

Spinozan Meditations on Life and Death

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In a well-known proposition in *Ethics* 4, Spinoza argues that ‘A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death’ (E4p67).¹ Spinoza’s argument for this claim depends on his view of imagination, reason, and *scientia intuitiva* and on his notion of *conatus*. We can reconstruct his position as follows. All things strive to persevere in existing (E3p6). As a matter of course any mind thus strives to imagine things that enhance its body’s power to persevere in existing and to repel the idea of anything destructive (E3p12–13). To the extent that our efforts at self-preservation are predominantly imaginative, they are insufficiently powerful to moderate our reactions to forces that affect us or to enable us to forge stable bonds with others who may help us. Just this limited power explains what Spinoza calls our servitude. Imaginative thinking, which produces our only (and in fact inadequate) idea of the ‘duration of our Body’ (E2p30), moreover models nature temporally, giving us a sense of things as present (E2p17s) and a picture of nature as a series of past and future contingencies (E2p44s, 4p62s).² Unpleasant as it may be, minds in the grip of imagination are vulnerable to being pushed to fearful images of their demise. Hence, they think of and meditate on death.³ So much in the common order of nature can provide *memento mori*.

The free person of E4p67 is in contrast a rational person, and to be rational means to be active rather than passive and oriented by necessity rather than contingency. Spinozan reason by its very nature operates with ‘common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things’ (E2p40s2) and comprehends things

¹ In Spinoza citations, E = *Ethics* (d = definition; ax = axiom; p = proposition; dem = demonstration; c = corollary; s = scholium; pref = preface; app = appendix); CM = *Metaphysical Thoughts*; TTP = *Theological-Political Treatise*; TP = *Political Treatise*; L = Letter; G = Gebhardt’s *Spinoza Opera* (4 vol.). English translations are Edwin Curley’s from Spinoza 1985 and 2016. For the TTP, I follow Curley’s adoption of Bruder’s paragraph numbering and give Gebhardt’s pagination. Although Gebhardt’s presentation of the TTP and *Ethics* are superseded by volumes III–IV of Spinoza 2009, under the general direction of Pierre-François Moreau, his edition remains a reference point.

² Letter XII calls measure, time, and number as ‘nothing but modes of thinking, or, better [*sed potius*] imagining’ (Giv 57).

³ Cf. TTP V.22 (Giii 74) and TP V.6.

'without any relation to time, but [rather] *sub specie aeternitatis*' (E2p44c2).⁴ E5p29 crisply articulates the difference between the temporality of imagination and the eternal viewpoint of reason and intellect: 'Whatever the Mind understands *sub specie aeternitatis*, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the Body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body's essence *sub specie aeternitatis*.' E5p38 shows the implications for destructive affects and the fear of death: 'the more the Mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the less it is acted on by affects that are evil, and the less it fears death'.⁵ Simply put, free people do not meditate on death because they cannot: their minds are otherwise occupied.⁶ If we are not thinking of death, it can have, as an author well known to Spinoza said, no sting.⁷ To the extent, then, that we are rational and free, death is a non-issue. Indeed, to the extent that we are able to meditate on life *sub specie aeternitatis*, we actually experience joy, love (E5p20s, p32c), eternity (E5p23s), and 'the greatest satisfaction of the Mind' (E5p27).

Reading these arguments, no doubt more than a few readers have sighed, 'If only...' Spinoza's vision is inspiring; would that we could achieve it. Spinoza's insistence that reason and intuition develop through cultivation and in conducive environments is a sobering reality.⁸ His analysis of human individuals and communities as exceedingly small forces in nature can further dampen our aspirations. We are 'infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes' (E4p3), such that no human being can 'undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause' (E4p4). We may to some extent become rational and even intuitive, but our limited power suggests that returning to imagination (E2p17s, 29s) and sad passions (E3p11, 4p4c) is inevitable. Becoming rational and free is an ongoing project, with advances and regresses, successes and failures. If, *per impossibile*, there were individuals or communities unaffected by more powerful forces in their environments, they would be free of inadequate ideas and passive affects. They

⁴ E.g. E3p3, p3c; E4p62dem: 'Whatever the Mind conceives under the guidance of reason, it conceives under the same aspect of eternity or necessity [*aeternitas, seu necessitate species*] (by 2p44c2) and is affected with the same certainty (by 2p43 and p43s).'

⁵ Cf. E3p18s2, E4p47s, and TTP XVI.32 'The only free person is the one who lives wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason alone' (Giii 194). TP II.11 further clarifies the idea of degrees of rational guidance and freedom.

⁶ *Scientia intuitiva*, the third kind of knowing, involves 'adequate ideas of the essences of things' (E2p40s2) and takes place 'without relation to the Body', i.e. without relation to time and duration (E5p40s).

⁷ I Corinthians 15:55. Garber 2005 reads Spinoza's discussions of death and the eternity of the mind as efforts to free us from fear.

⁸ Spinoza denies that that anyone is born rational or intuitive. We are 'born ignorant of the causes of things' (E1app Gii 78). TTP XVI.7 is stronger: 'Everyone is born ignorant of everything' (Giii 190). E4p68 and p68s, which presume the identification of freedom and reason, repeat the point. The proposition runs, 'If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free.' The scholium immediately rejects the proposition: 'It is evident... that the hypothesis of this proposition is false.'

would experience only and always 'absolute affirmation of existence' (E1p7s) and 'infinite intellectual love' (E5p35). Actual human individuals and communities, however, are constituted by ratios of adequate and inadequate ideas (E3p3, p9dem), that is, by meditations on life and imaginative ideas of death.

Other readers have found Spinoza's account of life and death distinctly wanting. Matson, for example, laments that 'In the end, the difference between life and death reduces to this, that in life one is continually vexed by inadequate ideas, all of which cease at death. We must keep on looking, if our search is for a philosopher who will join us with all his heart in the toast *L'chaim*.'⁹ Despite Spinoza's condemnation of asceticism as a 'sad and savage superstition' and his praise of pleasure and beauty (E4p45s), Matson finds only the offer of a Stoic waiting room for death. Other commentators have found some of the core ideas relevant to Spinoza's account of reason, freedom, and therefore life, such as adequate knowledge and adequate causation, highly problematic in view of the relative or absolute difficulty of achieving them.¹⁰ Freedom, in particular, as the most excellent form of life, has come in for substantial critique as unachievable.¹¹ For yet other readers, Spinoza's claim that destruction can come only from external causes makes his account of death, particularly death by suicide, incoherent, and in any case the literature offers multiple, incompatible readings.¹²

But what precisely are the life and death to which Spinoza refers? The aims of the present paper are to clarify these terms in the *Ethics* and to assess the cogency of Spinoza's position. Since the *Ethics* is related in complex ways to Spinoza's other works, I shall refer to them along the way. Letter 32 in particular will play a crucial role in clarifying Spinoza's account of how extended things cohere and his analysis of how we differentiate individuals. Along the way of clarifying Spinoza's views, I shall attempt to answer his critics, showing first that Spinoza envisions the prospect of an increasingly rational and joyful life, and emphasizing second that he envisions adequate knowledge and freedom in relative rather than absolute terms. The most serious and interesting problem for Spinoza, in my view, is his claim that death comes from outside (E3p4), which appears to conflict with his metaphysical and physical views.

My analysis unfolds in five parts. Section 1, 'Life as *potentia*', traces Spinoza's view of life, from God's life in the early *Cogitata Metaphysica* II.6 to the *Ethics*,

⁹ Matson 1977, 415.

¹⁰ Garber memorably calls Spinoza's doctrine of adequate ideas 'extremely intricate, rather technical, and perhaps not altogether coherent' (Garber 2005, 107). Della Rocca 1995 questions whether human knowers have adequate ideas (183, n.29); subsequently he accepts a scalar construal of adequacy (Della Rocca 2008). Marshall admits adequate ideas of God and infinite modes but not adequate ideas of finite modes (2008). Kisner endorses modified adequacy for human knowers (2010, 41–45).

¹¹ Garber characterizes Spinozan freedom as unrealistic (2005, 203–204). Youpa regards it as unattainable (Youpa 2010, 66). Kisner (2010, 101) considers Spinozan freedom à la E4p67 confused. Marshall identifies freedom with adequate causation (2013). My view accords with Nadler 2015, which depicts Spinozan liberation as difficult but achievable to some degree.

¹² E.g. Bennett 1984; Gabhardt 1999; Miller 2005; Nadler 2016; Grey 2017.

where *potentia* emerges as the primary term and *vita* is reserved for singular things. Section 1 concludes with a consideration of Spinozan singular things as determinate expressions of *potentia* and Spinozan life as their striving to persevere in existing.

Section 2, 'Living bodies', considers the lives of natural and social bodies.¹³ Spinoza characterizes extended individuals in terms of *rationes* of motion and rest communicated among parts. Spinozan *rationes* are stable but somewhat flexible organizational patterns through which bodies hang together and perpetuate themselves. Minimally speaking, embodied life is self-perpetuation with just enough power to endure affections, regenerate one's *ratio*, and affect other bodies. More robustly, embodied life involves increasing one's power to express one's *ratio*.¹⁴ Spinoza's Adam represents the former; successful human development, represented by the sage, shows us the latter.

Section 3, 'Death *sub attributo extensionis*', explores Spinoza's argument that destruction comes from external causes (E3p4) and his specific definition of the death of the body as the destruction of an individual's *ratio* and rearrangement of its parts into an incompatible *ratio* (E4p39s). E4p39s also introduces the idea of corpse-less death, which provides the occasion to consider the flexibility and complexity of an individual's *ratio* or nature. Spinoza's insistence that conversion is the rule in nature raises the question of how to determine the point at which elasticity turns to destruction.

Section 4 examines life and death *sub attributo cogitationis*. What we would call 'the life of the mind', Spinoza calls the mind's power of understanding. As Spinoza argues in E4p24, 'Acting, living, and preserving our being' 'signify the same thing' and all depend on understanding (E4p24). Death requires more explanation. In one sense, since the mind is the idea of an actually existing human body, decomposition of the body is decomposition of the mind. In another sense, the essence of the mind is, qua essence, eternal—the same is true of the essence of the body—and, to the extent that the mind knows its essence formally, the mind is eternal. Spinoza uses idioms related to death with respect to imagination and affects. I argue that these deaths are best understood as shifts in cognition and the quality of experience.

To conclude, Section 5 returns to destruction by external causes. To the extent that talk of internality and externality presumes or implies really separate and discrete finite things, it is incompatible with Spinoza's understanding of nature as expressed in, among other places, E1p28, E2lemm3, and the critique of free will. As Deleuze remarks, 'An animal, a thing, is never separable from its relations with

¹³ With a few exceptions, such as Jonas 1965, Spinoza's biology has not received much attention in Anglophone scholarship. In French, Andraut 2014 is a rich study of bodily vitality in Spinoza, Leibniz, and surrounding figures. Andraut 2019 specifically reconstructs Spinoza's medical knowledge and so sheds considerable light on the elements of physiology visible in such familiar texts as Letter XXXII.

¹⁴ I consider this same issue from a different perspective in Klein 2020.

the world. The interior is only a selected interior and the exterior, a projected exterior.¹⁵ Letter XXXII enables us to see selection and projection as imaginative operations and so returns us to the death or cessation of an individual—myself or another—as an imaginative idea. It thus returns us to Spinoza’s insistence on the difference between imagining and understanding and to his suggestion of a path from one to the other.

1 Life as *potentia*

Ethics I presents Spinoza’s central ways of thinking about substance or God or, as E4pref has it, Nature. Many characteristics of Spinoza’s God echo traditional metaphysical-theological notions, which Spinoza transposes, often with significant modifications, into his own distinctive philosophical framework. By the time Spinoza is finished with terms like cause or freedom, no more conventional thinker could possibly be satisfied. Indeed, his contemporaries were not satisfied at all, and denounced his revision and (ab)use of the philosophical lexicon.¹⁶ In the *Ethics*, one traditional attribute of God noticeably escapes Spinoza’s strategy of re-interpretation and re-appropriation: life. Spinoza’s exclusion of this perhaps especially anthropomorphic item is of a piece with his continuous and scathing critique of all anthropomorphic depictions of God. Nor can the association of life with religiously inspired discussions of eternal life been much of an enticement to reclaim the idea.¹⁷ That said, Spinoza was not averse to the idea of divine life in his earliest published work, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, which appeared as an appendix to his presentation of Descartes’ *Principia philosophiae*. While the *Cogitata Metaphysica* is mostly a critical examination of Scholastic and Cartesian views, Spinoza does at times offer his own view directly. Divine life is such a case, and both historical review and philosophical refashioning figure in the discussion.

A note at the beginning of Balling’s Dutch version of *Cogitata Metaphysica* II announces Spinoza’s intention to establish how ‘God’s existence differs entirely from the existence of created things’ (G1 249/Ci 315). Chapter II.6, ‘Of God’s Life’, is a pivotal part of the plan. Spinoza first reviews ‘the opinion of the Peripatetics’, which he characterizes as confused but declines to refute in detail, noting that he prefers to take it upon himself to explain ‘what is denoted philosophically’ by ‘life’. Speaking in his own name, Spinoza defines life as the force of persevering in existence:

¹⁵ Deleuze 1988, 125.

¹⁶ Laerke 2014.

¹⁷ E5p34s dismisses ‘the common opinion of men’ who confuse the eternity of the mind with post-mortem duration and suppose that imagination and memory remain after death. E5p41s calls the idea of an afterlife and the attendant ideas of reward and punishment to come ‘absurd’ and ‘hardly worth mentioning’.

We understand by *life* the force through which things persevere in their being [*nos per vitam intelligimus vim, per quam res in suo esse perseverant*]. And because that force is different from the things themselves, we say properly that things themselves have life [*habere vitam*]. But the power by which God perseveres in his being is nothing but his essence, so they speak best of all who call God life [*Vis autem, qua Deus in suo esse perseverat, nihil praeter ejus essentiam, unde optime loquuntur, qui Deum vitam vocant*]. Some Theologians think it was for this reason, i.e. that God is life [*Deus sit vita*], and is not distinguished from life, that the Jews, when they swore, said *chay yehovah*, living Jehovah [*vivus Jehovah*], as Joseph, when he swore by the life of the Pharaoh, said *chey phar'oh* [*vita Pharaonis*].

Spinoza's dismissal of unnamed 'Peripatetics' aside, the discussion of life is borrowed nearly verbatim from Maimonides. Like his medieval predecessor, Spinoza argues that pharaoh and pharaoh's life are differentiable, but God and God's living are one and the same.¹⁸ Where we can distinguish the essence and the existence of the pharaoh, such that the pharaoh *has* life from a source that 'is different', God's essence and existence are indistinguishable, such that God *is living*, and there is no otherness, exteriority, or composition. In the idiom of the *Ethics*, God's essence, like God's life, is to exist (E1d1, 1p7, 1p11, 1p20), but the pharaoh exists through a cause outside human nature itself (E1p8s2, p24, p33s1). As becomes clear later, Spinoza cannot unambiguously speak in a Maimonidean voice. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's embrace of the decidedly heterodox (to Aristotelians) phrase *causa sui* (E1d1), not to mention his rejection of creation (E1p8s2) and affirmation of a single order of causation (E1p25s), mark distance from Maimonides, but the idea of a force of persevering in existence and the idea of things whose existence is not necessary *per se* but only *in alio* remain.¹⁹ Spinoza's relation to Maimonides in the TTP is, moreover, formidably complex.

In the *Ethics*, God's power (*potentia*) replaces God's life. Spinoza presents God as having 'an absolutely infinite power of existing' (E1p11s), and he subsequently identifies God's power with God's essence: 'God's power is his essence itself' (E1p34).²⁰ Everything that exists, exists in God (E1p15), and God's infinite power is, moreover, infinitely productive, such that infinitely many things follow in infinitely many ways (E1p16). God is thus the efficient cause of both the essence and the existence of things (E1p25), or, in other words, 'particular things are nothing but the affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes

¹⁸ Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, Foundations of the Law II:10, Eight Chapters VIII, and *Guide of the Perplexed* 168.

¹⁹ For different approach to the Maimonides-Spinoza relationship, see Fraenkel 2006.

²⁰ See also E1p17s, which refers to 'God's supreme power, or infinite nature' (Gii 62) and E2p3s, which explicitly recalls 1p34 to identify 'God's power' and 'God's active essence'. See also TTP XVI.3 (Giii 189).

are expressed in certain and determinate ways' (1p25c). Speaking of what follows from God, Spinoza argues that 'whatever exists expresses the nature, or essence of God in a certain and determinate way [*certo ac determinato modo*] (by p25c), i.e. (by p34), whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things' (E1p36dem). In short, a human being's power 'is part of God or Nature's infinite power' (E4p4dem).²¹

Subsequent parts of the *Ethics* expand our understanding of *potentia* by introducing closely related terms for orderly analysis in different realms of inquiry.²² In *Ethics* 2, Spinoza uses force (*vis*) as a synonym for *potentia* in connection with singular things, noting in E2p45s that 'the force by which each [singular thing] perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature'.²³ *Ethics* 3 introduces *conatus*, the striving of any singular thing to persevere in existing, which he explicates as the singular thing's power and essence via propositions from *Ethics* 1 (E3p6–7). *Ethics* 4 links power and essence to human virtue, which Spinoza understands as 'power of bringing about certain things' that can be understood through the laws of human nature (E4d8). Spinoza identifies this active power with reason and adequate ideas (E3p1, p3, 4p24). In the concise formula of E4p52dem, 'man's true power of acting, or virtue, is reason itself (by 3p3)'. Completing the series of expansions of the idea of *potentia*, *Ethics* 5, 'On the Power of the Intellect, or on Human Freedom', rearticulates these links with respect to the third kind of knowing. Spinoza describes *scientia intuitiva* as the most powerful form of knowing (E5p36s). E5p36s also links *scientia intuitiva* with *beatitudo*, and E5p42 identifies *beatitudo* and *virtus*. Thus the concluding pages of the *Ethics* return us via multiple paths to the central idea of power and its expression in and as determinate things.

Potentia does not entirely replace *vita* in the *Ethics*. Where power, force, and essence pertain to all things, and where Spinoza's enigmatic claim in E2p13s that all individuals are to some degree 'animate' is also universal, life refers mainly to human beings and their affairs. The word first appears in E2p49s, in the midst of Spinoza's argument that fantasies of the will and its freedom devastate our capacity for knowledge and action. Spinoza warns the reader to distinguish carefully among 'ideas, images, and words', 'for the sake of speculation, and in order to arrange one's life wisely [*ad vitam sapienter instituendam*]' (Gii 132). In this instance, *vita* points to a 'way of life', not merely to being alive. Spinoza does ultimately relate his account of the best way of living to his account of what human beings are and how they persevere in existing. The first sentence of E3pref directs us to the *hominum vivendi ratio*, which can be understood as both 'the

²¹ Cf. TTP IV.3 (Giii 58).

²² As Renz observes, the *Ethics* 'seeks to map out how specific problems are related to each and thus to determine what kind of knowledge can legitimately be consulted to answer different kinds of questions' (Renz 2018, 21).

²³ E4p60dem and E5pref (Gii 280) use *vis seu potentia*.

human way of living' and 'the *ratio* [or structure] of the living human'. E3p57s plays on *vita* in a similarly double way, speaking of the life with which an individual is content and of life as 'the idea, or soul, of the individual'. In the first sense, E5p10s emphasizes the need for a correct *ratio vivendi*.²⁴ The second sense, which points to the human body as an organized composite, will prove to be especially important in distinguishing life and death. I turn to it in Sections 2 and 3 below. Minds, too, have *rationes*. E3p9, for example, develops the idea of the human mind's *conatus* as the activity or striving of a set of ideas, some adequate and others inadequate. I consider mental *rationes* in Section 4.

Spinoza conceives modes, and therefore singular things, as determinate expressions of the power of God (E1p25c, 2p45s, 4p4dem). As we saw above, E1p11 and p34 identify God's power and essence. In the case of singular things, Spinoza sometimes distinguishes their essences and existence in thought, and he sometimes identifies their essences and existence. These two ways of considering essences depend on grasping the difference between conceiving an essence as formal, in which case we refer only to structure and not to persevering in existence, and conceiving an essence as actual, in which case we refer precisely to persevering in existence.²⁵ Spinoza's familiar claim that the essence of a finite thing does not entail existence but requires a cause for existing exemplifies the formal case, depending as it does upon our ability to distinguish essence and existence in thought. E3p7dem, which concludes with the statement that 'the power, or striving' by which each things 'strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing itself', exemplifies his treatment of the identity of the actual essence with existence. In my view, Spinoza's anti-Platonism requires that the formal essence and the actual essence are the same essence conceived in two ways.²⁶ Thinking about singular things this way enables us to see that to exist as a singular thing is to have sufficient power to persevere in a certain structure or characteristic nature. Any given singular thing exists as a this or a that, and its striving to persevere in existing is evident in a pattern or organization.

Living, the human way of existing, is thus not formless existence or some kind of brute and general power of existence, but instead always the power of existing

²⁴ Cf. the opening of TTP IV, which defines law as a *ratio vivendi* and the title of TTP XIII. *Vera vita*, the characteristic TTP phrase for a life guided by reason, does not figure in the *Ethics*.

²⁵ Spinoza's technical term 'involvement' captures the connection. The essences of existing singular things are comprehended in one of God's attributes and 'involve the existence through which they are said to have duration' (E2p8c).

²⁶ Spinoza's rejection of the post-fourteenth-century metaphysics of real possibility leads him to hold that there are no essences without things, and no things without essences (E2d2, p10s). Nevertheless Spinoza's readers often emphasize either power or essence and intelligibility. For the former, Matheron 1991a and 1991b are exemplary; Laerke 2017 emphasizes the anti-Platonic motivation of this group. See also Nadler 2012. For the latter, Della Rocca 2008 is a classic case for the priority of intelligibility, and Garrett 2018 exemplary. Viljanen's 'dynamic essentialism' (Viljanen 2011, 5) attempts a third way.

indexed to a nature. As will become clear below, Spinoza conceives human beings as variable in two respects, power and structure. *Ethics* 3 conceives our variations in power and the mechanisms that cause them under the heading of affect. Affect proves an especially useful concept because it pertains to human bodies and minds simultaneously. One of Spinoza's signature claims is that both are active and passive (E3d3, p2s, p11s). As we saw in the Introduction, the more imagination organizes our experience of the world, the more passive we are, and the more reason predominates, the more active. The affect of passivity is sadness, that of activity, joy. Elsewhere in the *Ethics*, the idea of perfection does similar work. E1app, for example, instructs us to judge the perfection of things 'solely from their nature and power' (Gii 83), and E4pref indexes assessments of power to a thing's nature:

[W]hen I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. Rather, we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or diminished
(Gii 208–209).²⁷

While all finite things act and are affected, to be more perfect is to have more *potentia agendi*, that is, to be able to express one's power as activity and less subject to determination by others. For the human being, perfection depends on reason and intellect: 'Man's true power of activity, or his virtue, is reason itself' (E4p52), and the third kind of knowing is the most immediate experience of our power as an immanent expression of the power of God or Nature (Ep36s). Let us turn now to variation conceived in terms of structure.

2 Living bodies

While it may at first seem odd to begin with the life of bodies, Spinoza's demonstration that the human mind is the idea of an actually existing body (E2p11,13) and the prominent place accorded to physics in *Ethics* 2 underscore the importance of examining his view of bodies and their liveliness. Moreover,

²⁷ Cf. Letter XXXVI: 'I should like you to note what I said just now about the term imperfection, namely, that it signifies that something is lacking to a thing which pertains to its nature. For example, Extension can be called imperfect only in relation to duration, position, or quantity, because it does not last longer, or does not keep its position, or is not larger. But it will never be called imperfect because it does not think, since its nature, which consists only in extension, that is, in a definite kind of being, requires nothing of that sort' (Giv 185/Cii 30).

Spinoza often proportions mental power to bodily power, as in this passage from E2p13s, just before the so-called 'physical interlude':

in proportion as a Body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly (Gii 97).

What Spinoza suggests here, and follows with a sketch of the elements of a general physics and rudimentary human physiology, he subsequently demonstrates. On the basis of the physics, E2p14 formally argues that 'The human Mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable [*apta*], the more its body can be disposed [*disponi potest*] in a great many ways.' Later Parts of the *Ethics* repeat the argument. E3p11, for example, uses the same strategy to explain how the mind's power of thinking varies: 'The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking.'²⁸ As we shall see shortly, Spinoza reiterates the proportional relation of mind and body in a crucial discussion of life and death at the conclusion of *Ethics* 5.

Spinoza defines body in E2d1: 'By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (see 1p25c).' To be a body is just to be a determined and determining mode under the attribute of extension. Turning to human experience, Spinoza regards it as axiomatic that 'we feel a certain body is affected in many ways' (E2ax4) and that 'We neither feel nor perceive any singular things [NS: or anything of *natura naturata*] except bodies and modes of thinking.' The singular things at issue are defined in E2d7, whose reference to causal power and structure will orient our discussion. It reads:

By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of Individuals so concur in one action together that they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing (E2d7).

Like E2d1, the first sentence of E2d7 recalls E1p25c, emphasizing that singular things exist amidst and in relation to singular things. The second sentence then

²⁸ See also E4p38, E4 App xxvii, and E5p39 and its scholium, which I discuss in detail below. The idea of sameness in E2p7 and p7s underwrites proportionality without violating the E3p2 prohibition on cross-attribute causation.

directs our attention to causal efficacy and internal multiplicity. Far from being atoms, singular things are concurring assemblages of individuals that produce effects. Spinoza's formulation of E2d7 plays on common usage, which treats *res singularis* and *individuum* as synonyms,²⁹ but his distinctive usage emerges in the physics, which introduces *individuum* as a technical term for analysing the *ratio* or organization of composite extended things. Where understanding something as a *res singularis* treats it as the unified cause of an action and makes mention of internal structure, calling it an *individuum* points to its internal structure. Finally, the second sentence also indicates that singularity can be predicated in relative terms and at different scales. If things are one insofar as (*quod si*) they concur, defining the extent and/or the axis of concurrence will demarcate the boundaries of singular thing. In Section 5 below, I consider the problem of demarcating boundaries in Spinoza's physics and metaphysics. Here, I focus on structure and organization as features of bodily life.

Considered from the standpoint of physics, human bodies are complex wholes made up of heterogeneous parts, each of which in turn has its own constituent parts. In Spinoza's idiom, human bodies are composites of composites, and composition has no end: 'The human Body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite' (E2post1). From Spinoza's standpoint, the important issue is that the bodies that constitute an *individuum* such as the human body exhibit structure. They communicate their motions 'in a certain fixed *ratio* of motion and rest':

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 *ratio*, 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 others by this union of bodies

(Gii 99–100/Ci 460).

Spinoza's definition is notably comprehensive, lending itself to aggregates of bodies produced by contiguity and constraint—we can think here of a clump that seems to hang together, a heap or pile-up, or, in politics, a multitude—or to the component parts of a complex whole—as in the finely balanced, delicately interlocking parts of a human body, an ecosystem, or a well-organized *res publica*. Given sufficient agreement or similarity to sustain communication, we can speak of an individual. In all of these cases, the *ratio* dynamically specifies how the

²⁹ Renz 2018 chapter 3 provides an illuminating discussion that contextualizes Spinoza.

elements interact and so defines the individual's unity. Spinoza also calls the individual's *ratio motus et quietus* its *natura* and its *forma* (E2Lemm4–7).³⁰

Beyond the *Ethics*, both the TTP and Letter XXXII add 'law' as synonym for *ratio*.³¹ Letter 32 is particularly helpful insofar as it provides some detail about how communication works. Spinoza describes it as a process of mutual adaptation (*accommodatio*) among the parts of a whole, be it the blood or nature itself. This process of mutual affordance generates coherence (*cohaerentia*) and agreement (*convenientia*):

Now all bodies in nature . . . are surrounded by others, and are determined by one another to existing and producing an effect in a fixed and determinate way, the same *ratio* of motion to rest always being preserved in all of them at once, [that is, in the whole universe]. From this it follows that every body, insofar as it exists modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe, must agree with its whole and must cohere with the remaining bodies [*cum suo toto convenire* & *cum reliquis cohaerere*] (Giv 172–173a/Cii 19–20).

Spinoza's list of individuals in E3p57s includes human beings, horses, fish, and birds. E4p18s introduces human pairs and communities as individuals.³² Thus further examples for thinking about accommodation as a mutual and dynamic process might include the subtle adjustments that occur when lovers embrace or a parent picks up a child, the adaptations carried out in the human biome, or the cooperative functioning of musicians and listeners, whether on the model of the Belcea Quartet, John Zorn's ensembles, or John Cage's *4'33''*. In each case, bodies are affected and affect others as they persevere in existing.

Defined minimally, the living body is composed of accommodating extended parts that cohere according to a stable *ratio*, and it possesses a sufficient degree of power to persevere in existing. That is, the living body is composed of or by, exists among, and encounters other bodies, and it continues its characteristic pattern of motion and rest. Because Spinozan nature does not stand still, the life of the human body is regenerative motion: 'The human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, so to speak, regenerated' (E2post4). Bodily life is measured by the persistence of the *ratio*, which requires the replenishment of parts. Like the power of being mutually accommodating, the need for replenishment also suggests that individuals are to some degree flexible. They admit of

³⁰ Thus Lin 2005 refers to thing's *ratio* as its 'blueprint' or 'architecture', which he defines as a 'coherent, stable, and well-defined relationship, couched in terms of motion and rest, and obtaining between a complex individual's parts' (250–251). Youpa 2003 is also helpful.

³¹ E.g. TTP IV.1–2 on law as the *ratio vivendi* of an individual or group that acts in a fixed and determinate way (Giii 57–58). For a political community, law is determined by human decision.

³² On the contested issue of treating a political bodies as individuals, see Santos Campos 2010 and Sharp 2017. Classic discussions are found in Matheron 1988/1969, especially 346–347, and Moreau 1994, 441–459.

some elasticity and variability below the threshold of destruction, and they must have some reparative capacities. Hunger, sleep, and mild to moderate sicknesses from which an individual recovers seem obvious examples in this regard.³³ Without some tolerable degree of variation and repair, individuals would have no continuity but rather be in constant re-configuration.

But how does preservation work? Most obviously, bodies require other bodies as objects of consumption, as in the case of the foods we integrate into ourselves, or as resources for our use, such as tools and other materials necessary to sustain ourselves. Recalling E2post4, E4p18s emphasizes that 'we can never bring it about that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being, nor live without having dealings with things outside us'. Spinoza thinks that the satisfaction of the requirements for self-preservation can take a predominantly passive or predominantly active cast: we can happen upon sustenance, find that it is offered to us, or arrange to provide it. In broad terms, the first two possibilities are imaginative and unpredictable, resulting in instability; the third possibility depends on our rational efforts, which lend stability. While passive satisfaction does enable us to survive and can increase our power, we are in such circumstances only partial causes and our ideas are inadequate (E3d3, p1). In practical terms, congenial affections are to some degree beneficial, but because we are unable to understand how they bring us joy and how we are part of an order of nature that exceeds us, we are unable either to reliably repeat the beneficial pattern or cope constructively with its absence. Imaginative satisfaction, in other words, can easily turn to dissatisfaction, and imagination by itself provides few tools for managing shifting fortunes and affects. In the worst cases, inadequate ideas can lead to terrible, even mortal, errors and profound misery. Letter XVIII explains how Adam, living only on the basis of imagination, confused poison for food and thereby shortened his life; someone more rational would have understood what to eat to further self-preservation and what to avoid.³⁴ E4p68s similarly emphasizes the baleful consequences of Adam's ignorance. Eating the fruit of the prohibited tree of knowledge of good and evil made him fear death rather than desire to live. The same meal, further, made it impossible for him to realize that Eve 'agreed completely with his nature'. Adam imagined satisfaction but experienced despair.³⁵

If Adam exemplifies the precarious life of the ignorant, E4p45s sketches the flourishing life of the wise, for whom reason enables constructive action on exigencies of living and for whom human limitations prove more bearable.

³³ E3p59s introduces the idea of a change in bodily constitution or structure (*fabrica*) to explain hunger. E3p2 refers to sleep. Given the complexity of human beings, there may also be cases in which changes to a part do not change the ratio of the whole; cf. Matheron 1988/1969, 38–43 and Garrett's critique (Garrett 2018, 305–306).

³⁴ See the parallel discussion at TTP IV.26–27 (Giii 63) and the commentary in Deleuze 1988, 30–43.

³⁵ On Adam's becoming animal, p. 585.

E4p59dem instructs us that 'to act from reason is nothing else but to do what follows from the necessity of our own nature'. E4p25s notes that appropriate sustenance enables the whole body to be 'equally capable of all the things that follow from its nature' and, with it, the mind to be 'equally capable of understanding many things'. E4p45s explains that rational knowledge enables the wise person 'to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink' and to enjoy beauty of all kinds, whether natural or artistic. Unlike Adam, the sage refrains from eating poison and actively pursues what is known to be sustaining and enhancing. E4p45s also indicates that the wise experience some variations in power without being destroyed. The wise need refreshment and restoration, i.e., replenishment. Reason and wisdom thus do not eliminate what we require—our need—but rather enable us to act with regard to it.³⁶ The wise individual neither overindulges, nor falls victim to the 'savage and sad superstition' that prescribes self-denial and suffering. In situations where we experience 'things contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands', the wise person is satisfied by knowing herself to be a 'part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow', that is, by agreement with nature (E4app xxxii). Where Adam's life quickly turned from enjoyment to fear, the wise experience the joy of rationally informed self-preservation. Conceived less minimally, then, human living is the active and actively increasing pursuit of self-preservation under the guidance of reason.

Spinoza's analysis of human development in E5p39s, particularly his account of the difference between life and death, brings the issues considered so far into sharp focus. The scholium draws nature or form together with power, underscores the relationship between mental and bodily capacity, and differentiates between passive and active regeneration. The infant, Spinoza informs us, 'has a Body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes', and 'a Mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things' (E5p39s). Although Spinoza does not cite E2p13s or E2p14 here, his reference to the correlation between the body's capacity to be disposed in many ways with the mind's capacity to perceive many things recalls these antecedents. Where E2p13s stressed that understanding requires a body whose actions 'depend on itself alone', E5p39s considers the infant, whose life depends on 'external causes'. In this respect, E5p39s also picks up a discussion of the child's weak body and mind found in E3p32s. There, Spinoza observes that, far from reasoning for herself and acting on her own nature, the very young child immediately and without resistance receives and imitates the desires and feelings of others. The young child's body, in other words, has sufficient power to absorb impressions without being destroyed, but it lacks the power to reconfigure

³⁶ E5p4s sums up the difference, noting that one and the same necessity can be experienced as a passion or an action: 'all the appetites, or Desires, are passions only insofar as they arise from inadequate Ideas, and are counted as virtues when they are aroused or generated by adequate Ideas'.

affections in active terms and to direct itself. Consequently, the child's relation to others is dependent, mimetic, and imaginative. E5p6s confirms this picture, describing infants as unable to speak, walk, and reason. Children, according to Spinoza, 'live so many years, as it were, unconscious of themselves'. Their existence is, in Spinozan terms, more minimal than robust.

E5p39s contrasts the child who is overwhelmed by external affections, and consequently dies, with the child who lives in a constructive environment. Since we shall consider death in detail below, let us focus here on the living child. The living child, Spinoza explains, can 'change for the better', becoming happy (*felix*) by acquiring a body 'capable of a great many things' and a proportionately capable mind, one 'very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things' (5p39s). Thus, the child begins in a state of weakness and ignorance, knowing 'neither himself, nor God, nor things' and, should affections cease, so would he. The same child can 'become conscious of himself, and of God, and of things' and so become active (E5p42s). Spinoza indexes this change in capacity to the child's nature: 'we strive especially that the infant's Body may be changed, as much as its nature allows and is conducive to it, into another capable of a great many things [*conamur ut Corpus infantiae in aliud, quantum ejus natura patitur, eique conducit, mutetur, quod ad prima aptum sit*] and related to a Mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things' (E5p39s). As the sequence of verbs suggests, in trying to make the infant's body more able, we must attend to what its nature can sustainably undergo and be advantaged by, lest our efforts produce a corpse instead of an adult.³⁷ Edwin Curley's transition of *patitur* as 'allows' and *conduco* with the dative pronoun as 'conducive' captures the sense in this passage that human nature admits some affections as useful but resists others as destructive. Dramatic as the change from infancy to maturity may be, Spinoza conceives it a change in power permitted by and facilitated by, the individual's nature, not a change of nature.

So far, we have been considering natural bodies. Social bodies illustrate what Adam's agreement in nature with Eve and the child's need for supportive adults suggest: our self-preservation requires other bodies not merely instrumentally, in the sense of subordinating them for our use, but also as complementary parts in mutually enhancing wholes. Human beings are too weak to survive alone, and connecting with others increases our power: If 'two individuals of the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one'. The benefits of human connection are in principle unlimited:

³⁷ Another, more associative, way to think about *patitur* and *conduco* in this passage would be to stress that, in order to for undergoing to eventuate in the child's activity, we must affect the body in ways that it can bring together or connect.

Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree [*convenient*] in all things that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind and one Body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all (E4p18s).

Compared to the solitary person, the social body is better able to provide for its needs and withstand or repel threats. A Spinozan human being 'can hardly live a solitary life', and we 'derive, from the society of our fellow men, many more advantages than disadvantages'; 'by helping one another' human beings 'can provide themselves much more easily with what they require', and for 'only by joining forces can [human beings] avoid the dangers that threaten on all sides' (E4p35s). Hence 'The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us the necessity of joining with men' (E4p37s1). The TTP in particular elaborates on the benefits of a social body for matters of security, sustenance, and the pursuit of human perfection. From agriculture and cooking to industry, art, and science, a life 'without an organized community' and 'mutual assistance' is 'wretched and almost brutal' (TTP V.18–20/GIII:73). TP II.15 makes the same point: 'Men can hardly sustain their lives and cultivate their minds without mutual aid.'

Like all bodies and so like human individuals themselves, social individuals are constituted by agreement (*convenientia*) (E4p18s). Spinoza argues that 'the more a thing agrees [*convenit*] with our nature, the more useful or better it is for us' (E4p31c). Given Spinoza's nominalism, perfect agreement is impossible; singulars things may be similar in virtue of commonalities (E4p29), but no two are identical (E3p57). For human beings, durable agreement depends on reason. Indeed, there is 'no singular thing in Nature that is more useful to a man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason' (E4p35c1). As we saw above, reason enables us to act on the necessities of our nature; we keep ourselves together, and increase our power, by knowing what we need. In the case of social bodies, these necessities include social bonds, which reason generates and enhances insofar as it originates in and cultivates what is common, i.e. shareable and joinable (E2p40s1, E4p36). Rational people want for others what they want for themselves (E4p37). Like agreement, reason comes in degrees. Human beings may have relatively more or less (though not, per E4p29, nothing) in common, and their commonalities may be enhanced or diminished. To the extent that individuals are guided by reason—whether they are themselves genuinely rational or are induced to act as if they are rational by laws, practices, institutions, and social imaginaries—they are able to join together in a shared nature and strengthen their bonds. When, in contrast, human beings live by the guidance of imagination, they 'can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions' (E3p33). Hence, they are 'often drawn in different directions (by E4p33) and are contrary to one another (by E4p34)', even 'while they require one another's aid' (E4p37s2). TTP XVI.14

concur: 'By the laws of appetite, everyone is drawn in different directions' (Giii 191).

Without some degree of moderation by reason or, in more dire cases, by threats and force (E4p37s, TTP V.20 Giii 73), imaginative life yields commonalities too weak or abstract for durable and beneficial cohesion. Imaginative life does not, in other words, reliably sustain the processes of accommodation that characterize the agreement obtaining among the parts of a whole that we saw described in Letter XXXII.³⁸ Even the powerful dynamics of affective imitation (E3p27s) occur amidst the ambivalence and vacillations of mind that arise from the complex constitution of the body (E3p17s), the over-determination of images and affects (E2p18s, E3p27-57), and the sheer diversity of human beings and their desires (E3p57). If, moreover, we bear in mind Spinoza's insistence that that no one can completely alienate her natural right (TTP XVII.2 Giii 201), the challenge of establishing a harmonious and stable political *ratio* and thus the corresponding fragility of social bodies come clearly into view.³⁹ Spinoza's analyses in the TTP of the rise and fall of the Hebrew Commonwealth and other states, together with related discussions in the TP, are case studies in the integration and disintegration of social bodies.

3 Death *sub attributo extensionis*

Spinoza argues that destruction comes from exogenous forces: 'No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause' (E3p4). The demonstration presents the proposition as self-evident in view of the fact that a thing's definition 'affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, or it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away'. By way of further explanation, Spinoza suggests that the thing's essence is an internal principle of identification, such that, if we attend to 'only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it' (E3p4dem).⁴⁰ In short, things do not self-destruct, for selfhood by its very nature involves preservation. For the same reason, 'Things are of a contrary nature, i.e. cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other' (E3p5). These propositions develop a point suggested in E1d2, namely, that finite things owe their finitude not to themselves, but to others: 'That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature.'⁴¹ Destruction is nothing if not evidence of finitude. E4p20s, which considers apparent suicides, reasserts the impossibility of self-destruction and

³⁸ E4appvii discusses political accommodation, and E4p70s advises the wise living amongst the ignorant.

³⁹ Cf. E4pp xii-xiii on *ars et vigilantia* and TP VI.3, which defines the political *ars* as the production of *concordia*.

⁴⁰ E4p17s also presents E3p4 as self-evident.

⁴¹ See Section 5.

offers a threefold classification of how external causes might operate. Since 'no one avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature', apparent acts of self-destruction are to be explained as externally coerced action, efforts to respond to coercive force by submitting to a lesser evil to avoid a greater evil, or instances of being overcome by hidden but effective causes.⁴²

Spinoza treats human death in *Ethics* 4, whose sole axiom acknowledges the inevitable destruction of singular things: 'There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed' (E4ax). As we saw in the Introduction, human beings are weak singular things, 'infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes' (E4p3), and consequently vulnerable to destruction, not masters of our fates (E4p4). As much as a Spinozan human being 'follows and obeys the common order of nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires', accommodation is sometimes only partial, resulting in passions (4p4c) and sometimes in alterations of one's nature. Of course, accommodation sometimes proves impossible. Although we strive to avail ourselves of things that dispose the human body 'so that it can be affected in a great many ways' and become capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways' (E4p38), other entities exceed our power to the point of threatening and eventually overcoming our capacity for self-preservation. E4appxxxiii emphasizes that much happens to us 'contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands' because we are an exceedingly finite 'part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow'.

If life is the minimal degree of organized power to be affected in many ways and persevere in existing through regeneration, death is the opposite extreme, a loss of organization and an incapacity to undergo affections. Where life involves hanging together, death is the process of being taken apart and reassembled into something else. In E4p39s, Spinoza defines the death of the body as encounter with

things which bring it about that the human Body's parts acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another bring it about (by the same Definition) that the human Body takes on another form, i.e. (as is known through itself, and as I pointed out at the end of the preface of this Part), that the human Body is destroyed, and hence rendered completely incapable of being affected in many ways.

The definition at issue is the *individuum* in physics. Strictly speaking, death is de- and re-configuration, not absolute annihilation: 'I understand the [human] Body

⁴² TTP 17.104 (Giii 219) gives the example of people so 'worn out by a great calamity or plague' that 'they all preferred death to life'.

to die when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another' (E4p39s).⁴³ 'My' death is the regenerative process of some 'other' body that acquires parts of my body or even my body as a whole for its own preservation. To say that I die amounts to saying that the other body makes it impossible for me to exist at present and my parts are re-distributed to another or other bodies (E3p11s). Death is the expropriation of my parts for an incompatible *conatus*. Where I was, something else is.⁴⁴

If the E4p39s definition of bodily death is fairly straightforward, the remainder of the scholium is decidedly more obscure. In a cryptic, elliptical passage, Spinoza remarks that death need not involve a corpse:

Even though the circulation of the blood is maintained, as well as other [signs] on account of which the Body is thought to be alive—the human Body can nevertheless be changed into another nature entirely different from its own. For no reason compels me to maintain that the Body does not die unless it is changed into a corpse.

If some degree of alteration is consistent with persevering in one's ratio, Spinoza raises the question, 'How much?' and, further, 'In what regard?' As an example of corpse-less death, he gives us the unnamed Spanish Poet, who fell ill and upon recovering could not recognize his own works, appears to have died and become someone else: 'Sometimes a man undergoes such changes that I should hardly have said he was the same man.'⁴⁵ Much depends on the meaning of 'same', and it is difficult to determine the degree of alteration that marks the transformation of one ratio into another, such that the man formerly known as the Spanish Poet is no longer knowable under that description. If illness and recovery represent the elasticity and homeostatic resilience of an individual, an illness severe or systemic enough to alter the individual's defining capacities would seem to bring about a kind of transformation. Here we seem to have the alteration in one's nature to which Spinoza alludes in E4pc. But Spinoza gives us little guidance for determining the boundary between alteration compatible with one's nature and transformation into a different nature. Although the transformations of illness have made the Spanish Poet's history as poet inaccessible—in technical terms, the traces of those events in his body cannot be recalled and reactivated (E2p17–18)—he nevertheless remains alive and remains human. Even had he 'forgotten his native

⁴³ Cf. Letter XXXVI: 'To destroy a thing is to separate it into parts of the same kind so that none of them express the nature of the whole [*rem destruere est illam in ejusmodi partes resolvere, ut nulla earum omnium naturam totius exprimat*]' (Cii 29/Giv 184). E4p37s1 treats animal death.

⁴⁴ Rorty 1987 suggests that my investment in some notion of myself is 'temporary and temporizing' (Rorty 1987, 299), i.e. as I shall argue, anchored in imagination.

⁴⁵ For a different reading of the Spanish Poet, see Monaco 2018.

language' and so become 'a grown-up infant', he would similarly remain alive and remain human. And yet his life would not be fully continuous with his previous life; once a practicing Spanish Poet, the man has assumed a different form of life. Spinoza's idea of corpse-less death seems to acknowledge this situation of shifting identity and to indicate that we can speak of identity at different scales or degrees and in different respects. One can remain a man, but cease to be a poet.

A second enigmatic addition to the scholium introduces human growth and development as a comparison case. If the poet's corpse-less death seems 'incredible', Spinoza invites us to consider the example of the elderly person who cannot believe he was ever an infant. Spinozan elders grasp the continuity of their own history only because they see others develop; lacking introspective awareness, they must observe others and make inferences about themselves, however odd or implausible the inference may seem. Unfortunately for us, the scholium ends abruptly, without a clear conclusion. Citing the need to avoid arousing superstitious speculation, Spinoza offers only an abrupt promise to provide a more systematic explanation of continuity and change in human development later.⁴⁶ E5p39s, which we examined above in Section 2, resumes and resolves the discussion, explaining human development in terms of changes sustainable by the infant's nature, which it contrasts precisely to the production of a corpse and the losses of the Spanish Poet.

Let us consider one more case of corpse-less death, the biblical Adam in E4p68s. Compared to the Spanish Poet, Adam represents an alteration in some ways more extreme. As we saw above, Adam's fateful meal caused him to reject his wife 'who agreed completely with his nature'. Through this same process, Adam became more animal than human. Because 'he believed the lower animals to be like himself', Adam 'began to imitate their affects (see 3p27) and to lose his freedom'. E3p57s and E4p37s1 argue that animals are normally too different from our ratio for us to join with them, but Adam's misperception of likeness altered his ratio, generating non-human affects and undermining his own capacity for activity. Adam's becoming bestial is thus not the production of a corpse, but it is process of becoming other than human. He relinquished what Spinoza elsewhere describes as the capacity to live a human as opposed to an animal life: 'When we say, then, that the best state is one where men pass their lives harmoniously, I mean that they pass a human life, one defined not merely by the circulation of the blood, and other things common to all animals, but mostly by reason, the true virtue and life of the Mind' (TP V.5). The political equivalent of this corpse-less death would be the de- and re-configurations of civil strife and regime change.

⁴⁶ Curley thinks Spinoza was trying to avoid discussing immaterial souls and transmigration. Curley 1985, 569, n.22).

4 Life and death *sub attributo cogitationis*

So much for the life and death of bodies. What about minds? Spinoza uses the expression 'the life of the mind' only once in the *Ethics*: 'No life, then, is rational without understanding, and things are good only insofar as they aid man to enjoy the life of the Mind, which is defined by understanding' (E4app5). As we just saw, the phrase also appears in TP V.5, which contrasts mere animal life with 'the true virtue and life of the Mind'. As we have seen, Spinoza prefers *potentia* to *vita*. Thus, E5pref uses the expression *mentis, seu rationis potentia* (Gii 277) and insists that 'the power of the Mind is defined only by understanding' (*mentis potentia sola intelligentia definitur*) (Gii 280). These early expressions in *Ethics* 5 recall earlier propositions about virtue and draw together central terms in Spinoza's lexicon. In E4p20dem, Spinoza identifies virtue with 'human power itself [*ipsa humana potentia*]'. Almost immediately thereafter, he calls the striving to persevere in existing as the 'first and only foundation of virtue' (p22c) and identifies *conatus intelligendi* as the 'first and only foundation of virtue' (p26dem). Spinoza sums up these results in E4appiv, noting that the best life is the one devoted to perfecting the intellect, i.e. to acquiring intuitive knowledge of God, oneself, and things one can understand. What E4appiv sketches, Part 5 elaborates. There, Spinoza also replaces the idea of the 'life of the mind' with the idea of the intellect as the eternal part of the mind (E5p23, 29, p40c). We 'feel and know that we are eternal' (E5p23s), or, as Spinoza tells us in E5p36s, the third kind of knowing is 'more powerful' than the second kind because the intuiting mind experiences the immanent causal power of God or Nature. Here we very clearly see the connection of power, necessity, and eternity in Spinoza's philosophy.

Thus far, we have examined how Spinoza relates the increasing power, or life, of the mind to the increasing power, or life, of the body. In a curious and somewhat puzzling way, Spinoza's account of increasing one's power of understanding also alludes to death *sub attributo cogitationis*. As in the case of bodies, death in minds is de- and re-configuration. In one sense, since a human mind is nothing but the idea of its actually existing body (E2p11,13), a reshaped body comes with a reshaped mind.⁴⁷ E5p23s is clear: 'Our mind...can be said to endure...only insofar as it involves the actual existence of the body.' There is in addition a second, more subtle, and arguably more important sense of death *sub attributo cogitationis*. As we saw above in the Introduction, Spinoza holds that 'the essence of the Mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas (as we have shown in p3)' (E3p9dem).⁴⁸ Since the mind is its ideas (E2p48s), E3p9 means that

⁴⁷ Cf. Lin 2005, 255–258.

⁴⁸ E2p7s suggests *ratio mentis* on the model of the form of a body. E2p21 argues that the form of the mind is the idea of the mind, but the discussion at E3p9 seems much clearer.

changes in the relative proportions of the constitutive ideas are changes in the essence of the mind. The more a mind is constituted by, or, as Spinoza sometimes says synonymously, is occupied by,⁴⁹ imaginative ideas, the more passive the knower is. The more a mind is constituted by knowledge of the second and third kind, the more active she is (E3d2, p1). In other words, an increasingly active individual is more able to persevere in existing (E4p24), experience her power as part of the power of nature, and feel joy and intellectual love (E5p36s). In *Ethics* 5, Spinoza describes this increase in power in terms of the cessation of passions and the perishing of imagination. Thus corpse-less death figures in cognitive development.

E5p3 presents affective re-configuration as cessation. As we reinterpret images in terms of their constituent causal networks, the active joy of understanding supplants the passions characteristic of imaginative experience: 'An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it' (E5p3). Passions 'cease'—die—when confused and mutilated ideas are rethought as ordered and connected. To be sure, E5p4s emphasizes that our capacity to form clear and distinct ideas of our affects is limited, and E5p20s explains that increasing our power of understanding does not 'absolutely remove' the affects, but rather 'brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the Mind' (E5p20s). Spinoza is also quite explicit that the acquisition of knowledge of the second and third kind neither eradicates nor abolishes the bodily affections that imagination presents. Imaginative ideas really do 'indicate the natural constitution of the Body, or that its power of acting is increased or diminished' (E4p1).⁵⁰ The cessation of imaginative affects—passions—occurs instead in thought, as a shift in the way of thinking about events that actually happen in the body. To some extent, rational individuals experience more joy because they more usefully navigate their environments. Given, however, the weak force of human beings (even as collectives) in nature, not all shifts in thinking will be manifest as more prolonged or more vigorous bodily life.⁵¹ Spinoza thus points beyond our power to optimize durational affairs and toward changes in how we experience what happens to us and what we do.⁵² As the concluding paragraph of E4app suggests, coming to understand events in causal terms that include but extend beyond us attunes us to the order of necessity, true knowledge of which alleviates suffering and provides satisfaction. To the extent that the mind is able to connect the body's affections to

⁴⁹ E.g. E5p39dem.

⁵⁰ See also E5p21, which uses E2p8c and p26 to show that imagining exhibits the actual existence of the body.

⁵¹ Thus, Seneca's adherence to his principles lead to death (4p20s). E4pref also indicates that expressing one's nature and power—what he calls activity—is not equivalent to longevity: 'No singular things can be called more perfect [sc. more real] for having persevered in existing for a longer time. The duration of things cannot be determined from their essence, since the essence of things involves no certain and determinate time of existing' (Gii 209). Youpa 2003 treats this issue at length.

⁵² In Klein 2014 and 2020, I analyse the change as a perspectival shift.

the idea of God, that is, understand them adequately, it rejoices and experiences an uncorruptible love (E5p18, p20s). Where imagination presents bodily events as affections, reason expresses our power of actively engaging the same events.

E5p38s refers to 'the part of the Mind which we have shown perishes with the body', i.e. the imagination, as being 'of no moment in relation to what remains'. Here, too, we encounter the idea of a re-organization in ideas and a different way of thinking about what we experience. In the second and third kinds of knowing, imagination 'perishes' in the sense of being left aside or receding from view as the common notions organize the mind (e.g. E2p29s, 2p38–40s1). As the mind is more extensively occupied by adequate ideas, inadequate ideas are displaced and their power shrinks. Thus 'being of no moment' means being of no relevance. A few key propositions make the differences between imagining and understanding apparent. With respect to imagining, E2p30 argues that 'we can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge [*cognitio*] of the duration of our body'. The reason is that we know our body through its affections, ideas of which are confused insofar as they are isolated in relation to our body alone (E2p28) rather than considered in wider causal networks.⁵³ As we saw in the Introduction, this same imaginative process leads to the idea that things are contingent and corruptible, i.e. natal and mortal (E2p31c). By contrast, reason 'perceives things under a certain species of eternity [*sub quadam aeternitatis specie*]' (E2p44c). Beyond reason, intuition, which apprehends singular things in relation to God, involves understanding 'the very nature of existence', not 'duration, i.e. existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly' (E2p45s). On this issue, E4p62dem, which equates conceiving things *sub specie aeternitatis* with conceiving them *sub specie necessitatis*, provides a crucial clarification.

Considering death *sub attributo cogitationis* also brings us to Spinoza's claims about the eternity of the mind and the sense in which neither life nor death is relevant to eternity. Spinoza introduces the discussion of *scientia intuitiva* by noting in E5p20s that 'it is time to pass to those things which pertain to the Mind's duration without relation to the body'. The deep and perhaps instructive irony of announcing a time to pass beyond time notwithstanding, the remaining propositions concern the eternity of the mind we feel in *scientia intuitiva*. E5p23 argues that, even if the human body is destroyed, there is a sense in which the Mind remains: 'The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal.' This 'something that pertains to the essence of the Mind' (E5p23dem), precisely as eternal—Spinoza is here drawing on, but does not cite, E1d8—is 'neither defined by time nor [has] any relation to time' (5p23s). This 'something' 'expresses the essence of the body *sub specie aeternitatis*', i.e., is a mode of thinking which is eternal and necessary. It is, in

⁵³ Cf. E4p18s: 'If we consider our Mind, our intellect would of course be more imperfect if the Mind were alone and did not understand anything except itself.'

other words, the formal reality of the mind as a mode in the attribute of thought.⁵⁴ Spinoza's provocative claim in E5p23s that the mind 'feels those things that it conceived in the understanding no less than those it has in memory' emphasizes the contrast between the intellectual feeling that 'our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body *sub specie aeternitatis*, is eternal, and that the existence it has cannot be defined through time or explained through duration' and the imaginative sense of existing as endurance through time, which depends on 'the actual existence of the body' (E2p18s). To the extent or degree, then, that we are able to conceive the formal essence of our minds, we feel intellectually that we are eternal.

E5p29 demonstrates what E5p23s suggests: 'Whatever the Mind understands *sub specie aeternitatis*, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the Body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body's essence *sub specie aeternitatis*.' Put more simply, understanding *sub specie aeternitatis* ignores precisely what thinking *sub specie temporis seu durationis* requires. The demonstration is fairly straightforward. Spinoza argues that to conceive the 'present actual existence' of the Body is to locate it in time and measure its duration (E5p21 and 2p26). Since, however, E1d8 and its explanation instruct us that 'eternity cannot be explained by duration', to the extent that the Mind employs the apparatus of duration, it 'does not have the power of conceiving things *sub specie aeternitatis*'. To the extent that we think of things *sub specie aeternitatis*, we think of them as involving 'the eternal and finite essence of God (as we have shown in 2p45 and p45s)' (5p29s), and that eternal and infinite essence of God is 'necessary existence' (E5p30dem). Hence our thinking can be only a meditation on one's life as the power of existing, i.e. on a singular mode as an immanent expression of the power of god or substance or nature (E1p25c, 5p36s). E5p36s further explains that we can know 'how our Mind, with respect to both essence and existence, follows from the divine nature' through either the second kind of knowledge or the third. While what Spinoza calls the 'universal' or rational knowledge of this idea is powerful, the excessive joy and *amor dei intellectualis* the intuitive knower experiences 'when this is inferred from the very essence of a singular thing which we say depends on God' are the very feeling of expressing the power of existing, which is eternal and necessary (E5p36s).

5 Conclusion: the inside and the outside

Thus far, I hope to have explicated Spinoza's senses of life and death and to have defended him against some critics. Against Matson's disappointment, I have

⁵⁴ See also CM II.1: 'Duration cannot in any way pertain to the essences of things. For no one will ever say that the essence of a circle or triangle, insofar as it is an eternal truth, has endured longer now than it has since the time of Adam.'

argued that Spinozan life, understood robustly for human beings as living under the guidance of reason and as *conatus intelligendi*, offers considerable joy. Consideration of the relative, scalar character of Spinoza's claims about knowledge and freedom, exemplified in his 'insofar as' (*quatenus*) and 'the more... the more' (*quamprimus... quamprimus*) formulations, ameliorates concerns that he counsels unachievable goals. Human beings can become more rational and active without becoming absolutely so. These resolutions notwithstanding, Spinoza's insistence on destruction by external forces remains problematic, for it conflicts with his metaphysical and physical affirmation of the causal co-constitution and inter-relation of singular things. In this concluding section, I suggest that our idea of bounded things or easily discernable individuals is imaginative and so provisional. Far from being unreal, it makes possible the very investigation that undermines it.⁵⁵

As we saw, E3p4 argues that 'No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.' Tempting as it might be to suppose that the proposition refers to really discrete individuals whose interior and exterior can be reliably determined, Spinoza's definition of singular things (E2d7) does not instruct us where to draw the boundaries of the causally concurring, complex assemblies. Nor for that matter does he inform us about the point at which accommodation and flexibility end, such that concurrence is transformed into difference and disagreement. By leaving the question of the *termini* of determinate things open, and indeed by specifying that individuals constitute a singular thing to the extent that they concur, E2d7 seems at the very least to defer our wish for clearly bounded individuals. It also indicates that we may predicate singularity at different scales and at different degrees of agreement.⁵⁶ How much and what kind, then, of concurrence need we perceive to discern a singular thing, and what differentiates one singular thing from another? When E3p4dem concludes, 'So while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which destroys it', we need to know what it means to attend 'only to the thing itself, and not to external causes'. This question is all the more urgent in view of the way that the pivotal *conatus* propositions invoke the striving of 'each thing' (E3p6-8).

Returning to E1p28 and E2lemm3, which establish respectively, Spinoza's metaphysical and physical arguments that singular things exist in an infinite and dynamic causal network, complicates the question considerably. According to Spinoza, every singular thing, at whatever level of complexity or integration with other modes, is a determinate expression of the infinite power of nature.

⁵⁵ Oksenberg Rorty makes a similar point: 'The original limited point with which we begin—Hobbesian individuals endeavoring to preserve themselves—is meant both to be undermined *and* to be affirmed (Oksenberg Rorty 1987, 315).

⁵⁶ Sacksteder describes Spinoza's 'sliding scale of individual's' (Sacksteder 1977, 143) and coins the expression 'mid-region beings' (Sacksteder 1985).

As modes, Spinozan singular things are both determined and determining, and the regress of determination is infinite:

Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity (E1p28).⁵⁷

In the case of bodies,

A body which moves or is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another, and that again by another, and so on, to infinity (E2lemm3).

Considering the implications of E1p28 and in view of Spinoza's insistence on necessity in E1p29, Étienne Balibar has introduced the idea of transindividuation to distinguish the dynamic relations of co-constitution in Spinozan nature from an array of discrete, static things.⁵⁸ From a different but complementary perspective, Noa Shein has explicated E1p28 and its echo in E2lemm3 in terms of 'inter-determining relations'. Crucially, Balibar and Shein direct us to see the causal relations described in E1p29 as 'constitutive of the individuation of finite modes rather than describing the interaction between already established finite singular things'.⁵⁹

Shein uses Spinoza's physics to exhibit the constitutive character of causal relations. Given Spinoza's plenum physics, E2lemm3 requires that all motion be understood relationally and hence that bodies be understood as reciprocally involved, i.e. inter-determining. Any given body has its characteristic proportion of motion and rest amidst surrounding bodies, which it is simultaneously affecting and being affected by in the course of its persistence. Surrounding bodies in turn have surrounding bodies, and so on, such that any given body's causal relations occur both proximately and distally. As we saw in Section 2 above, Letter XXXII emphasized both local and larger-scale determination:

⁵⁷ Cf. E5p6dem: 'The Mind understands all things to be necessary (by 1p29), and to be determined by an infinite connection of causes to exist and produce effects (by 1p28).' TTP IV.4 (Giii 58) reiterates the theme. Spinoza's E1ax4 also captures the interconnected, mutually constitutive way singular things exist.

⁵⁸ Balibar 1997. Other helpful commentaries include Ravven 1998 and, Morfino 2006, and Sharp 2011, 21–54.

⁵⁹ Shein 2015, 335 [emphasis original] and 2017.

all bodies are surrounded by others, and are determined by one another to existing and producing an effect in a fixed and determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest always being preserved in all of them at once, [that is, in the whole universe]. From this it follows that every body, insofar as it exists modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe, must agree with its whole and must cohere with the remaining bodies (Giv 172–3a/Cii 19).

If no body is an island, with a clear line of demarcation and empty space between itself and others, it is hard to discern the boundary between its ‘inside’ and its ‘outside’, that is, between a thing and its causal environment. Indeed, the ‘internal’ motions of a thing and the ‘external’ motion of its others are one and the same motion, understood from different perspectives, not two motions. Thus, it seems we would search in vain for an intellectual idea of an ontologically discrete separate finite thing.⁶⁰ Letter XXXII acknowledges, further, that we can move from considering any given body as a whole to considering all bodies in their agreement as parts of a single whole, the universe. If one and the same thing can be conceived as a part and a whole, what explains the different scales at which we predicate part-whole relations?

Here the principal image of Letter XXXII, the ‘worm in the blood’, provides an answer. The Spinozan worm’s location and restricted cognitive power model how we live in our ‘part of the universe’ (Giv171a/Cii19). Just as the worm sees a collection of different particles and their collisions but cannot grasp them as parts integrated into the nature of the blood as a whole, nor conceive anything outside the blood into which it is integrated as a part, so too human knowers take parts for wholes. We perceive—myopically—local discrepancy rather than more expansive relations of agreement and accommodation, and our perceptions of disagreement produce ideas of distinct wholes. If agreements signal parthood, disagreement signals wholeness. Insofar as things ‘disagree with one another [*inter se discrepant*], to that extent each forms in our Mind an idea distinct from the others, and therefore it is considered as a whole and not as a part’ (Giv 170a/Cii 18). Perceptions of disagreement themselves reflect cognitive limitation. The worm ‘is capable of distinguishing’ particles of the blood and ‘capable of observing by reason how each particle, when it encounters another, either bounces back, or communicates a part of its motion, etc.’, but its limited observations and its minimal power of making distinctions are not sufficient to generate knowledge. The worm ‘could not know [*nec scire posset*] how all the parts of the blood are

⁶⁰ Balibar comments: ‘Spinoza never actually says that anyone whose actions can be explained by his own or his sole nature (*per solam suam naturam intelligi*) is acting solely, or separately from the others’ (1997, 24). Armstrong 2009 concurs and explores Spinoza as a theorist of relational autonomy; see also Tucker 2019. Still, many commentators find discrete individuals, e.g. Garrett (1994), Della Rocca (2008, 187) and (Viljanen 2011, 155).

regulated by the universal nature of the blood, and compelled to accommodate themselves to one another' (Giv 171a/Cii 19). The worm's experience is a cautionary tale: much as human abilities surpass the worm's, they are not unlimited. E1p33s1, for example, attributes the idea of contingency or possibility to 'a defect of our knowledge' according to which 'the order of causes is hidden to us'. TTP IV.4 notes that, given our ignorance 'of how things are really ordered and connected', considerations of practicality make it 'better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible' (Giii 58).

In denying the worm knowledge, Letter XXXII indicates that ideas of the boundaries of things, as marks of the limits at which we can see the integration of things and differentiate 'internal' agreement from disagreement with some 'external' force, originate in imagination. Plainly put, they are artefacts of our position and powers. Turning back to the *Ethics*, the idea of free will is the example *par excellence* of imagined disconnection and self-enclosure.⁶¹ Spinoza rejects free will precisely as a fantasy of causal independence, i.e. detachment and boundedness, rather than inter-determination: 'men are deceived in that they think themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined' (E5p35s; see also E1App).⁶² At a lesser extreme, however, ideas of boundaries and distinctions between self and another can—but may not always—be clues for self-preservation and for connection. To the extent that I discern my own characteristic *ratio*, even inadequately, I can strive to act on what I take to be the requirements of my *ratio*. Looked at the other way round, my interactions can prod me to begin to discern, even inadequately, my *ratio*. If, in short, my path in nature has been for whatever reason relatively constructive, more congenial than disagreeable, those experiences and ideas of them may provide pointers to comprehending my nature and so to finding compatible others. Thus, the imaginative selections and projections that constitute separation can initiate useful commonality.

More specifically, while a collection of fortunate affections and connections does not automatically produce action, the commonality I can experience in encounters with congenial others and the way I manage to avoid dangers can enable the emergence of reason. Thus, even an imaginative idea of myself can be the beginning of living according to reason and not merely the source of

⁶¹ E1p15s also suggests that the idea of discrete parts of substance is imaginative (Ci 423–425/Gii 59–60). While I cannot adequately defend the claim here, it is crucial to recognize that imaginative ideas are no less real than intellectual ideas. That they are incommensurable need not lead us to regard imaginative ideas as merely illusory.

⁶² Cf. E3pref and TP I.2 for Spinoza's rejection of conceiving a human being as an *imperium in imperio*. Letter LVIII (Giv 266) and TP II.7 differentiate divine and human freedom.

destructive fantasies like free will.⁶³ My local awareness and my local self-image are, from this perspective, at the origin of my ability to understand myself as a mode among modes and an expression of the power of substance. In the presence of a constructive affective regime, imaginative ideas are starting points that may lead to reason, which may give rise to *amor dei intellectualis* and an intuitive apprehension of the relation of singular things to God (E2p40s2, 5p36, 5p36s; TTP IV.11 Giii 60).

From the standpoint of considering life and death, the connection to living is manifest most strongly in Spinoza's insistence that knowledge of the third kind is 'more powerful' (*potior*) than knowledge of the second kind (E5p36s). Given Spinoza's identification of life with *potentia*, we can say that *scientia intuitiva* is the most vivacious experience, an immediate apprehension of how our mind 'follows from the divine nature and continually depends on God' (E5p36s). Reason too, is indisputably powerful, even without leading to *scientia intuitiva*. The mind's actions 'arise from adequate ideas' (E3p3), and 'acting, living, and preserving our being' 'signify the same thing' (E4p24). Thus, the Spinozan free person 'thinks of nothing less than of death' and instead meditates on life, experiencing the power of nature as joy and love rather than fear and sadness. As all readers of Spinoza know, any human mind is an idea of its body (E2p11, 13), and the more the body can undergo, the more the mind can know and do (E2p14, 3p11, 4p38, 5p39). Hence 'we strive especially that the infant's Body may change (as much as its nature allows and assists) into another, capable of a great many things and related to a Mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things' (E5p39s). In this light, the lives and deaths of natural and social bodies, are as relevant and interesting as the lives of minds. They provide clear illustrations of *rationes* as stable but flexible patterns of communicating force and of the processes of de- and re-configuration. Spinoza's analysis of death is perhaps particularly provocative in bringing to light the way he conceives individuation and identity in terms of scales, degrees, and respects.⁶⁴

⁶³ James 2011 and 2012 provide the most sustained analysis of how imaginative regimes may lead to living according to the guidance of reason and actually coming to understand. Deleuze's discussion of more and less general common notions is helpful on this point (Deleuze 1990, 275–279).

⁶⁴ I thank the participants in the original London conference and subsequent readers, Susan James, Noa Shein, Mogens Laerke, and Michael Della Rocca foremost among them, for their immensely helpful comments on this essay.