



Spinoza: Practical Philosophy

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Translated by Robert Hurley



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Chapter Six

SPINOZA AND US

“Spinoza and us”—this phrase could mean many things, but among other things, it means “us in the middle of Spinoza.” To try to perceive and to understand Spinoza by way of the middle. Generally one begins with the first principle of a philosopher. But what counts is also the third, the fourth, or the fifth principle. Everyone knows the first principle of Spinoza: one substance for all the attributes. But we also know the third, fourth, or fifth principle: one Nature for all bodies, one Nature for all individuals, a Nature that is itself an individual varying in an infinite number of ways. What is involved is no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated. This plane of immanence or consistency is a plan, but not in the sense of a mental design, a project, a program; it is a plan in the geometric sense: a section, an intersection, a diagram.* Thus, to be in the middle of Spinoza is to be on this modal plane, or rather to install oneself on this plane—which implies a mode of living, a way of life. What is this plane and how does one construct it? For at the same it is fully a plane

* The French word *plan*, used by the author throughout this chapter, covers virtually all the meanings of the English “plan” and “plane.” To preserve the major contrast that Deleuze sets up here, between *plan d'immanence ou de consistance* and *plan de transcendance ou d'organisation*, I use “plane” for the first term, where the meaning is, roughly, a conceptual-affective continuum, and “plan” for the second term. The reader should also keep in mind that “plan” has the meaning of “map” in English as well. [trans. note]

of immanence, and yet it has to be constructed if one is to live in a Spinozist manner.

How does Spinoza define a body? A body, of whatever kind, is defined by Spinoza in two simultaneous ways. In the first place, a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality. These two propositions appear to be very simple; one is kinetic and the other, dynamic. But if one truly installs oneself in the midst of these propositions, if one lives them, things are much more complicated and one finds that one is a Spinozist before having understood why.

Thus, the kinetic proposition tells us that a body is defined by relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed between particles. That is, it is not defined by a form or by functions. Global form, specific form, and organic functions depend on relations of speed and slowness. Even the development of a form, the course of development of a form, depends on these relations, and not the reverse. The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence. In the same way, a musical form will depend on a complex relation between speeds and slownesses of sound particles. It is not just a matter of music but of how to live: it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms.

The second proposition concerning bodies refers us to the capacity for affecting and being affected. You will not define a body (or a mind) by its form, nor by its organs or functions, and neither will you define it as a substance or a subject. Every reader of Spinoza knows that for him bodies and minds are not sub-

stances or subjects, but modes. It is not enough, however, merely to think this theoretically. For, concretely, a mode is a complex relation of speed and slowness, in the body but also in thought, and it is a capacity for affecting or being affected, pertaining to the body or to thought. Concretely, if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change. You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable. Affective capacity, with a maximum threshold and a minimum threshold, is a constant notion in Spinoza. Take any animal and make a list of affects, in any order. Children know how to do this: Little Hans, in the case reported by Freud, makes a list of affects of a draft horse pulling a cart in a city (to be proud, to have blinders, to go fast, to pull a heavy load, to collapse, to be whipped, to kick up a racket, etc.). For example: there are greater differences between a plow horse or draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and a plow horse. This is because the racehorse and the plow horse do not have the same affects nor the same capacity for being affected; the plow horse has affects in common rather with the ox.

It should be clear that the plane of immanence, the plane of Nature that distributes affects, does not make any distinction at all between things that might be called natural and things that might be called artificial. Artifice is fully a part of Nature, since each thing, on the immanent plane of Nature, is defined by the arrangements of motions and affects into which it enters, whether these arrangements are artificial or natural. Long after Spinoza, biologists and naturalists will try to describe animal worlds defined by affects and capacities for affecting and being affected. For example, J. von Uexküll will do this for the tick, an animal that sucks the blood of mammals. He will define this animal by three affects: the first has to do with light (climb to the top of a branch); the second is olfactive (let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch); and the third is thermal (seek the area without fur, the warmest spot). A world with only three affects, in the midst of all that goes on in the immense for-

est. An optimal threshold and a pessimal threshold in the capacity for being affected: the gorged tick that will die, and the tick capable of fasting for a very long time.¹ Such studies as this, which define bodies, animals, or humans by the affects they are capable of, founded what is today called *ethology*. The approach is no less valid for us, for human beings, than for animals, because no one knows ahead of time the affects one is capable of; it is a long affair of experimentation, requiring a lasting prudence, a Spinozan wisdom that implies the construction of a plane of immanence or consistency. Spinoza's ethics has nothing to do with a morality; he conceives it as an ethology, that is, as a composition of fast and slow speeds, of capacities for affecting and being affected on this plane of immanence. That is why Spinoza calls out to us in the way he does: you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination.

Ethology is first of all the study of the relations of speed and slowness, of the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterize each thing. For each thing these relations and capacities have an amplitude, thresholds (maximum and minimum), and variations or transformations that are peculiar to them. And they select, in the world or in Nature, that which corresponds to the thing; that is, they select what affects or is affected by the thing, what moves it or is moved by it. For example, given an animal, what is this animal unaffected by in the infinite world? What does it react to positively or negatively? What are its nutrients and its poisons? What does it "take" in its world? Every point has its counterpoints: the plant and the rain, the spider and the fly. So an animal, a thing, is never separable from its relations with the world. The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior. The speed or slowness of metabolisms, perceptions, actions, and reactions link together to constitute a particular individual in the world.

Further, there is also the way in which these relations of speed

1. J. von Uexküll, *Mondes animaux et monde humain*, Gonthier.

and slowness are realized according to circumstances, and the way in which these capacities for being affected are filled. For they always are, but in different ways, depending on whether the present affects threaten the thing (diminish its power, slow it down, reduce it to the minimum), or strengthen, accelerate, and increase it: poison or food?—with all the complications, since a poison can be a food for part of the thing considered.

Lastly, ethology studies the compositions of relations or capacities between different things. This is another aspect of the matter, distinct from the preceding ones. Heretofore it was only a question of knowing how a particular thing can decompose other things by giving them a relation that is consistent with one of its own, or, on the contrary, how it risks being decomposed by other things. But now it is a question of knowing whether relations (and which ones?) can compound directly to form a new, more “extensive” relation, or whether capacities can compound directly to constitute a more “intense” capacity or power. It is no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities. How do individuals enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum? How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other’s own relations and world? And in this regard, what are the different types of sociabilities, for example? What is the difference between the society of human beings and the community of rational beings? . . . Now we are concerned, not with a relation of point to counterpoint, nor with the selection of a world, but with a symphony of Nature, the composition of a world that is increasingly wide and intense. In what order and in what manner will the powers, speeds, and slownesses be composed?

A plane of musical composition, a plane of Nature, insofar as the latter is the fullest and most intense Individual, with parts that vary in an infinity of ways. Uexküll, one of the main founders of ethology, is a Spinozist when first he defines the melodic lines or contrapuntal relations that correspond to each thing, and then describes a symphony as an immanent higher unity that takes on a breadth and fullness (“natural composi-

tion”). This musical composition comes into play throughout the *Ethics*, constituting it as one and the same Individual whose relations of speed and slowness do not cease to vary, successively and simultaneously. Successively: we have seen how the different parts of the *Ethics* are assigned changing relatively velocities, until the absolute velocity of thought is reached in the third kind of knowledge. And simultaneously: the propositions and the scholia do not proceed at the same pace, but compose two movements that intercross. The *Ethics*, a composition whose parts are all carried forward by the greatest velocity, in the fullest movement. In a very fine text, Lagneau spoke of this velocity and amplitude, which caused him to compare the *Ethics* to a musical work: a lightning “speed of thought,” a “wide-ranging power,” a “capacity for discerning in a single act the relationship of the greatest possible number of thoughts.”²

In short, if we are Spinozists we will not define a thing by its form, nor by its organs and its functions, nor as a substance or a subject. Borrowing terms from the Middle Ages, or from geography, we will define it by *longitude* and *latitude*. A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity. We call longitude of a body the set of relations of speed and slowness, of motion and rest, between particles that compose it from this point of view, that is, between *unformed elements*.³ We call latitude the set of affects that occupy a body at each moment, that is, the intensive states of an *anonymous force* (force for existing, capacity for

2. Jules Lagneau, *Célèbres leçons et fragments*, 2nd ed., P.U.F., 1964, pp. 67–68. This is one of the great texts on Spinoza. Similarly, Romain Rolland, when he speaks of the velocity of thought and the musical order in Spinoza: *Empédocle d’Agrigente, suivi de l’Eclair de Spinoza*, Ed. du Sablier, 1931. As a matter of fact, the theme of a velocity of thought greater than any given velocity can be found in Empedocles, Democritus, or Epicurus.

3. Cf. what Spinoza calls “the simplest bodies.” They have neither number nor form nor figure, but are infinitely small and always exist as infinities. The only bodies having a form are the composite bodies, to which the simple bodies belong according to a particular relation.

being affected). In this way we construct the map of a body. The longitudes and latitudes together constitute Nature, the plane of immanence or consistency, which is always variable and is constantly being altered, composed and recomposed, by individuals and collectivities.

There are two very contrary conceptions of the word "plan," or of the idea of a plan, even if these two conceptions blend into one another and we go from one to the other imperceptibly. Any organization that comes from above and refers to a transcendence, be it a hidden one, can be called a theological plan: a design in the mind of a god, but also an evolution in the supposed depths of nature, or a society's organization of power. A plan of this type can be structural or genetic, and both at the same time. It always involves forms and their developments, subjects and their formations. Development of forms and formation of subjects: this is the basic feature of this first type of plan. Thus, it is a plan of organization or development. Whatever one may say, then, it will always be a plan of transcendence that directs forms as well as subjects, and that stays hidden, that is never given, that can only be divined, induced, inferred from what it gives. It always has an additional dimension; it always implies a dimension supplementary to the dimensions of the given.

On the contrary, a plane of immanence has no supplementary dimension; the process of composition must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives. It is a plan of composition, not a plan of organization or development. Perhaps colors are indicative of the first type of plan, while music, silences and sounds, belong to this one. There is no longer a form, but only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles of an unformed material. There is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force. Here the plan is concerned only with motions and rests, with dynamic affective charges. It will be perceived with that which it makes perceptible to us, as we proceed. We do not live or think or write in the same way on both plans. For example, Goethe, and even Hegel in certain respects, have been considered Spinozists, but they are not really Spinozists, because they never ceased to link

the plan to the organization of a Form and to the formation of a Subject. The Spinozists are rather Hölderlin, Kleist, and Nietzsche, because they think in terms of speeds and slownesses, of frozen catatonias and accelerated movements, unformed elements, nonsubjectified affects.

Writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers—painters too, even chance readers—may find that they are Spinozists; indeed, such a thing is more likely for them than for professional philosophers. It is a matter of one's practical conception of the "plan." It is not that one may be a Spinozist without knowing it. Rather, there is a strange privilege that Spinoza enjoys, something that seems to have been accomplished by him and no one else. He is a philosopher who commands an extraordinary conceptual apparatus, one that is highly developed, systematic, and scholarly; and yet he is the quintessential object of an immediate, unprepared encounter, such that a nonphilosopher, or even someone without any formal education, can receive a sudden illumination from him, a "flash." Then it is as if one discovers that one is a Spinozist; one arrives in the middle of Spinoza, one is sucked up, drawn into the system or the composition. When Nietzsche writes, "I am really amazed, really delighted . . . I hardly knew Spinoza: what brought me to him now was the guidance of instinct,"⁴ he is not speaking only as a philosopher. A historian of philosophy as rigorous as Victor Delbos was struck by this dual role of Spinoza, as a very elaborate model, but also as a secret inner impulse.⁵ There is a double reading of Spinoza: on the one hand, a systematic reading in pursuit of the general idea and the unity of the parts, but on the other hand and at the same time, the affective reading, without an idea of the whole, where one is carried along or set down, put in motion or at rest, shaken or calmed according to the velocity of this or that part. Who is a Spinozist? Sometimes, certainly, the individual who works "on" Spinoza, on Spinoza's concepts, provided this is done with

4. Cf. Nietzsche, letter to Overbeck, July 30, 1881.

5. Delbos, *Le Problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du spinozisme*, Alcan. This is a much more important book than the academic work by the same author, *Le Spinozisme*, Vrin.

enough gratitude and admiration. But also the individual who, without being a philosopher, receives from Spinoza an affect, a set of affects, a kinetic determination, an impulse, and makes Spinoza an encounter, a passion. What is unique about Spinoza is that he, the most philosophic of philosophers (unlike Socrates himself, Spinoza requires only philosophy . . .), teaches the philosopher how to become a nonphilosopher. And it is in Part V—not at all the most difficult, but the quickest, having an infinite velocity—that the two are brought together, the philosopher and the nonphilosopher, as one and the same being. Hence what an extraordinary composition this Part V has; how extraordinary is the way in which the meeting of concept and affect occurs there, and the way in which this meeting is prepared, made necessary by the celestial and subterranean movements that together compose the preceding parts.

Many commentators have loved Spinoza sufficiently to invoke a Wind when speaking of him. And in fact no other comparison is adequate. But should we think of the great calm wind the philosopher Delbos speaks of? Or should we think of the whirlwind, the witch's wind spoken of by "the man from Kiev," a nonphilosopher par excellence, a poor Jew who bought the *Ethics* for a kopek and did not understand how everything fit together?⁶ Both, since the *Ethics* includes both the continuous set of propositions, demonstrations, and corollaries, as a grand movement of concepts, and the discontinuous sequence of scholia, as a launching of affects and impulses, a series of whirlwinds. Part V is the extreme extensive unity, but this is because it is also the most concentrated intensive peak: there is no longer any difference between the concept and life. But in the preceding parts there was already the composition or interweaving of the two components—what Romain Rolland called "the white sun of substance" and "the fiery words of Spinoza."

6. Cf. Malamud's text above.