The Ethical Relation of Bodies: Thinking with Spinoza Towards an Affective Ecology

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Spinoza and Ecology beyond Ideology

In the recent documentary *Examined Life,* directed by Astra Taylor, Slavoj Žižek repeats an argument he has been making for some years now: namely, ecology has become the new opium of the people. In the film this argument is made quite vividly as he stands in the midst of a landfill clothed in a bright orange safety vest. The story he tells goes like this: ideologies arise as responses to real problems and real crises, but do so in a way that mystifies both the problem and its subjects by obscuring their reality. This act of obscuring happens by treating that crisis on the terms and conditions of an exchange of meaning that is dependent on the very system lying at the root of these problems. Žižek claims that ecology is an instance of such an obscuring ideology because it presents a view of Nature (the capital letter intended) that says what is natural is best and will form the best possible world. But the meaning of this "natural" is very anti-political in so far as it is anti-human, for what is natural is that which happens without human intervention or even hubristic human interaction like the setting up of a city. Under this ideology Nature is a wise thing, even a wise being, which would exist in a perfect balance and only fails to achieve this balance because of the actions of a hubristic humanity. This harmonious whole of a Nature freed from humanity is sublime beauty itself. If this is the story that contemporary ecology tells then it is nothing less, Žižek tells us, than a new instantiation of an old conservative trope that always warns human society not to violate a certain invisible limit. In the past this limit may have been the sanctity of the family or the nation, but now, under the age of ecology, it is the invisible limit of Nature's harmonious wholeness.

While Žižek locates a real danger here, one that scientific ecologists and ecological activists refer to as "green-washing", his analysis is limited by his contrarianism. In the light of the environmental crisis, which threatens the entire organization of life on this planet including human life, something more is required of theoretical engagement with ecology than Žižek's brazenly adolescent contrarianism. For, rather than engaging with the reality of the environmental crisis, Žižek is more concerned with playing an all-too-philosophical game of annoying environmentalists by claiming that the truly radical act would be to exploit nature more! While the danger present in a conservative ecological ideology is rightly identified by Žižek, it is suggested that any engagement with ecology dooms a thinker to become the new court philosophers - sophists and propagandists

really - for the underlying ruling ideology. But that underlying ideology is anything but green because it disempowers human beings and presents the situation as completely decided. When the very possibility for a different form of social life is closed off, human beings will be unable to live intentionally in an ethical way, which in the light of the environmental crisis must mean living in an intentionally ecological way.

We have to risk leaving the comfy confines of a contrarian philosophical act and think alongside ecology. Not so that we can live lives as court philosophers, but because the environmental crisis is real and deeply connected with the most pressing ethical questions of human society. So, what is actually important for thinking through ecology now? First, I need to be clear about what I mean with the term ecology. Part of the weakness of recent ideology critiques of "ecology", and I use the requisite scare quotes here, is the lack of a clear definition of what ecology is that is often coupled with a significant ignorance to how ecology actually operates as a science. Žižek, to continue using him as an example, appears to mean something more akin to popular environmentalism (so a middle class moralism of buying carbon offsets or driving a Prius) or political ecology (which would include groups like Greenpeace who engage in direct action against corporate polluters as well as more mainstream political activism by the various international Green parties). What I intend by the term ecology is an amalgamation of these political identities with its scientific identity.

This second aspect, ecology's scientific identity, is absolutely missing in most philosophical engagements with ecology and so what Žižek gives voice to is a general mood in philosophy that shows it is unable to engage seriously with the science of ecology. A serious engagement by a philosopher with material outside of philosophy proper, like ecology, would mean that the philosopher is open to rethinking and re-conceiving ideas and practices on that basis of this engagement, without simply ceding everything to that outside of philosophy. Spinoza was an exemplary thinker in this regard, using the axiomatic style of mathematics in his *Ethics* and engaging with Jewish and Christian scriptures on the terms of those texts. In both cases what we respectively find is neither a purely mathematical form of thought nor a purely religious form of thought, but a co-mutation of the two materials.

This aspect of Spinoza's thought is often missed when considering his relationship to contemporary ecology and it leads to an unilateral relationship in the mind of the philosopher where ecological issues are considered only through philosophy leading to an overdetermination of ecology by philosophy. I will explain this below with regard to two different understandings of Spinoza, the

determinist reading of Spinoza that sees his work as simply a kind of forerunner of a reductionist form of scientific reason and Arne Naess' reading of Spinoza as a forerunner to Naess' own "Deep Ecology". The focus in this section will be on the way that both the reductionist understanding of ecology and the holistic form appeal to Spinoza's grand metaphysical equivocation of God and Nature. I'll offer a counter-reading of this equivocation. However the goal of this essay, shared by the other authors in this collection, is not to simply provide secondary material on Spinoza's philosophy, however helpful and interesting that material can be, but to show how Spinoza's thinking can be used outside of philosophy for configuring a true interdisciplinary ecological thought. I will make the case that the truly powerful aspect of Spinoza's thought for an interdisciplinary ecological thought is not his grand metaphysics, but rather his theory of affect. This corresponds to what is most important now for a theoretical engagement with ecology, in both its political and scientific forms: first, a disempowering of the secular theology of Nature and second, an understanding of the extra- or non-rational relationship of human beings and human societies to the wider biosphere as well as how that relationship can become ethical despite its extra-rational status. Michael Mack has shown above that in Spinoza the human can finally be understood to retain his or her dignity without being at the centre of the cosmos. This chapter will explore how Spinoza's theory of affect can help us to understand how the human and non-human can form an ethical relationship through a focus on affect.

Forget (for now) God (or Nature): The Theological Form of Environmental Philosophy

There are two dominant legacies of Spinoza's philosophy that can be traced to ecology: the reductionist and mechanistic form of science that arose out of the Radical Enlightenment and the Deep Ecology movement that takes Spinoza as a main philosophical forbearer. Both of these movements are strongly theological in form. This means that they are not theological in the sense of the dogmatic theology of the various institutional faiths, but rather that they are theological in the sense that they are concerned with the highest within thought or the very possibility of beings. They concern themselves with big questions and their answers are given along a theological model of answering big questions that largely negate, displace, or obscure the question of the ethical relation of bodies, and its corollary human question, that is vitally important for ecology. This is because for both the reductionist and mechanistic scientistic thinker and the holistic deep ecologist there is an attempt to bring everything back to a cause that provides an order that finally explains how the

diversity of all things hangs together. In both cases what we find is an overdetermination of ecology by philosophy (understood here as operating as a secular form of theology).

Jonathan I. Israel has traced the importance of Spinoza's philosophy for the Radical Enlightenment and there his legacy appears as one of radical atheism serving as a precursor to modern eliminativist philosophies (Israel 2001). Israel shows that Spinoza's philosophy was put to use in radical ways throughout the development of European science, but does not exhaust the various plausible Spinozisms. In fact, in terms of how Spinoza's philosophy can be a powerful tool for contemporary ecology it is a good thing that Spinoza's philosophy is not simply a reductionist and mechanistic one. For this mechanistic philosophy, which went hand-in-hand with a mechanistic practice of science, is not adequate to the reality of an ecosystem nor the practice of contemporary ecological science. So if Spinoza's thought is not merely reduced to this position it may still offer something to ecological practice and thought.

Those, like Diderot and de Mettre, whose work was not Spinozist in the strict sense but for whom Spinoza paved the way for, created the philosophy at the heart of the mechanistic image of Nature that, for some time, scientific ecology laboured under and whose effects are still felt at times within the science. Yet, for their own atheism, they carried a theological problem into ecology. Daniel Botkin has traced this image of nature in his book *Discordant Harmonies* and he shows there that under this image of thought the Earth is dead as it is understood as a non-living machine instead of a living organism proposed by previous philosophies (Botkin 1990: 103). The death of the Earth in this mechanistic philosophy is not truly atheistic, meaning it hasn't escaped the theological forms of thought, because it is predicated on a theological perception of beauty: 'The mechanical view is constant with the idea of a divine order in most of its particulars and consequences, and thus the mechanical perspective simultaneously reinforced the ideal of divine order and was reinforced by that theological perspective (Botkin 1990: 103).' The theological perspective Botkin is here speaking of is, of course, the human search for a static vision of the cosmos where that stasis fosters a peaceful order that ultimately serves or can be manipulated to serve human ends. There is a deep connection here between an ecology guided by aesthetics and theological thinking:

> '[…] the belief in aesthetically pleasing and theologically satisfying physical symmetries was replaced by a belief in an aesthetically pleasing and theologically satisfying conceptual order. While the belief in gross physical attributes of symmetry, balance, and order was no longer tenable following the new observations of nature, Newton's laws created a conceptual order.

> Subsequently, theologians used this conceptual order to justify their belief in a perfect world where a perfect order (the laws of nature) ruled our asymmetric and structurally imperfect world (Botkin 1990: 109).'

Like other theological images of nature that Botkin examines, the mechanistic image locates a simple, solid-state reality of nature despite the empirical findings of ecological fieldwork. Nature is not a great machine in the sense of an ideal, 17th Century machine that works according to an outdated physical model for the purposes of static predictions. The one truth that this image could give us has largely been occluded – nature is ultimately artificial at the same time as it is natural, or, in other words, human beings can act as engineers or custodians of this machine for the benefit of all of nature (human and non-human). Yet, instead, the view has tended to see nature as a divinely constructed machine that must either be left completely undisturbed to remain perfect as such or completely subjected to human mastery (Botkin 1990: 108). The mechanical image fails not because it displaces God, but because it perpetuates a theological form of thinking that either negates one aspect of the Earth (humanity as the creator of unnatural artifice) or kills the whole of the Earth by refusing it life.

Deep ecology constitutes a radically different understanding of the world, but nevertheless operates along the same theological model that also can set up Nature, again with the capital-N, as a secular divinity perfect in itself, but unbalanced by the actions of humanity. This conception of nature is often confused with Spinoza's own project. Arne Naess, the leading intellectual figure in the movement of Deep Ecology, credits Spinoza with providing a philosophy that lays the foundations for a philosophy of deep ecology or 'ecosophia'. This is most explicitly expressed in the impressionistic article 'Spinoza and Ecology'. This article, while providing a very compact reading of Spinoza's philosophy in relation to ecology, connects both philosophy and ecology via axioms and maxims. There is an image of ecology that determines Naess' reading of the fittingness between Spinoza's philosophy and ecology. That image is the notion that ecology allows us to see the interconnectedness of all things. Naess takes this interconnectedness to be both the main object of inquiry for ecology and the subsequent foundation for ethical thought.

This interconnectedness is connected to the theological elements of Spinoza's thought, where Naess claims that for Spinoza nature is perfect in-itself and exists outside time without goal. Both statements mirror classical theological positions on God, especially those notions found most forcefully in the Medieval Scholasticism whose vocabulary and concepts Spinoza used and mutated.

Naess though does not try to move beyond this theological element of Spinoza's work and instead when Naess touches upon "the human question" or the question of individual powers and affects (the aspects that I claim are more interesting and potentially powerful for uniting with ecology), he always does so within the wider goal of highlighting the big answer. Everything must ultimately be related to the all or whole of interconnectedness as when he writes, 'All beings strive to main *and gain* power. God or Nature has no other power than ours. […] The freedom of the individual ultimately requires that of collectivity (Naess 1977: 49).' While this touches on the smaller questions within ecology, of individual powers and affects that make up this collectivity, it does so wholly determined by the context of the larger question and the larger answer without much attention given to affects and power. Which is to say without much attention given to the human question.

This reflects a problem of scale common to deep ecology where the individual entities are lost in the big question concerning the whole of the biosphere. This problem of scale is good in some ways, for it rejects the usual division of philosophical domains like ethics and metaphysics that you find in mainstream Anglophone environmental philosophy. This separation of philosophical domains is all too often imposed on reality itself such that you find ecology being brought before philosophy and asked to reveal its ethical status but to say nothing about metaphysics. Yet, ecology presents certain challenges to these kinds of philosophical scissions, for the ontological status of an ecosystem and the ethical demand arising from its existence are not easily separable. Naess recognizes this writing that 'one's ethics in environmental questions are based largely on how one sees reality' and that it is 'important in the philosophy of environmentalism to *move from ethics to ontology and back*. (Naess 1988: 66, 67).' But where this issue of scale, where deep ecology operates at the theological level of the whole, also carries with it an implicit philosophy of science. The notion of a deep ecology would appear to suggest that Naess' philosophy is developed alongside concepts from scientific ecology, yet Naess' real hope is to move from ecology to ecosophy. Ecology doesn't appear to set the agenda for the philosopher, but instead provides, as it so often does, a litany of facts about the destructive power of contemporary human society on the wider non-human world.

Rather than creating a unified practice of philosophy and ecology, which would require that the philosopher be challenged by ecological material, Naess provides environmental philosophy with a model that will be taken up by a plethora of other thinkers: Western philosophy, along with its complicity in the 'so-called scientific worldview', is to be challenged with Eastern philosophy (Naess 1988: 171-182). Naess doesn't do this in some naive sense, he isn't trading in a vulgar exoticism, but

when it comes to concepts that he finds problematic in the Western philosophical tradition, like the divide between objective and subjective qualities or the particular dominant form the concept of the self has, he draws on resources from the Eastern tradition combined with his own philosophical project rather than drawing on scientific ecology.

This is especially strange since he recognizes that ecology 'has application to and overlaps with the problems of philosophy' (Naess 1988: 36). So what is it that keeps Naess from engaging deeply with ecological concepts? The answer is that ecology as a science is suspect precisely because it is a *science*; it operates with the prefix -logy rather than -sophy. Within Naess' ecosophy science must be controlled, including ecology, science must be placed within a normative, that is philosophical, milieu that limits its power, or as Naess would rather say, that recognizes the limits of its power. The impetus behind this ecosophical reigning in of science is in many ways Spinozist, for it suggests that while nature may have an infinite number of attributes we know only two (E IP1, IIP1S), and so nature as such resists any total capture by thought. Yet Naess uses this resistance to critique the post-Galilean scientific worldview, claiming that we must resist any kind of universalization of one science, be it fostering biologism or ecologism, which generalizes the concepts of the particular science too much (Naess 1988: 39).

What then are the limits to scientific ecology that Naess thinks are necessary to engender a 'profound' understanding of nature that undergirds a deep ecology? Against ecologism, the over generalization of concepts from ecology understand simplistically, we can locate an ecological minimalism at work in Naess' ecosophy. We may even call this minimalism shallow ecologism, as it refuses a deep engagement with scientific ecology. This is operative in Naess' definition of ecology: 'The expression "ecology" is infused with many meanings. Here, it will mean the interdisciplinary scientific study of the living conditions of organism in interaction with each other and with the surroundings, organic as well as inorganic. For these surroundings the terms "milieu" and "environment" will be used nearly interchangeably (Naess 1988: 34).' This isn't a bad definition of ecology, in fact it is quite close to the generally accepted definition given in Michael Allaby's *A Dictionary of Ecology* that states, 'The scientific study of the inter-relationships among organisms and between organisms, and between them and all aspects, living and non-living, of their environment.' However, it doesn't delve into ecology's concepts with any depth either. Even the concepts it touches upon, "organisms" (populations, or the diversity of species that populate the ecosystem), "living conditions" (what we call the never-living space and temporality of the environment),

"interaction" (energy relations of exchange that arise out of the populations interaction with one another), and "environment/milieu" (ecosystem), are not explored in any depth in relation to philosophical issues.[1]

This lack of depth is related directly to the grand style of deep ecology with its focus on the 'big questions' and 'big answers'. So Naess thinks that the science of ecology only provides us with recognition of severely limited ecological knowledge, ecology tells us that we don't yet understand the ecological consequences of change in a particular ecosystem, 'The study of ecosystems makes us conscious of our ignorance (Naess 1988: 27).' Indeed, the only truly positive notion that Naess appears to take from ecology is the idea that 'all things hang together', which he takes to be an ontological statement that is ethically significant (Naess 1988: 38). Yet, Naess points out that this does not in itself explain how all things hang together, but instead of turning to the very things that ecology is precisely not ignorant about he turns instead to another philosophy (Gestalt thinking) (Naess 1988: 57, 57-63).

But ecology could provide resources for understanding how things hang together because it is not ignorant of the aspects mentioned above (biodiversity, energy exchange, the spatial borders of an ecosystem, etc.); ecology has developed a number of tools for understanding the various ecosystems and the wider biosphere. So what exactly is Naess referring to by claiming that ecology reveals our ignorance? Naess says that this has to do with a kind of political usefulness. No longer can politicians appeal to science or instrumental reason to deal with the pressing issues; cost-benefit analyses will no longer be a substitute for wisdom, and it isn't as if Naess is wrong here, since writing this over two decades ago governments have not appeared to become any more wise (Naess 1988: 26-28). If this were the case it would be laudable, but there is a slightly more nefarious effect of Naess' presentation of ecology, one that is often mirrored in other philosophical thinkers as well. In short, Naess is claiming that science, and ecology specifically, does not think. That only philosophy, in the guise of ecosophy, can provide the grand framework to make any practical sense of the statements of ecology: 'Without an ecosophy, ecology can provide no principles for acting, no motive for political and individual efforts (Naess 1988: 41).' Again we are left with a split in reality between what we know *is* with what we think we *ought* to do.

In a strange way, then, Naess is actually accepting the arrangement of philosophy and science that is unecological within thought. Not only does Naess not draw on scientific ecology to challenge and push philosophy on problems inherent to it and related to environmental issues, he

also doesn't attempt to mutate directly what he takes to be science's underlying *philosophical* split between primary and secondary qualities and objective and subjective reality. Rather, he continues the typical relationship of science and philosophy: philosophy over a science that does not think. At one point referring to the scientific study of the environment he asks sarcastically, 'Are we getting any closer with the long scientific strides built upon the work of Galileo or Newton (Naess 1988: 48)?' If the goal of a deep ecology movement was to turn the tide of environmental destruction by fostering an ecosophy can we not turn this question back on Naess? Are we getting any closer to an ecosophical relationship with the biosphere with the strides built upon the work of Naess?

The goal in this essay is obviously far more modest than Naess', for I only aim to show Spinoza's theory of affects can be useful for bringing together scientific ecology with environmental activism and public policy. That usefulness should tell us something about the importance of Spinoza beyond philosophy as well as provide tools and new lines of research for theorists and activists directed by ecological concerns. This task requires subtlety. A full exposition of a unified theory of philosophy and ecology, suggested in the previous section, is beyond the scope of this essay, but while not directly challenging and adapting Spinoza's philosophical concepts and logic with scientific ecology, nothing in this essay should stand outside such a democracy of thought.

But there are other restrictions as well, for the problem that arises from the theological form of environmental philosophy is one of attention, but to direct attention in a more ecologically productive manner we cannot simply foster an anti-theological form. While there may be comfort in playing the usual philosophical game of separating 'oughts' from 'is', it is nothing more than a distraction from the real tasks of thinking through the ecological situation. With neither the theological form nor the anti-theological form as a real option how can we direct our attention? Spinoza was dealing with the same impasse in his *Ethics* where he strove to move past the theological form of Descartes philosophy as well as provide a philosophy that did not split reality. His tactic was to radicalize the theological form, not to direct attention to confused abstractions, but precisely to direct attention to material bodies.

Instead of pitching the material against the ideal (what the theological form of thought is concerned with), Spinoza creates a chimerical form of thinking where the genetic codes of the ideal flow with the codes of the material.[2] Philip Goodchild describes this radicalization of the theological form as method of immanent critique writing:

> 'Spinoza, writing at the cusp of modernity, pioneered a method of immanent critique through a cynical equivocation: *deus sive natura.* […] By taking this Calvinist piety to its logical extreme, attributing all that happens to God, Spinoza is able to identity God with nature. […] Spinoza's method of immanent critique is clear: he began from the ultimate principle, the Word or mind of God, and attributed to it all the properties required by piety, including unity, universality and infinite power (Goodchild 2002: 73, 75).'

What Goodchild means by cynical is helpful to understand the radicalization of the theological form Spinoza employs. The conception comes from Goodchild's reading of Diogenes the Cynic and the essence of cynicism is shown in the recounting of two stories; the first is Diogenes responding to Plato's definition of man as a featherless biped by bringing in a plucked fowl into the lecture room and the second is Diogenes drawing of attention away from a set speech by eating lupins followed by his feigned shock that the assembly would be distracted from the speech by the simple eating of lupins. 'Such cynical gestures consist in responding to questions concerning the highest ideals with something material, edible and mortal (Goodchild 2002: 71).'

Even though the phrase "God, or Nature" does not appear until the Preface to Part Four, late in the *Ethics*, the entirety of the work witnesses to this intentional slippage between God or Nature. This equivocation isn't a form of pantheism (Hegel's reading) or of esoteric naturalism (Leo Strauss' reading) but requires that both the traditional conceptions of God and Nature are transformed.[3] And this "cynical equivocation" allows for attention to move outside the capture of the theological form that must always end in silence or poetry before the grandeur of nature for the Deep Ecologist. This is exactly the way it functions in the flow of Spinoza's text, allowing for him to move from the usual discussions required by the theological form, residing as they do in the ideal realm, to a real understanding of the 'nature and powers [or abilities] of the affects' (E IIIPref.). Spinoza tells us that, at the time of his writing,

> 'Most of those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of Nature, but of things that are outside Nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself. And they attribute the cause of human impotence and inconstancy, not to the common power of Nature, but to I know not what vice of human nature, which they therefore bewail, or laugh

> at, or disdain, or (as usually happens) curse. And he who knows how to ensure more eloquently the weakness of the human mind is held to be godly (E IIIPref.).'

While there are those 'who prefer to curse or laugh at the affects and actions of men, rather than understand them' Spinoza is able to direct a clinical attention towards them. No longer as things that, in the light of the ideal, are nothing but crude jokes to be mocked and laughed at, but, as things following from the universal laws of Nature (or God), Spinoza considers 'human actions and appetites just as if [they] were a question of lines, planes, and bodies (E IIIPref.).'

Spinoza's Theory of Affects and the Possibility of an Affective Ecology

Spinoza's theory of affects moves the attention of theory away from the separating the is and the ought and instead directs attention to the mixture of reason and passion, of the rational and those acts that lie outside of rationality, or what could be termed the extra-rational. Spinoza allows us to see that reason is not an absolute, that it is placed within a wider relationship, and that reason often is strongly directed by the affect it relates to at any given time. While it is clearly necessary to approach ecological problems from a rational perspective, what Spinoza's theory of affects shows us is that such an approach must be carried out with an understanding of what lies outside of the rational perspective. For with such an understanding we may begin to foster more productive affects that would in turn strengthen the rational process. Of course, readers of Spinoza's *Ethics* will be familiar with his own description of each affect (joy, hatred, etc.), and a project that takes the theory of affects seriously should be able to build on Spinoza's descriptions. But that is exactly what would be required: *building* on those descriptions. What is important to take from Spinoza's theory of affects is the model he gives of the relationship between affects. While historians of philosophy will of course be interested in the specificity of these descriptions, for a Spinoza beyond philosophy these specifics must be up for revision within a wider unified theory of philosophy and ecology. My claim is that the important aspects of Spinoza's theory of affects for such a project is to be seen by the place it finds within the *Ethics*, as a pivot between talking about "God or Nature" and the ethical place of humanity within nature, and within his discussion of the secondary nature of emotions (like guilt) to affects (like hatred).

So what is an affect, how does it fit within the wider schema of Spinoza's *Ethics*, and what does a theory of affect add to an expanded ecological research? The questions are ultimately related,

but let's start with the definition that Spinoza gives for affects in Part Three of the *Ethics*, where the idea is first introduced. There he writes:

> 'By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. *Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion* (E IIID3, emphasis in original).'

Affects are often waved away as *just* emotions or feelings. They aren't often taken to be very important for theoretical work, which was classically more concerned with reason and those things that lie outside the realm of emotion. What Spinoza's conception does is shift thinking concerning affect by simply giving it attention with the intention to understand them. So what is an affect? Simply put it is a power acting either from the body or acting upon the body and it is also the idea of that power. A joyful affect both expresses an increase in power (or the ability to effect change, not, we know, power in the sense of domination as such) and it can also increase power, both in oneself and in others. The opposite goes for sorrowful affects.

Importantly, affects are not something we consciously choose, but in many ways they happen to us. Spinoza uses the language of essence and 'of one's nature', but his use of these terms doesn't imply the same static state that these words tend to carry with them and in fact puts them into question. For while the reader of Spinoza's texts often finds what appear to be brazen assertions about the "nature" or essence of a human being, they must be balanced with statements like:

> 'no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone, insofar as Nature is only considered to be corporeal, and what the body can do only if it is determined by the mind. For no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions - not to mention that many things are observed in the lower animals which far surpass human ingenuity, and that sleepwalkers do a great many things in their sleep which they would not dare do awake. This shows well enough that the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things its mind wonders at (E IIIP2S).'

While we mistakenly think in our mind that we have control over ourselves, an affect is a kind of body or material thing that even our mind undergoes. For an affect is a kind of state that either

accords with our nature or does not. If it accords with our nature our power increases and our power decreases if it does not.

Spinoza's theory of affect is central to the wider flow of the *Ethics* and reading it within that flow helps to elucidate its importance here. Part Three of the *Ethics* is a pivot point between the abstract philosophy concerning God and Mind and the practical philosophy developed in Parts Four and Five. Ultimately the question of practice is centred on the question of affect, for affects have a dual identity. As touched on quickly above, we may either come under an affect that we have an adequate idea of such that the affect becomes an action productive of an increase in power or we come under an affect that is a passion that arises from an inadequate or confused idea. The question of these passions is treated at length in Part Four where Spinoza writes, 'Man's lack of power to moderate and retrain the affects I call bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse (E IVPref.).' This means that question of salvation treated in Part Five is also ultimately concerned with the affects as well, where Spinoza praises the power of reason against the affects as passions. It would be easy for a reader to mistake Spinoza's intention here, reading him as advocating living a Stoic life of coldness in the face of the passions, seeking freedom in detachment. But what we find in Part Five is not a denigration of feeling, of love or joy, in favor a cold mechanical reason, but instead what we can call a warm custodialism. There is no strict separation between reason and affects, for reason can act on an affect and change it from a passion to an act when we form a clear and distinct idea of it (E VP3) and an affect can arise from or be aroused by reason (E VP7).

I used the term "warm custodialism" above to describe the relationship between affects and reason in Spinoza's philosophy. The purpose in choosing this term is to avoid the negative connotations associated with managerialism, that confused, contradictory form of politics that aims to be apolitical, an apolitical-politics, that is prevalent in the world today. Managerialism, especially within the circles of environmental activists, is usually associated with a certain kind of economic rationality that considers all aspects of human action as if they could fit into a cost/benefit analysis. So human beings actions are tied to targets that they must meet with the aim of increasing the power of the organization. This can manifest itself in rather nefarious ways, but this managerialism is not present in Spinoza's conception of the relationship between reason and the affects. Rather, in the *Ethics*, reason is given the task of guiding the affects rather than ruling over them. A custodialism of

affects such that they become acts through being known, rather than through passions that rule over reason through confusion. Custodialism can be differentiated from this sort of managerialism by way of the difference in relationship. A manager is hierarchically over those he manages, imagining himself to be a kind of imperium within an imperium, while a custodian is more embedded in the social relationship of where she dwells.

Why though would any of this matter for ecological research and activism? Naess is correct that ecology's conception of a single biosphere that includes humanity amongst other ecological actors shares much in common with Spinoza's propositions and subsequent deductions concerning nature (or God). While pre-ecological conceptions of nature that arose out of classical philosophical and theological research, described in the previous section, posited a relationship between humanity and the rest of non-human nature that was predicated on their separation, the ecological age has largely come to accept this fundamental relation. The real problem for thought in the age of ecological awareness is not the relation of humanity and wider non-human nature, but the production of this relation. Does this relation produce an artificial cession between the two? Such an artificial cession is not impossible from the viewpoint of the natural right of human beings to decrease their power through a short-term increase nor is it, as existing, unnatural. Or, equally within the natural ability and thus right of human beings, can a relation be produced that is in turn productive of an ethical coupling that increases the overall power of the biosphere? This is the Spinozist question that the avant-garde of scientific ecology is beginning, in its own way, to take up. A question that requires we move our attention away from the grandeur of God or Nature and turn our attention instead to what could be provocatively termed "the human question".

Until very recently ecology had not taken up this human question in a particularly ecological way. Instead the human was a matter of side interest, either because if humans were involves it somehow wasn't truly natural (this is the stance of most 19th and 20th American nature writing) or because there was an impoverished understanding of the human within ecosystems. Not only at the physical level, since human dominated ecosystems were not of particular interest to the early naturalists that paved the way for contemporary ecology, but also at the level of ideas. Ecologists until recently have not explicitly considered the complex relationships human beings have with their own thoughts on nature and the effects those ideas have on their actions within ecosystems. This is beginning to change within a somewhat heretical subset of ecology called 'urban ecology'. Urban ecology is forced to deal with the human question by virtue of being focused on an ecosystem more heavily determined by human beings. In turn it must be concerned with the social form of common

life amongst human beings, as well as the human desire and need for what we can call non-human natural areas (remembering that the city is also a natural area).[4]

Some ecologists have been calling for this new direction for some time. For example there is the work of John F. Dwyer of the US Forest Service whose research has shown the different relationships of differing social populations have with forest preserves and how these relationships affect conservation efforts. There is also the turn towards considering human/non-human coupled ecosystems that is part of the general turn away from focusing on conservation towards a focus on resilience outlined brilliantly in Salt & Walker's recent book entitled *Resilience Thinking*. One of the most exciting projects I know of has just begun in Chicago under the name 'Collaborative Research: Coupled Natural Human Systems in the Chicago Wilderness: Evaluating the Biodiversity and Social Outcomes of Different Models of Restoration Planning'. The project has garnered funding from the US' National Science Foundation, which is a hopeful sign, as it marks a truly interdisciplinary project that brings together scientific ecologists with those in the human sciences like sociology and anthropology. This team is for the first time posing the human question in a truly ecological way. In a move reminiscent of Spinoza's geometric method the 'Coupled Natural Human Systems' project treats human ideas and attitudes towards nature as manifested in the common lives of various communities as a research variable that must be included within the wider research on the urban ecosystem. This is a revolutionary move within ecology. In addition to taking seriously the need for open and intelligent research into how best to restore and foster resilience in fragile and weak ecosystems, it considers the human interaction within that ecosystem. Not as a matter of history, which some ecological studies have already done, but as a matter of the here and now and so it is the first step towards understanding what the strength of these ideas are, what their effects are, and how, if necessary, they can be changed.

This is precisely where Spinoza's theory of affect could be useful and bring the philosopher into the wider interdisciplinary effort. Spinoza, we have seen, identifies the power of 'ideas' and 'attitudes' in the affects. Emotions proper, like guilt, are secondary to affects. Yet, at the popular level of environmental politics it is these emotions that are given attention. Mainstream environmental activists appear to think that if they are able to convince others of their guilty they will act green out of contrition. Spinoza targeted this sense of guilt, for when we focus on guilt we are not acting intelligently, but instead blindly groping for true joy. Against the theological form, however secular, of popular environmentalism is Spinoza's ethical vision. That vision is given

powerfully in the *Theological-Political Treatise* where Spinoza argues against a voluntaristic God, for God did not make an arbitrary law against eating the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil, but the law merely expressed the reality beneath the law that by eating of the body of the fruit Adam would decompose his own body. Without thinking maturely Adam confused this natural revelation with an arbitrary and petty divine prohibition (See Deleuze 1988: 17-29).

Affect theory can be of practical use here. Consider Proposition 16 and 17 of the Third Part of the *Ethics* where Spinoza writes, 'From the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have some likeness to an object which usually affects the mind with joy or sadness, we love it or hate it, even though that in which the thing is like is not the efficient cause of these affects. […] If we imagine that a thing which usually affects is with an affect of sadness is like another which usually affects us with an equally great affect of joy, we shall hate it and at the same time love it (E IIIP16, IIIP17).' This can provide us with an insight into the impasse contemporary Western society has with its own ecological consciousness. For example most of the already existing narrative of what it means to go 'green' is largely coded as white, upper-middle-class, which as an image for those outside that social group is caught up in other affects that have very little to do with practical changes that can foster a more rational and intentionally ecological dwelling. It also points to our ambiguous relationship with objects in the world like oil. For oil is necessary for our lives, it is productive of joyful affects as a necessary part of the freedom that comes from a car, but it also produces sadness for no one is able to use gasoline anymore without the underlying guilt of knowing that their actions are part of the underlying cause of global climate change. Or, in Spinoza's terms, we are aware of the future weakening of our power that comes every time we're at the pump filling up.

Beginning to look at these sorts of affective conditions of different social groups will become important areas of research. For the already existing narrative of what it means to be green is in reality only one expression of a single affective relationship. This affect is privileged in the media, but as we look to understand the nature of other social bodies we can begin to discover the tendencies of affects in those communities as well. Each community will hold within it a variety of different affects, some active and many passive ones, which can finally be understood in terms of the relations they produce. This is why, though urban ecologists may already know it, the city is a privileged site for ecological research into the human question, for the city is a site of ethical living. Spinoza says in the *Political Treatise* that 'Men are not born to be citizens, but are made so (PT 5.2)' and goes on to describe the formation of different cities by way of different affects - fear and anxiety

as well as hope for a greater good. The city is not *de facto* the site of reasonable human beings, of citizens, for cities must include the just and the unjust. The city becomes an ethical body in itself depending on the relation of the subjects that form it. By focusing on the affects of the social bodies that make up the body of the city urban ecologists can begin to understand what the affective health of that city is. This can be seen in so far as a joyful affect is tied directly to the ecological health of that city and the infrastructure which supports the city (here we have to include agricultural areas as well as those spaces reserved for non-human use) and so we will have a general sense of the ethical status of the whole of the ecosystem.

To close, what we have done here is move towards a Spinozist understanding of ecology where the theological form of environmental philosophy is radicalized. Practically this means that metaphysics, ethics, and politics are all given in one and the same vision as united under some relationship between affects. Thus a new relationship, one in the hope of a future joy, is fostered between philosophy and ecology. It is becoming increasingly clear that the health of an ecosystem and the health of the social communities of human beings are inseparable and so we see that there is an important parallelism between our ideas and our social bodies. This means that it is equally true that changes in the ecosystems we inhabit depend on our material actions as well as our theoretical ideas. Or, to state that in clearer language, in order to address the ecological crisis we must address the human question. Affects are powerful and by looking to how they function we may begin to find ways to foster more joyous relations with the rest of non-human nature. If we want to increase our joy in the light of the threat that faces not just an abstract quasi-divine Nature, but every actual living thing as well, then there is no alternative.

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[1] I have discussed these issues at length in Smith 2010.

[2] For a longer discussion of the chimerical logic at work in Spinoza's philosophy see Zourabichivli 2002: 218-226 and Gangle 2010: 26-43.

[3] On these themes see Levene 2004 and Polka 2007. Levene is especially helpful in arguing against Strauss' reading of Spinoza as a writer of an esoteric text.

[4] By non-human natural areas I mean parks, forest preserves, remnant prairies, and other places where human beings may visit but do not dwell in, as well as the necessary green infrastructure required in cities to deal with the toxic pollution produced by human activity.