“No one has yet determined what the body can do” : the turn to the body in Spinoza and Nietzsche

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Spinoza's Turn to the Body

My thesis is that Spinoza turns to the body in order to show the path towards the empowerment of the individual, the increase in her joy, freedom and, ultimately, the attainment of blessedness. This task requires dispelling a number of key philosophical errors and promoting adequate knowledge of the body.

In order to understand the nature of Spinoza's turn to the body, this chapter will proceed along the following steps. First, it will ask what drives Spinoza's turn to the body (section I). This will be broken down into two distinct lines of inquiry: the questions of what the key metaphysical errors are that Spinoza identifies and how he debunks them (section I.1); and what the key characteristics of the scientific context of Spinoza's time were and how he responded to them (section I.2). Second, it will ask what the nature of Spinoza's turn to the body is (section II). In order to answer this we need to consider Spinoza's theory of knowledge and how it is relevant for his turn to the body (section II.1); and how Spinoza understands the body (section II.2). The question of the ethical and political consequences of Spinoza's turn to the body will be discussed in the comparative chapter.

I. The motivations behind Spinoza's turn to the body

This section will begin by analysing the philosophical context of Spinoza's critique of metaphysics. The focus will be on five key notions (teleology, free will, the existence of a moral world order, the existence of evil and the unselfish) that Spinoza criticizes, as well as on their relations to the notions of matter and body (section 1a). I will then discuss why and how Spinoza formulates his critique of these five crucial notions and how this relates to his critique of the concept of substance (section 1b). I will then go on to consider how we should understand

Spinoza's engagement with the science of his time. First, I will ask how we should understand the salient features of the scientific outlook characteristic of the 17th Century and how we should understand the influence of scientific methods on Spinoza's turn to the body. In addressing this question I will focus on two crucial figures: Descartes and Hobbes (section 2a). Second, I will consider the manner in which Spinoza distances himself from science and ask how we should understand the points of departure (section 2b).

1. Spinoza's critique of metaphysics

1a. The context of Spinoza's critique

Spinoza's education can broadly be divided into two stages: the schooling he received as a member of the Jewish Community in Amsterdam and his studies of contemporary philosophic and scientific literature. The first stage consisted in the education he received in the school of the Jewish Portuguese community (Nadler 1999, p. 62) and in the Keter Torah study group[2] set up by the intellectual leader of the community, Rabi Saul Levi Mortera. It used to be widely held that Spinoza completed the education required in order to become a rabbi. However, Nadler has argued that there are good reasons to doubt whether Spinoza went further than the fourth, or perhaps the fifth grade out of a total of six (Nadler 1999, p. 65). Regardless of how matters stand on this point, Spinoza, as an exceptionally gifted young student, was part of Mortera's study group. There, he would have studied the Jewish Bible and the Talmud, together with medieval commentaries on them. In addition, he would have read a number of important Jewish philosophers, including Saadya Gaon, Maimonides or Gersonides. Spinoza felt increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional instruction he received and became interested in the new science and philosophy developing at the time. He could already have had access to it in the Jewish community through Joseph Salomon Delmedigo's book *Sefir Elim* (Book of the Gods) which is a study of Galileo's science (Nadler 1999, p. 138). These interests became the focus of Spinoza's life after his excommunication from the Jewish community on the 27th of July 1656[3]. Spinoza

2 Devoted primarily to the study of Jewish law.

3 The reasons for Spinoza's *cherem* (excommunication) have been the subject of debate in

learned Latin and was introduced to the study of liberal arts and sciences in the home of Franciscus van den Enden (Nadler 1999, p. 108). Later, he decided to improve his knowledge of philosophy, and especially Cartesianism, by attending the University of Leiden. He either lived in Leiden or made frequent trips to the University in 1658, and very possibly in 1657 as well. The university there was attractive to him because it was the best and the oldest in the Netherlands, and had professors openly dedicated to the study of Cartesianism and its applications in physics, medicine, logic and metaphysics. Spinoza never matriculated in Leiden, but that did not prevent him from attending courses (Nadler 1999, pp. 163-4)[4]. There were a number of individuals who would have been of interest to Spinoza (Jacob Golius, Abraham Heidanus, Frans van Schooten the younger), but his focus would probably have been on Adriaan Heerebord and Johannes de Raey. Heerebord was devoted to Descartes' thought and we shall see later that Spinoza was probably aware of his writings. By the late 1650s Heerebord had increasing difficulties at the University (due to his drinking problem) and was being eclipsed by de Raey[5]. De Raey was also an enthusiastic Cartesian who lectured on natural philosophy and other subjects including medicine (Nadler 1999, pp. 164-5). During his time in Leiden Spinoza met a number of students interested in the new Cartesian philosophy and in medicine, and who would later be part of his circle of friends: among them Lodewijk Meyer, Johannes Boumeester, and (probably) Adriaan Koerbagh (Nadler 1999, pp. 170-4).

the secondary literature, because the text of his excommunication, while the most virulent of the period, does not give us any precise details (Nadler 1999, p. 129). Some of Spinoza's heretical beliefs, which most likely played an important role, included the denial of the divine origin and the truth of the *Torah*, the immortality of the soul and the existence of a free God who acts as law-giver and as judge (Nadler 1999, p. 136). Israel, however, has argued that there was an economic substrate to the excommunication: Spinoza's family had become ruined financially and he decided to leave the community in order to extricate himself from debts and legal difficulties related to the failed family business (Israel 2001, pp. 171-2).

4 The fact that he never matriculated makes it impossible to know with certainty which courses he attended.

5 Joined by Arnold Geulincx around 1658, who had been forced to flee the University of Louvain due to his Cartesianism (Nadler 1999, p. 165).

It is not always easy to trace the sources of Spinoza's knowledge of philosophical literature. Spinoza very rarely quotes his sources[6], and even when he mentions the authors he refers to he does not always clearly indicate the passages in question[7]. Nevertheless, important studies have been dedicated to the question of Spinoza's intellectual and philosophical debts, starting with the classical work by Harry Austryn Wolfson[8]. Therefore, it is possible to attempt to situate his work in the philosophical context of his age and of his education[9]. The major influences on his thinking were: 1) Jewish philosophers and theologians he was acquainted with during his schooling in the synagogue, 2) classical and medieval philosophers that he came to know either after studying Latin under Van der Enden's tutelage or through the Hebrew authors he read, and 3) early modern philosophers like Bacon or Hobbes, with a special emphasis on Descartes and Cartesian thinkers. The Cartesian element is particularly important, given the fact that Descartes' philosophy was subject to lively debate in Dutch universities and in intellectual circles in the Dutch provinces. A study of Spinoza's letters shows that his circle of correspondents was also attuned to these debates.

Before considering Spinoza's reaction to his predecessor's treatments of a number of key philosophical issues, it is useful to present an account of the Jewish philosophical context Spinoza was familiar with. The emphasis will be on the accounts and evaluations of matter and of the body present in medieval Jewish thinking and on highlighting the main ways in which the themes of teleology, free will and morality were discussed. This account will focus on Maimonides, due to his pivotal role in the development of Jewish Philosophy, and his importance

6 There is a conspicuous absence of references to other authors in the *Ethics*, and yet the arguments indicate Spinoza's acquaintance with pagan, Jewish and Christian sources: Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Maimonides, Descartes, Bacon and Hobbes among others (Nadler 1999, p. 226).

7 To take the example of Spinoza's references to Descartes, who is mentioned two times by name in the *Ethics:* in the Preface to Book III there is no specific reference to any texts, and in the Preface to Book V there are only two precise references during the course of a detailed discussion of Descartes' philosophy.

8 See his monumental work *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, first published in 1934.

9 We possess a list of the books Spinoza had in his library at the time of his death, but his readings were most certainly not limited to that. To consider one example, the only book by Hobbes that was found in his library was *De Cive*. However, Curley believes Spinoza had also read the *Leviathan* (Curley 2005, note 10) and Garrett suggests he also had knowledge of *De Corpore* (Garrett 2003, p. 98).

to Spinoza himself. This will allow us to have a frame of reference in which to place arguments by other thinkers known to Spinoza: Saadya Gaon, Gersonides and Hasdai Crescas.

The Jewish philosophical context

Maimonides

Maimonides's major philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed (*henceforth *Guide),* presents the reader with the following problem: it is a book intentionally full of contradictions. Maimonides begins by telling the reader that this is not a philosophical work that starts from clearly formulated, fundamental principles and then draws the appropriate inferences from these premises. Maimonides's own opinions are presented in a fragmented, scattered manner, sometimes in the guise of parables, and these ambiguities are reflected in the reception of the *Guide* from its earliest commentators up to modern scholarship. In the Preface to the *Guide*, Maimonides warns the reader that, unless he or she is intelligent, well-educated in religious literature, philosophy, the sciences and also faithful to Judaism, the *Guide* can be harmful. Similarly to Averroes, Maimonides distinguishes between exoteric knowledge, suitable for the mass of the faithful and esoteric knowledge, accessible and beneficial to only a select few. Maimonides believes that by introducing contradictions into his treatise, he will allow only the faithful and educated to perceive his true opinions [10]. In the *Guide,* Maimonides discusses the religious tradition of Judaism together with the philosophical arguments of Plato, Aristotle as well as their interpretation in Neo-Platonism and Arabic Philosophy. The difficulty of the *Guide* stems from the fact that the arguments and conclusions reached in these various traditions are not always easily reconcilable, and Maimonides is happy to not express explicit, definitive opinions on many issues. As a consequence, debates regarding Maimonides's views in the *Guide*

10 The exegetical problems raised by an attempt to understand the *Guide* are amplified by the fact that Jewish law forbids the discussion of the biblical accounts of Creation and of Ezekiel's Chariot in public, and it is specifically with these two episodes that Maimonides associates his exposition of natural science and metaphysics (Seeskin 2005, p. 82).

continue to this day (Feldman 2005, pp. 324-325)[11].

In order to best understand the aspects of Maimonides's philosophy relevant to Spinoza's turn to the body, we need to start with an account of medieval Aristotelian cosmology. The universe was conceived as a series of concentric material spheres[12] and had an absolute centre and an outermost limit[13]. Each sphere had an indwelling soul and a separate intellect. The separate intellects formed a hierarchy and were emanations from God. Each indwelling soul attempted to approximate the perfection of the separate intellect and this explained the movement of the spheres. In the case of the sublunary world, the separate intellect was called the Agent or Active Intellect and was to play a prominent role in metaphysical and epistemological discussions throughout the Middle Ages. The events that take place in the sublunary sphere can be explained[14] by the movement and influence of the superior, supralunary spheres, and by God's influence through the Agent Intellect. This Intellect contains in full God's plan for our sphere, i.e. the sum total of relations and forms obtaining in nature. Things arise and go out of being in an attempt to approximate the Agent Intellect and the intellectual forms it contains. It therefore follows that the Agent Intellect is of huge importance in epistemology, not just cosmology (Stern 2005, p. 110). Knowledge of nature can be obtained insofar as the human mind knows the forms and their relations as they are present in the Agent Intellect (Nadler 2001, pp. 82-7)[15]. As we will see, Maimonides

11 A classic example is that of Maimonides's account of creation. He presents three possibilities: creation *ex nihilo*, found in the beginning of the Torah, creation out of pre-existing matter, inspired by Plato's *Timaeus* and the eternity of the world, found in Aristotle's works. Maimonides does not decide in favour of any of these and the controversy about his actual views persists (Feldman 2005, p. 330; Seeskin 2005, pp. 91-4).

12 Maimonides believed there were at least 18 orbs encompassing the earth (Langermann 2003, p.160).

13 This picture of the world was debated in many of its aspects. For instance, the outermost sphere was thought by some to turn and thus initiate the motion of the inner spheres while Gersonides rejected the postulation of this "starless sphere" (Wars 1999, Book V 2.IV; cf. Nadler 2001, p. 82).

14 The degree to which human behaviour is already inscribed in the Agent Intellect depends on the view one takes on determinism and on how divine providence and omniscience are related to free-will. A strong determinist strain is present in the work of Hasdai Crescas, while Gersonides is willing to argue for a "soft" theory of divine omniscience in order to preserve free-will (Feldman 2005, pp. 342-3).

15 This cosmology will be criticized by Hasdai Crescas, who will argue that there is no dis-

argues that any immortality we might hope to obtain is a consequence of the conjunction between our intellect and the Agent Intellect, so understanding it is a matter of the greatest importance[16].

Maimonides's take on these issues, insofar as we can glimpse them from the *Guide,* is influenced by his critique of the capacity that human knowledge has to grasp the truth. The standard for knowledge, i.e. science understood in the Aristotelian sense, consists in knowledge of causes and principles together with rigorous deduction of any demonstrations from these principles. Maimonides, however, sees human knowledge more as a patchwork collection of truths and admissions of ignorance (Seeskin 2005, p. 82).

In the domain of theology, Maimonides denies that we can have knowledge of any of God's attributes. He argues that the only way we can approximate knowledge of God is through negative theology. We start by reading the *Torah* and imagining God as a ruler on a throne, then reach metaphysical knowledge of attributes and we ultimately realize that these attributes are also inadequate. What we are left with is contemplative silence, since the gap between God and creation cannot be bridged (Seeskin 2005, pp. 88-91). Maimonides argues that we can prove that God exists, but we cannot say anything about his essence. Therefore, a priori proofs that start with the postulation of a perfect being are impossible (Seeskin 2005, p. 83). What we can know, however, are God's actions, i.e. the creation. (Seeskin 2005, p. 88) Nevertheless, even here, Maimonides is skeptical of the capacities of the human mind. While he accepts the possibility of knowing the sublunary world scientifically, he argues that the movement of the spheres is not fully graspable by human minds because these spheres are not constant in their movement. This argument needs to be understood in the context of a "crisis" in Ptolemaic astronomy. Planets, as Maimonides observes, do not always move in the same direction and at the same pace; they sometimes appear

tinction between sublunary and supralunary realms and that planets move due to physical properties, not intellects. Therefore, everything is subject to generation and corruption (Robinson 2003, pp. 401-3). In this respect, Crescas anticipates important developments in early modern science.

16 It is not absolutely clear whether Maimonides believes in the immortality of the soul or not (Rudavsky 2010, p. 87).

to move backwards – the so-called apparent retrograde movement. He therefore concluded that the movement of the spheres is irregular, and not as Aristotle described it, i.e. proceeding necessarily and eternally from the deity. It follows that God has created these pockets of irregularity and that general scientific theory (knowledge of laws[17]) does not suffice for knowledge of astronomy (Freudenthal 2005, pp. 141-2; Seeskin 2005, pp. 96-8). In spite of this, Maimonides places great emphasis on knowledge (Stern 2005, p. 105). Of the four perfections he mentions: material possessions, health-perfection of the body, moral virtue and intellectual excellence, he values intellectual perfection the highest[18]. However, if knowledge of God or the supralunary world is inaccessible, what kind of intellectual perfection could Maimonides mean? Stern suggests that Maimonides is referring either to knowledge of teleology in nature in the sublunary realm[19] or to the process of obtaining knowledge, rather than whatever systematic results the process of investigation may yield (Stern 2005, p. 128). An added benefit is that awareness of our ignorance will lead to humility, which Maimonides believes is a virtue (Stern 2005, p. 129).

Knowledge of the sublunary world consists in understanding the forms, i.e. the general nature of things (Nadler 2001, p. 86), together with their order and connections. Understood in an Aristotelian context form is, in contrast with matter, the essence of a thing, what makes it knowable for the intellect. In order to understand how we may know these forms, Maimonides's view of the human being must be outlined. In conformity with hylomorphism, Maimonides views the soul as the form of the body, not as a separate substance. The soul contains faculties (appetite, imagination) that can only be exercised in conjunction with the body. The only exception is the theoretical intellect, which grasps the pure forms.

17 Maimonides doubts the very basis for science, i.e. the constancy of nature (Freudenthal 2005, p. 150).

18 There seems to be widespread agreement on this issue among Maimonides scholars. It would thus be strange of him to advocate that knowledge is the highest good and at the same time deny any prospect of obtaining it.
Those who doubt it do so only because Maimonides is very sceptical of the possibilities of human reason. See Pines (1979) who argues that Maimonides will come to value the practical over the theoretical intellect in a manner similar to Kant's.

19 Maimonides is never sceptical about knowledge in the sublunary realm (Stern 2005, p. 117).

In the context of his epistemology, the faculty of imagination plays a prominent role. Imagination is a storage of images that are not presently perceived and is the ability to compose or separate these images. It is a problematic faculty: Maimonides describes it as a power that supplies the intellect with images and is indispensable to the prophet in translating intellectual intuitions into images communicable to the people. At the same time, it is not constrained by what exists, it offers abstractions rather than universals, and misrepresents immaterial things because it is bound up with the body[20]. In other words, imagination serves a positive role, but it can at the same time be a hindrance to knowledge (Stern 2005, pp. 107-8)[21]. Our intellect has the images supplied by the imagination at its disposal, but must do better than obtain mere abstractions; it must obtain the forms of the things it investigates. At first our intellect, or material intellect, as Maimonides calls it, is almost[22] pure possibility. It becomes actual by abstracting forms from particular images and linking them in demonstrations (Stern 2005, p. 109). The transformation from potential to acquired intellect is explained by the action of the Agent Intellect which illuminates the human mind[23]. This acquired intellect, in virtue of being identical with the forms it cognizes, is eternal. Insofar as Maimonides has a doctrine of the immortality of the soul[24], the acquired intellect is where this doctrine can gain traction. This argument is grounded in the Aristotelian presupposition that the knower, the act of knowing and the object known are identical, and this assumption will turn out to be crucial for Spinoza's

20 A reaction to the *kalam* school of thought, who argued that knowledge is coextensive with imagination (Freudenthal 2005, p. 137).

21 This tension in the evaluation of the epistemological role of imagination is reflected in Spinoza's epistemology.

22 It does contain first ineligibles e.g. the whole is greater than its parts or two things that are equal, are also equal to a third (Stern 2005, p. 108).

23 Stern argues there are two models for understanding the action of the Agent Intellect and that Maimonides employs both. The first stems for the work of Al-Farabi: the Agent Intellect illuminates both the images in imagination and the material intellect. The Agent Intellect does not emanate knowledge, but makes the acquiring of knowledge possible. The second model is Avicenna's: the material intellect cannot do the abstraction itself, so it receives the form from the Agent Intellect (Stern 2005, pp. 110-111).

24 There is no personal immortality for Maimonides, who comes close to Averroes on this point (Nadler 2001, pp. 88-89). For the righteous, the soul will persist after death without interference from the body. In their case the resurrection of the body, an article of faith in Judaism by this time, will be only temporary (Nadler 2001, p. 75).

take on Maimonides. It has been argued in the secondary literature that, in *Ethics* IIP7s, Spinoza is referring to Maimonides when he writes that "Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this[25], as if through a cloud". It is not difficult to go from Maimonides' argument for the identity of the knower and the known to the Spinozistic conclusion that God knows nature and therefore is identical with it. This also foreshadows the Spinozistic argument that the mind and the body are identical, since the mind is the idea of the body (Feldman 2005, p. 352; Wolfson 1983, vol 2, pp. 24-7).

We can observe that in Maimonides' epistemology, matter is the culprit if we fail to actualize our intellect. In fact, matter is an obstacle in two respects. The first, already alluded to, is the mixture of matter with the form we seek to know. Our imagination only grasps material images and makes it difficult (in Avicenna's account even impossible) for our intellect to cognize the immaterial form imprinted on matter[26]. Our intellect needs to abstract from all the accidents present in an object and present us with the universal form. The second respect in which matter is an obstacle is the fact that our body, insofar as it is matter, distracts us from theoretical pursuits. The body prevents us from focusing on contemplation through its demands, needs and desires. Matter is therefore an obstacle for the apprehension of the divine or the immaterial and for concentration on contemplation (Stern 2005, pp. 117-8; Rudavsky 2010, p. 89). Maimonides also argues that the fall of Adam, symbolic for the fall of humankind, is rooted in the weakness of the body, which makes us turn away from the intellect (Pessin 2009, p. 272)[27]. In Rudavsky's words: "Maimonides is obsessed with the material principle and its deleterious effects upon human behavior." (Rudavsky 2010, p. 138).

At the same time, Maimonides cannot ignore the body due to what Freudenthal has called "the biological foundations of intellectual elitism". In the article by the same name, he argues that Maimonides believes that humans are born unequal

25 That the thinking and the extended substances are in fact identical.

26 Matters are especially difficult when we try to understand wholly immaterial things, for instance God.

27 Maimonides famously compares matter to a married harlot (Guide III.8).

in their intellectual capacity and that this lack of equality is grounded in each person's biological constitution[28] (Freudenthal 2008, p. 293). Since intellectual powers depend not solely on innate capacities, but also on the humoral equilibrium present in the body, Maimonides will focus in his theory of morality on how to achieve this equilibrium (Freudenthal 2008, pp. 297-8).

The highest perfection available to a human being is knowledge. This belief is grounded in the assumption that the human being is fundamentally identical with the theoretical intellect and that the rest of our being is an unfortunate addition to our intellectual essence. As a consequence, moral perfection[29] is inferior to intellectual achievements. Discussions of morality in Maimonides occur in two contexts: propedeutic and consequent (Shatz 2005, p. 170). Propedeutic morality serves the purpose of preparing the individual for attaining intellectual perfection. In order to focus on contemplation of the forms, one must master the passions and cancel any influence of the body on the intellect (Shatz 2005, p. 188)[30]. The function of reason is to rule the whole body so that all its parts acquiesce to reason (Rudavsky 2010, p. 96). This can be achieved through ascetic training[31]. In the medical writings, Maimonides refers to the body as a beast of burden which must be trained and disciplined (Langermann 2003, p. 169). Consequent morality is an overflow of the intellect, once it has become conjoined with the Agent Intellect[32]. The virtues that arise from intellectual perfection are loving kindness, judgement and righteousness (Shatz 2005, p. 186). Morality is an inherently relational virtue, while, according to Maimonides, true perfection can be achieved by any person, even when living in isolation[33]. As a set of norms, morality is useful only in a world of matter, where we are subject to the passions (Shatz 2005, p. 168). The

28 For a less deterministic reading, see Rudavsky (2010, pp. 164-5).

29 When Maimonides speaks of morality, he can refer either to an action-based theory, inspired by Jewish law, or to virtue ethics, inspired by Aristotle, in which character traits, not actions themselves, are evaluated (Shatz 2005, p. 171).

30 Frank (1990) argues that Maimonides aims at the complete elimination of passions.

31 There is a certain ambiguity in Maimonides with regard to asceticism. On the one hand, he argues for the doctrine of the mean in Aristotelian fashion. On the other hand, he is influenced by the Neo-Platonic aversion to matter and body (Rudavsky 2010, pp. 100-1).

32 Whether this consequent morality is a heightened sense of moral action or a new perfection, an imitatio dei, is still up for debate (Rudavsky 2010, p. 193).

33 Moral virtues are conducive to communal order (Shatz 2005, p. 170).

fundamental problem with morality is that right and wrong are conventional terms, not rooted in reality. Moral virtues are therefore inferior to intellectual virtues (Rudavsky 2010, p. 164).

The last point that needs to be addressed is that Maimonides does not consider divine omniscience to be in conflict with free will. We must remember that he never claims that we can know God's attributes; therefore, we do not understand how God could be omniscient and anticipate choices that we believe we are free to make. The ignorance we are forced to profess on these matters may lead to doubts as to whether the world was created in order to reflect our interests and benefits. This view can be construed as an attack on anthropomorphism (Seeskin 2005, p. 101).

Matter and body

In order to grasp the complex understanding of the body in the Jewish Medieval Tradition, we need to place the discussion in the context of the analysis of matter. Matter is understood in relation to the notion of form, and their relation is conceptualized as a necessary play of opposites. It constitutes the fabric of reality and grounds a deep struggle between the body and the spirit. Following Greek thought, matter is "a kind of not-yet-being moment in the metaphysical analysis of things" (Pessin 2009, p. 269)

According to Pessin, there are three ways of understanding matter in Jewish thought. 1) negatively: matter seen as privation, the source of evil. This view, in which matter is inferior to form, can be found in Maimonides or Gersonides. 2) neutrally: in discussions of creation (Nahmanides, Gersonides, Abraham Ibn Ezra) or in Aristotle inspired analysis of physics and metaphysics (Maimonides and Crescas). 3) positively: in the work of Ibn Gabirol, with his exaltation of spiritual matter or, in a different manner, in Spinoza's philosophy (Pessin 2009, pp. 269-270).

1. The negative view on matter is focused on the critique of the body: happiness and rewards in the afterlife depend on intellectual cognition (at least for the rationalist Jewish thinkers) and the body makes this hard to achieve, if not impossible. We

have already seen how Maimonides treats this issue, and we must note that he is followed by Gersonides in urging to turn away from material needs and to care for the body only insofar as it facilitates intellectual pursuits (Pessin 2009, p. 274). Matter stands in the way of our conjunction with the Active Intellect. This understanding of matter is a testimony to the influence of Neo-Platonic Thinking on Jewish Medieval Philosophers[34].

2. The neutral discussion of matter is crucial to philosophical discussions of creation and of the supralunary and sublunary worlds. For the topic of this research, however, the most relevant study is that of the human body as an object of scientific consideration. Maimonides argues that, since the human body is created by God, and since it manifests an incredibly great complexity and perfection, it bears witness to the glory of the creator[35]. Such perfection cannot, in his opinion, be the result of chance, and since nature "has no intelligence and no organizing faculty" it cannot be the result of any mechanical art either. The only option left is divine or supernatural art. In the Appendix to book I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza will tackle this argument and, as we shall see, will argue that the structure of the human body is the result of mechanical art (Wolfson 1983, vol 1, p. 435).

3. The positive evaluation of matter finds a strong proponent in Ibn Gabirol. The matter he discusses is spiritual matter and is completely distinct from earthly, sublunary matter. In fact, it stands above celestial matter and above the Intellect (Pessin 2009, p. 290). Ibn Gabirol is a Neo-Platonist and spiritual matter is an emanation from God. In this context, Pessin warns us not to confuse Ibn Gabirol's positive view of celestial matter with Spinoza's: God is not identical with matter and spiritual matter is far removed from earthly matter for Ibn Gabirol (Pessin 2009, p. 296).

We must now consider, in light of the preceding discussion of Medieval Jewish Philosophy, the key notions Spinoza addresses in his critique of metaphysics illusions.

34 Matter lacks both being and goodness for Plotinus (Pessin 2009, p. 272).
35 Argument also used by Cicero.

Key metaphysical notions

Teleology

Maimonides' epistemology prevents him from engaging in a thorough discussion of the contents of divine will, and so his account of teleology cannot reveal a purpose for creation. Nevertheless, Maimonides never rejects the notion of final causes. He argues that the workings of nature cannot be the result of chance and that the only intelligible explanation of nature relies on the existence of an intelligent creator (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, pp. 434-5). In the emanationist cosmology Maimonides and other Jewish thinkers adhere to, the cosmos is organized teleologically, since the movements of the spheres, as well as of the sublunary realm, are governed by intellects that emanate from God and are ordered in view of his plan. Gersonides, a thinker who shows much higher consideration for human cognitive faculties than Maimonides[36], argues that the cosmos is pre-ordered according to the divine plan and that we are capable of knowing it [37]. This is essential to Gersonides' theory of the immortality of the soul: the mind is immortal insofar as it knows essences as they are in the Active Intellect. The ordering of the world according to the divine plan is a commonplace of Medieval Jewish Philosophy. However, this is only one facet of teleology. The second is the belief that God has ordered the world for the benefit of human beings. This belief, as we have seen, is rejected by Maimonides due to his commitment to negative theology. He is not the only one to do so: Saadya Gaon[38] also rejects it because God is above any consideration of external purposes (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 426).

36 In contrast to Maimonides, Gersonides, who was an astronomer, argued that we can know the supralunary realm scientifically.

37 There is some debate about how much God does know according to Gersonides. The traditional view, stemming from Gersonides' immediate reception in 13th and 14th century Provence, takes him to say that God does not know particulars but only the general forms, essences and plan (Manekin 2003, p. 331). Manekin argues that this is not the case and that Gersonides believes that God has knowledge of particulars. Regardless of the merits of the arguments mobilized in this debate, I will refer only to the traditional view here, given that this is the one familiar to Spinoza.

38 Tenth-century rationalist.

Free Will

The medieval discussion of free will cannot be divorced from divine providence. If God is omniscient and directs the affairs of humanity, as the doctrine of divine providence assumes, this means that he already knows what an agent will do, and so the agent cannot be said to be free. Maimonides' solution was to say that God knows in a way radically different from the way humans do, and so we cannot say anything about God's knowledge that would detract from our capacity for free choice[39]. Subsequent Jewish thinkers, due to their commitment to different epistemologies, were not satisfied with this answer. In order to understand this, we need to distinguish between two kinds of providence: general and personal. General providence consists in the belief that God has endowed beings with the means for self-preservation. This line of thought, inherited from Aristotle, only considers species and not particular individuals. The second kind of providence depends on the personal relation between God and the individual. The more an individual understands forms, the more she is conjoined with the Agent Intellect and therefore the closer she is to God (Manekin 2003, p. 311). Gersonides' arguments in favour of free will and contingency stem from this distinction. God knows the order of nature, determined by the influence of the spheres, and also knows the Agent Intellect. However, God does not know if, at a specific moment, an agent will perform this or that action: this is because a human agent can choose between following his natural disposition and acting according to intellectual providence (Manekin 2003, p. 313). In contrast to these attempts at preserving free will, Crescas foreshadows Spinoza in suggesting that freedom of choice may be an illusion (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 428).

The Moral World Order

The premise that grounds the belief in a moral world order is, according to Schopenhauer, that: "Every great pain, be it bodily or spiritual, states what we deserve; for it could not affect us if we did not deserve it." (WWV II 664). Within the Monotheistic context of Jewish though, we should add that the retribution for

39 However, for an argument in favour of determinism in Maimonides, see Rudavsky (2010, p. 154).

what we deserve is meted out by God, and that it does not necessarily consist in punishment, but also in happiness. The discussion of the moral world order and therefore of reward and punishment must take into consideration the following parameters: who is being rewarded or punished, what reward and punishment consist in, and when and why is the retribution meted out.

Gersonides joins Maimonides in arguing that what makes us truly human is the part of our intellect that is rational. The theoretical intellect is the part of us that can achieve immortality, if it gains knowledge of the essences[40]. Within this anthropology that minimizes the role of corporeality and the functions of the soul associated with it, the rewards and punishment dispensed by God truly affect only the intellect. In his interpretation of the book of Job, Maimonides argues that Job suffers only because he is concerned with material, bodily and moral goods. If he were a wise man who understood his true essence, he would realize that all his suffering does not affect the highest part of his soul. Maimonides bases his interpretation on the description of Job as a morally virtuous man, but not as an intellectually perfect one (Rudavsky 2010, p. 146). The consequence of this view is that the reward of the virtuous man is the enjoyment of intellectual cognition. Those who fail to achieve this perfection are condemned to be bound to their bodies and to the lower corporeal functions. During the Renaissance, Judah Abravanel, also known as "Leone Ebreo", will pick up on this intellectualist tradition and modify it in two ways that are important for Spinoza: 1) he identifies the Agent Intellect with God and so makes knowledge of essences knowledge of God; and 2) he describes the relation of the individual to God not only in terms of obtaining knowledge, but also as a relation of intellectual love of the Deity. God is therefore the formal, efficient, and final cause of all reality (Feldman 2003, p. 427). While Spinoza will of course depart greatly from the Neo-Platonic Judah Abravanel, his influence is apparent[41].

The problem that the notion of a moral order raises is the apparent absence of one. The problem of theodicy, as it would later be named by Leibniz, runs through

40 Gersonides is not as ambiguous as Maimonides about the possibility of immortality: the intellect, insofar as it knows forms, is eternal.

41 Abravanel's book *The Dialogue of Love* was found in Spinoza's library after his death.

Jewish thought. The issue has as its premise the belief that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and benevolent, and yet allows the virtuous to suffer and the wicked to prosper. The solution suggested by Saadya Gaon is the following: all humans perform good and evil actions, the only difference lying in the proportion of good and evil actions. Therefore, each human being deserves a share of punishment, but also of reward. It is up to God to decide when the reward and the punishment are meted out, whether in this life or the next (Nadler 2001, p. 150). Saadya Gaon also differs from Maimonides and Gersonides in his discussion of the body in relation to the afterlife. While they all focus on the role played by the Intellect, Saadya believes that all humans, righteous or wicked, suffer from the separation of the soul from the body upon death. The difference in suffering is only one of degree (Stroumsa 2003, pp. 85-6).

The question of why divine retribution is dispensed has two possible answers: either it is the result of good or evil actions on the part of the individual, whether in accordance with general moral principles or with the Law of the Torah, or it is the result of intellectual perfection. It should come as no surprise that the "rationalists" Maimonides and Gersonides focus on intellectual perfection. They encounter opposition, however, from Crescas, who argues that immortality is not intellectual. The individual soul persists after death and is rewarded with pleasure as a consequence of its obedience to God's laws. Immortality, therefore, is not limited to philosophers (Robinson 2003, p. 406).

The Existence of Evil

Spinoza's dismissal of evil as a figment of imagination has its roots in Jewish philosophy[42]. Its origins can be traced to Maimonides, who argues that all of God's creation is good, and that evil can only be spoken of in relation to us: "Evils are evil only in relation to a certain thing […] All evils are privations […] It cannot be said of God that he directly creates evil […] His works are all perfectly good" (Guide III.10). In the early Short Treatise Spinoza argues that good and evil are entities of reason (KV I.10). Spinoza's argument is that good

42 Spinoza's dismissal of moral values is more radical than Maimonides' in that he rejects both good and evil as illusions.

and evil exist only in our understanding and not in nature and are therefore only relations. This means that we call things good or evil depending on their relation to us and this judgment says nothing about the essence of things. This provides Spinoza with the foundation on which to argue that the moral values of good and evil are illusory insofar as they are understood to express universal and absolute values that have independent existence. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza will speak of good and evil in the moral sense as entities of imagination, instead of reason (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 437).

1b. Spinoza's critique of metaphysics

References to key ways in which other sources, particularly early modern philosophy, influenced Spinoza's critique of metaphysics will be made in the course of the following discussion. This will begin with arguably the most important illusion Spinoza counters, the belief in final causes.

Teleology

Spinoza argues teleology is a specifically human concept that arises out of the ignorance of true causes and out of desire. According to Maimonides, there are two ways of rejecting final causes: either claiming that everything is the result of the arbitrary will of God or that everything is the product of mere chance and accident. Spinoza rejects both approaches (Wolfson 1983, p. 423).

EIp16 is of paramount importance to understanding why God does not act teleologically according to Spinoza: From the essence (or adequate definition, as the intellect conceives it) of a thing (*res*) there follow, by necessity, multiple properties of that thing[43]. The more reality a thing has, the more properties follow from its essence. God, having an infinite number of attributes which express an absolutely infinite essence, has the greatest reality. Therefore, an infinity of things follow from God's essence in infinite ways (Gueroult 1968, p. 260). In the first corollary to proposition 16, Spinoza draws the inference that God is the efficient

43 Nadler argues that there is no difference between causal and logical necessity in Spinoza. The distinction only shows there are two ways of explaining how something is necessitated: internally, from its essence, or externally, due of tis antecedent conditions (Nadler 2006, p. 87).

cause of all things - since all things follow from God's essence or nature. Given this understanding of God's absolutely infinite production of things in nature, we can see why final causes have no place in Spinoza's system. God might not produce all things directly, but all the causal chains can be traced to God as the absolute first cause (EIp16c3).

In EIapp[44], which is dedicated to unmasking the errors behind the belief in teleology, Spinoza reveals the reasons for paying special attention to final causes: the prejudices that he exposes, e.g. the existence of good and evil, the existence of order and confusion in nature, the notions of praise, blame, sin and merit, all stem from an unwarranted faith in teleology[45]. This has led one commentator to argue that "Final causes [...] stand for almost everything that Spinoza opposes" (Allison 1987, p. 37). He rejects them because they can only lead to inadequate and unscientific explanations, and they stand in the way of achieving self-understanding and joy[46]. Spinoza's argument in the Appendix can be divided into three sections. The first shows why people believe that final causes exist. Here, Spinoza claims that humans are inclined by nature to embrace this prejudice. The second section contains arguments for the thesis that final causes are only an illusion. In the third section Spinoza shows how other prejudices follow from teleology. Before we go on to consider each section in detail, two general remarks are needed. First,

44 Spinoza claims that the rationale behind him writing the Appendix is that, even after the demonstrations of Book I, "many prejudices remain that could, and can, be a great obstacle to men's understanding the connection of things in the way I have explained it" and that he considers it "worthwhile to submit them here to the scrutiny of reason". This raises the question of why and in what way Spinoza believes his demonstrations in the first book are insufficient and need the addition of an Appendix. In order to answer this question it is useful to situate Spinoza's writings and, more specifically, Spinoza's critique of theology and associated illusions, within two contexts: philosophical and political, or doctrinal and historical (Balibar 1998, p. 9). The demonstrations in Book I can be read primarily from a purely philosophical perspective, insofar as they offer adequate knowledge of God and nature. It is nevertheless insufficient to read Spinoza only as a pure metaphysician whose interests lie exclusively in uncovering eternal truths. As is shown by his many political writings, he is also concerned with the deleterious practical effects of metaphysical illusions under various guises. EIapp can be read as an attempt to address directly the specific formulations of metaphysical illusions prevalent in Spinoza's historical context.

45 Spinoza here follows the Cartesian principle that in order to dispel a number of errors, it is sufficient to reject their common source (Gueroult 1968, p. 393).

46 EIapp is a direct refutation of Cartesianism (together with its residual Christian dogmatism) and its refusal to exclude teleology in discussions of God (Gueroult 1968, pp. 399-400).

Spinoza seems to conflate two senses of teleology. It is one thing to believe that everything in nature, including God and humans, act on account of an end. It is another to say that God has made all things for the benefit of mankind[47]. The first meaning can indeed adequately describe the views on teleology that govern the medieval cosmological picture, and Spinoza's formulation is also very close to the way Heereboord, a contemporary Cartesian, explains teleology (Wolfson 1983, p. 425)[48]. The second, however, is much more controversial, and we have seen how both Saadya Gaon and Maimonides reject this kind of anthropomorphism. The second remark is that, while it seems clear that Spinoza rejected a teleological explanation for divine causation and the world as a whole, his understanding of the world does not necessarily exclude teleological explanations in all cases. Bennett argues that Spinoza surreptitiously introduces teleology into the discussion of self-preservation in the beginning of Book III of the *Ethics* (Bennett 1984, pp. 244-5). He argues that Spinoza is allowed to infer from propositions 4-6 of Book III only that individuals have a self-preserving tendency i.e. they resist a harmful external force. If an individual does something, then that action will help her. However, Spinoza concludes that if something benefits an individual, then she will do it. The premise here implies that the actions of an agent are explained by her intentions and beliefs, and that final causes do play a role in accounting for behaviour. A similar criticism is formulated by Nietzsche in JGB 13 where he claims that Spinoza makes use of "superfluous teleological principles". Nadler suggests that one way of dealing with this is to say that Spinoza is fine with using teleology in the explanation of conscious human actions, but nothing else (Nadler 2006, p. 198). After all, Spinoza writes in EIapp that "men act always on account of an end". There are two main difficulties with this approach. The first is that Spinoza tries to displace a teleological self-understanding of humans with one formulated in terms of efficient causes, structured according to the geometrical

47 The first meaning of teleology is different from the second because the first meaning does not imply that God is benevolent and therefore directs his actions towards the benefit of mankind.

48 Compare Spinoza's "all things in nature, like men, work for some end; and indeed it is thought to be certain that God himself directs all things to some sure end." with Heerebord's "all natural things work for some end, or, rather, they work to some end, since they are directed by God to an end pre-determined for each thing" (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 425).

order: "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and squares." (EIIIpref). The second is that it is not clear how Spinoza can be entitled to distinguish between (teleological) explanations of human actions on the one hand and (non-teleological) explanations of inanimate object or animals, on the other hand (Nadler 2006, p. 198). Furthermore, the issue is complicated by the fact that Spinoza does not have a fully developed (if any) account of consciousness[49]. This will be discussed in greater detail in section II.2 of this chapter and in the comparative section.

The first section of the Appendix has two premises: humans are born ignorant of causes and are conscious of their appetite to seek their own advantage. Therefore, humans believe themselves to be free[50] and always act with a view to their advantage. It follows from this that when trying to understand what has been done, humans do not look for the efficient, but for the final cause. If they are not told what the final cause of an action was, they look to what usually determines them to act in such a way, and assume the same explanation is valid for the action they have observed. This way of thinking shows its deleterious effects in the attempt to understand nature. Humans encounter many things which can be used to their advantage and infer that they have been prepared by someone else for their use. They know these things are not man-made (e.g. eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, etc.) and so reach the conclusion that a God or a number of deities, endowed with freedom, have created them. They know nothing of these rulers and so believe that they must be similar to human beings. They therefore believe that God must be worshipped, since he desires to be held in the highest honor by the men he has helped:

> Hence, they maintained that the gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor. So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament

49 Attempts to find a theory of consciousness in either Spinoza's doctrine of "ideas of ideas" or in his account of the complexity of the human mind/body do not seem to be entirely convincing (see Matheron, 1994a; Nadler, 2008; Wilson, 1999).

50 Crescas anticipates Spinoza by saying freedom of choice may be a delusion (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1 p. 428).

> different ways of worshipping God, so that God might love him above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed (EIapp II/79).

When confronted with the fact that inconveniences happen to the pious and impious alike, humans appeal to ignorance of divine judgment. This constitutes the bridge to the second section of the appendix. As in the case of the definition of teleology that he presents, Spinoza here fails to distinguish between the multiple attempts at theodicy in the medieval tradition. The position he attacks is attributed by Maimonides to the Ashariya school (Wolfson 1983, vol.1, p. 431), but other explanations for the existence of evil have been suggested.

The second section begins with a reference to EIp16 (already considered above) and to the two corollaries of EIp32. The thesis that final causes are nothing but human fictions is based on the premise that modes follow necessarily from divine nature, not from the arbitrary freedom of divine will. Proposition 32 and its corollaries demonstrate that the will is a mode of thinking and, therefore, is determined by a necessary cause. This is true whether the will is infinite or not. Spinoza believes that the arguments he has presented so far should be sufficient for the dismissal of final causes. However, he adds four more considerations on this topic, meant to show the absurdities implied by teleology. The first consideration shows how final causes reverse the order of Nature. Teleology consists in considering the ends of things to be their cause and their real (efficient) cause an effect. In other words, it makes what is prior by nature posterior, or what is "supreme and most perfect" imperfect[51]. As justification for the last formulation, Spinoza refers to propositions 21 to 23 of the first book of the *Ethics*. Within the project of uncovering how modes follow from the essence of substance, Propositions 21 to 23 have the role of explaining the passage from the eternal, infinite and indivisible attributes to infinite modes. We know from E1P16 that God produces an infinity of modes, but the propositions under consideration here show that between attributes and finite modes we must place infinite modes[52]. Infinite modes are eternal and necessary

51 Perfection is power according to EIp11s i.e. power to exist and to produce effects (Gueroult 1968, p. 266).

52 In Letter LXIV to Schuller, Spinoza writes that the absolutely infinite understanding of

through their cause (the attribute). They possess second order infinity and do not involve absolute indivisibility, in opposition to the attributes (Letter XII to Meyer; cf. Gueroult 1968, p. 309). The power of the attributes is expressed as a whole through the infinite modes, but not so in the finite modes[53]. Given that Spinoza understands perfection as a measure of the power of a thing, we can appreciate why the doctrine of infinite modes is invoked in this context: God, expressed through the attributes, produces first infinite and then finite modes, and the infinite modes, being produced first, are more perfect. Teleology would like to put ends first and judge them to be the standard for perfection, but this would mean that creation occurs for the sake of finite modes, the least perfect things in nature (EIapp II/80). The second consideration proves that the doctrine of final causes takes away God's perfection, since it means that God wants something that he lacks. Spinoza dismisses as a mere verbal quibble the distinction between end of assimilation and end of need which was used by scholastics in order to support teleology[54]. To say that God creates for an end of assimilation implies that God does not work for his own benefit, but for that of things outside him. However, before creation, there are no things outside God for which he could work (Gueroult 1968, p. 396). Therefore, Spinoza argues that if God creates something and works for a certain end then he lacks something and so is not perfect (EIapp II/80). The third consideration is aimed at rejecting the belief that every occurrence in the natural world is the result of God's arbitrary decree. This belief has two premises: the first is that things themselves have no power and that they must be continuously created anew by God, an idea found both in Descartes and Heerebord, and the second is that we are not aware of the reasons why God makes everything happen,

God and motion and rest are infinite modes under the attributes of thought and extension respectively. He also says that there is a mediated infinite mode under the attribute of extension, the *facies totius universi*. He never mentions an infinite mediated mode under the attribute of thought (Gueroult, 1968, p. 314).

53 Infinite modes could be understood as the sum of the essences and of their existence under any given attribute (Gueroult 1968, p. 319) or as "the most universal and basic principles that govern all of the other things which belong to that aspect of the universe represented by the attribute" (Nadler 2006, p. 89).

54 The notion of end of assimilation refers to the idea that, as Heerebord put it, "God has done all things for an end … by making them like himself" God does not need anything but wants to make the objects of creation similar to himself (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 432).

but that there is no other way of explaining the great number of circumstances that concur in order for any event to take place. This second premise can be traced back to the Asharyia School, and is based on the same appeal to ignorance we saw in their attempt at a theodicy (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 434). Spinoza rejects the notion that limited things have no power, because, as expressions of God or nature, their essence is precisely a certain amount of power. He also rejects the attempt to understand natural occurrences as the result of a divine arbitrary decree because this belief amounts to nothing but the desire to find refuge in ignorance (*ignorantiae asylum)*.

The fourth consideration is aimed at countering the assumption that the structure of the human body is too complex to be produced by any mechanical art[55] and so must be the result of divine causation. This argument had been previously used by Cicero and Maimonides (using the example of the structure of the eye) and is based on the assumption that there are only two possible causes for the generation of the human body: divine art and chance. Maimonides believes nature possesses no intelligence or organizing faculty and so he does not entertain the possibility the mechanical art could have created the human body which Spinoza clearly does (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 435).

The third section focuses on the consequences of the belief in final causes. Teleology leads one to believe that "what is more important in each thing is what is most useful". Therefore, each person judges things according to the disposition of her brain and accepts the affections of the imagination as true. This leads to skepticism and lack of any true knowledge, since every person is disposed and affected differently. The target of criticism here is not so much subjectivity as the fact that the judgments made follow from imagination, not from adequate knowledge (Gueroult 1968, pp. 397-8).

Free Will

Spinoza is just as critical of the notion of free will as he is of teleology. The premises for his critique of presumed human free will are laid down in the discussion of

55 Mechanism will be discussed in section II.

God in Book I. Proposition 11 is crucial because here Spinoza argues that God must be conceived as *causa sui:* first, he shows that God's essence involves his existence and then, from the assumption that there must be a cause for everything that exists, he infers that the cause of God's existence is internal to God. This proposition serves not only the purpose of explaining God's nature, but also leads to establishing the standard according to which we judge whether a thing is free or not. God is absolutely free not because he is capable of both doing and not doing something – he is not (Nadler 2006, p. 187) – but because he is determined to act solely by his own nature[56]. True freedom consists in acting solely out of one's own nature (EIIId4)[57].

If free will is understood as the capacity to do a thing or forbear doing it (Nadler 2006, p. 186) then humans are no more capable of this than God is[58]. The source of the belief in free will is the fact that humans are conscious of their actions and appetites but unaware of causes (confirmed by EIIp35s). Starting with Book III Spinoza will try to show a path towards freedom conceived as determination by one's own nature, but this should not be confused with free will. This line of thought is present from Spinoza's earliest surviving writing: in the *Short Treatise* he writes that true freedom does not consist in being able to do or omit something (KV I.4), i.e. it should be not confused with spontaneity.

The attack on free will can be read as a reaction to the Cartesian doctrine outlined in the fourth Meditation. Descartes' argument is that the will and the understanding are different faculties. Human judgment presents ideas to the will for consideration and the latter can affirm, deny or suspend judgment on them. Spinoza's argument is that there are no general faculties, only particular ideas and volitions. Furthermore, ideas and volitions are not external to each other,

56 God creates everything out of his own nature, including ideas of all existing modes. This line of thought is directed against Gersonides' claim that God does not know particulars.

57 In letter LVI to Boxel Spinoza argues that there is no real opposition between free and determined, but between being caused by external and by internal causes. Only in the latter case can one be called free, and only God is absolutely free.

58 Developing the suggestion about absence of free will found in Crescas and moving away from Maimonides' argument for free will, argument grounded in our ignorance of divine omniscience.

but any idea already implies volition[59] (EIIp49s). The whole decision-making process described by Descartes is an illusion and particular ideas and volitions are determined (Nadler 2006, pp. 187-8).

Spinoza finds it remarkable that we believe the mind not to be determined, even if the body is subject to causal laws and has no freedom. This mistake is made by those who are unaware that the mind and the body are one and the same thing (Nadler 2006, p. 186). Acknowledging the identity between mind and body established in IIp13 is not only the best way for dispelling the illusion of free will, but is also the starting premise for promoting freedom understood in an adequate manner.

The existence of a moral world order

Spinoza's attack on the notion a moral world order is better understood if it is divided into arguments against an imaginary order in nature and then against a particular variety of this order based on moral concepts.

The only order present in nature is the intelligible one presented in the *Ethics:* nature can be explained using the key notions of substance, attributes and infinite or finite modes. Each finite thing has a cause, which in turn has a cause and so on, ad infinitum. Human beings who are ignorant of the order and connection of things judge things according to their imagination and consider things to be well ordered if they can "easily remember them" (EIapp II/82). They therefore believe that God has disposed things for their own benefit. They thus "unknowingly attribute imagination to God" (EIapp II/82) because they claim that God acts according to the way they imagine things to be well ordered, rather than from God's intrinsically rational nature. What the ignorant call confusion is their lack of ability to understand the true order of nature[60]. Their lack of understanding stems from their belief that universal ideas are adequate[61].

59 A volition consists in assenting to or denying the judgment contained in the idea.

60 Spinoza's use of the term confusion likely refers to and attacks what Maimonides calls "absence of order" and Gersonides and Crescas "ill-order" (Wolfson 1983, vol. I, p. 437).

61 Spinoza could have found the idea that "species and other general ideas are only things of reason, whilst everything that exists outside the mind is an individual object, or an aggregate of individual objects" in Maimonides (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 437).

The moral world order refers to the idea that God creates the world and governs it in such a way that good is repaid and evil punished. This could happen in this life or the next, as Saadya argues. The concept of eternity of the mind present in Book V of the *Ethics* has been subject to much scholarly debate[62], but what seems clear is that Spinoza does not entertain any notion of temporal immortality[63] after death. Furthermore, the part of the mind that is eternal is not subject to divine judgment and retribution. It therefore follows that the only possible moral order is in this life and that divine providence must guarantee it. However, Spinoza rejects both types of providence discussed by medieval thinkers. He cannot accept general providence, since God does not endow beings with the means for self-preservation. He merely produces everything that follows from his nature, regardless of whether these things can preserve their own being or not. Spinoza cannot accept personal providence either, since God cannot be said to love or tend to the needs of any individual. Even the person who has adequate knowledge and loves God "cannot strive that God should love him in return" (EVp19) since God is without any passions, whether they be of joy or sadness (EVp17)[64].

The existence of evil

The word "malum" that Spinoza uses can be translated either as 'evil' or as 'bad'. In EIapp he focuses on what we would translate as 'evil'. Those who are ignorant of true causes will regard everything only with respect to how it affects them. If an event suits them then they call it good, while if the event harms them in any way they call it evil. They mistakenly believe the event or thing is evil in itself when they should just notice that it is contrary to their nature[65]. In EIVpref the

62 See, for instance, Curley (1988), Hampshire (1951), Moreau (1994), Morrison (1994), Nadler (2001), Wolfson (1934) or Yovel (1989).

63 Temporality is a concept essentially different from the a-temporal notion of eternity. The concept of temporal immortality refers to the hypothesis that the soul might endure after death for an unlimited period of time.

64 Spinoza's God or nature is not the same benevolent divinity we find in the stoics (Matheron 1994b, p. 156), but it must be mentioned that Spinoza transforms, in the *TTP*, the two meanings of the concept of divine providence. In Chapter 3 (pp. 45-6) he speaks of the external help (*auxilium)* given by God, which is the "fixed and immutable order or nature" and the internal help, which is the power specific to each human nature. One may wonder whether the word "help" is ironic.

65 An idea already present in Maimonides (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 437).

significance of "malum" is closer to what we would call bad. Human beings tend to evaluate things according to the ideal picture[66] they have in their minds of how that thing should be. For instance, they have an ideal of a house and they evaluate the perceived object according to how closely it approximates their ideal. This implies that humans believe they know the intentions of the author of an object. While this is already highly problematic in the case of man-made objects, it is a completely inadequate way of considering objects produced by nature without any human interference. Spinoza argues that nature does not act according to final causes and so there is no ideal according to which we are to judge the products of nature. Evaluating a thing as good or bad may say something about us and about our ignorance, but it cannot say anything about nature. Good or bad, or perfection and imperfection[67], are notions that human have devised and that are inadequate.

Spinoza does not do away with the notions of good or bad/evil and perfection or imperfection all together. What he does is change their meaning so that it suits his thought. As he argues in the same preface to Book IV, he does want to keep the notion of good in order to designate an ideal that humans should approximate. The details of this notion, together with the similarities with Nietzsche's imperative to think "Beyond Good and Evil", will be explored in the comparative chapter, but it suffices to say here that it is not a moral ideal. Attaining this ideal is a question of increasing one's power of acting, rather than behaving according to some confused and arbitrary norms or ideals that we imagine.

The unselfish

What does Spinoza understand by altruism, why does he criticize it as an illusion, and what is the alternative he offers? The last question will be dealt with in greater detail in the analysis of Spinoza's normative thinking in the comparative section. For the moment, it is important to formulate the guiding questions that will allow us to investigate the nature of Spinoza's normative position and to compare it with Nietzsche's.

66 Spinoza's critique of universals will be outlined in section II.1.

67 Taken here to describe the greater or lesser correspondence between the intention of the agent and the outcome of her actions, and not in the spinozistic sense of greater or lesser power.

Della Rocca has argued that, given the framework of Spinoza's system, we need to understand altruism in the following manner:

> It is possible for an object x to strive to do F, not because such an action would increase x's power of acting or offset a decrease in x's power of acting, but because such an action would increase another individual's (y's) power of acting or offset a decrease in y's power of acting. (Della Rocca 1995, p. 231).

Spinoza's criticism of an altruistic explanation for our actions is that it fails to grasp the essence of (human) nature. In EIIIp6 and 7 Spinoza argues that the essence of each thing is its conatus, i.e. the striving to persevere in its being. This effort follows solely from the essence of each thing, and not from the essence of anything else. In IVp25 Spinoza uses this argument in order to show that nothing strives to persevere in its being for the sake of another, but only for its own sake. From this it follows that if we believe we are acting for the sake of another we are merely deluded, and so offer an inadequate interpretation of our actions. Della Rocca uses two examples in order to show how the apparently unselfish motives behind our actions are in fact concealed egoism according to Spinoza (Della Rocca 1995, pp. 232-3). The first example is the situation when I am motivated to assist another person out of pity. According to Spinoza pity is a form of sadness (EIIIp22s) and so when acting out of pity I am actually trying to alleviate my own sadness (EIIIp27c3dem)[68]. The second example is when we strive to make others act according to the dictates of reason (EIVp37). What might on the surface appear a noble altruistic impulse is in fact the desire to make others useful to us, since nothing is more beneficial to us than other human beings living according to reason (EIVp37dem).

Spinoza's critique of altruism is part of his project of undermining traditional forms of morality found in the Jewish and Christian traditions of his time. The question we must turn to now is what Spinoza's own ethical project is. If we grant Spinoza the premise that human beings act only selfishly, we must ask whether his

68 Pity is bad and useless (EIIIp50) and humility is not a virtue (EIIIp53) - contra Maimonides.

ethics amounts to an endorsement of unmitigated egoism and moral relativism. Spinoza's answer is that he advocates an enlightened form of egoism, which consists in the enhancement of power (according to reason). In the comparative section we will therefore have to ask why Spinoza values the enhancement of power, why the process of enhancement should be guided by reason, and how Spinoza's normative project is based on an adequate understanding of the essence of human beings. Once we understand Spinoza's ethical and political arguments in the context of his commitment to immanence, naturalism and an ontology of power we can better see how his commitment to the enhancement of the power of other human beings depends not on altruistic principles but on enlightened egoism.

Spinoza's critique of substance

In order to better situate the five points mentioned within Spinoza's general philosophical project, it is crucial to sketch the dominating feature of his metaphysics, namely his critique of the metaphysics of substance, especially in its Cartesian form. This is important because it shows how Spinoza's understanding of substance precludes any notion of teleology or free will in God, as well as how the doctrine of immortal, separable souls is an absurdity. It further has the added benefit of showing the inseparability of body and mind.

Spinoza's critique of substance is not aimed at discarding the notion of substance altogether, as will be the case with Nietzsche. It is rather aimed at a reconfiguration of this fundamental notion. There are two salient features of this transformation that need to be emphasised in the context of the present research. First, Spinoza rejects an understanding of God or substance without the attribute of extension. This implies that the body and the material are not metaphysically inferior or subordinated to the soul or thinking substance. The essence of a mode of substance (e.g. a human being) is not determined by the attribute of thought alone [69]. This will have crucial consequences for Spinoza's arguments in Book V of the *Ethics*, when he will consider the part of the mind that is eternal and will argue, as will be

69 In contrast to so many of his Jewish predecessors' hostile attitude towards matter and the body.

shown later in this thesis (section II.2), that there is also an eternal essence of the body. This view will also have important consequences for Spinoza's physics, since he will argue that motion is inherent to matter and not given to it by a transcendent cause, i.e. God. This stands as a guarantee for the autonomy of the physical, given that explanations in natural philosophy can be given without recourse to causes outside the attribute of extension itself. Secondly, Spinoza argues from the very beginning of Book I of the Ethics that there is no plurality of substances. This means that there is no plurality of entities that can be considered in and through themselves (i.e. substances), in isolation. Given that adequate understanding mirrors the order of nature, there can be nothing in nature that can be understood in isolation from everything else. For human beings, this means that, as Spinoza famously put it in EIIIpref, the human is not "a dominion within a dominion". Human beings cannot be understood on their own, do not have free will and must struggle in order to increase their power to act and so their freedom. The *Ethics* is an account of how this enhancement is possible and Spinoza's turn to the body is an integral part of this project. The question of how Spinoza's revaluation of the notion of substance and his critique of metaphysical values relate to Nietzsche's will be discussed in the third chapter.

I.2. Spinoza's attitude to contemporary science

Spinoza does not play a fundamental role in the history of science. He is far from having the same degree of influence on the development of 17th Century science as his famous contemporaries, Descartes or Leibniz. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the scientific developments of his own age, corresponded with some of the leading scientific figures in Europe and his philosophical thought is a testament to the profound influence scientific thought had on him (Barbaras 2007, p. 22; L'écrivain 1986, p. 16). This section will first investigate some of the ways in which Spinoza's thought was informed by science and will then proceed to analyse Spinoza's critique of scientific thinking.

It might seem surprising that a thesis dedicated to the turn to the body deals with Spinoza's relation to science as a whole. This is the result of a peculiarity of 17th Century science, namely the lack of distinction between scientific disciplines.

Aristotle had previously argued for the need to distinguish between various domains of theoretical knowledge. Distinctions stem from either the specific principles that different disciplines use, or from the various degrees of clarity or certainty they offer[70]. Modern researchers would also, of course, distinguish between, for instance physics, anatomy and biology. Spinoza's time, however, sees many attempts to undermine the distinctions between the various methods and conceptual apparatuses at work in different sciences[71]. Descartes holds that everything in nature can be accounted for using mechanical principles (Hatfield 1992, p. 335; Shapin 1996, p. 56). Boyle argues that two principles, matter and motion, are enough in order to explain the entire physical world (Shapin 1996, p. 46). Leibniz opines that "*everything happens mechanically in nature*, that is, according to certain mathematical laws prescribed by God". Bodies can be understood only through reference to "magnitude, figure, situation, and changes in these, either partial or total" (PPL 1989, 189)[72]. This should not, nonetheless, lead us to conclude that there was widespread consensus among the leading scientists regarding the nature of the method to be employed (Shapin 1996, pp. 3-4). This appeal to mechanistic principles is a result of the dissatisfaction with the old, scholastic physics[73]. Some scholars have argued that what made the scientific

70 In the *Posterior Analytics*, the locus classicus for his discussion of science, Aristotle argues it consists in demonstrations that start from primary, immediate and true principles, known with certainty. Science gives us knowledge of what is necessary, i.e. cannot be otherwise (see Posterior Analytics 71b9-72b4, 73a21-74a3). Of the principles used in scientific demonstration "some are proper to each science and others common – but common by analogy" (76a37-40). There are primitive principles in each genus (74b23-4), and one cannot prove anything by crossing between genera (75a38-39).
In the case of practical philosophy, Aristotle speaks of the "clarity that accords with the subject matter", because "one should not seek out precision in *all* arguments alike". Political art examines things that "admit of much dispute and variability" and so it is enough if one demonstrates the truth "roughly" (Nicomachean Ethics 1094b12-1094b25).

71 'Physiology', for example, had two coexisting and related meanings in the seventeenth century: the study of nature in general and the study of the human body as a part of nature (Hatfield 1992, p. 338).

72 Letter to Herman Conring, dated March 19th, 1678.

73 This should not mask the continuities. It has been argued, for instance, that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities can be traced back to Ockham (Dijksterhuis 1975, p. 475). We can observe the debts of early modern scientists to their medieval predecessors in Boyle's preservation of the notion of form: what he does is change the meaning of the notion from substantial form to structure of the corpuscles that make up the object (Dijksterhuis 1975, p. 483).

revolution a coherent movement was not an agreement about the correct way of explaining nature. It was rather a common rejection of the scholastic tradition in natural philosophy (Clarke 1992, p. 258; Shapin 1996, pp. 54-55, 133)[74].

In spite of the numerous differences, it is possible to group scientific developments in early modern Europe under the heading of the project of the mechanisation of nature. Mechanism consists in the belief that nature is composed out of particles or corpuscles of matter that are fundamentally inert. They are set in motion by collisions which always imply direct physical contact. Therefore, no action at a distance is allowed. The observable forms and qualities of things are best understood in terms of the size, motion, rest and position of particles (Macherey 1995, pp. 745-6). In order to understand what Spinoza thought science had to say about the body during the 17th Century we have to gain a more detailed understanding of what mechanism means, together with the specific accounts of the body offered by those thinkers particularly important to Spinoza. Special attention will therefore be paid to Descartes' and Hobbes' accounts of the body.

2a. The influence

The mechanisation of nature comprised four distinct elements (Shapin 1996, p. 13):

1) The use of mechanistic "metaphors" in order to understand natural processes. Scientists like Kepler, Descartes or Boyle elaborated analogies between the natural phenomena they observed, whether the movement of the planets or the behaviour of natural bodies, and the causal workings of machines, particularly clocks. If the movement of mechanical parts was enough to explain the motions of clocks, mills etc., they believed it would be adequate for understanding the planets or the human body. The metaphor of the clock was especially appealing to seventeenth Century thinkers because its inner workings were perfectly intelligible and, while the clock itself is inanimate, it could mimic the complexity and purposiveness of intelligent agents. Everyone was of course aware that clocks needed intelligent designers,

74 It can be argued that the version of scholasticism under attack was a simplification and caricature of the natural philosophy of the Schools (Clarke 1992, p. 260).

but in the same way the workings of the clock did not require any intervention from its maker, the natural world did not require intervention from its creator, God, in order to function (Shapin 1996, pp. 33-6). Knowledge of machines served as a model for all knowledge because machines had a determinate structure: their components and their creation were known and, in principle, always specifiable. They were models of uniform and regular motion (Shapin 1996, p. 36). The use of mechanistic explanations required the repudiation of two traditional assumptions: a) that there is a radical distinction between nature, created by God, and artifice, which can only imitate nature imperfectly. It had previously been argued that nature, as divine creation, was far superior to anything humans could produce and that it would be immoral to try to compete with the Divine creator (Shapin 1996, p. 31); b) that there is a break between the sublunary and the supralunary realms, so that the motion of the heavenly bodies is caused by souls rather than by physical causation (Shapin 1996, pp. 17-8).

2) The mechanisation of knowledge: the use of an explicitly formulated method of investigation that leads to the elimination of the effects of passions and interests in order to obtain a pure knowledge of nature. In England, due to Bacon's influence, the emphasis was on an inductive and empirically grounded procedure that accumulated knowledge of particulars and proceeded to offer causal knowledge and general truths (Shapin 1996, p. 92). Continental philosophers, following Descartes, expressed skepticism concerning the possibility of reaching knowledge of nature from experiments. Experiments were designed to confirm the results of rational inquiry, but could not be used to select among the multiple possible causal accounts for the same phenomenon (Shapin 1996, p. 115).

3) The depersonalisation of knowledge: an increasing separation between the knower and the object known as evidenced in the distinction between everyday experience and what nature "is really like". Copernicus dealt a powerful blow to common experience when he argued that we are not situated on a static body circled by the heavenly bodies. Common experience was reduced to the status of mere "appearance" (Shapin 1996, p. 25)[75]. We perceive forms and qualities,

75 Nevertheless, Descartes or Hobbes still display suspicion of artificial experiments and

but according to mechanism, focusing on them leads to a confused knowledge of the world. What is required of the scientist is to explain the world in terms of primary qualities, independent of any observer: extension, motion, number, and figure. The primary qualities were taken to be objective, geometrical-mechanical properties of bodies, while secondary qualities were understood to be subjective labels for sensations and for our reaction to them in terms of pleasure and pain (Dijksterhuis 1975, p. 474).

4) The knowledge obtained is used in order to control nature and in order to promote social, moral, ethical and political goals. This was to be accomplished in the most rigorous fashion possible, i.e. without recourse to passions. The same method employed in the investigation of natural bodies could be employed in order to study and gain power over oneself, other human beings and political entities.

Descartes on the body

In Descartes' work the body features in two distinct ways: as an object of science and as "my" body, i.e. the personal, felt body, the place of the passions. Both meanings are present in the two works under consideration here: *The Meditations on First Philosophy* and *The Passions of the Soul.* The difference lies in the priority given to the two meanings in the two works. In the *Meditations*, Descartes' focus is on establishing the metaphysical grounds necessary for the science of physics, and so the scientific understanding of the body is his primary interest. In the *Passions*, however, he is investigating the nature and power of passions, the influence they have on the individual and how they can be mastered. Therefore, the scientific understanding of the body is subordinated to this task. This difference in priority translates, as I will argue, into a difference in Descartes's understanding of the body in these two works. I will end this section by asking: In what way can we consider Descartes to be a precursor to Spinoza's turn to the body?

show a certain preference for common experience (Shapin 1996, p. 82).

The Meditations

In the *Meditations,* Descartes' understanding of the body is dominated by his famous doctrine of the mind-body dualism. The change in the subtitle of the *Meditations* from the first to the second edition of the work is telling. The subtitle for the first edition (1641) is: *In which the Existence of God and the Immortality of the Soul are Demonstrated*. For the second edition (1642), the subtitle reads: *In which the Existence of God and the Distinction between Soul and Body are Demonstrated.* Descartes was dissatisfied with his proofs for the immortality of the soul[76]. What he felt his arguments did lead to was the real distinction between mind and body[77].

The mind-body dualism is rooted in the distinction between extended and unextended substance. Matter[78], or corporeal substance, is characterized as inert. The movement of matter therefore needs an external cause, which it finds in God. Besides God, the mind can also imprint movement on matter, on bodies (Garber 1992, pp. 321-2). This seems to be a threat to the possibility of understanding nature since, if we are to conceive the laws governing it, nature must be subject to constant laws. If the quantity of movement can be changed at any time by a non-corporeal agent, then we have no guarantee for the veracity of the science of physics. Descartes' solution is to argue that motion is the product of mass times velocity and that the soul can only influence the direction of movement (Garber 2001, p. 137)[79]. Even if the soul is not a threat to the veracity of Cartesian physics, any investigation of nature depends on the movement imparted by God on matter.

76 See the letter to Mersenne from December 24th 1640: "As for what you say, that I have not said a word about the immortality of the soul, you should not be surprised. For I could not prove that God cannot annihilate it, but only that it is of a nature entirely distinct from that of the body, and consequently it is not bound by nature to die with it.".

77 See also the letter to Elisabeth 21 may 1643.

78 Matter is recognized as such in virtue of being extended (Principles of Philosophy II: 23, see Cottingham 1992, p. 239). The principle that matter is to be understood in terms of a single defining property was probably inherited from the scholastics (Clarke 2006, p. 165).

79 A version of the law of the conservation of matter that will later be criticized by Leibniz (Garber 2001, pp. 138-9).

In the Second Meditation a body is understood as something

> that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of being enclosed in a place, and of filling up a space in such a way as to exclude any other body from it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; of being moved in several ways, not, of course, by itself, but by whatever else impinges upon it. (Meditations, 26).

A body is (first and foremost) extended, flexible and mutable (Meditations, 31). Descartes proves the existence of bodies by arguing that ideas of bodies are the effect of an external active force. These ideas do not depend on my consent and are more vivid and, in a way, more distinct than what I know through meditation or in memory (Meditations, 75). Since God is not a deceiver and I know that these ideas of bodies do not come from me, they must come from things (Meditations, 80). This, or course, is not a guarantee that bodies resemble the ideas one has of them and it is not clear whether a body can be known clearly and distinctly. In the Replies to the Objections to the Meditations, Descartes elaborates on the body and argues that there is no power in the body by which it produces or conserves itself (Meditations, 118).

Descartes does not present his natural philosophy as true, but merely as a reasonable hypothesis (Clarke 1992, p. 262). Nevertheless, an advantage of Descartes' physics is that it eliminates teleology from the study of nature. Descartes accepts that natural philosophy cannot give us an understanding of nature beyond any doubt, but, as a methodological principle, he investigates matter in isolation, without considering the Divine plan (Kennington 1972, p. 94). As opposed to Leibniz, he considers God only insofar as he produces movement in matter, not insofar as this production has a purpose (Garber 2001, p. 163).

The teaching of nature

While scientific knowledge of matter, and therefore of the body as an object of science, is only hypothetical, it offers more certainty than the grasp of the body as "my" body. Sleeping and dreaming show that I can have the same experience of my body during my slumber that I have when awake. I can easily recall having been

deceived about the state and actions of my body during my slumber, and therefore must conclude "that there are no clear and definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake form being asleep" (Meditations, 19). Nevertheless, Descartes argues that my body seems to be called mine by a special right. Otherwise, why would sensation lead me to desire, do or feel something (Meditations, 76)? Given the dualist starting point, Descartes is forced to concede that there is no affinity between the bodily sensation and the will present in the soul that nonetheless seems to follow from the sensation. He is forced to admit that he has no explanation for this other than that he has "been taught this way by nature" (Meditations, 76).

From what has been said so far, it seems that Descartes' discussion of the body excludes teleology. Nevertheless, Descartes' doctrine of the teaching of nature confounds such expectations. The teaching of nature, while imperfect, has been supplied by God for our preservation (Hatfield 1992, p. 360)[80]. Nature is understood by Descartes as "God himself or the ordered network of created things" (Meditations, 80). My nature refers to the combination of all things bestowed upon me by God, and Descartes believes that the teaching of nature must therefore contain some truth (Meditations, 82). The teaching of nature should be distinguished from the light of nature, which offers clear and distinct ideas. The teachings of nature are not a guide to the nature of things, but they inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part. The teaching of nature is therefore teleological in nature. The teaching of nature has been bestowed on me by God insofar as I am composed of mind and body in order to follow what produces pleasure and avoid pain (Meditations, 82). This line of thought is based on the assumption that nature teaches me that 1) I have a close, intimate unity with my body, 2) I exist among other bodies which are useful or detrimental and that 3) I am aware of inner affections, signalled by hunger, thirst and pain.

Nature in humans is not omniscient, it can inadvertently guide us to do wrong because it drives us to many thing with which reason does not agree. The teaching of nature is a spontaneous impulse that has been instituted in us by God in order

80 Perhaps reminiscent of medieval discussions of general divine providence.

for our body to function in the majority, but not all, of the situations we encounter (Meditations, 87)[81]. It should therefore not be confused with the habit of making reckless judgments (Meditations, 82), nor should we believe that nature is corrupt and always diverts us from the good and the true (Meditations, 84). The existence of the teaching of nature is a proof of God's goodness (Meditations, 87).

We can summarize the notion of "teaching of nature" by distinguishing between its theoretical and its practical functions. The theoretical is subordinated to the practical function, which has a strong teleological component: we are endowed by God with the capacity to strive for what is good for us as a unity of mind and body. The focus of the *Meditations*, however, is a theoretical one, i.e. to provide the metaphysical foundation necessary for physics, and so the practically-oriented line of thought is not fully developed. The emphasis will nevertheless change in Descartes' later work, when his focus will be on the pursuit of the good. This is made possible by a focus on the affective structure of human beings, considered as a unity, rather than as the uneasy association of two radically distinct substances.

The *Passions of the Soul*[82]

There is a noticeable tension in the *Meditations* between on the one hand the strict mind-body dualism and on the other hand the teaching of nature that shows us that our mind is united to our body. One way of resolving the tension is to argue that nature deceives us and that dualist metaphysics is a true description of the world and of ourselves. Descartes, however, does not take this route. He is aware of the problems raised by understanding mind-body interaction in his metaphysics, as they are discussed in his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. In the letter from May 16th 1643 Elisabeth argues that movement requires extension and physical contact, which manifest themselves in the impulse

81 The body has a series of nervous paths that lead to the brain. If any part of the chain is affected, the signal will be interpreted as being caused by the first element in the chain. The fundamental problem is that we do not always have the proper reference for the sensation we feel (Meditations, 86-7).

82 Focusing on this treatise is not accidental: Spinoza had studied it with special interest, probably in the Latin translation of 1650, and it is the only work mentioned by title in the *Ethics* (Beyssade 1999, p. 115).

of the thing moved, the manner in which it is moved and in the qualities and shape of the surface of the mover. It is not at all clear how an immaterial thing, possessing none of these characteristics, could move a body. Elisabeth writes that the word immaterial seems to mean simply the negation of matter and to point to a lack of knowledge of the true cause of movement (Letter to Descartes, June 20th 1643). The first of Descartes' responses, dated May 21st 1643, centres on the distinction between four kinds of primitive notions. Primitive means that each idea can be understood only though itself and all other knowledge is based on the primitive ideas. Descartes argues that all human knowledge (*science)* consists in distinguishing these notions and in attributing each only to the object it belongs to. The first kind consists in the most general ideas: being, duration, number, etc. Second, we have the primitive idea of the body: extension, from which follow shape and movement. Third, the primitive idea of the soul consists in thought, which includes perceptions of the understanding, and inclinations of the will. Fourth, and most interestingly for the argument present here, we have primitive notions of the soul and body together: their union, on which depends the power of the soul to move the body and of the body to act on the soul, in order to cause sensations and passions[83]. Descartes argues that the fourth type of primitive notion is evident to those who do not philosophize, because they only use their senses and conceive of the mind and body as one thing (Letter to Elisabeth, June 28th 1643). Descartes recommends to Elisabeth a therapeutic course[84], rather than a line of arguments, in order to grasp this union (Garber 2001, p. 174). This is not to say that Descartes considers Elisabeth incapable of philosophical speculation, but rather that this resonates with other doubts that Descartes expresses regarding philosophical (metaphysical) contemplation[85]. In order to explain what he means by the union of mind and body further, Descartes uses an example taken from

83 Garber makes the interesting point that the intelligibility of the mind-body connection and its actuality are slightly different issues and do not necessarily overlap (Garber 2001, p. 170). Descartes can be read here as dealing only with the second issue.

84 "it is by using only life and everyday conversations and in abstaining from meditating and studying those things which exercise the imagination that we learn to conceive the union of soul and body" (Letter to Elisabeth, June 28th 1643).

85 Descartes argues that the study of metaphysics should be undertaken only once (Letter to Elisabeth, June 28th 1643) as propaedeutic to physics (Letter to Mersenne, Jan 28th 1641). See also Hatfield (1992, p. 336).

scholastic natural science: the case of heaviness (Letter to Elisabeth, May 21st 1643). The scholastics understood heaviness as a quality or force inherent in the object, but distinct from it, that makes it tend towards the earth (Garber 2001, p. 177). This is inaccurate insofar as we are trying to do physics, but it is an adequate way of comprehending the relation between the soul[86] and the body. We grasp the union by abstaining from the activity of the understanding and from that of the imagination. We must focus on the senses (*les sens)*, as those who never philosophize do (Letter to Elisabeth, June 28th 1643).

In the *Passions of the Soul* (1649) Descartes elaborates on the union between soul and body from the point of view of passions (art. 2) and metaphysical discussions of substance distinctions are abandoned[87]. Passions are "perceptions, feelings or emotions of the soul that we relate to it and that are caused, maintained and fortified by some movement of the spirits[88]" (art. 27). Passions are caused by physical objects acting on our body, by inner agitation of animal spirits or even, through a complicated mechanism, by movements imprinted on the body by the soul (art. 12). As opposed to sensations, they are experienced as being in the soul (art. 25). Insofar as they are considered in the body, passions are actions. Passions incite the soul to want what they have disposed the body towards (art. 40). The soul has volitions in its power, but as Descartes concedes in a letter to Elisabeth (September 1st 1645), the body can shape the will. Descartes argues that passions are not to be feared, since they can be very useful when guided properly (art. 211). This is very far from considering the body the cave of the soul (Kennington 1972, p. 100), from which it must emerge. How then are the body and its movements understood by Descartes in this context? In a similar vein to the earlier *Traité de l'homme,* (composed in the early 1630's) Descartes treats the human body as a machine. He is therefore optimistic about how much can be understood about the body on the mechanical model (Cottingham 1992, pp. 245-6). In articles 12

86 Descartes sometimes speaks of the soul as the true substantial form of man (AT II 505, AT III 503, AT IV 346), i.e. that from which characteristic behaviour of a thing follows (Garber 2001, pp. 196-7).

87 The greater part of the science of nature must come from mechanics and kinematics. Metaphysics, deductive theoretical physics and the laws of motion serve only as background for explaining natural phenomena (Rorty 1992, p. 376).

88 Animal spirits.

and 14 he argues that there are three causes of movement in the body: the soul[89], the sense impressions we get from outside the body and the unequal agitation of animal spirits[90] and the diversity of its parts. In article 5, Descartes argues that a considerable error in understanding the body stems from believing that the absence of the soul causes cessation of movement and disappearance of heat. All the actions of the body that we share with animals can be entirely explained by understanding the machine that our body is; there is no need for the soul as an explanatory principle (art. 16). Descartes draws a parallel between living and dead bodies on the one hand and a working and non-functioning clock on the other hand (art. 6)[91]. The body is no longer the *locus* of inert matter we saw in the *Meditations*. The focus has shifted to the activity of the body. The movement present in the body is no longer traced back to God, but to the interaction with other bodies and to the activity of animal spirits.

The fact that Descartes no longer engages with the metaphysical conundrum of mind-body dualism allows him, throughout the *Passions*, to engage with the notions of body and of mind-body union without having to consider the soul as a distinct substance. He also considers at length the positive role that the passions, and therefore the body, can play for the well-being of the individual, even if the passions do not necessarily furnish clear and distinct knowledge and they need to be correctly interpreted (Rorty 1992, p. 379). The practical aspect of the teaching of nature is reconsidered with a view to a selfish concern for one's own good (Kennington 1972, p. 99).

The novelty of Descartes' position in the *Passions* extends, however, beyond this. The study of the human being, not just the body, is now pursued through the study of the conflict of passions on the basis of the mechanistic categories of stimulus and response (Kennington 1972, p. 115)[92]. The passions are important

89 See articles 31, 34.

90 Descartes inherits the notion of animal spirits, together with much of his physiology, from scholastic and Galenic physiology. His radical innovation is to translate these notions into mechanistic categories. (Hatfield 1992, p. 341).

91 We see here that for mechanism the normative and teleological aspect of well-functioning machines is crucial (Hatfield 1992, p. 361).

92 A similar argument is made by Susan James in her book on *Passion and Action: The*

due to the fact that they are expressive of states of the person[93]. If we consider the information provided by the senses[94] using the primitive notion suitable to the mind-body union, we may be able to decipher the code contained within passions in order to advance our understanding of the capacity of the mind and body to act and be acted on together. The task of the philosopher is not to be satisfied with the knowledge of those who have no doubt that the soul moves the body and the body acts on the soul (Letter to Elisabeth, June 28th 1643), but to analyse this union using its primitive notion as "natural scientist"[95], on the model of Descartes' investigation in the *Passions.* While the notion of the union of mind and body is indeed primitive, that does not entail that it is exempt of all further analysis or interpretation[96]. The apparently "incomprehensible character" (Vandenbussche 2015, p. 225) of the mind-body union can be made clearer if we focus on the notion of activity understood mechanistically. The mechanistic account of the body, using 'animal spirits', is used by Descartes in order to provide an account of how the motions of the body and the passions in the soul can coincide (see art. 38). Passions are modulations in the power of the person's soul to "act and be acted on together with the body"[97] and they express variations in this integrated power depending on whether and to what extent the mind and the body co-operate[98].

Emotions in the 17th Century Philosophy. She argues that the focus on the *Meditations* in secondary literature has led to the overemphasizing of the role of dualism in Descartes' philosophy. She also argues that this led to focusing on the objective aspect of perceptions in Descartes to the detriment of his insights into emotions (James 1997, p. 106).

93 I agree with Greenberg (2007) or Brassfield (2012) that we have good reason to doubt they actually have any representational content. Besides expressing various states of the person, they also help focus the mind on certain objects or motivate the agents (Greenberg 2007, p. 715).

94 This is the faculty whose use is recommended by Descartes to Elisabeth in the letter dated June 28th 1643. In the *Meditations* sensations represent things as good or bad to us (Greenberg 2007, pp. 715-6). I believe (but cannot fully argue for here) that the correspondence with Elisabeth marks the beginning of a new, broader way to think about the senses: 1) they cover everything we know about the person, the mind-body union 2) we should be mindful not just of what they tell us, but of what they indicate of the person's capacity to act and be acted on, i.e. its states.

95 "physicen" (letter to abbé Picot, August 14th 1649).

96 As claimed by Vandenbussche (2015, p. 225).

97 In the letter to Elisabeth dated May 21st 1643 Descartes argues that two things belong to the human mind: to think and to be united with the body, i.e. "to act (*agir*) and be acted on (*pâtir*) together with the body".

98 Williston (1999, p. 55) writes that "concurrence of nature and habit, volition and right reason […] is the highest goal of Cartesian moral science". My thesis is that we need to take a step back and argue that the concurrence of the powers to act and be acted on of the body and soul

Descartes speaks of the passions using physical and mental accounts, but also a psycho-physiological discourse, which shows us their union and takes precedence over the first two. This opens up the possibility that the mind-body union, the person, possesses an endogenous power to act, which, even if not known through the primitive idea of extension, can be known through its own primitive notion without recourse to first philosophy.

In other words, the thesis that I put forward here is that Descartes' account of the person in the *Passions* combines a mechanistic approach to understanding the human with a rejection of mind-body dualism. The dualist account of persons in the *Meditations* is replaced by an explanation "*en physicien".* Kennington goes so far as to argue that the metaphysical language of substance is actually a threat to the founding of science[99]. Instead of considering the mind-body dualism as fundamental to Cartesianism, we should instead focus on the dualism and interplay of mechanism and teleology (Kennington 1972, p. 115). While, as we have seen, teleology plays an important part in Descartes' understanding of the Teaching of Nature, mechanistic principles come to the fore in Descartes' treatment of passions[100].

We are now in a position to suggest an answer to the question of how Descartes' work on the passions may have influenced Spinoza. The most obvious possible objection to a rapprochement is that Descartes speaks of passions, which are physical in cause and mental in effect, whereas Spinoza speaks of affects, of which passions are only a subcategory, and which of course cannot be explained by causation between attributes. However, this objection should not discourage us for two reasons. First, in the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes speaks of the passions using physical and mental accounts, but also a psycho-physiological discourse, which is based on their union[101]. This anticipates Spinoza's threefold account of

are of the utmost importance.

99 In the case of human beings, science must study composite phenomena that are not reducible to thinking or extended things (Kennington 1972, p. 115).

100 I do not claim that teleology is eliminated from Descartes' discussion of the passions, only that it no longer plays the same dominant role it did in the Teaching of Nature.

101 Contra Schrijvers's claim that Spinoza undertakes "the consideration of a new dimension, so far unknown, of the affections of the body" (Schrijvers 1999, p. 64).

affects in the *Ethics.* Spinoza could find in Descartes the thesis that the human is a single person that has body and thought and that the passions dispose the mind to will the same things that they drive the body to perform. Spinoza differs only insofar as he takes this accord up to full "equality and identity" (Beyssade 1999, p. 123). Second, it is not sufficient to argue that spinozistic affects are broader because they include actions. Descartes, while not using the same technical language Spinoza does, includes affective activity under passions (Jaquet 2004, pp. 49-50)[102]. Further impetus for analysing the two together is provided by the fact that both attempt to treat of passions as part of nature and therefore subject to rational scrutiny (Jaquet 2004, pp. 59-61). They both seek to identify the simple passions or affects from which the rest are composed. Descartes stands as Spinoza's precursor in the project of synthetically reconstructing affects from their "proximal causes", and in this they differ from the phenomenological description provided by Aristotle (Schrijvers 1999, p. 63). The important similarities are not cancelled out by the fact that they provide different lists of primary passions, nor by the fact that Descartes aims to treat of passions as a natural scientist, while Spinoza claims that he will study affects as if they were "lines, planes and bodies" i.e. geometrically[103] (Jaquet 2004, p. 62). Furthermore, they both denounce their predecessors' inadequate treatment of passions or affects. Descartes distances himself from 1) the practices of the Jesuits – grounded in a tradition going back to Latin poets and philosophers like Seneca and Cicero – who aim to develop a cathartic discourse regarding the passions, rather than understand them and 2) the attitude of moral philosophers who see the passions as disturbances which cannot be the proper object of science. Spinoza also denounces the satirists who laugh at human affairs, the theologians who curse them and the melancholics who disdain humans (EIVp35s; cf. Jaquet 2004, pp. 57-9).

102 Nevertheless, affective activity in Descartes involves only the mind, not the mind and the body (Beyssade 1999, p. 124).

103 As we will have the chance to see later in this chapter, the question of what the geometrical order means for Spinoza is highly problematic, but it must include a dynamic account of reality that follows from his power ontology. This, as well as his claim in the *TP* (I 4) that he will study affects as atmospheric phenomena (rather than as geometrical entities, see Jaquet 2004, p. 117), brings him very close to Descartes' method.

These initial and important points of contact should not blind us to the fundamental differences. Spinoza rejects the teleological aspect of Descartes' doctrine of the teaching of nature, together with the hypothesis that passions are good in nature (art. 211) because they are instituted by God (Meditations 63-4). In the background, we also have Spinoza's very clear rejection of an understanding of matter as inert and of the idea that bodies have only an exogenous source of movement. He also argues against the notion that some of our desires, and therefore some passions, can be mastered using our free will (art. 144)[104] or that we can have absolute mastery over the passions (art. 150; cf. Jaquet 2004, p. 70). Despite these differences, Descartes' work on the passions and the shift in the understanding of the body opens up the possibility of thinking about affects beyond the mind-body dualism. Descartes strives to offer an account of the passions outside the context of his dualist metaphysics and of teleology. In virtue of his argument that only the improper usage of the passions should be feared (art. 211), Descartes can focus on analysing the dynamics of passions and the possibility of mastering them without appeal to transcendent causes. We can identify here a number of therapeutic methods that are important to Spinoza: deleterious passions can be changed through habit (art. 44), they cannot be combatted directly by our will, but indirectly using the representations of object associated with the passions (art. 45), can be combatted by firm judgement regarding good and evil, but sometimes also by other passions (art. 48), by distinguishing what depends on us from what does not (art. 144 and reminiscent of stoic moral philosophy) or through generosity and reflection on the necessity imparted on the world by divine providence (art. 145)[105]. Even though Descartes did not develop a metaphysical system suited to a purely immanent treatment of passions, he does join Spinoza in emphasizing that his discussion of the passions is aimed at showing how to act according to virtue with a view to the greatest good, which is happiness, or the increase in joy (art.148). While Descartes speaks of the possibility of absolute mastery over the passions (art. 50), the arguments he mobilises in order to show the conditions of possibility for this

104 Also against the claim, attributed by Spinoza to Descartes, "that the mind has absolute power over its own actions" (EIIIPreface) and over the passions (EVPreface).

105 See also Jaquet, 2004, 71: the starting point for all these changes is the natural disposition of our pineal gland.

absolute mastery show that it can only be considered an ideal. Absolute mastery requires perfect knowledge, or science (art. 48, 49) which we do not possess (Letter to Elisabeth, September 15th, 1645), it requires an uninhibited power of the soul over its own volitions, which we do not possess (Letter to Elisabeth, September 1st 1645), and it requires a great deal of industry and habit, in order to change the normal course of our passions (art. 44). While Spinoza is influenced by these themes in his own critique of the possibility of absolute mastery over the passions[106], his practical philosophy is shaped by a deeper fundamental shift away from Descartes. Spinoza, as I will argue in chapter III, thinks the possibility of exercising power over the affects starting from a critique of the thesis that firm, determinate and true judgments lead to self-transformation and empowerment. His thesis is that the two are identical, and that there is a deep continuity between epistemological certainty and empowerment precisely because they are different descriptions of the same thing. This amounts to a reformulation of the notion of "power over the affects" that shows the deep continuity between the descriptive and the normative aspects of Spinoza's philosophy[107].

Hobbes on the body

Hobbes is relevant to this thesis on two counts: a) his explanation of the mental and affective nature of human beings in mechanistic terms and b) his development of a scientifically-inspired method of research for understanding the constitution of the body politic.

a) Hobbes' critique of scholasticism is based to a large degree on his attack on the language that the Schools use[108]. One of the instances he criticizes is the expression "metaphysical motion". This "metaphysical (or metaphorical) motion" is used by the Schools in order to explain the operations of the mind and the beginning of

106 Both Descartes and Spinoza criticize the Stoic ideal of the perfect sage, unmoved by passions.

107 Jaquet argues that Spinoza writes that Descartes shows the "cleverness of his understanding" (*ingenii acumen*) (EIIIPref) because he saw the true problems concerning affects but gave fictitious, occult solutions based on mind-body dualism and free and infinite will (Jaquet 2004, p. 74).

108 Hobbes contrasts his nominalism: "for every idea is one, and of one thing" with the belief in universal essences to be found in scholasticism (Watkins 1955, pp. 138-9).

voluntary action (James 1997, p. 126). Hobbes writes that

> because some Motion they must acknowledge, they call it Metaphoricall Motion; which is but an absurd speech: for though Words may be called metaphoricall; Bodies and Motions cannot" (Leviathan, 38).

While Descartes accepts the possibility of the existence of mental motion and its effects in either impacting or being impacted on by the body, Hobbes does not find such a possibility intelligible. In opposition to Descartes or Malebranche, who saw thoughts as the soul's response to bodily changes, Hobbes argues that thoughts are bodily motions[109]. In order to have thoughts, a being must be capable of sensing. Sense is a "*seeming*, or *fancy*", i.e. a reaction, "resistance, or counter-pressure" of the heart against the movement provoked in the organs of sense, nerves, brain and heart by an external object" (Leviathan, 3). A body that is capable of thought will possess the capacity to have phantasms[110]. This means it will be able to receive and react to external motions and will have the capacity to compare phantasms (pictures), which implies the ability to retain the motion imprinted on it[111] (James 1997, p. 128). In spite of the above, it has been argued that Hobbes is not a fully-fledged materialist[112]. Watkins describes him as being an epiphenomenalist and claims that Hobbes really regards thoughts as shadows and overtones of movements in the brain. This move is facilitated by the use of ambiguous terms on the border between physiology and psychology: compulsion, disturbance, tranquillity, celerity, dullness, agitation, stirrings, phantasm, and most importantly endeavour[113] (Watkins 1955, p. 136).

109 Hobbes attempts to provide a causal explanation of human nature, an explanation compatible with mechanism. (Watkins 1955, p. 138).

110 "Thought consists in a succession of phantasms, that is, pictures" (Gert 2006, p. 158).

111 Watkins shows that the idea of motion permeates all of Hobbes' thought: "geometry studies motion; thought is motion, imagination and memory are made possible by the law of inertia; 'life itself is but motion'" (Watkins 1955, p. 129).

112 For the view that Hobbes is "clearly and explicitly a materialist" (Gert 2006, p. 157). The claim made there is that the mind consists of motions in the body, but that Hobbes did not know the nature of these motions.

113 Endeavour is: "These small beginnings of Motion, within the body of Man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions" (Leviathan, 23).

Hobbes does not admit a radical difference between perceptions and volitions: both are motions. The only difference between them is their position in the sequence of thoughts, which translates into a sequence of motions. Passions incorporate traits usually associated with both the phenomena of perception and of volition. Similarly to perceptions, they are ideas that represent things as good or bad to us, i.e. as useful or detrimental, but, like volitions, they can move us to actions. Perceptions, volitions and passions are never self-caused and we are never "free" in the sense of uncaused (James 1997, p. 135). The passions have the role of helping the body in its striving for preservation: they help us desire what is good and avoid what is bad[114]. For Hobbes, this amounts to Endeavor: the translation of the Latin *conatus,* which is called *appetite* when it drives us towards something we desire or *aversion* when it drives us away from something harmful (Leviathan, 23). In other words, endeavour refers to the capacity of a body to preserve its integrity and its functioning (James 1997, p. 130) Appetite and aversion are our conscious awareness of the body endeavouring to maintain itself and to follow what is good and shun what is bad for it[115] (James 1997, p. 131). For Hobbes all motivation is egocentric and striving is determined by efficient, not final causes. This means that moral considerations cannot explain behaviour (Watkins 1955, pp. 136-7). From Hobbes' nominalism it follows that there are no universal notions of good and evil. However, God has made us similar in certain respects[116], and one of these similarities is that we all fear death. It is therefore possible, even if we do not have the same nature, to be akin to other humans in our endeavour for self-preservation (Watkins 1955, pp. 141-2).

In conclusion, we can argue that the following points are important in order to understand Hobbes as a precursor to Spinoza's discussion of affects: the attempt to overcome the mind-body dualism and offer an account of human beings in naturalistic terms; the description of mental and affective life without recourse

114 A view similar to Descartes'.

115 Hobbes wants to argue that we are capable of influencing and modifying our thoughts. However, it is not clear how this reflexive capacity translates into a physical account of motion (James 1997, p. 131).

116 All men are engines of a similar design (Leviathan, 1) and the differences stem from the speed at which these engines operate (Watkins 1955, p. 143).

to final causes; and the explanation of human behaviour without an appeal to moral notions. The differences between Hobbes and Spinoza are, nevertheless, significant. Hobbes understands God as a transcendent power that imprints motion on matter and that designs human beings as machines i.e. teleologically[117]. As a consequence of this view, humans can be set in motion only by external causes and so possess no endogenous power (Watkins 1955, p. 136). Another important difference is the emphasis (shared by Descartes) on the striving for self-preservation. While Spinoza's conatus has often been understood as the striving for self-preservation (among others by Nietzsche), I will argue that self-preservation is only a special case of the expression of power that defines the fundamentally dynamic nature of human beings for Spinoza. Hobbes understands the world as a hostile environment in which power means the power to resist others and is understood within the context of a lack of security (Patton 1993, pp. 146-8). As we will see later, this stands in direct opposition to both Spinoza's and Nietzsche's active and affirming accounts of power.

b) The question of method is crucial to understanding Hobbes's philosophy. Watkins argues that it is the bridge connecting his (natural) philosophy and his political doctrines. The importance of the notion of method is by no means singular to Hobbes among early modern philosophers. What is distinctive is that he is not influenced by Bacon or Descartes, but that he takes his method from science: from Galileo and Harvey (Watkins 1955, p. 129). The resolutive-compositive method used by Hobbes was profoundly influenced by Harvey's method of investigation into the workings of the blood system. Since this system was not directly observable in its workings, Harvey started out by dissecting and inspecting its constitutive elements. From there, he made a hypothetical reconstruction of the whole system and how it works. The resulting hypotheses were tested and confirmed by observing the effects of amputations, ligatures, infections, etc. This dissection-reconstruction method was inspired by the distinction we find in Aristotle between the order of discovery, in which we merely perceive the effects confusedly, and the underlying order of nature, governed by simple, universal principles. The

117 Man is made by Nature, which is "the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World" (Leviathan, 1).

natural philosopher has the task of finding the underlying causes behind the effects we observe. In other words, the researcher must resolve the effects into their constitutive principles, or causes, and then re-assemble it (Watkins 1955, pp. 129-130). The constitutive principles can be understood in two ways: the physical parts that form the system (as did Harvey) or as the universal principles governing it (Galileo). Watkins argues that Hobbes combines the two meanings (Watkins 1955, p. 132). The goal of the philosopher is 1) to start from and understand an effect using hypothesis about its generative causes and 2) deduce effects from generative causes[118]. This method can be applied to the investigation of natural science, geometry or civil society. An important consequence of this method is that the natural laws governing humans are no longer understood as transcendent (in the Platonic tradition) or as immanent to legal systems (in Aristotelian fashion). They can be deduced from the nature of human beings in the course of Hobbes' psychological investigation. The reconstruction of the civil state is not purely descriptive: this rational reconstruction shows us what the state ought to be, in order to conform to our nature. Natural laws function as a hypothetical imperative: they dictate duties directed at our own preservation (Watkins 1955, pp. 133-4).

For the purposes of this thesis it is important to highlight three important points of contact between the philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza[119]. First, Hobbes shows how the same method of inquiry can be applied to both discussions about the nature of reality and human beings and on the constitution of civil society. The unity of method is a key element to understanding Spinoza's thinking as a whole and the continuities between the *Ethic*s and the political works. Second, the emphasis on the process of generation of the state, on its composition, is crucial to Spinoza's analysis of the body politic as a multiplicity of powers, generated according to natural, immanent laws. Third, Hobbes' treatment of the state shows how a naturalistic understanding of civil society includes not only a descriptive, but also a normative account of what the state ought to be and how that can be achieved. The normative account depends and builds on the descriptive work.

118 Hobbes writes in the Preface to *De Cive* (9) that everything is best understood by its constitutive causes.

119 For Spinoza's views on the difference between him and Hobbes on politics, see letter 50 to Jarig Jelles.

Spinoza strives to show how an adequate understanding of nature and of human beings is indispensible to the empowerment of the body politic, and consequently, of its constitutive elements. It must be noted that these elements are of particular importance to Spinoza's last work on politics, the *Tractatus Politicus*[120], where Spinoza tries to offer a scientific account of the generation, nature and goals of civil society (Balibar 1998, p. 50)[121]. We can now turn to some of the limits of mechanism apparent to the scientists of the time.

Early modern natural philosophers, while crediting mechanism with great explanatory power, soon came to realize its limits. The core of mechanistic principles was the postulation of particles that compose the objects under investigation. The problem with this was identifying these particles and accounting for their nature and constitution. If science was to overcome scholastic natural philosophy, then it had to make good on its promise of experimental verification. However, these small particles were not available for observation[122]. Some eminent scientists such as Boyle or Leeuwenhoek hoped that the particles might become visible under a microscope, but even they were sceptical about this ever being possible (Shapin 1996, p. 50). Another important aspect of mechanism was the thesis that movement could only be explained through contact. Motion could not be explained as self-movement, but only as the effect of an external cause, and action at a distance was condemned as a scholastic fancy. However, in spite of their best efforts, 17th Century natural philosophers could not satisfactorily explain gravitational pull without appealing to the possibility of action at a distance. Even Descartes' explanation of gravity[123] did not manage to persuade the scientific community. It is perhaps ironic that the scientist who is most often depicted as the

120 Hobbes is still highly relevant despite the fact that Spinoza stops using the language of the social contract in this work .

121 The earlier *TTP* is much more polemical in nature and is aimed at a number of contemporary issues of the Dutch Republic of Spinoza's time.

122 Descartes was aware of this issue, but did not seem to be affected by it too much as long as the mechanistic model had explanatory power (Clarke 1992, p. 267).

123 Descartes' vortex theory of planetary motion is the basis for his account of gravity cf. Principles of Philosophy IV: 21-27.

culmination of the scientific revolution, namely Newton, provided an explanation for the law of universal attraction that depends on action at a distance.

To these two concerns that were general throughout early modern science, Spinoza adds criticisms of his own. Nevertheless, before considering them, we should outline the ways in which he was influenced by mechanism. I will do so by considering each of the traits of mechanism mentioned above in turn.

1) The use of mechanistic "metaphors": Anyone reading the so-called Physical Interlude from Book II of the Ethics will no doubt recognize the reference to some key mechanistic principles. While a more detailed discussion is reserved for section II.2, some salient features of this account need to be mentioned here. Bodies, no matter how complex, can be broken down into simple bodies that are characterized only by their certain determinate[124] ratio of movement and rest, quickness or slowness. The movement of these bodies is conceived as the result of the impulse that one body communicates to another. Yet it must be noted that a very important element of the mechanistic set of metaphors, i.e. the clock, is not at all used by Spinoza here and barely used throughout his entire corpus. The word clock appears only two times (Buyse 2013, p. 62). This already seems to indicate a certain dissatisfaction Spinoza felt with regard to mechanistic metaphors. A machine, such as the clock, requires a maker. In other words, it requires an intelligent creator or designer who arranges the elements that make up the clock so that it performs a certain function. Given Spinoza's critique of final causes and of intelligent design, most famously in EIapp, we cannot be surprised that he did not employ the metaphor of the clock in his writings.

2) The mechanisation of knowledge: The principle of the mechanisation of knowledge seems ubiquitous throughout Spinoza's oeuvre. Recalling Shapin's definition, this principle displays two aspects: a) the formulation of a method of investigation and b) the elimination of the passions from knowledge.

a) The formulation of method: There is no question that the use of a method is

124 The latin *certa quadam ratione* has been translated as certain fixed ratio. However, in the section dedicated to the Physical Interlude, I will argue that this translation can be misleading.

absolutely crucial to Spinoza's philosophy. No other early modern philosopher (including Descartes and Hobbes) has been so adamant about the importance of method or used it so consistently. Spinoza's most important work, the *Ethics*, was written in the geometrical order and this form is shared by three other texts: an enclosure to Letter 2 to Oldenburg, the first of the two appendices to the *Short Treatise* and *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy.* Other works might not be written in the same form, but that does not mean they forego the notion of method. The treatise on the *Emendation of the Intellect* is not written in a geometrical form, but is dedicated to the elaboration of a method that can later on be used in the investigation of nature. The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is not written in the geometrical form either, but its major premise is that Scripture can be studied methodically, just like nature (Chaui 1999, p. 20). It is true that Spinoza experimented with other forms of philosophical writing: among others, he wrote a good many letters and used them to elaborate and present his thinking and he even composed philosophical dialogues in his early *Short Treatise*. Nevertheless, the centrality of the geometrical method cannot be doubted, together with Spinoza's belief that it is the best way of demonstrating truths clearly (see Letter 2 to Oldenburg; cf. Nadler 2006, p. 37)

So far, I have used the expressions geometrical order, geometrical form and geometrical method without drawing any explicit distinctions between them. There is an on-going debate on whether the geometrical order in which the Ethics was written refers to a method of demonstration (form of exposition) or to a method of discovery[125]. Wolfson has claimed that Spinoza's preference for the Euclidean geometrical form cannot be traced to the substance of Spinoza's philosophy and that there is no intrinsic relation between the content of the book and its appearance (Wolfson 1983, vol. 1, p. 55). Recent commentators, however, have moved away from this interpretation and have argued in favour of a closer link between the form and the content of the *Ethics.* The elements of the

125 This distinction must be placed in the context of the Cartesian distinction between analysis: "shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it were a priori" and synthesis which "employs a directly opposite method where the search is, as it were, *a posteriori*. It demonstrates the conclusion clearly and employs a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems, and problems." (AT 156).

geometrical order of the *Ethics* are: definitions, axioms, propositions, corollaries or postulates. These elements, connected through demonstrations, form a tightly knit order. Geometrical demonstrations cannot skip any steps in the argumentation and Spinoza describes them as "cumbersome" (*prolixo* in EIVp18s) because they require careful elaboration of all the details of the arguments made. The *Ethics* also contains scholia (commentaries), prefaces or appendixes which have a more discursive form. The definitions are the bedrock of the system. They stand at the beginning of the *Ethics,* formulate the fundamental elements of Spinoza's ontology, epistemology, psychology and ethics. They delineate the essence of the thing they are defining and thus allow the philosopher to deduce all the properties that follow from the nature of the thing. They are used by Spinoza not only in the beginning of each book, but on numerous occasions during his demonstrations (Nadler 2006, pp. 44-5)[126]. Much of the debate about the geometrical order revolves around the status of definitions. It is by no means immediately evident that definitions are true, nor is it clear why readers should accept them, in spite of Spinoza's claim that adequate ideas are self-evidently true[127]. One way to account for this is to say that they constitute arbitrary starting points and that Spinoza wants only to demonstrate what follows from a purely arbitrary set of principles. This interpretation is not very appealing, nor does it do justice to Spinoza's avowed belief in the truth of his philosophy (Letter 76 to A. de Burgh). A more refined version of this interpretation is to claim that the Ethics has a "hypothetico-deductive status". Spinoza does not prove the truth of his definitions because they can be judged only together with the consequences that follow from them (Bennett 1984, pp. 18-9). In order to substantiate his thesis, Bennett refers to EIIp11cs in which Spinoza asks his readers to suspend judgement until they have read the entirety of his demonstrations. However, there does not seem to be any reason why this plea on Spinoza's part should be taken to refer to the *Ethics* as a whole: it is offered in the context of the claim that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God, and Spinoza might have thought that his readers

126 The logical sequence of arguments in the *Ethics* is supposed to mirror the necessary flow of things from God. (Nadler 2006, p. 41).

127 "He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (EIIp43).

will find this specific doctrine particularly disturbing. Furthermore, if Spinoza's demonstrations throughout the Ethics do have a hypothetical character, there would be no reason for him to claim that philosophy is true (not simply probable) and that it is superior to the knowledge derived from experiments, as I will argue he does in his correspondence with Boyle. An alternative interpretation is that the geometrical order stands for a geometrical method that somehow shows the truth of the definitions[128]and so is both the order of discovery and the order of demonstration. In order to better understand Spinoza's method, we can look at the way he describes it in the *TIE:*

> the true Method is the way that truth itself […] should be sought in the proper order […] it is understanding what a true idea is by distinguishing it from the rest of the perceptions; by investigating its nature, so that from that we may come to know our power of understanding and so restrain the mind that it understands, according to that standard, everything that is to be understood; and finally by teaching and constructing certain rules as aids, so that the mind does not weary itself in useless things.[129]

Spinoza makes no distinction here between the truth of the definitions and the truth of what follows from them: all is discoverable by the use of the proper method, which is a method of discovery, not just demonstration. How exactly this works in the case of the *Ethics* has been the subject of fascinating studies[130], but what is pertinent to the present line of argumentation is that Spinoza is committed to: 1) the use of definitions to refer to what "expicates a thing as it exists outside the intellect - and then it should be a true definition" (letter 9 to De Vries, March 1663). Already in the early *TIE*, Spinoza gives three criteria for a good definition: it expresses the essence of a thing, it gives us its immediate proximate cause

128 This would imply that the geometrical method includes both analysis and synthesis, if we are to use Descartes's language (Steenbakkers 2009, p. 49).

129 This is reminiscent of Descartes' definition of method in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind:* "reliable rules which are easy to apply, and such that if one follows them exactly, one will never take what is false to be true or fruitlessly expend one's mental efforts, but will gradually and constantly increase one's knowledge till one arrives at a true understanding of everything within one's capacity" (Rule 4, AT X, 371-2)".

130 See, for instance, Barbaras (2007), Garrett (2003) or Gueroult (1968).

and from it all properties of a the thing must follow (TIE 51; cf. Jaquet 2004, p. 87) and 2) the use of a method of discovery that produces true (or adequate) knowledge and that produces results that are more certain than those of natural sciences, as his correspondence with Boyle shows.

It is important to notice in this context that the mechanistic picture of the world does not necessarily imply a mathematical conception of nature. The belief in the explanatory power of mechanism does not depend on the ability to represent physical laws mathematically, even if most natural philosophers insisted on the role of mathematics in understanding nature (Shapin 1996, pp. 57-8). Bacon and Boyle had their doubts regarding the force of mathematical explanation, but Spinoza was sufficiently impressed by the spirit of mathematics (Barbaras 2007, p. 22) to disagree with them.

b) The elimination of passions: Perhaps even more ubiquitous than Spinoza's reliance on method is his famous rejection of passions as heteronomous and harmful to pure knowledge. It does not take long to find, throughout his writings, testimonies of his belief in the virtues of this detachment[131]. This has not failed to make an impression on subsequent thinkers and, as we will see in the comparative section of this thesis, Nietzsche is no exception in his engagement with this aspect of Spinoza's thinking. What is worth mentioning here, and will be pursued in section II.1 is that, despite appearances, Spinoza does not wish to divorce reason and knowledge from affects. This argument depends on Spinoza's distinction between passive and active affects. While there is no question that Spinoza does wish to transform passive affects (passions), he believes it impossible to exclude active affects from intellectual pursuits. It will therefore be argued that Spinoza's engagement with the principle of the mechanisation of knowledge is much more complex than appears at first.

3) The depersonalisation of knowledge: An important component of Spinoza's epistemology is dedicated to the critique of the confusion between inadequate and adequate knowledge. By inadequate knowledge, Spinoza means confused knowledge: sensation, imagination, knowledge through signs rather than

131 The Preface to Book III of the *Ethics* or the first chapter of the *Tractatus Politicus.*

knowledge of common notions or of essences (EIIp40s2)[132]. Nature or substance is not as it first appears to human beings and its true nature can become known only to a subject that abandons its prejudices and understands substance in a non-anthropomorphic manner. We can therefore see the connection between Spinoza's ideal of adequate knowledge and the depersonalisation of knowledge that characterizes early modern attempts to break with scholasticism and establish a new understanding of nature. It must nevertheless be said that due to Spinoza's emphasis on the importance of knowing one's own body, his epistemology is not simply an attempt to depersonalise knowledge, but rather to expose the passionate, disempowering epistemological factors.

4) The practical applications of scientific knowledge: Spinoza definitely intends to use the results of his investigation of nature in order to promote practical goals. This is clear both in his political treatises, in which he tries to expound the best political constitution in accordance with human nature, and in the *Ethics*, where knowledge is employed for the sake of obtaining freedom, joy or blessedness.

2b. The Critique

Spinoza's critique of scientific developments stems from the way he understands adequate knowledge. In order for something to be known adequately[133], we need to know its place in the order and connection of things. According to the geometrical method, this implies knowing its causes, the process by which it was generated, and its effects. The importance of the last aspect of adequate knowledge becomes evident once we remember that the reality or essence of a mode is nothing other than power to act. If we are to understand a mode, we must know what it can do. The appeal to a method in order to ensure the adequacy of our knowledge is, as has been mentioned, an integral part of what has been called the scientific revolution. What is specific about Spinoza is that the knowledge obtained by science does not live up to the exigencies of his method. Perhaps the most striking example of this inadequacy is Spinoza's evaluation of scientific experiments (Buyse 2013, p. 62).

132 A more detailed discussion of adequate and inadequate ideas will be presented in section II.1.

133 For more on adequate knowledge see section II.1.

Pierre-François Moreau, in his excellent study on the problem of experience in Spinoza (Moreau, 1994) has argued that there is a distinction between experience in the everyday sense of the word and scientific experiment. Scientific experiment is one kind of experience. Moreau has also argued that for Spinoza scientific experiment is not always simply superior to everyday experience, but has its limitations, and that experience is, in certain cases, to be preferred. We can find examples of the latter in the field of politics. It is impossible to set up rigorous, controlled experiments in the field of politics. The object of study is far too complex for all the variables to be monitored carefully and therefore we would not know adequately any of the elements in play[134]. Scientific experiment can hope to achieve certainty only in simple cases in which it is easy to observe all the elements in play. However, even here, Spinoza has his doubts. Scientific experiment features as a philosophical problem in Spinoza starting with the *TIE.* There, Spinoza raises the following problem: We may have multiple laws of nature that we know to be true. Understanding which one of these natural laws is applicable in a concrete example cannot be determined by experiments alone (Moreau 1994, p. 266-7). In order to better understand this argument, the best place to search for clues is Spinoza's correspondence with the English scientist Robert Boyle. The letters referred to here are: 6, 11, 13 and 16[135].

The experiment discussed in letters 6,11,13 and 16 concerns the decomposition and re-composition (redintegration) of nitre. Boyle's conclusion is that nitre is composed of fixed and volatile parts. Spinoza's response is that Boyle's experiments do not warrant the explanation he supplies for the phenomena observed. In order to substantiate his claim, Spinoza offers an alternative explanation that is capable of accounting for the same phenomena: the nitre is composed of a single kind of parts, and the observable differences are due to causes other than the composition of nitre (letter 6). As Spinoza succinctly puts it in letter 13, Boyle claims nitre is a heterogeneous body, while he holds it is homogenous. The problem Spinoza is getting at here is of great importance to the scientific revolution: if an observed

134 Perhaps this also explains Hobbes' skepticism concerning experiments.

135 These are not direct exchanges between Spinoza and Boyle, but Oldenburg acts as Boyle's mouthpiece.

phenomenon can be explained equally well by two or perhaps more hypothesis then what guarantees that the mechanistic principles are better than the old scholastic philosophy of nature? We can find Spinoza's answer to this problem in letter 13. He takes issue with Boyle's justification for his experiments, i.e. that they prove that a mechanistic, quantitative explanation is better than the scholastic qualitative one. Spinoza believes that the superiority of mechanism has already been shown and, crucially, that this superiority does not rest on empirical grounds, but rather on adequate a priori reasoning.

To summarise, scientific thought does not satisfy Spinoza's demands for philosophical adequacy because a) scientific experiments cannot offer certainty and b) scientific principles are not established by science, but by a priori philosophy. We cannot have scientific certainty until we possess adequate philosophical ideas. After we have considered the salient features of the philosophical and scientific contexts for the turn to the body, we must turn to the central question of what is the nature of the turn to the body in Spinoza.

II. The nature of the turn to the body.

What is the nature of Spinoza's turn to the body? In order to answer this question, three sub-questions need to be raised. The first is: What is Spinoza's theory of knowledge, insofar as it connects to his turn to the body? The answer to this question plays a double role. First, it highlights the importance of the turn to the body for Spinoza's epistemology: we have inadequate knowledge because we misunderstand our body and, if we want adequate knowledge, we must have an adequate understanding of our body. Second, it provides the criteria necessary in order to understand what an adequate knowledge of the body is and therefore to evaluate the various ways of knowing the body Spinoza suggests in the *Ethics*. The second sub-question is: How does Spinoza understand the body? In my view there are three ways Spinoza does this throughout the *Ethics* 1) In a manner close to mechanism, in the Physical Interlude, 2) As a multiplicity of affects, in books III, IV and the first half of book V and 3) as an essence, in the second half of book

V. Using the answer to the first sub-question, I will argue that the mechanistically inspired understanding of the body is inadequate, and that viewing the body as an essence, while consisting of adequate knowledge, fails to offer a fully sufficient grasp of how to achieve empowerment. My thesis is that focusing on the second way of understanding the body is the best way to grasp the complexity of Spinoza's thinking on the body and its capacity for empowerment. The third sub-question is: How does Spinoza's normative account of ethics and politics follow from his understanding of the body? This question will be dealt with in detail in the comparative section of this thesis, but it is important to highlight here the features of Spinoza' account of the body that will play a crucial role in his normative thinking. The notions I will focus on are: empowerment, desire and conatus.

1. Spinoza's theory of knowledge and its relation to the body

The key passages for understanding Spinoza's theory of knowledge are EIIp40s2 and EIIp41. According to EIIp41, the only cause of falsity is knowledge of the first kind. What Spinoza understands by knowledge of the first kind is explained under EIIp40s2 and falls under two headings: 1) knowledge of things presented to the senses. This knowledge is mutilated, confused and without order for the intellect. Spinoza calls this random experience. 2) knowledge from signs, e.g. from hearing or reading certain words we recollect things and form certain ideas of them, like those through which we imagine things. Knowledge of the first kind is called by Spinoza "opinion" or "imagination". There are two kinds of knowledge that are necessarily true or adequate according to EIIp41[136]. These two kinds of knowledge, described under EIIp40s2 are: 1) knowledge that comes from having common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (second kind of knowledge) and 2) intuitive knowledge, which proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things (third kind of knowledge). We can speak of knowledge solely under the attribute of thought and the causes of an idea can only be other ideas, or modes conceived under the attribute of thought. Nevertheless, given that the

136 For an account of how Spinoza changed his views on truth in the works preceding the *Ethics*, see Curley (1994).

object of the mind is the body and that, with the exception of ideas of ideas, the object of our ideas are modes conceived under the attribute of extension, it is both important and useful to understand the bodily correlates of the various types of knowledge Spinoza discusses.

The bodily correlate of inadequate knowledge

Knowledge of the first kind, the only type of knowledge that is inadequate, can be understood in two ways: 1) lack of correlation between what an idea purports to present and what it actually corresponds to, and 2) the lack of knowledge of the causes that produce the idea in our minds (Nadler 2006, pp. 161-2). The lack of correlation between an idea and its ideatum is characteristic of a false idea, but it does not explain how a false idea comes to be formed in our minds. For this purpose, the second manner of understanding inadequate ideas is crucial. For the purpose of this thesis, we must analyse the bodily correlates of the nature and origins of the first kind of knowledge[137].

Spinoza explains the first meaning of knowledge of the first kind in EIIp29c. The argument he makes there is that the human mind will always have inadequate knowledge as long as it perceives things from the common order of Nature. The knowledge Spinoza refers to here is knowledge of the mind itself, of the body and of external bodies. The mind knows these three only through its knowledge of the affections of the body (EIIp23, EIIp19 and EIIp26 respectively) and it has a mutilated and confused knowledge of the affections of the body (EIIp28 and its scholium). The reason is that an affection of the body involves the nature of the human body together with the nature of external bodies (EIIp16). In order to have adequate knowledge we would need adequate knowledge of both causes (the human body and the external body) of the affections, knowledge not available to the human mind. There is, however, a further dimension to this account of the origin of inadequate ideas in the affections of the body. This dimension is indicated by the use of the expression "common order of Nature" in EIIp29s, which resonates with

137 Spinoza's theory of knowledge has received much attention in the secondary literature; see for instance Della Rocca (1996); Gueroult (1974); Marshall (2008); Radner (1971); Wilson (1999). It is not the prupose of this thesis, however, to engage with the nuances of this discussion.

Spinoza's reference to "random experience" in EIIp40s2. This expression refers to the fact that our body is determined "from fortuitous encounters with things". The order in which we become acquainted with things is at odds with the causal order and connection in which they feature in the infinite intellect of God. The way we grasp the agreements, differences and oppositions of things is determined by chance. Spinoza explains this at greater length in EIIp40s1. There he wants to show how universal concepts like "Man, Horse, Dog" or Transcendentals like "Beings, Things and Something" are formed[138]. These two types of terms arise from similar causes: the body has only a limited capacity to form distinct images[139]. Once that capacity is surpassed, images will become confused and so the mind will imagine all the bodies it has perceived confusedly. The mind will lose sight of the differences between the various impressions it has received and will focus solely on the elements on which they agree. These elements differ, of course, from person to person, and so the transcendental and universal terms will have different meanings for each individual. This physiological account of the source of errors in the human mind is a representative case of Spinoza's recourse to the body in describing how falsity appears. Another example can be found in EIIp17. The mind, once affected by an external object, will regard it as actually existing or present, until it is affected in a contrary manner. This, of course, does not mean that the external body itself will continue to be present. Therefore, the human mind can be mistaken. These physiological processes that describe the origins of falsity cannot be taken to offer an exhaustive description of the causes of all kinds of errors. What they offer are examples of how the affections of the body translate into inadequate knowledge: because they are the result of random experience and because they are not understood within their causal nexus.

In order to explain the second meaning of the first kind of knowledge, Spinoza refers to EIIp18s. The scholium is dedicated to an explanation of what memory is. Memory consists in a certain connection of ideas involving the nature of things

138 The terms are inadequate and contrasted with the adequate common notions.

139 An image, according to EIIp17s is not a mental or psychological terms, but a physiological concept, referring to a thing under the attribute of extension. It is an affection of the human body. Spinoza's use of the term is not subject to the same ambiguity that Hobbes' use of "phantasm" is guilty of.

outside the human body. It depends on the order and connection of the affections of the human body. As Spinoza explains in the demonstration to EIIp18, associations in the mind are created when the body is affected by two or more bodies at the same time. In the future, when the mind imagines one body, it will recollect the other. The connections established here do not reflect the order of the intellect, but rather the random order in which the human body is affected. The example Spinoza uses to make his point is that of the Latin word *pomum* which has no similarity to the thing it describes and is associated with it arbitrarily. Language employs the associations we have formed arbitrarily, and, due to its use of signs, can be misleading when trying to adequately understand nature. We should note that the source of this kind of error is again understood physiologically and traced back to the confused or mutilated knowledge provided by the body's affections. The difficulty involved in our perception of the world is amplified by the fact that, when perceiving something, we very often focus more on the pleasure or displeasure that a thing produces, rather than on the logical ordering of causes that has brought about the event we are experiencing. We therefore have a fragmentary awareness of both the nature of the external object and of our own body. (Nadler 2006, pp. 167-8) Instead of being the product of our intellect, ideas are formed as a result of our highly selective experiences[140]. A similar argument will be made by Nietzsche, who will emphasize the importance of the sensations of pleasure and unpleasure in the way in which we understand the world (see for instance MA 18 2.39). Laurent Bove, in his work on Spinoza (Bove 1996), has uncovered another crucial dimension of the first kind of knowledge. His argument is that the first kind of knowledge is useful for the survival of the individual and that it expresses the power of the body to structure experiences according to its needs. An important way in which reality is construed in a useful manner is by simplifying it: knowledge of the full nature of the causal nexuses that structure

140 Imagination does not always necessarily contain false ideas. If, as Spinoza argues in the EIIp17s, the mind imagines a non-existent thing and at the same time is conscious of the fact that the thing does not exist, then this is not a proof of the weakness of the mind but of the efficacy of its nature. As several commentators have argued, imagination is not a defect, but a virtue. Imagination only affirms an idea and error appears when we correlate this affirmation with reality, i.e. we assume that the idea we have affirmed stands for an objective essence of a thing (Allison 1987, p. 109; Severac 2011, pp. 398-406).

reality is sacrificed in order to obtain practical guidelines that allow the individual to navigate obstacles successfully and survive (Bove 1996, p. 56). This process of active simplification will also be discussed by Nietzsche, who will also emphasize its benefits for survival while pointing out the epistemic distortions it generates.

The corporeal correlate of adequate knowledge

Spinoza writes that knowledge of the body[141] is the key to understanding ourselves and yet no one has, so far, understood what a body is and can do (EIIIp2s). Spinoza believes that adequate knowledge is of the utmost importance because it translates into an increase in freedom or joy and leads to the state of blessedness, discussed in book V of the *Ethics*. It is therefore of the greatest significance and urgency for a human being to find the best philosophy that contains such adequate understanding. In order to understand adequate knowledge we must start with what Spinoza calls the second type of knowledge or knowledge of common notions. Spinoza explains the term "common notions" in propositions 38-40 of the EII. These notions are ideas of properties "common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies" and are "equally in the part and in the whole" (EIIp39). Things conceived under the attribute of Extension, for instance, share the same basic nature (being extended) and undergo the same kinds of modification. Because things have common properties the ideas corresponding to these bodies will also have common features (Nadler 2006, p. 175). Spinoza's example in EIIp38c, which is supposed to make clear what he means by common notions, is taken from the Physical Interlude, namely Lemma II, and points out that all bodies, insofar as they are understood under the same attribute (that of extension) agree insofar as they "can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest". Following Spinoza's indications, we can infer that under knowledge of common notions he understands cognition of infinite modes (immediate or mediated), as well as knowledge of properties common to a group of objects[142]. Gueroult argues that knowledge of

141 The body is a mode expressing God's essence under the attribute of extension (EIID1).

142 Spinoza is not forthcoming in providing examples of common notions, but they are presumably things like: possessing shape (no matter the specific shape), size, divisibility, mobility (Nadler 2006, p. 175). To use Wilson's example, when I perceive a stain on the carpet, I may not

common notions does not include knowledge of the attributes because attributes are the causes of things, not their properties. Therefore attributes are not included in perceptions of things, as properties are (Gueroult 1974, p. 424). The human mind will have adequate ideas of these common notions because the adequate ideas are in God "both insofar as he has the idea of the human body and insofar as he has ideas of its affections" (EIIp38). The affections of the body are incapable of supplying adequate knowledge of the human body and of external bodies because, by necessity, they present the mind with a partial acquaintance of things. The common notions, however, due to their presence in full in bodies, as well as in their parts, cannot be known in a partial or mutilated manner.

The third kind of knowledge has been considered notoriously problematic by many exegetes. Curley writes that "This is ground on which the prudent commentator will hesitate to tread" (Curley 1969, p. 137) and Yovel believes that it is "one of the most difficult and controversial aspects of Spinoza's system" (Yovel 1989, p. 154)[143]. While this warning must be heeded, Spinoza's discussion of the eternal essence of the body known under the third type of knowledge contains important clues for better understanding Spinoza's turn to the body, even if his arguments about eternity have sometimes been considered problematic. According to the definition of the third type of knowledge it is knowledge of the essence of things and it proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God (EIIp40s2). Spinoza speaks of things here insofar as they follow from the necessity of divine nature (EVp29s). It is under the third type of knowledge that we best see how individual essences express God's nature, i.e. his power. In EIIp40s2, Spinoza uses the example of the ratio between the numbers 1 and 2, on the one hand, and 3 and 6, on the other hand, in order to illustrate his theory of knowledge. Having the third kind of knowledge, or intuitive[144] knowledge, means

understand the cause of the stain, I may not know its nature nor the composition of the carpet, but I am certain that the stain is an extended thing and so falls under the attribute of extension (Wilson 1999, p. 148).This example follows Spinoza's cue in focusing on extended bodies.

143 The third kind of knowledge has given risen to numerous responses, ranging from Novalis' description of Spinoza as a "God-intoxicated man" to Bennett's claims that this doctrine is "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster" (Bennett 1984, p. 357) and that "Spinoza is talking nonsense and that there is no reason for us to put up with it" (Bennett 1984, p. 373).

144 The term intuitive refers to a) an inferential demonstration that could be grasped at

that we can immediately see that the ratio between the two pairs of numbers is the same[145]. We are told in EIIp42 that this kind of knowledge is always true and in EIIp47s that from knowing God we can deduce and know many things adequately under the third kind of knowledge, but more on this matter is reserved for book V[146]. In EVp20s Spinoza argues that the third kind of knowledge has power over affects, and later that intuitive knowledge is much more powerful than the second kind of knowledge (EVp36s) because the desire for it constitutes the greatest striving of the mind (EVp25)[147]. Therefore, obtaining it gives rise to the greatest satisfaction (*acquiescentia*) of mind (EVp27) or its greatest joy (*summa Laetitia*) (EVp27). This is the greatest virtue the mind can have (EVp25) and therefore the more it obtains it, the more it will strive to conceive even more things under this kind of knowledge (EVp26). The third kind of knowledge presupposes the second kind, but it offers an important advantage: it presents in an intuitive, synoptic manner what the second kind of knowledge presented in a discursive, fragmentary way (Yovel 1989, p. 154). We do not gain any new, additional information through the third kind of knowledge, but we do have a synthesized version of what we already know: this condensed version is called by Spinoza the essence of a thing (Yovel 1989, p. 156). The privileged object of knowledge of the third kind is the philosopher herself, i.e. her body and her mind (Yovel 1989, p. 164). This way of knowing the body will be explored later, in the section dedicated to considering the body as an essence. In the comparative section I will argue that Nietzsche is interested in Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, but that his (problematic) criticism is based on the unwarranted assumption that intuitive knowledge is purely intellectual and so divorced from the affects[148].

once rather than a protracted demonstration whose conclusion we do not immediately see and b) knowledge of particulars as opposed to knowledge of universals. Spinoza understands intuition to be knowledge of the complete nature of a thing (Bennett 1984, pp. 364-7).

145 Yovel is critical of this example because it makes the third kind of knowledge appear banal and easily accessible to everyone (Yovel 1989, p. 154). This cannot be Spinoza's point.

146 Gueroult argues that there is no contradiction between the intuitive, i.e immediate, nature of the third kind of knwoledge and the fact that it is the result of a deduction from Gods essence (Gueroult 1974, pp. 448-450).

147 Spinoza does not fully explain why exactly the mind is affected more by knowledge of essences than by universal cognition embodied in knowledge of common notions (Bennett 1984, p. 369).

148 Spinoza writes that "we feel and know by experience that we are eternal" (EVp23s).

We must note that Spinoza's strategy in discussing both kinds of adequate knowledge is to argue that God and the attributes are ontologically "simple". From this we can infer that their concepts are as well (Gueroult 1974, p. 420). God and the attributes do not have parts, and therefore cannot be grasped in a mutilated manner. God's essence is power and so the simple idea of God is the idea of power, of activity (Marshall 2008, p. 70).

In light of the preceding discussion of the theory of knowledge in Spinoza, we are now in a position to ask why he grants so much importance to the body in understanding both the essence of human beings and the origin and nature of adequate and inadequate knowledge[149]. Adequate knowledge of nature and of human beings always consists in ideas. Nevertheless, the object of these ideas can be understood starting from the attribute of thought, in which case we have ideas of ideas, or starting from the attribute of extension. While adequate knowledge of our minds and of other ideas starting from the attribute of thought is possible and Spinoza spends much time discussing it, obtaining it has been rendered extremely difficult by the accumulation of the metaphysical illusions Spinoza criticizes (illusions considered under section I.1). Knowledge of the body, while not free of difficulties, does not have to face the same deeply-rooted difficulties. This argument entails that focusing on the body has certain strategic advantages[150] and brings Spinoza close to Nietzsche. In addition, as Spinoza argues in EIIp13s, in order to understand the mind one must first understand its object, which is the body[151]. We understand the power of the mind and the difference between the human mind and others by grasping the complexity and power to act of the human body (EIIIp13s). Spinoza situates himself against the philosophical tradition

149 Curley claims that Spinoza tells us more about extension and less about thought (Curley 1969, p. 144).

150 Spinoza's doctrine of attributes does not exclude asymmetry: it allows for focus on one attribute or another, depending on circumstances. This is one reason why using the term "parallelism" in order to refer to Spinoza's philosophy can be misleading (Jaquet 2004, pp. 32-4, 144-5, 226-8).

151 The same move is present in Spinoza's analysis of affects: one must first understand the physical aspect of an affect (Jaquet 2004, p. 146).

which claims that the body is the source of evil, ignorance and at best a necessary inconvenience that we may, with sufficient effort, subdue and use in our search for truth and virtue. We must note that Spinoza does not argue that he (or any other thinker) has given a satisfactory answer to the question of what a body is or can do. His point is rather to emphasize that no question regarding human beings and nature is complete without an explanation of corporeal nature. Furthermore, an answer that avoids any such reference is likely to be tainted by metaphysical errors because it does not understand how knowledge is obtained and by which criteria its validity can be evaluated. We can see how the turn to the body gains a normative aspect, by constituting the standard according to which philosophical doctrines can be evaluated. Later on, in the context of Spinoza's theory of affects, I will argue that the turn to the body is used by Spinoza in order to set up a normative account of morality[152]. Understanding the body opens up the possibility of increasing one's power and therefore the joy and freedom one possesses. In order to better understand the turn to the body in Spinoza's philosophy, we must ask what adequate knowledge of the body is and what role it plays in the economy of the *Ethics*.

2. Spinoza's understanding of the body

The body in the Physical Interlude (EIIp13s to EIIp14)

One of the goals of Book II of the *Ethics* is to argue against the Cartesian notion of mind-body dualism. Key to this argumentation is Spinoza's monism, which implies that mind and body are one and the same thing understood under two different attributes. To be more precise, the body is the object of the idea that constitutes the mind (EIIp13). The difference between humans and other finite modes of substance is the complexity of their minds and bodies: the human body is capable of acting and being affected in a great number of ways, greater than in the case of other modes (EIIp13s). Spinoza writes that "no one will be able

152 Curley writes that the moral convictions that underlie Spinoza's metaphysics are what mattered most to him (Curley 1969, p. 155) and this is a point that will be considered in the comparative study given its importance for a comparison with Nietzsche.

to understand it[153] adequately, or distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body". Further down he writes that "to determine what is the difference between the human mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, that is, of the human body". Against much of the tradition, Spinoza explains bodies starting from extensions alone: not only is there no need for an immaterial principle, but minds are now explained starting from the distinction between bodies (Jaquet 2005, pp. 220-1). Spinoza ends EIIp13s by writing that he wants to "premise" (*praemittere*)[154] a few things regarding the nature of bodies.

The Physical interlude can be divided into three sections. The first one, dealing with the simplest bodies (*corporibus simplicissimis)*, ends before the definition. The second part, containing an account of complex bodies ends with the scholium to lemma 7. The third part, beginning with the scholium, deals with the human body[155]. In the first section, Spinoza starts by showing how bodies differ from each other. They are all modes of extension, so they cannot differ with regard to substance (Lemma1), nor can they differ with regard to the infinite immediate mode of extension, namely motion and rest (A1). With regard to the simplest bodies, the only possible criterion for distinguishing them is their ratio of movement and rest, speed and slowness (Lemma1)[156]. In the rest of the section, Spinoza is busy showing the nature of the ratio of movement and rest: he discusses the origin of motion or of rest, which can be imprinted on a body only by another body, and so on to infinity (Lemma 3), establishing the law of inertia (no body changes its state unless it is impacted on from outside – Lemma 3, Corollary), and in axioms 1 and 2 shows that the manner of movement is determined both by the nature of the

153 Curley's translation implies that "it" refers to the union of mind and body. However, the French translation by Pautrat makes "it" refer to the mind. Given the rest of the scholium, it is this second option that seems the most plausible (Beyssade 1999, note 25).

154 According to letter 83 to Tschirnhaus from 15 July 1676 (one of his last surviving letters), Spinoza never managed to put definitive order into his thoughts on physics.

155 What Spinoza says about the human body could, in principle, also apply to very complex animals (Jaquet 2005, p. 217).

156 For the difficulties of distinguishing between the simplest bodies on the basis of their ratio of motion and rest alone, as well as for a possible solution to these problems, see Gueroult (1974, pp. 155-165).

affected body as well as by the nature of the affecting body[157]. The second section deals with individuals or composite bodies which are created when a number of simple bodies are determined to move together according to the same determinate ratio of movement and rest. As opposed to the simplest bodies, the composite ones are distinguished from others by the specific union of bodies that constitutes them (Definition)[158]. Depending on the way the composite bodies connect, they can be solid, soft of fluid and therefore the difficulty in altering their shape can be greater or smaller (A3). The following four lemmas deal with metabolism, growth and movement of limbs and locomotion respectively. Lemma 4 is key and has been taken by Jonas (Jonas 1965, p. 47) to describe the process of metabolism. The lemma shows how a body, more specifically an organism[159], can have its parts replaced continually and yet maintain its structure and nature. This lemma allows us to understand another reason for Spinoza's dissatisfaction with mechanistic metaphors besides the implicit teleological connotations. A machine is a self-sufficient whole with fixed parts that once put in motion, functions until one of the parts breaks down. This is an inadequate simile for an organism, because the organism possesses a certain ability to regenerate itself[160]. The third section starts with a consideration of what it means to have an individual formed out of the complex bodies presented in section 2. Such an individual is characterized not only by its greater size, but most importantly by its capacity to be affected in an even greater number of ways without changing its form. Spinoza argues that if we were to continue this process to infinity we would reach an Individual composed out of all the modes of extension. It would be infinite and thus could be affected in an infinite number of ways[161]. In the six postulates[162] that complete the Physical

157 Everything contained in the first section and that applies to the simplest bodies also applies to the composite bodies of sections II and III. (Gueroult 1974, pp. 153-4).

158 Bodies can be distinguished by size, shape or other properties but the basis for these distinctions is the specific ratio of movement and rest. (Gueroult 1974, p. 164).

159 All bodies are animated to different degrees (Gueroult 1974, p. 143), but not all qualify as organisms and have a metabolism. Animated means only that they have a corresponding idea under the attribute of thought.

160 The organism preserves itself and its unity due to, and not in spite of, metabolic changes (Allison 1987, p. 99).

161 Presumably this is the mediated infinite mode of the attribute of extension, the *facies totius universi*.

162 Postulates are, according to EIIP17s, only empirical observations. This means that Spi-

Interlude Spinoza applies the insights already acquired to the human body. In the subsequent propositions from Book II, the complexity and excellence of the human mind will turn out to be a function of the complexity and excellence of the human body.

In Spinoza's account of the body the emphasis lies on the notions of form or structure, continuity and relation. The relation of a body with the outside depends on the form or structure it has and is determined by the environment (Jonas 1965, p. 48). It is important to notice that the composite bodies are formed as a result of outside pressure, exercised by other bodies (Definition). The ratio of movement and rest of a body is given to it by another body, and so on to infinity (Lemma 3). There is no mention here of conatus, the essence or power of a thing, and we have to wait until Book III for this notion to be introduced. This explains why, in the scholium to lemma 7, Spinoza writes that composite bodies can be affected in many ways, and does not distinguish between being able to act and being acted upon in a great number of ways, as he will do in other contexts. The specific difference that characterizes a body is only its ratio of movement and rest, speed or slowness, and not any amount of power explained by the singular essence of a thing.

In order to assess the role played by the Physical Interlude in the economy of the *Ethics* we must return to the formulation Spinoza uses to introduce it: he speaks of "premising" a few things about the nature of the body. Does this mean that the content of the Physical Interlude does not enjoy the same certainty that the rest of the Ethics is supposed to manifest? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to distinguish between two elements used in the argumentation: the common notions and the simplest bodies. We have already seen that common notions are necessarily adequate and so there is no reason to doubt that bodies are determined by their ratio of movement and rest. We are, however, entitled to ask what justification Spinoza has for speaking of the simplest bodies. Their existence is not demonstrated in the *Ethics* and, given Spinoza's critique of Boyle presented in section 1 of this chapter, we can ask whether they only serve as

noza's theory of the human body is established by "experience" which we cannot doubt" (EIIP17s) see Gueroult (1974, p. 170).

reasonable hypotheses that supply a plausible, but not necessarily the true physical explanation of bodies.

The lack of epistemic certainty, together with the absence of the notion of conatus, raises a further difficulty: understanding the ratio of movement and rest characteristic of bodies. First, we need to mention an issue of translation: the most common way of translating the latin *certa quadam ratione,* used by Spinoza to refer to the specific ratio of movement and rest characteristic of bodies, is "a certain fixed ratio" (used in the Definition after A2). It seems this choice is justified by the first meaning of *certus*[163]: "determined, fixed". However, a second definition reads: *certus* is said "of things the certainty of whose existence is given, but whose nature is not more definitely designated, or comes not into consideration" (Lewis & Short 1958, p. 320). If indeed the nature of the simplest bodies, the building blocks of Spinoza's physics, is hypothetical[164], then there is no absurdity in assuming that the ratio characteristic of bodies cannot be known precisely and adequately through the kind of physical account Spinoza offers here[165]. The existence of this ratio is certain, due to the fact that motion and rest belong to an infinite mode, but not the precise nature of the ratio[166]. To translate *certus* as fixed would also be problematic because Spinoza's account of the body must be able to explain the existence of variations in the constitution of the body that do not amount to its destruction. We will see in the next section how these variations can be accommodated by an account of the body centred on the notion of power and affects. On account of these difficulties, the Physical Interlude cannot be said to offer a fully adequate and satisfactory account of the body. We must therefore turn to the explanation of human nature given in Books III and IV.

163 According to Lewis & Short (1958).

164 In section I.2a I have argued that Spinoza's geometrical method is not hypothetico-deductive and so, if his demonstrations are to be adequate, they must be based on premises that are certain.

165 Curley argues that we can, according to Spinoza, deduce the laws of motion of bodies from the nature of the attribute of extension. Curley, nevertheless, stops short of writing that we could know bodies adequately if we only know these general laws of motion (Curley 1969, p. 60) He writes that knowing that bodies are either in motion or in rest does not mean we know anything about bodies (Curley 1969, p. 108).

166 This resonates with Bennett's claim that the ratio of motion and rest is a formula serving as placeholder for a detailed analysis which Spinoza had not worked out (Bennett 1984, p. 232).

Before moving on to consider the body as a multiplicity of affects, we must raise the following question: How can Spinoza speak of a body as a stable composite body if it is not characterized by a fixed proportion of motion and rest? How can we make sense of the stability that human bodies display diachronically if they do not possess a fixed structure? In my view this question finds an answer in Spinoza's thinking only if we understand stability as a dynamic concept. The human body is preserved in a constantly changing environment and it mirrors the nature of its environment by being in a state of constant change itself: growing, changing the bodies which compose it or undergoing metabolic changes and processes. The human body remains dynamically and relatively stable because its parts communicate their specific ratio of motion and rest to one another. The concept of communication or transmission of motion is crucial and it is important to underline that as long as the process of communication of motion occurs, human bodies will persevere in existence regardless of any changes in the nature, size or shape of their parts. We must note that, because Spinoza does not speak of conatus here, he cannot account for this dynamic stability in terms of an endogenous force. The stability of the body is the result of outside pressure. The forces that preserve the stability of the human body are exogenous to it and we must wait for the next section in order to consider Spinoza's account of endogenous processes of self-organization in the body.

The body as a multiplicity of affects

Spinoza's thinking on the body is shaped by the premise that we do not know the essence of the body adequately. We do not have the same adequate knowledge of the body that God has and, instead, we must be satisfied with knowledge of the affections of our body i.e. the interactions between our body and surrounding bodies. Given that this is the starting point, we must ask how Spinoza believes we can come to have any adequate knowledge of the body. His answer is that we come to know the nature of the body by understanding the nature and logic of our affects. His argument can be reconstructed as following. When we are affected, we do not have adequate knowledge of the bodies causing the affect (our body and the external causes), but we do have adequate knowledge of the properties that our body and other bodies have in common. Knowledge of these properties

is labeled, as we have seen, knowledge of common notions. Regardless of the characteristics of a thing, or even regardless of the attribute under which they are conceived (in the case considered here it is the attribute of extension), the one thing they all have in common is that they are expressions of substance, i.e. of God's essence or power. If we were to somehow gain an adequate understanding of the dynamics of power expressed through our body, we would gain the most crucial insight possible into what we are. It is precisely this that Spinoza believes he can deliver in the discussion of affects in books III, IV and V of the Ethics. The crux of the matter is, of course, to understand power in its very specific manifestation in and through our own body, hence the emphasis on our affective structure (Bove 1996, p. 13).

The context of Spinoza's investigation into the nature of affects has two dimensions. The first, internal to Spinoza's philosophy, is his commitment to treat of man as a part of nature. This means that affects follow the laws and rules of nature just as bodies do under the attribute of extension (EIIIpref). The second dimension is extraneous to Spinoza's system and consists in the influence of other philosophers on his treatment of affects. The main source here is Descartes and his importance is highlighted by the fact that the references to Descartes in the Prefaces to books III and V are among the very rare instances in which anyone is mentioned by name in the *Ethics*[167]. Spinoza is critical of Descartes for not understanding affects properly and believing that the mind has absolute power over them. Spinoza points out, however, that Descartes, to his merit, did attempt to explain the first causes of affects, and so did more than those who merely attempt to bewail or laugh at human nature (EIIIpref)[168]. We can find a similar project in Hobbes. While in both Descartes and Hobbes the emphasis was on explaining passions starting from a mechanistic understanding of the body, they did not offer a purely materialist explanation of the passions. Descartes acknowledged the role of the soul in his treatise on the passions, even if he encountered difficulties in explaining how the soul and the body might interact and how the body might affect the soul or the

167 In the EVpref Spinoza goes so far as to offer precise references to the text of Descartes' *Passions of the Soul.*

168 The striving to offer a naturalised understanding of human beings, free from moral illusions, is of course a project shared by Spinoza and Nietzsche.

mind master the body. Hobbes has been read as more dedicated to a reductionist account of affects, but, as we have seen, he has trouble giving full explanations of affects in mechanistic terms and he does preserve epiphenomenalist vocabulary. Spinoza steers clear of any proximity to reductionism by virtue of his doctrine of parallelism (Allison 1987, p. 85). However, due precisely to his parallelism, he must explain the passions, or rather their extended correlates, under the attribute of extension, without any recourse to the notion of soul. Descartes or Hobbes have attempted this by using purely mechanistic principles, but Spinoza will take a different route that distinguishes his account both from theirs and from the Physical Interlude we have previously considered. The major difference is Spinoza's use of the notion of conatus, introduced in EIIIp6.

Before exploring this notion, it is important to acknowledge that Spinoza engages in a project similar to that of Descartes and Hobbes and tries to explain all affects starting from a small number of basic or primary affects. The building blocks for Spinoza's theory of affects are: *laetitia* (joy or pleasure), *tristitia* (sadness or unpleasure) and *appetitus* or *cupiditas (*appetite or desire) (EIIIp11s). Joy and sadness refer to contrasting processes in the mind and in the body and joy is defined as "a man's passage from a lesser to a greater perfection", while sadness is "a man's passage from a greater to a lesser perfection" (EIIIp11s and Def. of Affects 2 and 3)[169]. Other kinds of affects are subspecies or compounds of these three (EIIIp59s). Desire is the essence or nature of each individual and joy and sadness seem to "be swallowed up in desire" (Bennett 1984, p. 261). Spinoza argues that an individual's desire is directed towards an increase in power, of which self-preservation is a special case. (EIVp15)[170]. This exposition has not elucidated yet the manner in which Spinoza understands the concept of desire or appetite. They constitute the "very essence of man" (EIIIp9s) and are identical with the famous notion of conatus, to which we must now turn[171].

169 Bennett agrees that pleasure and unpleasure are the movements themselves, but mentions that in EIVp59 Spinoza seems to imply that they are the causes of movements. Given that this is an isolated occurrence he does not dwell on this point and neither shall I (Bennett 1984, p. 254).

170 In EIVp24 Spinoza writes that preserving our being, acting and living signify the same thing. This should not be confused with simply continuing to exist.

171 Spinoza's normative thinking revolves around the elaboration of the best strategies for

Conatus

Conatus, the essence of the human body, is an expression of God's power, an actual and productive singular essence (Bove 1996, p. 9), and is described as the power by which each thing "strives to persevere in its being" (EIIIp6) or "does anything, or strives to do anything" (EIIIp7dem).

The much debated proposition 6 of book III, in which Spinoza introduces the notion of conatus, is key to understanding the differences between this account of the body, as a multiplicity of affects, and the earlier account of the body in the Physical Interlude. The proposition, in Curley's translation, reads: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power[172], strives to persevere in its being". We have already mentioned in section 1 of this chapter Bennett's critique of Spinoza's deduction of conatus[173]. For our present purposes, it is useful to focus on one inconsistency Bennett claims in Spinoza's deduction. In the demonstration to EIIIp6 Spinoza uses EIIIp4 and 5 to show that any single thing (*res*) strives, insofar as it can, to persevere in its being. Proposition 4 reads: "No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause" and proposition 5 is "Things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject[174], insofar as one can destroy the other". Bennett's point is that propositions 4 and 5 only allow Spinoza to say that the destruction of a thing can solely come from outside, from an external cause (Bennett 1984, pp. 244-5; Manning 2002, p. 185). Spinoza is not justified,

the empowerment of the conatus, as will be discussed in the comparative section.

172 The word power is not found in the Latin, as Garrett points out (Garrett 2002, p. 135). Nevertheless, there are very good reasons to believe that conatus must be understood as a manifestation of a thing's power, as will be argued later.

173 Bennett believes Spinoza is an anti-teleological thinker and argues that the instances where he does offer teleological explanations are inconsistencies that should be interpreted in light of his overall project (Bennett 1984, p. 219). While Spinoza's commitment to the claim that God as a whole does not act teleologically is clear, a number of commentators have pointed out that this does not exclude thoughtful or unthoughtful teleology in the case of finite modes (Garrett 1999, p. 314; Lin 2006, p. 319).

174 The seemingly effortless transition from a logical concept (subject) to a physical notion (thing) has not escaped the attention of various commentators. This move can only be justified in virtue of the "ontological transposition of the cognitive" (Matheron 1988, p. 16) in Spinoza. For the contrast between Spinoza's position and Kant's distinction between logical and real opposition in the *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* see Viljanen (2008, p. 98).

however, in writing that a thing strives to persevere in its being, insofar as striving is taken to imply any kind of activity i.e. active pursuit of what helps a thing persevere in its being. This understanding of the nature of a thing as a passive or reactive ratio of motion and rest can be traced back to the Physical Interlude (Manning 2002, p. 195), where the parts of complex bodies were compelled by other bodies to remain in contact and be moved at the same or at different speeds (EII, Def. after AII). Bennett's critique, however, does not do justice to the first part of Spinoza's demonstration[175]. There, Spinoza reminds us that modes express God's power in a certain and determinate way and invokes EIP25c and IP34. Proposition 34 is "God's power is his essence itself" and the corollary to EIP25 claims that "particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way". God's power is that by virtue of which he acts, and insofar as things express this power in a finite manner, they also act (EIp34dem)[176]. The Physics of Book II is not sufficient to explain the power that things possess (Viljanen 2008, pp. 104-5). Instead of the demonstration to EIIIP6 being a weakness, it opens up a new dimension to Spinoza's account of the body and shows why it is crucial to consider the body as the expression of endogenous power: it is the only way to adequately understand the body's actual essence.

The reading of conatus as a passive resistance to outside influences, a striving for mere self-preservation, is unproblematic for the explanation of conatus found in chapter XVI: "each thing strives to persist in its present state" (TTP 16 2). The description found in the *Ethics* however replaces "persist in its present state *(in suo statu)*" with "persist in its being *(in se)*" and this makes all the difference (Viljanen 2008, p. 105)[177]. This difference between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* can also

175 Bennett does not mention the essential element of power or force in Spinoza's discussion of conatus, and he refers to cognitions where Spinoza makes no reference to consciousness (Schrijvers 1999, p. 71).

176 Gueroult, in an interesting analysis, has shown how in EIp34, 35 and 36, God's *potestas*, the capacity to produce things, is identified with *potentia*, the force to actually produce them (Gueroult 1968, pp. 387-9). This eliminates the concept of possibility and forms the basis for Spinoza's rejection of a God imagined as king or as a law-giver acting arbitrarily (Balibar 1998, p. 14; Negri 1991, pp. 191-2).

177 In the early CM (II, 11) thigns have, from themselves, no power to act. In the *KV* (I.5), which is close to the *TTP* on this, the essence of things is a power to persist in the same state, in

be brought out using the preceding analysis of Hobbes. Starting from the crucial distinction between Hobbes' and Spinoza's notions of power[178], we can start to understand the dynamics behind the transition in the analysis of affects from the *TTP* to the *Ethics.* At first, it might seem that there is a marked difference between Hobbes's list of primary affects in *De Cive* (fear, glory and desire, with fear being primary) and Spinoza's list in *TTP 1* (desire (*cupiditas*) is fundamental, fear and pride follow from it). Closer analysis, however, shows that Hobbes places desire for a certain good as first, while Spinoza thinks fear as the most powerful affect (Jaquet 2004, pp. 91-3). In order to understand the deep reasons why the Hobbesian moment of the *TTP* is overcome in the *Ethics*, we must see that the whole category of active affects is not present in the *TTP*. In the *TTP* Spinoza is close to Hobbes in his understanding of affects because he understands them as purely passive or reactive. As soon as Spinoza comes to understand power as the active affirmation of the properties that follow from the essence of a thing, not just as resistance or reproduction of existing affects, he moves beyond the Hobbesian framework (Jaquet 2004, pp. 113, 115). The modifications in Spinoza's understanding of power and conatus bring with it crucial differences in his analysis of the dynamics of affects.

How must we understand the endogenous power[179] that Spinoza describes using the term "conatus"? We can do this by comparing the power of finite modes and the power of God. In both cases power can be spoken of in the same way (univocally[180]) and it consists in the production of effects. Power is understood as affirmative, active expression of itself (Negri 1991, p. 47). Being is power, which constitutes itself as an open totality (Negri 1991, p. 52). The differences surface when we consider the contrast between absolute and determinate power.

virtue of divine providence. It is only in the Ethics that the conatus as a dynamic power to act appears (Jaquet 2005, pp. 270-1).

178 Hobbes thinks power as power to resist others within a hostile universe, while for Spinoza power is affirmative, active, and constitutive and does not necessarily involve a lack of security in the face of an external threat.

179 Negri argues that letter 37 to Bouwmeester (June 1666) marks the moment when Spinoza's "conception of being has changed: It is now given as power" (Negri 1991, p. 39).

180 The notion of analogical being is negated, together with the concepts of possibility (Negri 1991, p. 43), abstraction and mediation (Negri 1991, p. 62).

A mode has power, i.e. is the cause of an effect, insofar as the effect is understood solely from the nature of the mode. In other words, a mode is cause insofar as its effects are produced by God as it is expressed through the individual essence of that mode alone. The finite power of a mode is the affirmation of that mode, i.e. the actualization of that mode's capacity to "act and be acted on in a great number of ways". The power of a mode is its power to know, since power is the capacity to form "clear and distinct ideas", deduce "some from others", and order and connect "the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect" (EVp10 and dem). While the second type of knowledge is essential in order to understand the dynamic of finite modes engaged in power relations, the third type of knowledge shows us how the power of a mode is an expression of the immanent power of God. In connection to Nietzsche, it is essential to see that the power to produce effects is conceived by Spinoza according to the logic of expression. This means that the effects generated manifest the power of their cause, in this case the finite mode, without exhausting it. For Spinoza, exhaustion generated by action is impossible, since power always expresses the essence of a mode and there is nothing in the essence or definition of the mode that can lead to its disempowerment and eventual demise. When the decomposition of modes occurs, it is an infringement on the mode's power from an outside, more powerful thing. Spinoza does not think that when a mode acts it expends, or exhausts, its power.

The introduction of conatus, an intrinsic power constituting the essence of a singular thing, comes at a price. Spinoza must reject the Cartesian explanation of organisms in purely mechanistic terms (Garrett 1999, p. 330). This confirms that Spinoza was aware of the shortcomings of mechanism and saw the insufficiencies already discussed in section 1, but it also explains how teleology resurfaces in his philosophy. There are occasions where Spinoza speaks of conatus or appetite as a striving determined only by efficient causes and which dispose the body to do something and determine one's goals or valuations[181]. Nevertheless, there are

181 Perhaps most famously in EIIIp9s, where he writes that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, desire it" (see also EIIIp39s).

instances when he reverts to a more common-sense notion of striving[182]. The debate on this point revolves around the causal power of representations in determining our behavior. If the content of our representations is causally inert then any goals we might have will play no role in determining our behavior. This argument implies that there is a dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic features of an idea and has been championed by Bennett (Bennett 1984, p. 224). The intrinsic feature of an idea is its structure and the multiplicity of impulses and efficient causes that generate it. To talk of the intrinsic feature of an idea is to explain it as an impulse, without any reference to the future or to any object of desire. Extrinsic features, in Bennett's reading, are the representational features of thought, the objects of desire and the beliefs we may hold about them. Bennett argues that explanations using only efficient causes are to be preferred due to their adequacy, but that teleological explanations are kept by Spinoza because they make it easier to account for human behaviour. Recent commentators, however, have argued that Spinoza does allow for representations to play a causal role (Garrett 1999; Garrett 2002; Lin 2006; Manning 2002). Garrett argues that Spinoza would reject the distinction between the causal efficiency of a thing (its intrinsic features) and the causal efficiency of a representation (extrinsic features), even if modern philosophers might not (Garrett 1999, pp. 319-320). Representational properties are, in this, way, integrated into the efficient chain of causation, into the explanation of nature (Garrett 1999, p. 325). The beliefs we hold about good and evil and about what our behaviour should be are part of our mental constitution and therefore, in virtue of their existence, have a determinate power to act and influence us. This reading does away with the problematic distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic features[183], while demanding less exegetic effort in explaining away uncomfortable passages in which Spinoza is speaking teleologically[184]. If this

182 EIIIp28, EIIIp29 or EIIIp31c, EIVp19.

183 According to Bennett the intrinsic properties, i.e. the causally efficient ones, are motion, rest, shape, size, etc., in other words the notions used in the Physical Interlude (Bennett 1984, p. 219). These, nevertheless, do not exhaust Spinoza's conceptual apparatus in explaining the essence of modes.

184 Spinoza writes that "men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end" (EIapp II/78). While the Appendix may be written for those who will not follow the "cumbersome" geometrical order of Spinoza's demonstrations, it is hard to believe that Spinoza would want to compromise and speak inadequately. We must therefore acknowledge that

interpretation of teleology is correct, then the reader would be right to ask whether this does not signal an inconsistency in Spinoza's thinking between the rejection of the validity of teleological thinking about God and its affirmation in the case of humans[185]. It is important to underline that the discrepancy is due to the fact that Spinoza considers teleology to be a legitimate way of speaking of humans only because human beings are finite. According to EIIIp6 only singular or finite things have conatus and it is only conatus that can be spoken of teleologically. God, being infinite, cannot be thought of in the same manner. This interpretation shows how Spinoza can maintain his commitment to naturalism by integrating goal-directed behavior and thinking into causal nexuses and also shows how teleological descriptions are not merely useful tools for describing behavior, but also have explanatory power[186] (EIVd7). The power of finite modes is directed towards more power, but this "more" does not impose a teleological structure on desire: expansion or empowerment simply means that a thing succeeds in "doing what it is internally determined to do" (Schrijvers 1999, p. 69). On this reading, there is no need to accuse Spinoza of inconsistency simply due to the fact that he believes that different discourses are adequate when speaking of infinite and finite things.

We can summarize Spinoza's account of the body as a multiplicity of affects and the role played by the notion of power in this account by emphasizing that its crucial feature is an endogenous account of motion and of the capacity of the body to act and be acted upon. The mechanistic account in the Physical Interlude explained motion and the body exogenously, as the result of outside pressure. In his account of affects, however, Spinoza explores the possibility that we can understand the body starting from its essence, i.e. power. This line of thought has

for Spinoza humans do act on account of ends.

185 Nietzsche criticizes Spinoza's "inconsistency" in JGB 13 5.28 and we will come back to this in chapter III.

186 In the Preface to Book IV Spinoza writes that in the case of human beings what we call a final cause "is nothing but a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, *or* primary cause, of some thing". In the same Preface, Spinoza clarifies what he means by primary or first cause: "it is really an efficient cause". Spinoza's example is that of a man who desires to build a house: he has an appetite to build the house which can be explained by the imagined conveniences of domestic life (EIVpref II/207).

important consequences for grasping the way Spinoza understands subjectivity and, in the comparative section, will prove to be an important point of contact with Nietzsche's philosophy.

The body as an eternal essence

Spinoza writes at the end EVp20s that he will now pass to discuss "those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body". At first glance, this appears to mean that Spinoza wishes to stop thinking about the body and contemplate purely intellectual essences for the remainder of book V. This reading, however, is not the one that Spinoza wants to suggest. After writing that we must leave our body behind, he goes on, in book V, to speak of the eternal essence of the body, which the mind knows. Spinoza does not wish to do away with the concept of the body, but to understand the body itself under the aspect of eternity (Gueroult 1974, p. 423)[187]. This allows Spinoza to argue that we can have knowledge of the third kind while maintaining that the mind is the idea of the body[188]. Whereas so far the body has been considered in duration, we now consider it as an eternal essence.

We must consider the question of what Spinoza understands by eternity and by essence. Eternity should not be understood as immortality, as indefinite existence in time. What it refers to is a manner of considering things apart from space and time[189]. The essence of a thing is its productive power understood synoptically, in its fullness, as God does. Knowing essences lays "bare the internal design of nature and its occupants" (Yovel 1989, p. 163). In the case of the body, this implies knowing the power that it has insofar as it is "capable of doing a great many things"

187 Negri argues that there is an ascetic tendency (abstraction from affects, from things and from time) in book V of the *Ethics*, but that it is tempered by constant references to the body (Negri 1991, p. 172). Perhaps this is reminiscent of the ascetic tendency in Maimonides.

188 In Evp40s Spinoza writes that he has considered things "without relation to the body's existence". The essence of the body outside duration is clearly part of his arguments. This goes against the argument that the doctrine of eternal essences is a remnant of what seems to be Spinoza's early inclination to follow the Stoic path and make reason self-sufficient and detachable from the body (Huenemann 2008, p. 104).

189 Whether Spinoza is successful in his arguments concerning essence is not discussed here.

(EVp39dem). There is no doubt that Spinoza holds that this way of understanding the body is adequate. This manner of understanding things synoptically, apart from duration, is the intuitive, i.e. non-discursive, kind of knowledge considered in section II.1. This shows that the essence of the body (or of any other mode) understood under the third type of knowledge is not different from the essence understood under the second type of knowledge. They are the same thing, namely power, understood in two different, but adequate manners. The difference lies in the fact that the third type of knowledge allows us to connect our knowledge of the body with our knowledge of God in an immediate manner.

Knowledge of the body, must, in virtue of being adequate, be knowledge of its power. More precisely, it must be knowledge of the dynamics of power that the body is part of. Here, we encounter the following difficulty: how can we reconcile the thesis that the power of a thing is invariable in eternity, known synthetically under the third kind of knowledge, with the claim that it is nevertheless variable in actuality (Curley 1969, p. 163; Schrijvers 1999, p. 69)? The focus on the dynamic aspects of power brings out two fundamental dimensions of Spinoza's understanding of the eternal essence of the body. First, we have seen in the case of the second kind of knowledge that Spinoza provided the conceptual tools necessary to conceive both the empowerment and the disempowerment that the body can undergo. Under the third type of knowledge, however, it is difficult to see how we could understand disempowerment and passive affects. This is because the eternal part of our mind is the intellect, through which we can only act. Imagination, through which alone we are acted on, perishes in the third type of knowledge (EVp40cor.). The mind can conceive affections of the body only insofar as it conceives the body in duration. Under the third type of knowledge, it does not (EVp21dem). We must therefore conclude that under the third type of knowledge the dynamics of power that we can grasp are, asymmetrically, limited to an understanding of the increase in power[190]. Second, it appears that even the

190 The following objection can be raised: knowledge of evil is always inadequate because it depends on inadequate ideas, i.e. passions (EIVp64). Therefore, also under the second kind of knowledge it is only natural that we would not know evil and disempowerment since this kind of knowledge is correlated only with empowerment. We must, however, remember that this argument is presented in the context of Spinoza's discussion of the hypothetical model of a "free man"

possibility of knowing the mechanisms of empowerment are threatened by the tension between Spinoza's concepts of joy (*Laetitia*) and blessedness (*Beatitudo*). Joy, as we have seen, is understood by Spinoza as a transition from a smaller to a greater perfection. In the case of the third type of knowledge, this transition translates into understanding more and more things by the third kind of knowledge. The more we understand singular things in this way, the more we understand God (EVp24) and the more we have this knowledge, the greater is our desire to know things by this knowledge (EVp26). The more knowledge of this kind that we have, the more we are conscious of both God and ourselves (EVp31s)[191]. This straightforward account is complicated, however, by the use of the notion of blessedness. Contrary to joy, blessedness is not a passage to a greater perfection, but consists "in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself" and the mind "has had eternally the same perfections" (EVp33s). In EVp33s Spinoza argues that joy and blessedness are the same thing ("there is no difference here"), but that there is a distinction between them insofar as the notion of joy must be seen as a passage to a greater perfection, while blessedness must not[192].

A critic may object that the enumerated above are unfounded precisely due to the direct link Spinoza establishes between blessedness and the body. Spinoza speaks of the intellectual love of God in connection to the mind alone, but when he treats of the mind together with the body he speaks only of "love towards God" (*amor erga Deum*; cf. EVp42dem). This love towards God is clearly presented by

(which will be discussed in the comparative section). This hypothetical situation is contrasted by Spinoza with the reality of finite modes, which are always subject to passions, and which calls for knowledge of "both out nature's power and its lack of power, so that we can determine what reason can do in moderating the affects and what it cannot do" (EIVp17s).

191 The idea that our mind is eternal due to the knowledge it has is reminiscent of arguments found in Maimonides or Gersonides: the human mind becomes one with the Agent Intellect by knowing the eternal forms the Agent Intellect contains. It is also worth noting that Spinoza's argument resembles Gersonides' insofar as the eternity of the mind depends on the specific eternal forms it knows. Not all minds are identical, even if they are eternal. Mason argues that eternity does not involve a loss of identity for Spinoza, even if memory is lost (Mason 1997, p. 240). It seems that the only way to argue that for Spinoza blessedness still involves a transition is to argue that it is a transition to having a greater number of adequate ideas (Schrijvers 1999, p. 77).

192 The issue is particularly vexing since Spinoza, while using both joy/love and beatitude in order to describe the third kind of knowledge, argues in EVp35 that God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love. It is very difficult to see how God could pass from a smaller to a greater perfection.

Spinoza as an affect, in fact "the most constant of all the affects" (EVp20s), by which he means the most powerful. As opposed to the more problematic case of the intellectual love of God, the love of God would, by being an affect, admit of a transition to greater power that is proportional to bodily aptitudes and the part of the mind that is eternal. This increase in power would result in a greater power over the affects, i.e. in "restraining lusts" (EVp42dem; cf. Jaquet 2004, pp. 170-1). The difficulty with this claim is that, in the demonstration to EVp42, Spinoza builds his argument by claiming that blessedness arises from the third kind of knowledge, which in turn gives rise to power over the affects. This means that, if the concept of "beatitude" is problematic, it is not at all clear how something that follows from it can escape these difficulties, in other words to be susceptible of transitions in power. The fact that Spinoza speaks of the love of God as the "most constant of all affects" in EVp20s does not make it any clearer how the third kind of knowledge can map out a processes of empowerment related to both mind and body. In light of these difficulties in Spinoza's account of the dynamic of power of the body under the third kind of knowledge, we can appreciate the advantages of the second kind of knowledge in discussing that ability of the body to act and be acted on in a great number of ways.

This last manner of knowing the body, I have argued, is problematic because it makes it difficult to understand the dynamic of power. Nevertheless, it is helpful in allowing us to understand the nature and logic of Spinoza's notion of power and its expressions. Under the third type of knowledge, Spinoza argues, we can perceive intuitively how the essence of the body follows from God, and therefore gain privileged access to the nature of particular things. This privileged knowledge of individuals, which goes beyond what the second type can offer us, has special connections with love that go beyond the general ones between reason and affectivity. It therefore opens up a new dimension for self-knowledge (Lloyd 1994, p. 108). We must also notice that to understand conatus as a singular thing expressing the power of God is to present indivisibility as a mark of the conatus (Lloyd 1994, p. 128).