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Deleuze and New Materialism:  
Naturalism, Norms, and Ethics

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Abstract. This essay examines Deleuze's relation to new materialism through an engagement with new materialist claims about the human and nonhuman relation and about agency. It first considers the work of Elisabeth Grosz and then moves on to a consideration of Deleuze's own conception of a new materialism/new naturalism (Deleuze elaborates a 'new materialism' in his work on Spinoza of the 1960s). I seek to show that Deleuze is an ethically motivated naturalist concerned with an ethical pedagogy of the human, which he derives from his reading of Spinoza. I seek to illuminate some of the principal features of this ethically guided materialism/naturalism and show that even in his later work with Felix Guattari, which situates all life, human and nonhuman, on a plane of immanence, there remains a recognition that the human animal is ethically distinguished as the inventive species par excellence. My main claim, then, is that Deleuze's project cannot be aligned with a new materialism that supposes a flat ontology and that does away with an ethical distinction between the human and the nonhuman. Although Deleuze bequeaths a complex legacy to post-modern thought in his thinking about the human, it should not be supposed that he has no affinities with aspects of a humanist position and pedagogy.

Introduction

There are two key questions we might ask of the new intellectual work around materialism: just what is new about the so-called new materialism? And, second, what role should Deleuze play in these debates about the new materialism? In what follows I seek to show why Deleuze is important for the new materialism but that he also bequeaths a complex legacy to contemporary thought about the human. In key work of the 1950s and 1950s Deleuze's texts support a rich philosophical naturalism that is also a kind of humanism (the concern is with the promotion of human emancipation and the freedom of Reason); in his collaborative work with Guattari in the 1970s his work takes on a more anti-humanist inflection and orientation (here the human is placed on a plane of immanence

that strips it of its ontological privilege).<sup>1</sup> Although it is stated by some of its proponents that new materialism is a term coined by Rosi Braidotti and Manuel de Landa (Dolphijn and Tuin 2011: 383), this, as we shall see, overlooks the fact that in the 1960s Deleuze was using this term in connection with his reading of Spinoza.<sup>2</sup> It is my view that it is Deleuze's Spinozism that accounts for his complicated reception, allowing, as it does, for both humanist and anti-humanist, and even post-humanist, appropriations. Deleuze's Spinozism allows for different possibilities for thinking, then, and my worry is that we are being invited to opt for an anti-humanist and post-humanist position at the cost of neglecting what I regard as some important insights that Deleuze developed in his reading of Spinoza in the 1960s, notably into the ethical task of human emancipation. Although one might claim a 'strategic' value for the term, rather than a 'descriptive' one, as Dolphijn and Tuin indicate, key issues are at stake in the appropriation of Deleuze for the ends of a new materialism (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012).<sup>3</sup> Whilst it may well be the case, as Coole and Frost contend, that 'thinking anew about the fundamental structure of matter has far-reaching normative and existential implications' (Coole and Frost 2010: 5), in Deleuze's

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<sup>1</sup> This is no doubt an oversimplification. However, I would maintain that at the heart of the book on Spinoza of 1968 is an ethical pedagogy and that its 'humanist' orientation is widely neglected amongst commentators on Deleuze. For an anti-humanist reading of Deleuze's 1960s 'Spinoza' see Peden 2014, chapter six.

<sup>2</sup> Typically Deleuze is construed not as a new materialist but as a 'new vitalist'. In ignorance of the fact that Deleuze actually deployed the term 'new materialism' in his work on Spinoza in the 1960s, Coole and Frost bizarrely assert that, 'Gilles Deleuze, whose work has been influential in much of the new ontology, did not count himself a materialist despite his radical empiricism and some evocative descriptions of materialization' (Coole and Frost 2010: 9).

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps interesting to note that Coole and Frost, in their introduction to their edited collection *New Materialisms* speak of the interventions of the new materialists as 'renewed materialisms' (Coole and Frost 2010: 6). In a recent contribution Claire Colebrook has argued that materialism 'is always a turning back, is always part of a materialist *turn*, and is therefore always a "new" materialism' (Colebrook forthcoming).

case the focus is very much on the normative and existential implications of *human* becomings, even when this involves the human becoming, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, animal, molecular, and imperceptible (Deleuze and Guattari 1988).

A note on the use of '-isms'. With regards to humanism, as Beatrice Han-Pile notes, humanism is a concept that is as widely used as it is indeterminate. It is often, at least in the English-speaking world, associated with a view of the world that is secular and optimistic and that contends the privilege of human beings over non-organic (or organic but nonhuman) entities, 'defending the rights of human beings to happiness and to the development of their individual potential' (Han-Pile 2010, 118). On the continent, especially in France and Germany, for thinkers such as Foucault, it was a dirty word and on account of its implied anthropocentrism. As far as I know Deleuze never employs the word humanism or the term anti-humanism. As I will endeavour to show there are features of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza in the 1960s that clearly align his position with elements of humanism and there are other aspects, especially the way he continued to develop his Spinozism, that align his position with anti-humanism. But even here, I want to show, Deleuze does not produce an ontology that refuses to recognize the differences between the human and other forms or modes of life.

I shall shortly show how Deleuze conceives materialism and naturalism. For now let me note that by 'naturalism' I am referring to key Spinozist-inspired moves made in modern thought, such as construing the human being as fully part of nature in which it enjoys no special metaphysical value or privileged place in the natural order. In addition, no cosmic exceptionalism is allowed: everything in the world, be it human, animal, or

mineral plays by the same rules. Materialism is a general view about what actually exists: everything is material or physical. It originates with the early Greek thinkers, such as Democritus, and materialism is physicalism. Understood as a general theory about what exists it is an ontological view.

I have two opening sections on Elisabeth Grosz's attempt at a 'new materialism' and 'renaturalization'. In the rest of the essay I then look at Deleuze's Spinozism of the 1960s and the highly innovative thinking that he developed with Guattari in 1980 with the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus*. I conclude with some critical points of reflection.

### A New Materialism?

What is taken to constitute the 'new materialism' is typically said to question the privilege given to the human being in the human/nonhuman binary, along with the emphasis on mind and subjectivity and the construal of matter as passive and inert, so at the core of this latest turn in theory is a preoccupation with the agential properties of matter itself. Even within inorganic matter there are emergent, generative powers or agentic capacities to be discerned, and this is seen to entail the break down of the distinction between organic and inorganic, or animate and inanimate, at the ontological level. Furthermore, materiality is taken to be something more than mere matter. As Coole and Frost put it, there is 'an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable' (Coole and Frost 2010: 9). This means for them that amidst 'a multitude of interlocking systems and forces' we can 'consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency' (ibid.). As Coole and Frost further put it, the perception

now amongst many working in the humanities and the social sciences is that ‘the radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn is now more or less exhausted’ (Coole and Frost 2010: 6). This is encapsulated in the ‘feeling’ that ‘the dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate to thinking about matter, materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy’ (ibid.). There is thus needed, they further contend, ‘a theoretical rapprochement with material realism’ (ibid.). The key insight and claim centres on the question of agency:

Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert, disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively human who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature. Instead, the human species is being relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain agentic capacities...Matter is no longer imagined here as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. (Coole and Frost 2010: 10)

The aim here is to be strictly non-anthropocentric: there is no privileging of human bodies or even of human capacities for agency. The contention is as follows: ‘As a consequence, the human species, and the qualities of self-reflection, self-awareness, and rationality traditionally used to distinguish it from the rest of nature, many now seem little more than contingent and provisional forms or processes within a broader evolutionary or cosmic productivity’ (ibid. 20).

In its Deleuzian mode the new materialism has an intellectual and a political agenda. It seeks to contest the primacy accorded to the human in our theoretical discourses and then utilize this for the ends of a post-humanist position. In the process it raises questions about the status and development of Deleuze's thought, and forces one to ask: what is the relation between Deleuze's own work and his collaborative work with Guattari? For it is the latter work that the new materialists most draw upon in order to advance this materialism. Elisabeth Grosz is more confident than I am when she asserts that, and I quote:

These nonhuman forces – from the smallest sub-atomic forces to the operation of solar systems, forces comprising the human and its overcoming, forces that cannot be comprehended by the human...but that connect the human to all that is both human and nonhuman – are Deleuze's primary preoccupation throughout his work (Grosz 2015: 19).

Such a claim clearly reveals that the Deleuzian-inspired new materialism aligns itself with the position of post-humanism. For Grosz to think the human in relation to the non-human entails upheavals and challenges various forms of human, and even post-human, disciplinarity (ibid.: 22-3). She contends in a recent interview that for Deleuze Spinoza is the prince of the philosophers on account of his far-reaching naturalization of the human: the human occupies a miniscule place on the impersonal 'plane of immanence' (this notion is handled later in the essay). Thus, 'When we understand the human, not as the telos or end of nature but as a small part of it, many philosophical claims about human privilege fall away' (ibid.: 22). The only problem with this position is that it can make little sense of key work Deleuze carried out in the 1950s and 1960s and that centres on

questions of human subjectivity, agency, and ethical pedagogy. It also fails to acknowledge the complexity and complex evolution of his reading of Spinoza, the chief source for a reading of Deleuze as a naturalist and materialist.

The work of Grosz has been identified with new materialism, though she in fact embraces it only with qualification and some hesitation. She sees her work in two ways. First, it attempts to go beyond the post-war discourses of structuralism and post-structuralism. For her these discourses have served to foreclose the problem of existence of an independent material reality, one beyond human consciousness and control, and in favour of emphasizing the constructed character of the real. Second, she wants 'following Darwin' a concept of matter that does not remove it from its opposing term, be it mind, life, Idea, form, or Spirit. She confesses that she is not sure that this project can be still be said to be one of materialism, and then she adds:

Perhaps it involves a new kind of materialism; or perhaps materialism is no longer an adequate term and we need to generate a new term. What I am seeking is a new concept of matter that also involves something incorporeal, a spark of virtuality that enables life to emerge (Grosz 2001a: 18).

Deleuze is central to this project with his emphasis on pre-individual virtuality and reliance on a genealogy of the concept of matter that is said by Grosz to run from Darwin, through Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson on to Gilbert Simondon and Raymond Ruyer (ibid. 21). In essence, she wants a new materialism that thinks matter in terms of events and processes rather than in terms of things and objects. Already we begin to see the 'old' character of much of what is taken to be a new materialism: the concern with an ontology

of the real is arguably as old, in its early modern incarnation, as Spinoza and the desire for a philosophy of events and processes strikes up a rapport and an affinity with the modern likes of Bergson and Whitehead.

In the work of both Grosz and Rosi Braidotti then, two of the main proponents of a new materialism that is inspired by the work of Deleuze, there is expressed a desire for a return to the real and to realism: 'I would like to return to the question of the real, the question of ontology, the question that the privileging of subjectivity and representation has tended to foreclose' (ibid. 17). And, Braidotti echoes this when she argues that we need to locate 'Life itself' as a nonhuman agent at the centre of scientific and political debate: 'After so much emphasis on the linguistic and the cultural, an ontology of presence replaces textual or other deconstruction' (Braidotti 2012: 171). She then invokes 'neorealist practices of bodily materialism' and refers to 'radical neo-materialism or posthuman feminism'. Furthermore, Grosz reads Deleuze as producing not a materialism but a 'philosophy of the real' and that is to be conceived as a 'theory that addresses the real without distinguishing its material from its ideal components, a kind of supersaturated materialism, a materialism that incorporates that which is commonly opposed to it - the ideal, the conceptual, the mind, or consciousness' (Grosz 2011b: 43).

These are welcome moves in the light of the emphatic priority accorded in recent decades to subjectivity and representation and in which it is assumed that it is not possible to think beyond the human. However, it's far from clear to me that the primary move suggested by the new materialism, away from the representational subject to the ontologically real, captures what is most distinctive about Deleuze's philosophical practice,

chiefly, its ethical motivation. Deleuze is an ethically motivated naturalist who attaches himself to naturalism because he sees it as a project of demystification and human emancipation. The task is to liberate human beings from the realm of myth: the myth of religion, the myth of a false physics, and the myths of a false philosophy. Although it can be conceded that the new materialism would welcome such a conception – philosophy as demystification – we cannot overlook the extent to which this requires an ethical pedagogy of the human being and of the kind undertaken by Spinoza in his ‘ethics’ (an education in the three main kinds of knowledge, for example). In addition, we can note that Grosz’s conception of a new materialism, in which matter is to be supplemented by a notion of virtuality, is fully anticipated by Deleuze and at work in his appreciation of key early modern materialists or naturalists such as Spinoza. Deleuze’s new materialism has its location in sources that we would expect it to have on an informed appreciation of the history of philosophy, namely, in Epicureanism and Spinozism. However, Deleuze does not himself conceive the new materialism as operating in terms of a supplementary dimension of ideality or virtuality. On the contrary, he sees virtual or ideal actions and passions as fully immanent features of matter itself. Perhaps this is what Grosz actually means, and if she does then her characterization of the new materialism is incisive and in tune with Deleuze’s own conception of it.

What cannot be upheld, though, is the idea that Deleuze flattens ontology in such a way that he is seen to have little concern, if any, with issues of normativity and as they pertain to what is distinctive about the existence of the human animal. This is my main anxiety over the Deleuzian-inspired new materialism: it fails to engage with key aspects of

Deleuze's work in the 1950s and 1960s and that centre on issues of normativity, including as they pertain to the distinctive ethical character of the human animal. How can we claim that the human animal is ethically distinguished? A clue to Deleuze's own position on this issue is provided in his early short essay on 'Instincts and Institutions', in which he holds to the view that in the case of both instinct and institution we are dealing with 'procedures of satisfaction' but with a key difference in the case of the human subject: an organism responds instinctively to external stimuli, 'extracting from the external world the elements which will satisfy its tendencies and needs'. More, 'these elements comprise worlds that are specific to different animals'. In the case of the human animal, however, 'the subject institutes an original world between its tendencies and the external milieu, developing an artificial means of satisfaction' (Deleuze 2004: 19). In this piece Deleuze even goes so far as to maintain that, 'humans have no instincts, they build institutions. The Human is an animal decimating its species' (ibid. 21). In short, the human is an *inventive* species, building institutions and creating norms and as a way of satisfying its needs and desires. As a 'species', then, we are ethically and politically distinguished since the means of satisfying our life is not given or simply of the order of instinct. Deleuze always maintained that the ethical and the social are profoundly *positive*. As he puts it in the early essay '...if it is true that tendencies are satisfied by the institution, the institution is not explained by tendencies. The same sexual needs will never explain the multiple possible forms of marriage' (ibid. 20). In his first published book on Hume of 1953 Deleuze opposes social contract theories because they present us with a false and abstract image of society, in which society is defined only in a negative way: society is construed as set of limitations on

egoisms and interests rather than as a positive system of invented endeavours: “the state of nature is always already more than a simple state of nature” (Deleuze 1991: 39). As Deleuze seeks to show the problem of society is not one of limitation but of integration. In short, the human animal is, first and foremost, an inventive species, so that although justice is an artifice and not nature, for us artifice is part of our nature. Justice is that which extends and expands our passions. Deleuze writes: ‘The social is profoundly creative, inventive, and positive’ (ibid. 46). And: ‘the subject is normative...’ (ibid. 86)

### The Politics of Renaturalization

I now want to focus on Grosz’s project of renaturalization in which she makes inventive use of Deleuze’s readings of Nietzsche and Spinoza. In seeking to show our fundamental continuity with nonhuman agencies the result, I want to suggest, is a neglect of core Deleuzian insights into the normative character of the human creature. This is what I focus on in my second section on Deleuze.

Bergson defined the task of philosophy as one of ‘thinking beyond the human condition’, where this condition refers not to an existential predicament but an evolutionary one, naming the dominance of our spatialized habits and established patterns of representation (see Bergson 1965: 193). Grosz has her own unique way of thinking beyond the human. She is perhaps distinctive amongst the feminist cultural theorists of her generation in writing so positively of nature, as well as life and biology, and developing what one commentator has insightfully called a ‘politics of renaturalization’. According to Hasana Sharp, on Grosz’s interpretation nature, ‘designates uncontainable dynamism,

irrepressible mutation, and constant self-differentiation. She elaborates and calls for new models of nature that insist on our continuity with nonhuman agencies...' (Sharp 2011: 169). Of course, Grosz is attentive to the pitfalls identified by decades of denaturalizing critique, and it is well known that feminists, race theorists, and critical theorists have advanced strong suspicions of appeals to nature, which often function as discourses of normalization. However, Grosz's appeals to nature are clearly designed to disrupt such normalization. Like other theorists, amongst which I would include myself, she appeals to the work of Deleuze and Guattari in order to do this, making productive if contentious use of their notion of a becoming-imperceptible (Ansell-Pearson 1999).<sup>4</sup> So, whilst there is an acknowledgement of the need to denaturalize those discourses that eternalize social roles, attributing in the process a transhistorical human nature, 'we also need to see our projects in terms of natural forces that exceed human powers' (Sharp 2011: 174). As a feminist Grosz is stridently anti-humanist: 'Because, for Grosz, any humanization and anthropomorphism falls into a phallogentric economy of the same, she rejects the possibility of stretching the category of the human to include its excluded others' (Sharp 2011: 168). As Sharp puts it, Grosz confronts her readers with a theoretical choice between a humanist philosophy of the subject and an inhuman theory of impersonal, natural forces (Grosz 2002: 470). Her source for this philosophy of the impersonal is Nietzsche, though Sharp thinks it can also be located in Spinoza.

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<sup>4</sup> This work pioneered the biophilosophical appreciation of Deleuze and influenced much of the new materialism, especially as Deleuze has inspired this materialism.

Perhaps Grosz is at her most contentious with the idea of a politics of imperceptibility, which she develops and advances contra the perceived humanist claims of a politics of recognition. She writes of a 'regime of recognition', which she equates with an identity politics (Grosz 2002: 463). Here identity is conceived not as something inherent, as given or internally developed, 'but as bestowed by an other, and only an other, and thus can also be taken away by an other' (ibid.: 465). Grosz adds to this: 'Identity comes only as result of the dual motion of the internalization, or introjection of otherness, and the projection onto the other of some fundamental similarity or identification with the subject' (ibid.).

What are Grosz's main claims and arguments about the restricting confines of an identity politics? She associates the politics of recognition with the Hegelian 'law of desire' in which the subject can only become a subject as such through being recognized by another subject (ibid.: 465). Her main anxiety is that a vision of justice predicated upon the validation of social subjects by other subjects is to succumb to a servile politics. Instead we should think about politics in terms of agonistic forces and impersonal becomings. As noted, Grosz has recourse to Nietzsche to develop such a politics. She refers, for example, to Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) as a significant event in the articulation of such a politics since it provided a 'Nietzschean rewriting of the Hegelian dialectic as the servile rationalization of the slave and the herd, rather than as the movement of an enlightening "spirit" to its own self-fruition' (ibid.: 466). This means that instead of emphasizing the need for an identity the task is to seek out forces and continuous self-modification, including what Grosz problematically calls 'an untimely leap into futurity'

(ibid.). I say problematic since Nietzsche himself argues against all and any such ‘leaps’ into the future (see the denouement to the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, for example, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: ‘only a buffoon thinks the human can be jumped over’). The key move is the following one: instead of offering a model of liberation through identity based on the subject’s internal constitution, which is to provide a model of psychological interiority ‘inhabited by the spectre of the other’, we think in terms of subjects as bodies and forces with the capacity to act and be acted upon (ibid.). Here she follows Deleuze in presenting a Spinozist-inspired Nietzscheanism, combining a notion of force with one of affectivity (affective bodies) (see Deleuze 1983: chapter two).

Grosz wants to go a long way with this elusive notion of force. She wants us to stop conceptualizing the subject as an agent of causal effects, or as a victim of another’s agency, and instead see things in a ‘Nietzschean’ manner in which politics, subjectivity and the social are to be viewed ‘as the consequences of the play of the multiplicity of active and reactive forces that have no agency, or are all that agency and identity consist in’ (ibid.: 467). This requires an understanding of force in terms of ‘its full sub-human and super-human resonances: as the *inhuman* which both makes the human possible and which at the same time positions the human within a world where forces works in spite of and around the human, within and as the human’ (ibid.). For Grosz, the struggle to produce a different future is not a struggle by subjects in which the desire is to be recognized and valued, ‘but a struggle to mobilize and transform the position of women, the alignment of forces that constitute that “identity” and “position”, that stratification that stabilizes itself as a place and an identity. Politics can be seen as the struggle of imperceptible forces, forces

in us and around, forces in continual conflict' (ibid.). In this task we expose the fiction of ourselves as masterful subjects, that is, as masters of the very forces that constitute us as subjects.

The question can now be posed: need we accept the terms of the 'theoretical choice' Grosz presents us with between a humanist philosophy of the subject and an anti-humanist philosophy of forces? Does Deleuze not offer an ethical pedagogy of the subject in his work on Spinoza that has affinities with a humanist orientation? To this topic I now turn.

### Deleuze and Naturalism

Let me now turn to Deleuze. In this section I wish simply to note some salient features of his thinking as it pertains to naturalism and materialism.

In his work Deleuze offers a new naturalism and that at one point he calls a 'new materialism' (Deleuze 1992: 321). It is ironic perhaps that with the rise of the new materialisms in recent years, in which Deleuze's writings and concepts have come to play such a seminal role, this fact is rarely, if ever, acknowledged or drawn upon. Deleuze's commitment to, and conceptions of, naturalism/materialism are to be found in two main sources: his essay on Lucretius from the 1960s and his book on Spinoza, also from the 1960s. Although well known today as an appendix to *The Logic of Sense* from 1969 Deleuze's essay 'Lucretius and the Simulacrum' was first published in 1961 in *Les études Philosophiques* as 'Lucrèce et le naturalisme'. Deleuze speaks of Spinoza's 'realization of naturalist program' that has both mechanist and dynamic aspects (Deleuze 1992: 229). In

fact, he locates a 'new naturalism' in both Leibniz and Spinoza and articulates a clear preference for the latter. For Deleuze, Spinoza belongs to a tradition of practical philosophy that involves naturalism. This naturalism consists in the critique of superstition since it is this that cuts us off from our power of action and diminishes it, and induces in us sadness: naturalism exists, says Deleuze, to defeat this sadness (ibid. 270). Spinoza is a materialist in the importance he places on the body and on bodies. One might also wish to appeal to Spinoza's atheism, though here Deleuze has a specific understanding of his atheism: it consists in the insight that the moral pseudo-law is simply the measure of our misunderstanding of natural laws (ibid. 253). For Deleuze the question of Spinoza's atheism is without interest if it depends on arbitrary definitions of theism and atheism, and we can only pose the question in relation to what is commonly referred to as 'God' from the religious viewpoint. The new materialism is, for Deleuze, first and foremost, a philosophy of immanence (ibid. 322). In this materialism, centred on immanence (or more traditionally, pantheism), there is the attempt to recognize the positivity of nature and penetrate its depths and to grant the human being the thinking capacities necessary to penetrate these depths. Nature is not construed as passive or inert, and instead Deleuze speaks of an 'expressive' nature, a nature of causal explication, and argues that there is an immanence of expression in what expresses itself (including substance, attributes, and modes).<sup>5</sup> He acknowledges that in this thinking of immanence the concept 'insinuates itself among the transcendent concepts of emanative or creationist

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<sup>5</sup> 'Substance first expresses itself in its attributes, each attribute expressing an essence. But then attributes express themselves in turn: they express themselves in their subordinate modes, each such mode expressing a modification of the attribute' (Deleuze 1992: 14).

theology' (ibid. 232). The transformation effected, however, is radical since there is no transcendence of the One beyond or above Being or the transcendence of a Being above its creation. Being is univocal in all its expressions, so that the One is said with a single meaning of all that differs.

Following Ferdinand Alquié (1906-85), Deleuze construes the new naturalism as a reaction to Cartesianism. Descartes's venture of a mathematical and mechanical science devalues nature by depriving 'it of any virtuality or potentiality, any immanent power, any inherent being' (ibid. 227). In Cartesian metaphysics Being is sought outside nature and in a subject that thinks it and a God that creates it. The importance of the anti-Cartesian reaction is that it seeks to re-establish the claims of a nature that is granted specific forces and powers. Deleuze carefully elaborates:

But a matter, also, of retaining the chief discovery of Cartesian mechanism: every power is actual, in act; the power of Nature are no longer virtualities referred to occult entities, to souls or minds through which they are realized. Leibniz formulates the program perfectly: to counter Descartes by restoring to Nature the force of action and passion, but this without falling back into a pagan vision of the world, an idolatry of Nature. Spinoza's program is very similar... (ibid. 228)

Deleuze is clear that in both Leibniz and Spinoza the attempt is made to restore a philosophy of nature. In both the idea of 'expression' is central; indeed, Deleuze goes so far as to claim that their anti-Cartesianism is grounded in this idea. In Spinoza nature comprises and contains everything and is at the same time explicated and implicated in each thing: 'Attributes involve and explicate substance, which in turn comprises all

attributes. Modes involve and explicate the attributes on which they depend, while the attribute in turn contains the essence of all its modes' (ibid. 17).

In this expressive ontology 'substance is self-expressing in the attributes: it is both what is denoted by them and what manifests itself in them. The essence of substance, on the other hand, is the sense of substance's self-expression' (Wasser 2007: 53). However, Deleuze is keen to defend Spinoza's system from the kind of concern about it articulated by Leibniz, namely, that it renders us impotent as creatures: 'the theory of modes was only a means of taking from creatures all their activity, dynamism, individuality, all their authentic reality. Modes were only phantasms, phantoms, fantastic projections of a single Substance' (Deleuze 1992: 226). For Deleuze everything in Spinoza contradicts such an interpretation. Rather than utilizing the idea of the mode so as to take power away from creatures, it is, Deleuze contends, the only way of showing how things participate in God's power, 'how they are parts of divine power, but singular parts, intensive quantities, irreducible degrees' (ibid.: 227). If man is a part of the power or essence of God (or Nature) this is the case only insofar as the essence of God explicates itself through the essence of the human being. For Deleuze, Leibniz and Spinoza are in fact united in sharing the project of a new naturalism. The difference is that Spinoza's philosophy of nature is the more dynamical and non-finalist of the two.

The new naturalism Deleuze espouses has its anchor, then, in readings of Leibniz and Spinoza. It's from an anchor in this naturalism that Deleuze develops an ethics, a conception of normative activity, and an ethology that brings the human and the animal into rapport whilst respecting the differences between the human and other forms of life:

our task as human animals is a uniquely normative one and we shall see in due course just what this entails and why Deleuze is committed to such a view. In spite of his commitment, then, to univocity and immanence Deleuze does not produce an ontology in which there are no longer distinctions to be made between forms of life and modes of being or power, so in his work there is a clear recognition that the human animal is the normative animal *par excellence*. Deleuze, therefore, cannot be allied with new materialisms that collapse normative distinctions and that seek to deprive the human of its normative privilege however we construe this.

#### Deleuze on Spinoza and a New Naturalism

There are two key aspects to Deleuze's thinking I now wish to explore: first, the nature of his naturalism, and second, how he evinces in accordance with this naturalism a thinking of norms and ethics. The aim is to show that Deleuze has a set of distinctive insights into the normative character of the human animal. Although, as we shall see, his work with Guattari opens up new ontological possibilities for thought and life, bringing human and nonhuman life into rapport on a plane of immanence, even here there is an acknowledgement that the human animal is ethically distinguished.

Deleuze sometimes writes of Spinoza's 'new materialism' and mostly of his 'new naturalism'. As I have indicated, the former centres on the thinking of immanence and a focus on the body, and the latter focuses on an expressive nature. In Spinoza nature is characterised as a positive and productive power. It is from within infinite nature that all finite things exist as a plurality of modes: nature is not the creation of a transcendent God

and the thinking subject is not placed outside the order of nature. Two points are worth stressing. First, that Deleuze fully acknowledges that the dynamic characteristics of our being – our conatus in Spinoza’s language – are fully linked with mechanical ones. For example, a body’s conatus requires the effort to preserve the state to which it has been determined by nature. At the same time: ‘A composite body’s conatus is also the effort to maintain the body’s ability to be affected in a great number of ways’ (Deleuze 1992: 230). We are thus determined in our capacity to be affected and so long as we remain exercised by passive affections then our conatus is determined by passions, in which our desires are born from passions. However, even on the level of a passive affection, which testifies to our impotence and cuts us off from that of which we are capable, we find, however minimal, some degree of a power of action (ibid. 231). This leads us to acknowledging a second point: the ethical task is an on-going labour. As substance God is necessarily the cause of all his affections, and as these affections can be explained by his nature they can be called ‘actions’. The case is completely different with finite modes, such as ourselves. Such modes do not exist by virtue of their own nature; rather, their existence is composed of extensive parts that are determined and affected from outside. This is why we can say that the affections of modes are *passions*: the changes that the modes undergo are not explained by their natures alone. Childhood is the obvious example in the human case, an abject state common to all of us and in which we depend heavily on external causes. Now the ethical question and task comes to the fore, which can be put as follows: can a finite mode attain to a state of active affections and, if so, how? Here we need to a rather modest conception of what is possible: whilst we exist as finite modes we find it impossible to

eliminate completely the level of passions, so the best we can bring about is that such passions occupy only a small part of ourselves (ibid. 219).

A profound difference between Spinoza and Leibniz can be noted: 'Spinoza's dynamism...deliberately excludes all finality' (ibid. 233). For Spinoza teleology is not at work in nature: "Nature is a complex process without any predetermined end...There is no ultimate foundation outside of nature, but immanent powers, relations, and bodily compositions constitutive of nature itself" (Hayden 1998: 110). Deleuze holds Leibniz's finalism to be an inverted mechanism in which, although there is an expressive nature, this nature is given by God and the pre-established harmony. Things are very different in Spinoza. In him we find a pure immanent causality that is to be thought in terms of the endowment of things with their own force of power and that belongs to them as modes. On this conception of nature finality is excluded, and this is the true significance of the notion of conatus: 'Spinoza's theory of conatus has no other function than to present dynamism for what it is by stripping it of any finalist significance' (Deleuze 1992: 233). This means that there is no given moral harmony, no metaphysics of essences, and no mechanics of phenomena: 'Expression in Nature is never a final symbolization, but always, and everywhere, a causal *explication*' (Deleuze 1992: 232). It is not that there is no mechanism or determinism in Spinoza for Deleuze; rather, he is pointing out that, although everything is physical, there is also a level on which a physics of force and dynamism allows for essence to assert itself in existence and espouse the variations of the power of action. The 'physical' is to be understood in three ways: (a) in terms of a physics of intensive quantity corresponding to modal essences; (b) in terms of a physics of extensive

quantity, which is a mechanism by which modes come into existence; (c) in terms of a physics of force representing or signifying a 'dynamism' through which essences assert themselves in existence and espouse the variations of their power of acting.

For Deleuze, Spinoza is most definitely engaged in a philosophy of nature. But for Deleuze it is also the case that Spinoza belongs to a great tradition of practical philosophy and whose chief task is that of demystification (pertaining to myths and superstitions). The two projects are inseparably linked since it is through an understanding of what nature is – asking questions about it works and coming to know that we are fully implicated in it – that we can acquire and cultivate a 'superior human nature', moving from a human condition of passivity and reactivity to a superior one of activity. Amongst other things, superstition is what cuts us off from our power of action and diminishes it, including fear and the hope linked to fear, as well as the anxiety that leads us to phantoms. I quote from Deleuze:

Like Lucretius, Spinoza knows that there are no joyful myths or superstitions. Like Lucretius he sets the image of a positive Nature against the uncertainty of the gods: what is opposed to Nature is not Culture, nor the state of Reason, or even the civil State, but only the superstition that threatens all human endeavour. And, like Lucretius again, Spinoza assigns to philosophy the task of denouncing all that is sad, that lives on sadness, and all those who depends on sadness as the basis of their power...The devaluation of sad passions, and the denunciation of those who cultivate, and depend on, them form the practical object of philosophy... (1992: 270)

Of course, it's a little more complicated than this since, as Deleuze acknowledges, some sad passions have a social function and can be socially useful (hope, humility, remorse, etc.).

Still, for Deleuze, naturalism – from Lucretius to Spinoza and Nietzsche – is directed towards and moved by a philosophy of affirmation: ‘Spinoza’s naturalism is defined by speculative affirmation in his theory of substance, and by practical joy in his conception of modes’ (ibid. 272). Deleuze cites Spinoza’s well-known piece of wisdom that the free human being thinks of nothing less than death and that true wisdom is a meditation on life and not death.

How does Deleuze develop a normative ethics from this new naturalism? He writes of Spinoza developing a theory of natural right from the insights of Hobbes and that is opposed to the classical theory of natural law. The antique tradition of natural law (Cicero) advances the following theses: (a) our being can be defined by its perfection within an order of ends (we are naturally reasonable and sociable); (b) the state of nature does not precede society but rather we live in conformity with nature in a good civil society; (c) in this state what is primary and unconditional are duties: our natural powers are only potential and require an act of reason to realize them in relation to the ends they need to serve.

Spinoza transforms this in a specific manner, the details of which we do not need to trace here, grounding everything in natural right or power. The key development that needs to take place in our thinking for Deleuze is this: it needs to be a matter of capacities and powers, in which ‘law’ is construed as identical to ‘right’ and this means that natural laws are to be conceived as *norms of power* rather than rules of duty: ‘This is the very meaning of the word *law*: the law of nature is never a rule of duty, but the norm of a power, the unity of right, power and its exercise’ (258). On this model duties, of whatever

kind, are always secondary relative to the exercise of our power and the preservation of our right. Moreover:

Thus the moral law that purports to prohibit and command, involves a kind of mystification: the less we understand the laws of nature, that is, the norms of life, the more we interpret them as orders and prohibitions – to the point that the philosopher must hesitate before using the word ‘law’, so does it retain a moral aftertaste... (ibid. 268).

These norms are ones of life in the sense that they relate to the strength and the power of action of individuals. We are normative types or animals out of a specific motivation: we do not wish to be only the subject of chance encounters but rather to seek a rational organisation of our natural powers and to enhance the cultivation and enjoyment of these powers. Moreover, as one commentator on Spinoza argues, although he is a deep naturalist and accepts rocks have minds, he has no difficulty ‘accepting that these minds are not capable of the things required of agents, such as deliberation or responding to reasons’ (Kisner 2011: 59). So, although the human is a mode like other modes it is also the most complex mode since it is in possession of the greatest number of affects and ideas.

The difference between natural law and civil law is minimal on Spinoza’s naturalistic and monistic account. Human laws, i.e. civil laws, pertain to human interests in a specific manner, whilst the laws of nature do not. Still, human laws are ‘expressions’ of natural law in the sense that in their invention human beings are following their natural impulse (the natural law) to preserve themselves. As one commentator has expressed it:

Nature herself does not deliver civil law in its detail, but she certainly provides the impetus for it, and the human being who conceives statutes is just as much a natural being heeding the call of self-preservation as is the caveman who hunts for food (De Brabander 2012: 90).

In nature we do not see a moral difference – of good and evil – but we can posit in relation to it a legitimate ‘ethical’ difference, such as the difference between the wise man and the foolish person. The content of Reason is strength or freedom. Deleuze notes that this difference does not relate to *conatus* since fools and ignorant human beings seek to persevere in their being as much as reasonable and strong human beings. How, then, do we think this ethical difference and locate it? For Deleuze this centres on the kind of affections that guide our *conatus*, and this involves developing adequate ideas and active affections: ‘Reason, strength, and freedom...are inseparable from a formative process, a development, a culture. Nobody is born free, nobody is born reasonable. And nobody can undergo for us the slow learning of what agrees with our nature, the slow effort of discovering our joys....’ (Deleuze 1992: 262) For Deleuze, reason is involved in all the stages of our becoming-ethical and normative subjects, enabling us to move from the badness of chance encounters to common notions and adequate ideas, and so helping us make the effort to organise our encounters, including agreements and disagreements, in a more thoughtful and rational manner (ibid.: 280). For Deleuze, then, reason – even in its so-called ‘commandments’ – does not demand anything from us that is contrary to nature and so a reasonable being can be said to ‘reproduce and express the effort of Nature as a whole’ (ibid. 265). Deleuze refuses to see reason simply as an artificial endeavour (say one of ‘convention’); rather, it is necessary to appreciate that reason proceeds not by artifice but by a natural combination of relations, and here the emphasis is not on a prudential

calculation of self-interest and interests so as to bring about social union, but rather 'a kind of direct recognition (*reconnaissance*) of man by man' (ibid. 264).

What exactly does Deleuze mean by appealing to this 'recognition'? It works quite differently to the notion of recognition Grosz is keen to criticize. In an effort to diminish the role of sad passions in our lives we strive to rationally organise our encounters. True utility is to be defined as seeking to organize what is useful to us in terms of striving to encounter bodies that agree in nature with us. It is impossible for us to avoid all 'bad' encounters, such as disease and death. Nevertheless, it is possible for us to strive to unite with what agrees with our nature and that give the expectation of a maximum of joyful affections. Deleuze now argues: '...if it be asked what is most useful to us, this will be seen to be man. For man in principle agrees in nature with man; man is absolutely or truly useful to man' (261). This means that the effort to organize rational encounters translates itself into an effort to form an association of human beings in relations that can be combined. To practise reason in this context is to do nothing contrary to Nature since the demand made is only that everyone should love themselves and seek what is useful to themselves, striving to preserve their being by increasing their power of action. Deleuze insists, then, that: 'There is thus no artificiality or conventionality in reason's endeavour...The state of reason is one with the formation of a higher kind of body and a higher kind of soul...' (264). Man recognizes man and we, as finite modes, recognize, through common notions, a positive order of Nature: 'constitutive or characteristic relations by which bodies agree with, and are opposed to, one another. Laws of Nature no longer appear as commands and prohibitions, but for what they are...norms of

composition, rules for the realization of powers' (291). Recognition in this context means, then, a kind of *gratitude*. As Spinoza himself writes: 'Only free human beings are very thankful to one another' (Ethics IV: P 71).

What is a norm? Deleuze calls it, following Hume, 'a general rule'. Whatever these norms are – rights of possession, rules of interaction – they exist to provide human activity and endeavour with stability and community: "The function of the rule is to determine a stable and common point of view, firm and calm, independent of our present situation' (Deleuze 1991: 41). For Deleuze the human animal is an inventive species owing to its cultural formation and for Deleuze this is our role within nature. Although we can 'naturalize' humanity we need to see ethics and politics *as our nature*. Deleuze refuses to see the realm of human invention, such as custom, artifice, and convention, as ontologically opposed to nature, though clearly there is plenty of room for a critique of culture and its inventions.

### Late Deleuze

I now want to turn finally to Deleuze's collaborative work with Guattari and Deleuze's later Spinozism. I am suggesting that in spite on the emphasis on ontological univocity, Deleuze continues to recognise that the human animal is ethically and normatively distinguished.

Deleuze and Guattari favour a model of evolution in which emphasis is placed on transversal communication takes place across phylogenetic lineages and in contrast to genealogical tree models and where evolution is mapped in terms of relations of filiation and descent. A rhizome, for example, is said to be 'anti-genealogy' that operates not

through filiation or descent, but rather via 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots'. They see this as an inventive domain of evolution since it involves novel alliances or creative becomings. They write: 'if evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation'.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari posit nature as a plane of consistency that is 'like an immense abstract machine', which they call the 'machinic phylum'. It is said to be 'abstract' yet 'real and individual': 'its pieces are various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 254). This is, in fact, to posit a novel monism in which the plane of nature enjoys a unity that 'applies equally to the inanimate and animate, the artificial and the natural' (ibid.). It is now worth citing Deleuze and Guattari at length on the character of this plane since it is their fundamental insight:

Its unity has nothing to do with a ground buried deep within things, nor with an end or a project in the mind of God. Instead, it is a plane upon which everything is laid out, and which is like the intersection of all forms, the machine of all functions; its dimension increase, however, with those of the multiplicities of individualities it cuts across. It is a fixed plane, upon which things are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness. A plane of univocity opposed to analogy. The One is said with a single meaning of all the multiple. Being expresses in a single meaning all that differs. What we are talking about is not the unity of substance but the infinity of the modifications that are part of one another on this unique plane of life (ibid.).

There is much here to unpack and that merits clarification. I cannot do this here. I want instead to focus on this point: Deleuze is interested in how we define a body and its powers of being and acting. For him a body can be almost anything and can be defined in two ways: first, it is composed of an infinite number of particles in which it is characterised by relations of motion and rest, speeds and slownesses; second, a body is an 'affective' one in that it affects other bodies and is in turn affected by them. Deleuze thinks the Spinozist characterisation of a body is far-reaching since it means that what truly defines a body is neither form nor functions, but the relations of movement and affect. It is the second proposition just outlined that interests Deleuze the most and leads him to discuss biology and ethology, especially the work of von Uexkull. He writes:

You will not define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the number of affects it is capable of (Deleuze 1988: 124).

So, he suggests, long after Spinoza we find biologists and naturalists, such as von Uexkull, describing animal worlds in terms of affects and their capacities.

Now, Deleuze acknowledges that there is a difference between the human world and animal worlds but holds that this novel ethology can be made use of in the case of the human. We do not know what affects we are capable of in advance, and this suggests that there is an 'empirical education' in life, involving 'a long affair of experimentation, a lasting prudence' and a wisdom that implies constructing a plane of immanence. In terms of our becoming-ethical we can say that we do not know what a body can do: it is a mode of practical living and experimenting, as well as, of course, furthering the active life, the life

of affirmative activity, for example, cultivating the active affects of generosity and joyfulness, as opposed to the passive and sad affects of hatred, fear, and cruelty. Deleuze even thinks ethology has a political implication and application since it becomes 'no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities' (1988: 126). In terms of human community we might say the task is to form a higher individual, and all the classical questions of modern political thinking then come enter onto the horizon, such as: 'How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world?' We can also explore the different types of sociabilities that may be available to us as human animals, such as the difference between the community of human beings and that of rational beings.

The picture of life Deleuze develops in his later writings with Guattari, and in 'Spinoza and Us', can readily lead us astray, thinking mistakenly that he has completely collapsed distinctions between nonhuman and human, nature and culture, nature and artifice. Of course, this is the great naturalist vision: to dethrone the primacy of the human and naturalise it. As Grosz puts it, the aim is to wrest life from 'the privilege of the human' and places it in the living and nonliving worlds (Grosz 2011b: 39). For Deleuze, too, things are in relation with one another through this breakdown of form and function and thinking beyond genealogical or filial models of evolution. However, this does not mean that the ethical becoming of the human is not something specific or singled out for special treatment.

## Conclusion

My main critical point in conclusion can be articulated as follows: the commitment to univocity does not mean that all living systems and entities enjoy the same ethical and cultural reality. In his work in the 1950s and 1960s, on Hume and Spinoza, for example, Deleuze clearly recognizes that the human animal is the normative animal par excellence, being what Hume called 'the inventive species'. Today, of course, we would be keen to describe it as also the destructive species.

It is clear though that Deleuze does not provide enough information in his later writings about the different communities and sociabilities that might exist or reflect on our treatment of nature or ecological issues. However, I think Deleuze provides us with new concepts that can contribute to critical work on these topics, and this has been done in the literature. For example, let's reflect on the possible ecological significance of nature conceived as an immanent plane of life in which living things are not fixed by an invariable order. If nature is distributive of a life of affects and affective relations, then there is a basis for affirming the continuity between each thing in the world, and basis for appreciating the multiplicity and diversity of nature, so endorsing the concept of biodiversity and giving us a model of ecological complexity (Hayden 1998: 118). Here we might appeal to the multiplicity of ecological milieu, the diversity of their interactive elements and the dynamic relations between milieux, in which each thing constantly connects to an immanent exteriority in order to flourish. We cannot posit on this plane as an indifferent and closed system. Of course, we might also suppose this means the end of the human/nonhuman distinction and on ontological level this makes sense, though I think it important we do not collapse it on other levels: culture, history, and ethics, and politics.

We have seen the extent to which Deleuze provides a new naturalism through his re-working of Spinozism (his Epicureanism is equally important but has not been dealt with here),<sup>6</sup> and we have also seen the extent to which this commitment to naturalism on his part is ethically motivated. My main contention has been that although Deleuze produces an innovative ontology, or onto-ethology, he cannot be identified with the intellectual move that would deprive the human animal of its ethico-normative distinctiveness. True, Deleuze does not ground knowledge in a human subject or restrict knowledge to representation, and this is what makes him so challenging as a so-called post-modern thinker: he is committed to metaphysics. However, we need to be attentive to the different components that make up Deleuze's identity as a philosopher and work through them carefully, noting the tensions that his intellectual commitments give rise to, sometimes productively, at other times less so (one thinks, for example, of the extraordinary tension that exists between a commitment to Nietzscheanism and a commitment to Bergsonism). It is my hope that this essay will at least serve to get readers to re-think the appropriation of Deleuze by new materialism and to seriously consider ethical questions and normative issues.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that Deleuze's legacy to contemporary thought

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<sup>6</sup> For insight here see my essay, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Only recently has attention been devoted to raising questions about Deleuze as a normative thinker. As one commentator has noted, the moral and value-theoretical aspects of Deleuze's philosophy have tended to be ignored or overshadowed by the ontological, historical, and political aspects (Jun 2011, p. 89). Along with other so-called 'post-modern' thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault, Deleuze has been accused of moral relativism, scepticism, and even nihilism. In an essay entitled 'Thinking and Normativity in Deleuze's Philosophy', which opens a collection of essays devoted to this topic, Anders Kristensen construes Deleuze as a normative thinker in the sense that he is never concerned merely with objective factual statements on the subjects he addresses: 'the metaphysics of Deleuze aims at changing and not describing...the world in which we live' (Kristensen 2013, p. 11). 'Metaphysical science', as Deleuze's project is described, is said to be normative in the sense that what we need and ought to think is to be invented: 'It is this invention

is a highly complex one. In terms of the ‘new materialism’ it is important to appreciate that Deleuze was advocating such a materialism in the 1960s and based on classical sources. At the same time, it is important to recognize the value of the post-human turn and the attempt to naturalize the human and politics as we encounter it in the work of Elisabeth Grosz: it contains important insights that can help cultivate novel ecological ways of thinking, and there can be little doubt that the eco-political crisis now facing the planet needs the resources of the Deleuzian-inspired materialism if it is to be adequately thought through and engaged with. However, what cannot be so readily relinquished are the humanist elements of Deleuze’s Spinozism and its commitment to the tasks of demystification and human emancipation.

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of new ground that makes it possible for a different way of thinking that can open new forms of action and belief’ (ibid. p. 12). For the importance of norms in Deleuze see also Hughes 2012, especially pp. 144-6.

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