organizations of its power." (Sharp2011b 112) One finds here a claim that could also fit within the Deleuzian ontological frame, where Being is said of difference in itself.

The conclusion we reach is puzzling: is Deleuze merely copying the ontology developed by Spinoza? One would be forced to say no: in the end, Deleuze wants to move away from

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<sup>56</sup> "l'essentiel de l'univocité n'est pas que l'Être se dise en un seul et même sens. C'est qu'il se dise, en un seul et même sens, de toutes ses différences individuanes ou modalités intrinsèques. L'Être est le même pour toutes ces modalités, mais ces modalités ne sont pas les mêmes. Il est 'égal' pour toutes, mais elles-mêmes ne sont pas égales. [...] L'Être se dit en un seul et même sens de tout ce dont il se dit, mais ce dont il se dit diffère : il se dit de la différence elle-même." (*DR* 53)

the reliance on terms like ‘substance’ or ‘God’, and desires to develop an ontology that apprehends individuals in themselves, without the recourse to a kind of life force that all unites them (c.f. *DR* 59). Ultimately, the ontology sought by Deleuze would maintain the immanence and the univocity, but would totally replace Being with individual becomings, nomadic paths that have to be grasped in an empiricist inspiration. In other words, the difference between Being and beings would disappear, because the only Being we know is the one that is expressing itself in the manifold, cannot be defined in itself except as a productive process. Substance, according to the early Deleuze, is still too static, still missing the productive aspect. According to his early writing, Deleuze considers Spinoza to maintain a kind of dualism between substance and modes, which would keep the structure of traditional metaphysics, i.e. explaining individual entities according to an abstract notion of Being. If we are to describe Deleuze ontology, we would have to say that it is an ontology that considers entities as processes, as nomadic journeys, thus transforming Being into a self-writing map.

We wonder, however, if this is not where Deleuze falls short. In his late writings, he moves away from such a conception, and he starts focusing on modes of individuality that do not fall within the usual framework. Individuals are considered as ‘haecceities’, which roughly means something akin to ‘a day’ or ‘a season’. Those forms of individuality are open to change, to new connections, and are also multiplicities. What defines ‘a day’, as a form of individuality? It is a structure, a duration in which different events happen, a capacity to be affected and to affect the following day. It is a certain intensity, a degree of power in our experience of time. Similarly, ‘a season’ is not a fixed form of individuality, it is a certain force, a certain assemblage of dynamism that brings forth certain

consequences, such as the melting of the snow, the burgeoning of the buds, the death of the tree leaves, etc. In a certain way, Deleuze moves away from his desire to establish an ontology solely focused on specific nomadic journeys, and embraces something closer to Spinoza's modal ontology, where a mode is an inlet of divine power, connected to all the other modes. "The highest joy and passage to the greatest perfection emerges from the affirmation of oneself as a causal agent, a real constituent of nature, whose power is determined intrinsically by virtue of being a modification of divine attributes, and extrinsically by virtue of the co-affection of ambient modes." (Sharp2011b 116) It is as if, growing more and more mature, Deleuze realized that the impetus of his youth, of his desire to achieve an ontology that could do away with terms like 'Being' or 'Substance' was impossible –or lead to a chaotic apprehension of the universe. Maybe the requisite for an ontology of pure immanence, that affirms individuals in their unique existence, is something like Spinoza's divine *potentia* that causes itself, modifies itself, and pulses through any single entity. Maybe the last concept developed by Deleuze, viz. 'A Life', is a last attempt at thinking Being as pure immanence, differing from Spinoza's system through notions of individuals as 'haecceities' or 'events'.

This, however, exceeds the scope of the present thesis and warrants a separate treatment where Life, as a concept, would be considered on its own. For now, we need to recognize the following: thinking existence in itself requires an immanent and univocal ontology, which considers entities as unique expressions of power, known through what they can do, which follows from the power of reality itself. Spinoza made this claim very clear: whatever happens to us or to other entities is always caused by, and within the power of Nature, and so does not require any explanation that is based on transcendent principles or concepts.

*Causa sui* might be the key to a metaphysics that empowers individual entities, chanting the creative glory that shines through them. Such is the legacy of immanence.



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