“Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet?” Malcolm X asks his black audience in 1962. The once “new social movements,” including feminists, queers, and antiracist activists, name self-hatred as a primary injury of oppression. A spokesman for the black consciousness movement in South Africa fighting apartheid, Biko, characterizes the fundamental challenge of his struggle thus: “the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality.” The dehumanization carried out under oppression deprives the oppressed of self-respect and self-love. Hatred is animated in the oppressed not only toward their abusers but toward themselves. They cannot avoid entertaining the possibility that they, by virtue of deed or intrinsic property, merit systematic degradation. As W. E. B. Du Bois famously put it, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” Sandra Bartky similarly characterizes feminist consciousness as that anguish that occurs upon recognizing that one has internalized the “intimations

of inferiority”⁴ more and less subtly communicated in misogynist environments. Women often consume themselves with self-punishment since so many of society’s messages convey that we are simply not good enough the way we are. The rigors of feminine hygiene become so many quotidian exercises of self-abuse, until we come to feel that painful contradiction that ignites feminist consciousness: the belief that one is and is not inferior.⁵

Leaders of political movements often formulate the act of resistance as necessary, not only to convince, as if by rational argument, those in power that they are wrong, but to engender a sense of self-worth in the oppressed. To contradict systematic and pervasive acts of shaming and humiliation, queers declare their pride in themselves and their communities in annual festivals all over the world. This is not only a message to those in power (“we’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!”) but an act that produces a feeling of one’s own power (“we are here, we exist, our presence will endure”). Thus, Martin Luther King Jr. hails “the Negro revolution” as a transformation internal to the Negro soul. What matters first of all is not affecting the oppressors but transforming defeated beings into self-valorizing persons. By virtue of resistance, the oppressed shows himself that “he was somebody.”⁶ The task of so many movements for liberation is heralded as a decolonization of the imagination, an exorcism of the master from the bodies and souls of slaves.⁷ Many borrow from the powerful imagery of Hegel to pose the question of how to develop an autonomous point of view by which to love oneself anew. The art of resistance and revolt reroutes the circulation of hatred that prompts the oppressed themselves to imitate the affects of their oppressors, becoming occupied by the contemptuous gaze of the master and thereby hating themselves.

Seizing on Hegel’s portrait of violent struggle as an effort to secure dignity and equality, many activists and theorists invoke, albeit often ambivalently, the politics of recognition. Within this tradition inspired by Hegel, the struggle against oppression belongs to a process of “anthropogenesis,” of becoming men by winning the respect of the Other. For the politics of recognition, the goal is to establish mutuality among masters and slaves such that they regard one another as belonging to the same universal category. To be recognized is to uphold the imperative of

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⁴. Here Bartky alludes to Fanon’s description of black experience in *Black Skin, White Masks*.
abstract right: “be a person and treat others as persons.” Struggle is conceived as the confrontation of two rationalities transmuting particular points of view into universal ones. Through transforming the content of universal categories defining the human person, those seeking recognition win their personality and gain their dignity in struggle with the oppressor. Without struggle, personality is empty and abstract. If freedom is granted by the master to the slave, Frantz Fanon contends that it only confirms the master’s magnanimity and thus his superiority. The slave must act to transubstantiate himself and his world. His is a struggle not only with the external other but with the internal other who denies his core humanity.

Yet, for good reason, many theorists and activists, like Fanon, question whether white, masculine universality can be expanded to include black, feminine particularity, without reestablishing the status quo. The possibility of mutuality and reciprocity that animates the politics of recognition is called into question by postcolonial theorists, even as they invoke the master-slave dialectic as a paradigm for overcoming self-contempt. Thus, although many movement leaders and theorists link the struggles of the oppressed to a need to overcome self-hatred, there is disagreement about the conditions necessary for winning a new form of self-regard. The question of whether freedom is to be gained by throwing off the shackles of the master “by any means necessary,” including putting down the dog that bites you, is only the best-known controversy within black liberation. The debate about racial or sexual separation, to take another example, implies a disagreement about how to address hatred. Should the strategy lie in appealing to the ideals of universal personhood and humanity in order to establish genuine fraternity? Or ought we to cultivate an autonomous perspective amongst ourselves, in some measure of isolation from the dominant culture?

A feminist and queer theorist, Elizabeth Grosz, makes a novel and perhaps perplexing suggestion that avoids either universalism or separatism. She seeks to abandon the master-slave dialectic, the ambition of confronting the other either without or within, by rejecting the goal of anthropogenesis. She urges that we cease to seek to become human, which, for

her, can only mean becoming “men.” Rather than denaturalizing constructions of blacks, browns, queers, and women as essentially inferior and seeking to confirm ourselves as spiritual beings, she prescribes re-naturalizing ourselves as corporeal forces striving to actualize our power within nature. Grosz urges gender and race theorists to abandon the “regime of recognition,” which, she contends, cannot escape an investment in a humanistic politics of identity. Rather than mobilize for visibility, intersubjective affirmation, and cross-cultural, mutual understanding, she advocates “a politics of imperceptibility” grounded in an “inhuman” ontology of forces.

In this chapter, I outline the problems Grosz identifies with a politics of recognition and examine her exhortation to “imperceptibility” and “impersonality.” I propose that Grosz’s idiom of force, nature, and impersonality grounds her effort to produce a political vocabulary entirely alien to humanism. I understand humanism in politics to include any vision of justice derived from a special feature of existence that is not exhibited by nonhuman beings but is held to be universally shared by humans. A politics grounded in the recognition of shared rationality, the universal ability to formulate one’s life plan or vision of the good, or the capacity to assume reciprocal obligations would be included. Grosz is concerned, however, not with any and all political theory but specifically with feminist, queer, and antiracist thought. She is concerned with movements among the oppressed to constitute alternative ways of life, not defined by their oppressors. The politics of recognition often appears more congenial to gender and race theorists than either liberal individualism, which disavows the constitutive role of relationships and radical human dependency in shaping autonomy and selfhood, or an unmodified communitarianism, which lacks a sufficient analysis of power relationships internal to communities. Understandably, these thinkers and actors appreciate the emphasis in the politics of recognition upon the arduous and antagonistic intersubjective processes of establishing relationships of respect, equality, and sympathy among people with distinct languages, cultures, and histories. The politics of recognition, importantly, aims to heal the profound damage caused by

12. The exhortation to fight oppression by becoming men is everywhere in the language of the “new social movements,” from Fanon to King to Biko. It is also to be found in “old social” workers’ movements.
The Impersonal Is Political

The affective damage of oppression is, at best, inadequately addressed by mainstream liberal and egalitarian politics, which focuses on the rights owed to individuals and the just distribution of goods, respectively. Grosz rejects the politics of recognition, however, on the grounds that the desire to be known, seen, and valued by the Other is an inevitably submissive acquiescence to a humanism that can never fail to be masculine.

In an effort to develop her alternative “politics of imperceptibility,” I turn to Spinoza’s critique of anthropocentrism. In support of Grosz’s suggestive remarks, I contend that a posthumanist politics of renaturalization might better address some of the needs a politics of recognition identifies. Indeed, the politics of renaturalization I derive from Spinoza is, perhaps first and foremost, a strategy of antihatred. Spinoza frequently identifies his naturalism as a response to the psychic and corporeal damage entailed by the proliferation of hatred, which can be extended to misogyny and cultural imperialism. The politics of recognition rightly aims to respond to this damage, but renaturalization maintains that the cure for dehumanization cannot be the achievement of “personhood,” as long as personhood depends upon regarding one another as uniquely capable of transcending nature. Grosz’s call for an experimental politics animated by a desire for joyful affects and the enhancement of bodily pleasures, practices, and powers offers a contemporary idiom and application for the politics of renaturalization. In linking our projects, I hope to show that Spinoza’s philosophy speaks to gender and racial oppression, even if Spinoza sometimes exhibits a dim view of women’s capacities (TP 6.37, 11.4).

In particular, the politics of renaturalization offers an alternative remedy for the sad affects provoked by misrecognition. Moreover, it includes affective criteria for measuring the successes and failures of political practice that do not imply an opposition between humanity and nature. In both Grosz and Spinoza, we discover the need for a practical wisdom of renaturalization by which we affirm that the impersonal is political.

The Politics of Recognition

The politics of recognition has come under suspicion recently, even as it arguably remains a predominant way of conceiving political struggle in North American and western European multicultural democracies. Many

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17. For example, Markell, Bound by Recognition, and Oliver, Witnessing.
are likely familiar with the debates about whether the terrain of politics has shifted entirely toward recognition and away from redistribution, but the various parties tend to concede Charles Taylor’s claim that recognition is “a vital human need” and that the misrecognition of identities is an appropriate way of understanding oppression and injustice in late capitalism. Present-day theories of recognition are diverse and rather vague as to what precisely the desire for recognition is, what aspect of the self or group requires and is owed recognition, by whom, and toward what end. As Patchen Markell points out, it is often unclear whether the politics of recognition aims to re-cognize the already existing truths of intact identities, or whether the dynamics of recognition are meant to bring into being and enable the very subjectivities to whom recognition is due. In other words, Markell asks whether the politics of recognition is meant to know or to make social subjects. The Hegelian paradigm allows doing and knowing to be understood as dynamic, co-constitutive processes, yet the metaphysical and epistemological tension between becoming and recognizing suggests that the satisfaction of a desire for recognition is an awkward yardstick for justice. If the construction of individual and group identity is an ongoing, responsive, and intersubjective process, how can moral demands for recognition be met? Can Spirit ever be satisfied that an act of recognition has succeeded? From the perspective of practice, can we codify the recognition of identities in institutions, laws, or procedures?

Although ambiguities lurk within the politics of recognition, we can identify its fundamental animating principles. Most basically, the model of recognition aims to replace the monadic model of liberal individualism with a dyadic (intersubjective) model of social subjectivity derived from Hegel’s early Jena writings as well as his famous master-slave dialectic, from which the phrase “the struggle for recognition” acquired its renown. Theorists in this somewhat diverse neo-Hegelian tradition develop moral and political theories that regard freedom as an achievement dependent upon social relationships and institutional conditions conducive to the development of “an intact identity” and a positive relationship to oneself. The framework of recognition articulates a thoroughly social understanding of human psychology, which entails attention to the less

18. Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition?”
20. Theorists of recognition in the French tradition rely heavily on Kojève and Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, whereas those in the German tradition, following Habermas, emphasize Hegel’s earlier writings. I thank Cristian Lo Iocano for this point.
21. Honneth and Fraser, Redistribution or Recognition?
measurable forms of injustice inflicted by pervasive symbolic deprecia-
tion of particular identities. The politics of recognition takes into account
how systematic social invisibility, misrepresentation, and distortion genu-
inely harm individuals and groups. Clearly, the damage produced by his-
tories of conquest, genocide, slavery, colonialism, cultural and linguistic
imperialism, and millennia of patriarchy is not healed by formal equality,
greater access to jobs, housing, and social services alone. In the words
of Charles Taylor, “misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It
can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with crippling self-
hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital
human need.”22 Whether and how this vital need is met through politi-
cal practice and institutions animates important divisions within po-
itical thought today.23

The neo-Hegelian paradigm is attractive in that it takes seriously a
continuity, in feminist terms, between the “personal” and the “political.”
Feminists typically regard the personal and the political, the private and
the public, to be co-constitutive. The same power relationships that func-
tion in the public domain of institutional life affect the ostensibly private
realm of the home. For example, feminists call attention to how domes-
tic violence and rape are systematic problems suffered disproportionately
by women, especially women of color and first-nations women.24 Marxist
feminists contend that the public roles typically played by men are con-
tingent upon the invisible work (e.g., affective labor involved in sexuality,
moral discipline, and childcare) of women in the home.25 The public realm, then, is parasitic upon the private, its unacknowledged foundation, and
constitutive of personal experiences and identities.

Hegelian politics accommodates considerations of “the personal” bet-
ter than mainstream liberalism. For Hegel, in the home as much as in the
domains of civil society and the state, we struggle to be recognized as free
beings.26 Because we are social beings, relations of domination and sub-
mission pervade our lives, and freedom emerges from a complex system
of relationship between various spheres of “ethical life.” Hegel’s thought
acknowledges the family as a site in which human freedom is brokered
and produced. Although not a technical term when used in the feminist
slogan “the personal is political,” “person” implies a legal and moral iden-
tity rather than a natural property of humanity. It originally referred not to our private lives but to our public *personae*, the various masks we bear as social actors playing distinct roles. “Person” refers to how we represent ourselves and how we are represented by others. It is an index of how a juridical sensibility has infused our quotidian sense of who we are that, in feminist politics and colloquial discourse, “person” names how we want to be seen: we are persons rather than things. Moral discourse, feminist and otherwise, conveys a yearning to be regarded as self-defining beings with a moral sensibility and an interior life. The personal is political, for feminists, in this sense, too. From a Hegelian perspective, whether women are visible as moral agents, capable of making free choices, depends upon “ethical life.” Feminism is, at least in part, a struggle for women to be regarded as persons.

For Hegel, “person” is an ambiguous term. “What is highest for a human being is to be a person, but nevertheless the bare abstraction ‘person’ is something contemptible in its very expression.” Because considering ourselves to be “persons” involves understanding ourselves as radically free wills, undetermined by bodily impulse or sensuous circumstance, “personality” is our greatest achievement. Nonetheless, being an abstract, universal term predicable of each and every rational being is unsatisfying and even insulting.

The person is thus at once what is high and what could not be lower; there lies within it the infinite and the simply finite, or the determinate and the thoroughly limitless. What can sustain this contradiction, which nothing natural has within itself or could bear, is the majesty of the person.

Its inability to say anything about who I am makes it contemptuous, and yet “personhood” is an indispensable form of freedom in modern life. Individuals and peoples transcend their natural condition of arbitrary particularity and achieve the universal status of person only by virtue of those other domains in which freedom is concretely constituted: the loving space of the family home; the competitive realm of civil society; and

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27. See Poole, “On Being a Person,” 45.
28. This is not her language, but I am thinking of Gilligan’s now classic work, *In a Different Voice*, as well as the tradition it inspired.
29. See, e.g., Bordo, “Are Mothers Persons?”
civic institutions. Persons, from a Hegelian perspective, are not “transcendental conditions” of morality and law but products of social practices and institutions. Through a historical process of anthropogenesis, we cease to be things and become persons. To be a person is to be more than a human-animal. It is to be a creature of dignity, a bearer of reason, capable of moral relations with one’s fellows. The politics of recognition is friendly to feminism insofar as it acknowledges that “personhood” is not given but achieved in relationship to others. It gives rise to a politics that explicitly acknowledges, not only the formal requirements of equality and freedom, but the essential roles of, in Honneth’s terms, love and solidarity. Of course, this is precisely where recognition risks becoming overly substantive for liberalism and threatens to encroach upon individual liberties.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the complex set of debates surrounding the politics of recognition in political theory as a whole. Grosz addresses her critique of recognition to gender and postcolonial theorists. She thereby targets those who write as the misrecognized, those who may be, according to Taylor, enduring “grievous wound[s]” and suffering “crippling self-hatred.” In particular, Grosz responds to recognition theorists Drucilla Cornell, Sara Murphy, and Judith Butler. Grosz engages these particular theorists by virtue of sympathy for their overall political impulses and a shared desire to fight cultural imperialism, racism, and sexism. Yet she urges those who understand themselves to be either misrecognized, or writing on their behalf, to reject the intersubjective dynamic presupposed by the model of recognition. She makes what may be a startling suggestion that feminists and postcolonial thinkers forget about “the Other” and affirm the irrepressibly agonistic dynamics of nature and bodily forces. It is to her suggestive critique that I now turn.

Elizabeth Grosz’s Critique of the Politics of Recognition

Grosz’s call for a politics of imperceptibility first appears in a critical response to an essay by Cornell and Murphy, “Anti-racism, Multiculturalism, and an Ethics of Identification.” Grosz applauds Cornell and Murphy for endeavoring to reformulate a politics of recognition that is not tied to the acknowledgment of an authentic, prepolitical, conscious cultural iden-

31. This is a very general gloss of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.
33. See chap. 5 of The Struggle for Recognition.
34. A critical assessment can be found in Markell, Bound by Recognition.
tity, a model they attribute to Charles Taylor. Cornell and Murphy aim to decouple the struggle for recognition from any notion of “authenticity,” while advocating an “ethics of identification.” The notion of authenticity derived from Johann Gottfried Herder and Lionel Trilling presupposes that we are all equally human, but each in our own unique way. Even as Taylor, with Hegel, insists that we become who we truly are only in time and in ongoing relationships with others, Cornell and Murphy contend that seeking “authenticity” entails an unacceptably static notion of personal and cultural identity.\(^{35}\) Authenticity, for them, eclipses the recognition of individuals as the sources of the meanings of their identities, meanings that are continually being revised and reinterpreted.\(^{36}\) Instead, they advocate an “ethics of identification,” an ongoing transformative practice among diverse social actors, which allows for the emergence of incipient, novel identities. They emphasize the freedom to recreate oneself through the assertion and recognition of one another’s humanity. The basis of their politics is the dignity and respect owed to all human beings \textit{qua} human, which entails attention to each person’s need to develop and transform her self-representation and cultural meaning. Theirs is a “personal politics” in the technical sense. It pertains to the struggles of diverse agents to \textit{represent} themselves publicly as moral agents. Theirs is a neo-Hegelian (rather than neo-Kantian) personal politics, because it emphasizes democratizing the procedures through which representations are engendered and established. It highlights the concrete conditions and social processes by which particulars become universals. Specifically, Cornell and Murphy advocate the (state) provision of “the psychic and moral space” in which the oppressed are equally able to shape how they are seen through participation in public discourse, art, and literature.\(^{37}\)

Although Grosz appreciates the move away from a politics of identity conceived in terms of authenticity, she remains highly critical of any language of recognition. She fears that any vision of justice predicated upon the validation of social subjects by other subjects belongs to “a politics that is fundamentally servile.” Grosz acknowledges that minorities seek recog-

\(^{35}\) “Anti-racism, Multiculturalism, and an Ethics of Identification,” 420, 444.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 421.
\(^{37}\) The proposal by Cornell and Murphy demonstrates the difficulty Markell indicates. How is the state to confer recognition upon identities subject to constant revaluation and recreation? Although they suggest that the state guarantees “the psychic and moral space” necessary for such self-recreation, they still insist that the state recognize individuals and groups as bearers of identities, albeit shifting and provisional ones. “Recognition” comes to be an awkward term for whatever state policies might promote such fluid processes of identification.
nition from each other and not necessarily from the dominant culture, but she rejects any conception of the self that is “governed, in advance, by the image and value of the other,” no matter who that other happens to be. Elsewhere Grosz advocates a turn to a Nietzschean conception of the subject precisely because it is wholly “indifferent to the other.” She urges her readers to think instead about politics in terms of agonistic forces and impersonal “becomings.” She calls for the politics of recognition to be supplanted by a fight for “bodily activities and practices.”

Needless to say, Grosz’s is an unusual feminist critique of Hegelian theories of intersubjectivity and recognition. Kelly Oliver, for example, endeavors to go “beyond recognition” because subjectivity need not be modeled on violence and antagonism, as it is in Hegel, Beauvoir, Sartre, and Butler. Oliver objects to a flattening account of any and all social subjectivity on the model of trauma and a portrait of all otherness in the image of threat and hostility. She argues, persuasively in my view, that such a universal account elides the real differences between social subjectivity under conditions of radical oppression and social subjectivity in a context of privilege. Oliver elaborates an alternative account of dyadic intersubjectivity that neither presupposes violence nor covers over distinctively oppressive histories. Her theory aims to bear witness to the profound sufferings of particular others. Oliver’s theory supports the feminist vision of a just world in which social subjects emerge in a context of responsiveness, attentive connection, and love.

Like Oliver, the vast majority of feminist theorists focus on ethical practices of attuning oneself better to others, especially the disadvantaged. They promote political strategies that modify and refine symbolic representation, social meaning, and communicative interaction. For example, Oliver advocates an alternative notion of vision in terms of sensual connectivity, counter to the speculative tradition in the history of philosophy. Without revising the very notion of visual apprehension, Cornell and Murphy insist upon the right to participate actively in one’s social representations. In various ways, most feminist theorists advocate seeing better, conceiving others more appropriately, and becoming better able to perceive differences in subjective experiences. At the same time, many

39. Grosz, Time Travels, 86
41. Grosz, Time Travels, 87.
42. Oliver, Witnessing.
acknowledge in a Levinasian vein that an ideal of mutual transparency is neither possible nor desirable. Yet we are still called upon to become ever more sensitive to our failure to apprehend the needs, desires, and experiences of other subjects. Even as a traditional model of transparent, mutual recognition is typically rejected, a nonperfectible effort to see, perceive, and imagine better remains a core aspiration in feminist and antiracist theory.

Vision, representation, and consciousness have concerned feminist and antiracist politics since their inception. Even as social movements have extended beyond juridical politics of abolitionism, suffrage, and women’s rights, they are dominated by the problem of representation. How are gendered and racialized subjects portrayed? How do we mobilize counterimages and intervene in the production of stereotypes? How do we develop practices that avoid the mutilating distortion of people of color, lesbians, and sexual minorities? In other words, as a politics of representation, feminist and antiracist ambitions remains centered on the problem of “personality” and moral agency.

Grosz, in stark contrast, does not advocate a theory of social subjectivity that is more loving and responsive to particular others and their histories. Her Nietzsche-inspired paradigm of impersonal, nonsubjective forces renders violence and conflict both necessary and irresolvable. Grosz advocates a politics of imperceptibility because it privileges acts, forces, energies, and bodies. She rejects a dialectic of self and other, since “acts don’t have an ‘other.’ Only Subjects have an ‘other.’” In advocating imperceptibility, she opposes a project of mutual clarification and disclosure, a meeting of minds, as a salve for pain caused by hatred and humiliation. She turns away from metaphors of vision, illumination, transparency, and representation. Instead, she urges her readers to join her in a political project that embraces opacity, dissolution, indiscernibility, and departicularization.

What motivates Grosz’s strange exhortation to imperceptibility? To

44. See, e.g., Young, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity.”
45. Both Taylor (“The Politics of Recognition,” 26) and Honneth (The Struggle for Recognition, 121) insist on an ideal of recognition that eliminates distortion.
47. This is true despite the movement, originating in North America in the early 1990s (well before that in France), to take “the body” as a point of theoretical departure. It is no accident, however, that Grosz, a pioneer of what has been called “corporeal feminism,” continues to resist the representationalist orientation of feminist and antiracist thought.
whom might it be attractive? When one examines her inspiration for a politics of imperceptibility, her counterprogram might appear even more perplexing. Grosz appropriates the notion of imperceptibility (without citation) from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. The notion of becoming-imperceptible appears at the extreme end of a spectrum of “becoming-animal.” Deleuze and Guattari propose becoming-animal as a notion of transformation that is not predicated on identification, imitation, resemblance, or analogy. Rather than the reflection of an unconscious urge to work out a psychic identification with a lost other (a parent, love object, or part of oneself), becomings-animal are impersonal communications between bodily forces that cannot be represented by concepts or explained through developmental narratives. If I represent myself as feeling “like a dog,” it may be the way I imagine the destabilizing effect of a molecular exchange between the porous and dynamic assemblage I call “my body” and the myriad inhuman bodies by virtue of which I exist. Becomings-animal, according to Deleuze and Guattari, occur on a continuum that begins, on the one side, with what they call the “special introductory power” of becoming-woman and culminates, “at the far side,” in becoming-imperceptible.49

In an early work, Grosz finds Deleuze and Guattari’s affirmation of becoming-woman as a portal to becoming-imperceptible to be problematic.

But there must remain a wariness, insofar as they too sever becoming-woman from being-woman, and make the specificities of becoming-woman crucial to men’s quest for self-expansion. They render women’s becomings, their subversions, their minoritarian and marginal struggles subordinate to a cosmic becoming-imperceptible which amounts, in effect, to a political obliteration or marginalization of women’s struggles.50

Today, however, she urges feminists and postcolonial theorists to embrace what once appeared to her as a mystical “obliteration” of the demands, desires, and projects of women. Perhaps the link between becoming-imperceptible and becoming-woman as part of the project of becoming-animal is what prevents Grosz from noting that a politics of imperceptibility is conceptually inherited from Deleuze and Guattari. Yet insofar as the project of becoming-animal and becoming-imperceptible belongs to a

program of radical antihumanism in Deleuze and Guattari, its lineage is essential to her critiques of Cornell and Murphy as well as of Butler.

Cornell and Murphy preserve the language of recognition to affirm the necessity of contesting and opening up the symbolic content of the term “human.” Butler claims in *Undoing Gender* that her project necessarily begins and ends with “the human.” Butler’s recent work explicitly belongs to a “post-Hegelian politics of recognition,” which comprises an effort to expand the designation of humanity in response to implicitly socially sanctioned violence against unrecognizable others. Grosz consistently exhibits suspicion, however, of any discourse of the human. Although she often invokes Nietzsche to support her emphasis upon the “inhuman,” she is at least equally inspired by Luce Irigaray’s critique of the phallocentric logic of Western thought. When she defends her preference for a language of forces rather than subjects, she notes that feminists are likely to consider an idiom of force, power, and action to be masculine and patriarchal. “But this maneuver of identifying force with the masculine is already to humanize force (which in effect is to masculinize it, in a phallocentric logos), to anthropomorphize it and to refuse to see its role not as the effect but as the condition of subjectivity and subjective will.” In her parenthetical identification of humanization with masculinization, we can detect a distinctively feminist motivation for the language of force in the politics of imperceptibility. Because, for Grosz, any humanization and anthropomorphism falls into a phallocentric economy of the same, she rejects the possibility of stretching the category of the human to include its excluded others. Although many feminists argue that “the human” implies a masculine subject, most do not see any alternative to an appeal to this particular universal, especially if they are writing programmatic political theory. Yet Grosz does not shy away from promoting a turn to the inhuman: the multiplicity of natural, bodily forces and the nondiscursive terrain of actions, affects, and mutations. Although Grosz does not condemn all humanist political theories *tout court*, she claims that feminist and antiracist struggle is starved for new languages, concepts, and problems. Perhaps only an uncompromising effort to exit the regime of recognition and eschew the desire for visibility and intersubjective affirmation can yield a new horizon for politics?

52. See Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.
53. As well as the obvious allusion to Lyotard, *The Inhuman*.
The Impersonal Is Political

Thinking beyond the (Hu)Man

One of the distinctive aspects of Grosz’s counterproposal is her invocation of a more “primitive” and naturalistic language rather than a more sophisticated conceptualization of our increasingly diverse world. Although moral and political thought today operates almost exclusively in a “postcritical” idiom in which discussion of natural causality is all but verboten, Grosz writes of causes, forces, and conditions. She does not avoid characterizing nature itself. Nature, guided by her interpretation of Darwin, 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, while striving to avoid pitfalls identified by decades of denaturalizing critique. Feminists, race theorists, and critical theorists, for good reason, evince strong suspicion of appeals to nature, which often function as discourses of domination that identify some social groups with animal functions and others with spiritual ones. In response, Grosz outlines a concept of nature that disrupts rather than promotes normalization. Nature, for her, is self-differentiation and thus cannot promote a stable model. This portrait of nature, she hopes, cannot be used as a norm against which to find anyone defective or inferior. Moreover, in contrast to the Cartesian and Hegelian traditions, nature is replete with various active powers, rather than a passive object that spiritual subjects might hope to master.

Most feminists and race theorists who appropriate the Hegelian intersubjective model do not accept it in its entirety. Rather than modifying it to suit our purposes, Grosz argues that we ought “to begin with different working assumptions” that challenge our dependence upon a receptive audience. It is the fixation on the dyadic relation of master and slave that Grosz seeks to overturn. She thereby makes an urgent call for “new intellectual resources” to address domination. Toward that end, she suggests that “[s]ubjects can be conceived as modes of action and passion, a surface of catalytic events, events which subjects do not control but participate in, which produce what history and thus what identity subjects may have.” Rather than a “psychical interiority inhabited by the specter of the other,” she advocates a perspective in which “what marks the subject as such is

56. See, Grosz, Time Travels, part 1.
57. See, for example, Fanon’s discussion, “The Negro and Recognition,” Black Skin, White Masks.
59. Ibid., 468.
its capacity to act and be acted upon, to do rather than to be, to act rather than to identify.”

Thus she endeavors to address the same phenomena (the social subjectivity of the oppressed) that preoccupy many feminists and antiracists today, but in an alternative idiom.

Grosz confronts us with “a theoretical choice” between a humanist “theory of the subject” and an inhuman “theory of impersonal,” natural forces. We might also call this a theoretical choice between the “personal” (universal consciousness freed of natural determination) and the “impersonal” (the causal network of affects). Although Grosz develops this alternative theoretical lens through Nietzsche, it might just as easily be discovered in Spinoza. Spinoza’s challenge to anthropocentric thinking can supplement the impersonal approach she advocates. Moreover, compared with Nietzsche’s philosophy, Spinoza’s thought arguably exhibits less suspicion toward collective efforts and may, for that reason, have greater potential to support a feminist agenda. Indeed, a number of feminists recognize Spinoza’s philosophy as a rich resource. Nietzsche alerts modern subjects to our problematic assumptions, habits, and investments with more rhetorical force than perhaps any other philosopher. I would like to suggest, however, that Spinoza opens up still further avenues, especially for the practice of a politics of imperceptibility.

The fundamental premise of the politics of renaturalization—that humans are not different in kind from any other natural being—allies it with Grosz’s program. Although Spinoza was writing well before Hegelian theories of recognition, his thinking was no less animated by a concern with the pervasiveness of hatred in human societies. He frequently laments that “men are naturally inclined to hate and envy” (E III p55s). Also as in Hegel (and many others in the history of philosophy), freedom depends upon coming to accept and affirm oneself as one truly is, in essence. Yet, rather than being essentially a free person by virtue of the infinity of the will, as Hegel maintains, each of us is essentially a part of nature, dependent upon both the infinite power of nature as a whole and the infinitely many finite forces to which we are ineluctably connected. Enmity and hatred are inevitable consequences of our finitude. Owing to the sin-

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60. Ibid., 466.

61. Given that Grosz’s Nietzsche is mediated by Deleuze, who finds very similar strains of thought in Spinoza, it is not a big leap from one to the other. Moreover, the precise language of acting and being acted upon is closer to Spinoza’s, although he more often discusses the body as what “affects and is affected” by others.

62. Gatens, Imaginary Bodies; Gatens and Lloyd, Collective Imagining; Braidotti, Metamorphoses.
gularity of essences in nature, even if humans share many capacities and our bodies and minds are structurally similar, our distinct requirements and aspirations often do not coincide. Love, being prompted by joy from an external cause, is also possible only by virtue of finitude. Indeed, finitude and human psychology are such that we are constantly animated by love and hate, which determine us personally and anonymously, since “anything can be the accidental cause of joy, sadness, and desire” (III p15). Strife and enmity follow from hate and its derivatives: envy, mockery, disdain, anger, and vengeance (IV p45c1). Peace, or political unity, depends upon organizing our social relations to counter one of the most prevalent emotions among human beings: odium. Spinoza defines hate as “sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause” and notes that each of us cannot but strive to “remove and destroy the thing he hates” (III p14s). Sadness, recall, is simply the feeling of a decrease in one’s power to persevere in being (III p11s), and the mimetic character of our psychology virtually guarantees that we are most affected by the behavior and action of those whom we identify to be “like us” (III p27). The question for the politics of renaturalization becomes: how do we address hatred among us? In particular, how do we exorcise the self-hatred that follows from imitating the affects of the hateful other?

According to the politics of recognition, human conflict, whether it takes the form of direct confrontation, property crime, or self-mortification, is about the desire for the esteem of the other. The thief, in taking something, not only aims to satisfy his biological need for food but claims that his life is valuable, that he has a right to food, and seeks a response from the universal. This is how, for Hegel, “the criminal is intelligence. His inner justification is . . . to count as something, to be recognized.” Even if the ambition to be esteemed by others is potent in human psychology, Spinoza’s ethics does not advocate overcoming enmity through mutual esteem. Although some, like Levinas, have found the lack of concern with the other in Spinoza’s ethics to be its most objectionable aspect, Grosz suggests that preoccupation with the other has led to impasses in emancipatory politics. Spinoza advocates the cultivation of self-esteem (acquiescentia) in response to enmity, hatred, and self-hatred. Yet his understanding of self-esteem is not an egoistic affirmation of the unique value of the individual but a liberating appreciation of nature and the distinctive shape of one’s power within it. It is liberating because it involves the experience of one’s own agency, not as an illusory transcendence of natural

63. Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–1828, 126.
determination but as a constitutive natural force (E IV p52, V p27). Thus, although Spinoza shares Hobbes's view that the ambitious desire for esteem must be presupposed in the successful organization of a state, good institutions redirect rather than satisfy the urge to find our worth in the eyes of fellow men. The politics of renaturalization seeks a new ethos and practical wisdom (by structural means) to revalue dependency and natural determination and produce a new understanding of action. While the Ethics advocates an impersonal identification with God and nature, the political writings, in complementary ways, aim at a harmony of minds (peace) through a coordination of the powers of diverse agents (TP 6.4). Both of these trajectories depend upon overcoming an understanding of humanity as different in kind from nature.

In other words, the politics of renaturalization displaces the drive for that special kind of respect owed to one’s humanity, so fundamental to contemporary liberal humanism. The desire to be esteemed imprisons us, as long as it depends upon being seen as an absolute special genre of being, elevated out of nature by virtue of one’s rationality, consciousness, unconditioned will, or anything else. The hypothesis of the politics of renaturalization is that ceasing to imitate the hatred of others requires abandoning an economy of recognition, by which we determine who is human (fetuses? babies? women? slaves? the cognitively disabled?), and thereby demarcate our sphere of moral concern. Grosz and Spinoza contend, albeit in different ways, that self-love and the production of collective power and pleasure require a nonhumanist theory of agency and desire.

Spinoza’s distance from humanism, as chapter 1 argues, is captured by his famous announcement that he will “consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.” In contrast to the humanist tradition, he refuses to treat “man” as though he is “outside Nature,” as if the human realm is an “empire within an empire . . . that disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature” (E III pref). What has been called Spinoza’s “antihumanism” is not a denial of human freedom or worth, which is no less the preoccupation of his philosophy, but a rejection of the idea that there are special laws that belong to human existence alone, in any of its manifestations. As is surely familiar to readers by now, “the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must . . . be the same, namely, through the universal rules of Nature.” Spinoza contends that his denial of human freedom as it is traditionally understood “contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one,

64. I treat one of the structural means in detail in Sharp, “Feeling Justice.”
to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry with no one.” Ceasing to regard humans as free, as different in kind, attenuates hate and its relatives. This claim may not seem especially political, since it concerns moral failures to respect others. Yet he proceeds to affirm that the renaturalization of human freedom likewise “contributes, to no small extent, to the common society insofar as it teaches how men are to be governed and led, not so they may be slaves, but that they may freely do those things that are best” (II p49s). Elsewhere, he directly connects the mitigation of hate to the effort of renaturalization: If we recall that “men, like other things, act from the necessity of nature,” the hate we feel when suffering the common wrongs of men will “easily be overcome” (V p10). The view of humans as endowed with radically free wills that prompts hate, on Spinoza’s account, is precisely what Hegel thinks requires recognition.

Hegel’s is a rich and demanding concept of human freedom and its social conditions. Yet it is unacceptable from the point of view of renaturalization, since recognition entails viewing humans as special kinds of beings. Although contemporary thinkers are not uncritical of Hegel’s treatment of nature, the politics of recognition’s valorization of “postconventional” societies confirms the insistence upon human transcendence. Justice and freedom are more available insofar as a people progressively spiritualizes the natural world, including human bodies. To put my claim in the strongest possible terms, if Spinoza is right, the politics of recognition is a self-hating endeavor. To insist that we are other than we are, and to judge ourselves and others by a spiritual standard that can nowhere be met, invites mockery and contempt. It is no accident that Spinoza accuses most philosophers of writing “satire” and invective that offer little to understanding, rather than ethical and political theory (E III pref; TP 1.1). Especially when confronted with the pain we cause one another, philosophers divide humanity into those closer to God and those more bestial. Their own hatred of human wrong alienates them from an explanation of the causes of human frailty. The politics of recognition risks mocking humans as they really are by imagining them as one would prefer them to be.

Spinoza’s challenges to humanism, in my view, aim precisely at misanthropy. Insofar as humanism grounds moral and political theory in special features of humanity that imply our transcendence of nature,

66. “Postconventional society” is a term of art among Habermasians.
Chapter Five

it fuels resentment every time we fail to rise above our circumstances. Philanthropic motivations animate what some have decried as Spinoza’s dispassionate inhumanity. Spinoza’s polemic against a uniquely human perspective evinces his conviction that we can love ourselves only by getting over ourselves. Does this mean we can end oppression as soon as we acknowledge the iron laws of natural necessity? No, the politics of renaturalization understands “how foolish are attempts so often made to get rid of a tyrant while yet the causes that have made the prince a tyrant cannot be removed” (TP 5.7). Tyranny, for Spinoza, is not the independent action of a sovereign individual but rather an effect of a vast constellation of impersonal causes. We need an entire set of “new modes and orders” to transform current power relations. As detestable as an oppressor is, “hate can never be good,” for “we strive to destroy the man we hate,” which will do little to reorder the causes of our hatred (E IV p45). We should act, as much as possible, with an informed understanding of the myriad impersonal causes hostile to our flourishing. Because we are finite, self-defense may require opposition and destruction, but that will likely be only a temporary abeyance of what ails us. Being part of causal networks means that political transformation is profoundly difficult. The tyrant’s head cannot simply be cut off. Yet the extent to which “the common wrongs of men” torment us can be minimized by viewing one another and ourselves as parts of nature. The politics of renaturalization calls for a change in how we understand human existence. To see ourselves opposed to nature is to hate ourselves.

To return to the debate within feminist and antiracist politics, Grosz distinguishes herself from Judith Butler, who has radicalized social construction more than any other theorist by denaturalizing sex and gender. Grosz notes that “denaturalizing is important. But it is not my project. We have, by now, been denaturalized as much as we need to be. What I’m much more interested in [is a] sort of renaturalizing that has been taken away, redynamizing a certain kind of nature.” While we need denaturalization’s suspicion toward discourses that eternalize social roles, attributing them to a transhistorical human nature, we also need to see our projects in terms of natural forces that exceed human powers. The politics of renaturalization, by way of Grosz and Spinoza together, decenters human reality by acknowledging its production within a force field of powers and

67. Alquié, Le rationalisme de Spinoza, and Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought.
68. I allude to Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy, 5.
counterpowers indifferent to human flourishing. The project of renaturalization seeks an alternative response to the “crippling self-hatred” that is the object of a politics of recognition. Rather than yearning for the affirmation of our humanity, or insisting upon a satisfying self-representation within the social imaginary, we strive for a liberating knowledge of ourselves as natural beings.

What would it mean politically, however, to affirm our natural rather than human being? What kind of political practice is urged by the renaturalization of humanity? One of the virtues of the politics of recognition is its insistence that justice issues from a complex social dynamic that includes a robust affective dimension in excess of individual psychologies. The politics of recognition maintains that we cannot liberate ourselves. Although it does not seek the other’s recognition, the politics of renaturalization is not solitary. We need (many) others, but it is important to consider those others to include more than human beings. Broadening our frame of reference, apprehending political power and individual agency as something that involves more than social relations, mitigates the sad passions that animate a culture of justice as retribution, recrimination, and reparation. Depriving humanity of its special status as part of a project of loving and knowing ourselves and the nonhuman beings on whom we depend is arguably of increasing importance in an epoch that threatens environmental catastrophe. I have yet to make any detailed suggestions about what kind of political practices and institutions Grosz’s politics of imperceptibility, a contemporary articulation of what follows from renaturalization, might entail. I conclude with some thoughts toward that end.

A Politics of Imperceptibility

Grosz’s terms are not precisely Spinoza’s. While Spinoza rejects the view of man in nature as a dominion within a dominion, Grosz objects to the politics of recognition as a form of “identity politics.” Identity politics is linked to recognition insofar as it seeks affirmation of group identity as a meaningful part of who one is. Black and feminist consciousness involve coming to see oneself in terms of a social identity and fighting to transform the meaning of that identity for oneself and others. Spinoza’s effort is a rather generic effort to renaturalize “man.” Among social movements today, it is not enough to see humans as a whole in a new light. We must attack particular abuses and local hatreds. Factionalism and radical prejudices were far from alien to Spinoza (cf. E IV p46), and he analyzes religious hatred in detail in his Theological-Political Treatise. Yet, in his day,
he was not yet concerned with racist or sexist “biologization” of human differences. Denaturalization has been central to gender and race theory, because the oppression of women, non-orthosexuals, and racial minorities has often been justified, since at least the mid-eighteenth century, on biological grounds. Grosz’s exhortation to renaturalization addresses an audience that is deeply skeptical of appeals to nature.

The politics of imperceptibility, as I understand Grosz, critiques orienting political action around human representations. Yet it is still concerned with “concepts.” She proposes a project of emancipatory renaturalization through an appreciation of material forces that are indifferent to human conceptualizations even as they constitute them. While she takes inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari, note that they do not entirely reject identity politics. With respect to the feminist movement, they write: “It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view of winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity.” At the same time, they warn that “to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow,” poses a constant threat to efforts at self-transformation. Grosz advocates a “molecular” politics of impersonal flows. Rather than focusing on the visibility and social legitimation presupposed by molar politics of identity, impersonal and imperceptible politics likely takes inspiration from radical queer politics.

The politics of queer nation and lesbian separatism have long argued, against the aspiration for inclusion in the dominant culture, that the failure of the dominant imaginary to represent us might have liberating potential. The obscurity and illegibility of “abnormal” subjects may not only be a source of pain and exclusion, even if it is wretched to be hated and scorned. There have always been some radicals who contend that relative invisibility can be exploited toward new ends. Darkness might be enjoyed rather than illuminated. Consider Sartre’s assessment of Aimé Césaire’s poetry: “night is no longer absence, it is refusal. Black is not color, it is the destruction of this borrowed clarity which falls from the white sun.” Perhaps, in addition to the Irigarayan rejection of the masculine symbolic economy where humans can only ever be men, Grosz’s exhortation to

70. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 304.
71. See, for example, Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*. Thank you, again, to Cristian Lociano for suggesting the link between molecular and queer politics.
72. A point frequently made by lesbian politics, such as Wittig, *A Straight Mind and Other Essays*.
imperceptibility emerges from the queer affirmation of the autonomy of counterculture, of the pleasure, solidarity, and possibility of being outside the mainstream. While it is important not to romanticize oppression, it is also important not to overestimate the constitutive impact of the hegemonic gaze. Emphasizing the spaces of creativity and possibility afforded by an underground movement that avoids the sun arguably contains some promise in an epoch when media are centralized and overwhelmingly controlled. Seizing the means of production of representation may be a futile project. At the same time, new media allow local groups to go viral and make unforeseen contacts. A politics of imperceptibility pursues contact and communication, but without striving for admission to universality.

Spinoza offers the politics of imperceptibility a rigorous and uncompromising critique of human transcendence. Moreover, Spinoza’s philanthropic challenge to humanism is genetically linked to Grosz, in that it serves as an ontological foundation for her Deleuzian framework. When Deleuze and Guattari invite us to consider becoming-imperceptible, they do not advocate a retreat from perception absolutely, as if that were possible. Perception in itself is not necessarily problematic, and, for Spinoza, our minds and bodies perceive in excess of our consciousness. Spinoza contends that “nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the mind” that is an idea of that body (E II p12), and yet “the human mind does not know the human body” (II p19s) and usually only marvels at what it can do (III p2s). For Spinoza, perception happens in nature but is not a uniquely human phenomenon. Deleuze and Guattari target not the perceptive power of nature itself but the dominant regime of perception, the social imaginary that filters, contours, and categorizes beings into intelligible entities. Their imagery of becoming-imperceptible challenges, sometimes through evasion rather than self-assertion, the hegemonic sociosymbolic order.

Children and the insane figure as Deleuze and Guattari’s examples of becoming-animal on the way to becoming-imperceptible. Children are exemplary because they do not perceive the world as divided into atoms. Children apprehend “assemblages” of proximate beings producing effects in unison, as when little Hans notices the horse-omnibus-street. Children of a certain age do not yet operate in terms of the hegemonic sociosymbolic order, fail to use names appropriately, and often imitate the affects of beasts or trains and thereby affirm nature as replete with

possibilities for relationships and transformative involvements. Children and madmen, for Deleuze and Guattari, do not become imperceptible absolutely, in the sense of being inaccessible to other bodies and minds. Rather, they fail to conform to the dominant order and thereby travel a less manifest path, among the infinitely many that compose nature. If the examples in *A Thousand Plateaus*, however, are largely children, werewolves, and (socially defined) madmen, how does this translate into a politics of imperceptibility? And what is especially feminist or antiracist about such a politics?

Grosz’s schema offers inspiration and redirection without much positive guidance. A politics of imperceptibility entails a reconsideration of “the subject,” be it an individual or group, in terms of vital forces. In her words, “Rethinking the concept of the subject in terms of force means profound transformations in all related concepts—of objects, of the social, of actions and agency.” Grosz promotes an increasingly “abstract” feminist theory as a means to overhaul fundamental ontological categories. Her work is increasingly autonomous from specific problems that traditionally preoccupy feminist and antiracist thought. She does not often discuss particular institutions of oppression and instead elaborates new ways to consider time, space, and force. Her early work on gender and embodiment has given rise to a style of thinking that is not confined to responding to the most manifest exigencies in the lives of women or racialized groups. It risks appearing detached from lived experiences of oppression. Yet the circumscription of feminist theory to women’s issues domesticates and restrains feminist thought. It treats feminism as an application of philosophy rather than as a comprehensive philosophical effort. In Grosz’s intervention into the debate surrounding the politics of recognition, we can see that her style of thinking is not devoid of political prescription.

Grosz’s thought shares with Spinoza’s a kind of irony. Grosz explicitly advocates greater abstraction in feminist theory, and, similarly, Spinoza’s philosophy strikes critics (as well as admirers) as hyperrational and distant from sensual experience. The truth to these characterizations lies in the fact that Spinoza and Grosz advocate, first and foremost, a radical transformation of thought. While each presents a picture of nature as a realm of agonistic forces indifferent to human well-being, their projects promote and exemplify intellectual efforts that appear distinct in character from an arena of bodies struggling to survive and thrive. Yet, as I argue in chapter 2, Spinoza’s “parallelism” of mind and body supports a

portrait of ideas themselves as forces, desiring powers in nature, striving to prolong and enhance their existence. Bodily servitude entails mental servitude, and vice versa. Spinoza's and Grosz's intellectual interventions into the discourses of their day are energetic, forceful activities that combat and suppress certain ideas and enjoin others to form countermodes of thinking and being. Although agonism inevitably belongs to the effort to change one's causal milieu, thinking in terms of force is not the same as thinking only in terms of opposition. Forces thrive and suffer by virtue of their relationships to ambient others. The arguments contained in Grosz's and Spinoza's philosophies represent not only inspiration for alternative ways of thinking and living, endeavoring to affect and displace other modes of thinking. They are lived enactments of those very alternatives. Their challenging ideas are evidence that they have enjoyed fortuitous encounters with other minds and bodies and marshaled the power to know themselves and live in their worlds according to different norms. Spinoza's *Ethics*, a treatise on the pleasure and power of understanding, is a product and project of assembling forces to think, feel, live, and love oneself, like any other thing, as a part of nature. Similarly, Grosz's ideas are both nourished and constrained by a history of suffering and acting among feminist and antiracist ideas, since these traditions comprise ecosystem of ideal forces in which her ideas exist and act.

While only time will reveal what differences their theories might make for any of us, Grosz promotes the effort “to become more mobile, more fluid and transformable.” Instead of an effort to be valued as persons, feminism becomes 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.”

She advocates the politics of imperceptibility as an intellectual effort, which is not the effect of willing subjects. An optimism of the intellect and a pessimism of the will, it leaves its “traces and effects” everywhere but is acknowledged only retrospectively as increased mobility, surprising encounters, and enabling energies that transform gendered and raced subjectivity. How might we engage in a politics of imperceptibility? How do we galvanize imperceptible destabilizations of identity?

Like the plateau from which Grosz takes her inspiration, one might wonder whether becoming-imperceptible just happens, independent of any subjective effort, or whether one may undertake such “becomings” as

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77. Ibid., 471.
78. Negri reformulates Gramsci’s phrase in *Subversive Spinoza*, 41, among other places.
a project. Imperceptible politics makes no sense as a teleological plan to be drawn up and executed according to the transparent intentions of human actors. Yet Grosz advocates a politics and not just a mystical attunement to subterranean transformations. Since she does not develop her politics in detail, however, I offer Spinoza’s political thought as a notion of practice that acknowledges the imperceptible forces operative in our affective engagements with human and nonhuman beings. The politics of renaturalization, like imperceptibility, engenders different indices of effectivity from a humanist politics oriented around seeing one another as fellow men. In contrast to a recognitive measure of justice, which depends upon satisfying “self-consciousness,” the politics of renaturalization aims at the collective production of joy in ourselves as natural powers. The project of renaturalization maintains that mutual understanding remains elusive as long as we seek to find ourselves reflected in one another as equally human, equally transcendent of nature. For Grosz, striving to be equally human necessarily implies seeking to be equally masculine, to which others would surely add, yearning to be equally white. If seeking to be equally masculine, white, and superior to nature is the basis of humanism, we clearly need a new aspirational horizon.

Let us consider again Spinoza’s frequent counsel for the organization of large deliberative assemblies. The insistence upon collective deliberation productive of rationality links Spinoza to today’s neo-Hegelians. It is no accident that thinkers of freedom as a relational phenomenon emphasize communication and public interaction among political practices. Collective reasoning, however, need not be seen as a stage for the conscious expression of reason and identities seeking recognition. For the politics of imperceptibility, as I interpret it in a Spinozan vein, the index of a successful “meeting of the minds” will be the ability of collectivities to produce potent and enabling ideas, ideas that allow us to think and act more capably given that we cannot but be parts of nature. The “goal,” then, will be not the satisfaction of self-consciousness or the achievement of humanity but the affirmation of radical mutual dependency and natural determination as conditions of our agency.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza advocates democracy on the basis that a large number of thinking powers assembled together generate better ideas: “there is less reason in a democratic state to fear ridiculous proceedings. For it is almost impossible that the majority of a large assembly would agree on the same absurdity” (*TTP* 16.9). He develops this claim in the *Political Treatise*:
When all decisions are made by a few men who have only themselves to please, freedom and the common good are lost. The fact is that men’s wits are too obtuse to get straight to the heart of every question, but by discussing, listening to others, and debating, their wits are sharpened, and by exploring every avenue they eventually discover what they are seeking, something that meets with general approval and that no one had previously thought of. (*TP* 9.14)

Discussion, discord, and listening produce what the deliberative body is seeking, something no one previously considered. Rather than the identical character of each person’s fundamental yearning, deliberation exposes what the general approval determines to be useful. If we recall, Spinoza defines utility as what enables one to be affected and to affect others in a great variety of ways (*E IV* p38). Large assemblies are valuable, as I argued in chapter 2, because being moved and moving others require corporeal proximity. Forces and energies need to combine and act in excess of the particular imaginings, desires, and volitions of the individuals involved.

A space of conflictual speaking is liberating not only because we may come to respect the powers of other reasoners and find our moral agency confirmed. It might liberate because other bodies and minds are the only possible source of our own power. We think only because others think (*homo cogitat* not *ego cogito*); we act only because others act. As parts of nature, our powers are synergetic combinations with other natural forces. The collective basis of any activity confirms the enabling aspects of our unavoidable dependency. Even if we are diminished and disabled by hatred and oppression, we manage to think and feel otherwise only by forming and fortifying alternative constellations of affect. Black does not become beautiful because those in power agree that it is beautiful. Rather, black is beautiful because a group articulates and proliferates the words, feelings, institutions, and practices that erode the destructive forces institutionalizing the antithetical proposition. An oppressed person cannot simply see

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79. Spinoza’s advocacy of large deliberative assemblies does not exhaust his political philosophy, which I treat only selectively throughout this book. His political philosophy is a complex treatment of the uneasy relationship between passions and actions, irrationality and rationality, in the collective body. Although most interpretations exaggerate the difference between the ethical and the political projects, especially with respect to the putative pessimism Spinoza evinces about the potential for mass empowerment and collective activity, I select the example of deliberation by virtue of its proximity to the politics of recognition.
the truth in the claim that black is beautiful but must join herself to those other counterpowers to engender new ways of being. At an exhilarating march, regardless of whether any new adjustments to the universal are achieved, protestors will feel beautiful. They will feel that their presence engenders joy and power in others and be strengthened by the recursive effect of the passionate exchanges. A successful march, then, is one that feels good, connects agents to one another, and thereby produces a circuit of empowerment. For the politics of imperceptibility, the agency constituted at such an occasion is limited as long as we measure success by either the index of humanization or the representations of the oppressed in the Other.

Imperceptible politics, as Grosz articulates it, does not have a particular end in view, other than seeking vitality, connection, and sharing of power in terms other than those prescribed by the dominant order. The politics of imperceptibility, as a particular expression of the project of re-naturalization, may not, in my view, entail a wholesale revision of what counts as political practice. Even public deliberation, the realm of politics that is most often viewed in terms of intersubjectivity, recognition, and communicative action as the dialogical generation of rationality, can fruitfully be considered an open-ended project of vitality and discovery.

Just as public deliberation has been central to neo-Hegelian politics, consciousness-raising has been a core practice of feminist and black liberation movements. Consciousness-raising might seem anathema to a theory that decenters self-consciousness and intersubjectively derived truth. As it is conventionally understood, consciousness-raising coincides neatly with the commitments of the politics of recognition to mitigate self-loathing. Catharine MacKinnon describes consciousness-raising as an intersubjective practice aimed at engendering a positive identity. She cites Sheila Rowbotham approvingly: “In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor, [an oppressed group] has to become visible to itself.” MacKinnon associates feminist liberation with becoming visible to oneself and others through a process of mutual self-clarification and group identification. Group identification engenders solidarity and new sources of self-esteem. Women find validation in other women who can recognize their contributions to society as meaningful, necessary, and world-sustaining. The method of discussing women’s quotidian lived experience reveals patriarchy (a systematic form of “identity

invalidation” for women) to be the source of their feelings of inadequacy. The moral regeneration this feminist technique promoted resembles the aims of the politics of recognition. Consciousness-raising aims to attenuate self-loathing, produce solidarity and self-esteem, and generate a more accurate apprehension of oneself and other oppressed women. It aspires to see through patriarchal social conventions and undo the psychic mutilation they have wrought. The ultimate goal is to restore to women their moral agency as persons, eroding the conditions that maintain women as objects. It is unsurprising that “[t]he analysis that the personal is political came out of consciousness raising.”

Grosz’s plea for an impersonal politics of bodies and natural forces may seem utterly alien to consciousness-raising. And it is contrary to such a practice as it is traditionally understood. Grosz would likely share the suspicions that Wendy Brown articulates with respect to feminist efforts to unveil the “‘hidden truth’ of women’s experience.” An impersonal politics inspired by Nietzsche might have little more than contempt for a project that institutes a unitary female experience armed with Truth against patriarchy, a regime of distorting lies. Nonetheless, we might approach the practices around consciousness-raising from an impersonal perspective. Consciousness-raising among liberation groups involves gathering to speak, listen, and argue, as well as to plan public actions like marches, boycotts, campaigns, institutional reform, and sometimes more radical acts of sabotage, etc. An assembly of the oppressed might be reimagined as a collective production of powers, linkages, and transformations. Assembling to think and act with others who desire to live, feel, and experience themselves otherwise might find a place as an experimental process grounded in little more than the yearning to generate a counterpower, a new arrangement of corporeal forces, and alternative sources of pleasure and agency. Such consciousness-raising will not endeavor to recognize one another’s experiences as analogous, or our relationships to the social structure as interchangeable. It will not be an effort to recognize “who we are.” Rather, a politics of impersonality might focus on what we desire. Following Grosz and Spinoza, impersonal politics takes its point of departure from the desire to enhance our pleasure and power the only way it can be done: together. It is an affective politics that seeks enabling relationships, wherever they may be found.

81. MacKinnon, Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, 91, 93.
82. Ibid., 95.
83. Wendy Brown, States of Injury, 42.
84. Ibid., 75.
An impersonal politics that endeavors to renaturalize rather than humanize the oppressed does not necessarily invalidate traditional feminist or antiracist practices of resistance, even as it reimagines and approaches them with new criteria of success. As renaturalists, we do not aim primarily to be understood and valued by our fellows. We pursue strength, affinities with other vital forces, and alternative futures. A politics of imperceptibility, like the politics of renaturalization, begins from the insistence that human existence is within and not above nature. We depend upon and affect innumerable forces, human and nonhuman. The measure of our agency that is determined by other’s perceptions may be significant, but it is hardly the totality of our power and freedom. Preoccupation with our need to be seen as who we really are may be self-defeating. If our identities are constantly being revised, reinterpreted, and experienced differently in response to new encounters and relationships, we will often find what we never knew we were seeking. Although Spinoza himself exhibited little concern for women, a feminist politics of imperceptibility does not need him to recognize its validity. The politics of imperceptibility siphons enabling energy and power wherever it happens to find it. It infects and enjoins whichever beings and forces might aid in the construction of a joyful insurgency against patriarchy, misanthropy, imperialism, and, yes, “crippling self-hatred.”
People who study animals often say more about themselves than they do about animals.
—CATHARINE MACKINNON

All the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain Nature are only modes of imagining, and do not indicate the nature of anything, only the constitution of the imagination.
—BENEDICT DE SPINOZA

We are the veal.
—Bumper sticker

Spinoza insists that humans are not different from other natural beings, relentlessly criticizes the tendency to imagine God in anthropomorphic terms, and denies the existence of any special moral laws inscribed in nature or the heavens that might guide human endeavor. Yet he does not advocate humility with respect to nature, God, or other species.¹ Deep ecologists celebrate Spinoza for undermining the bases for human

¹. At least, he does not advocate humility for the rational (E IV p53). More on this below.
exceptionalism. Similarly, poststructural Marxists find in Spinoza an ally against liberal notions of humanity that imply a given dignity as the ground of universal equality. These critics interpret Spinoza as an “anti-humanist,” meaning that his principles deny philosophical humanism’s treatment of man as a special kind of being who chooses his fate, independent of structural forces and unconscious influences. Ecological philosophers embrace and develop Spinoza’s profound critique of anthropocentrism and the instrumentalization of nature. Yet readers are troubled by the fact that despite his denial that man “through rank and dignity is a being entirely different from things, such as irrational animals,” he asserts that we can do whatever we like with nonhuman things. Although Spinoza does not place any special metaphysical value on humanity, he urges us to prefer ourselves and one another to other natural things. He appears to authorize the exploitation of nonhuman nature, even as he excoriates those who fantasize a God who might “direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed” (E I app).

I will argue that even if Spinoza’s remarks on animals do not limit human exploitation, their principal point is not to determine anything about the relationship between human practices and flesh and blood beasts. Although Spinoza will not bolster a case for vegetarianism, his remarks on beasts are not even about animals per se. Rather, he admonishes us not to treat nonhuman nature and animals in particular as paradigms for human virtue. This admonishment has important implications for ecological as well as democratic appropriations of Spinoza. Deep ecologists have been most forcefully taken to task for disregarding that, for Spinoza, nature sets no standards for human behavior. Yet commentators regularly imply that nature functions in Spinoza’s thought as a standard against which to judge certain political forms and ways of life as defective. Admittedly, it is tricky to navigate Spinoza’s critique of anthropocentrism and his remarks on animals, because he rejects the elevation of humanity with such force that his objection to the humiliation of human-

2. See Althusser, “On Spinoza,” and Tosel, Du matérialisme de Spinoza. Their chief targets were Kant and the German idealists for whom rationality and free will produce an “infinite” chasm between humans and the rest of nature, including animals.
4. Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, 15.
6. Israel, Radical Enlightenment, 274.
ity can easily be overlooked. His remarks on animals demonstrate that he was not only concerned to deflate human pretension with respect to natural determination. He likewise opposed the direct inversion of a human-centered perspective, in which nonhuman nature becomes the model for existence, and human culture comes to appear as corrupt and subnatural. Thus, green and radical democratic Spinozists must beware of finding in the account of nature implicit norms to which humans ought to subordinate themselves.

The desire to find in the beast an alternative moral vision, a more natural idea of man, stripped of social distortion arguably lurks in democratic theory in the Rousseauvian vein as well as some ecological theory and animal ethics. If Spinoza is to be linked to these causes, each of us must be wary of the affects driving our critique of anthropocentrism. The politics of renaturalization must avoid enshrining nature as a new idol. To go beyond man, I argue in this chapter, we should not humiliate him. A rejection of humanism does not entail an ennoblement of the cosmos or animal instinct. A posthumanist politics sensitizes us to our permeability and involvement with nonhuman powers, without requiring us to subordinate ourselves to them. A liberating framework for thinking about who and what we are cannot emerge from self-hatred and a desire to repent, by virtue of which we are only “twice wretched” (E IV p54).

Although several commentators note Spinoza’s lamentable attitude toward animals, no one has discussed the keen psychological insight animating his remarks. His claims about animals militate against the misanthropic despair that can erupt as a reaction to impossible ideals and superhuman norms. Political norms derived from the presumption of perfect rationality and sovereign free will, or other putatively human traits that make us unlike any other “thing,” can generate what I call “an antinomian dialectic.” Spinoza’s declaration that we can kill animals by virtue of their different “natures” takes aim at those who prefer animals to human company. He criticizes the retreat from the demands of civilization as a response to the harshness of the moral law. Thus, while the self-humiliation of man before nature appears to be the opposite of the celebration of philosophical humanism’s deification of man, Spinoza finds that they are not really opposites at all. The admirer of beasts shares the

7. His earliest critics, however, were most struck by his removal of humility from the column of the virtues, and saw his philosophy as, first of all, a dethronement of God and an abominable inflation of man. Cooper, “Spinoza on Humility.”

8. The sharpest condemnations are in Berman, “Spinoza’s Spiders, Schopenhauer’s Dogs,” and Wolloch, Subjugated Animals.
humanist’s desire for moral law but becomes corrupted by humility, the
“sadness that arises from the fact that man considers his lack of power”
(\textit{E III p}55s). His feeling of impotence before the law makes antinomian-
ism, the life of brutes, attractive.

In order to substantiate my interpretation, I systematically examine
Spinoza’s remarks on beasts (\textit{bruta}). After elaborating his concern about
what I call “the antinomian dialectic”—the human attraction to uncul-
tivated savagery precisely because it is nonhuman, or more precisely \textit{anti}-
human—I proceed to discuss his conviction that we require a human
exemplar in order to guide our actions. Spinoza’s meditations on beasts
must be understood in light of what he identifies as a necessary but prob-
lematic human need for exemplars, what we would today call “norms,”
to guide and measure our projects, aspirations, and institutions. As an
alternative to the models of man or beast for a politics of renaturalization,
I examine the posthumanist suggestion that the paradigm of “man” has
become an obstacle to our collective vitality. If in the seventeenth cen-
tury Spinoza identified a powerful “desire to form an idea of man, as a
model of human nature which we may look to” (\textit{E IV pref}), more recently
Deleuze and Guattari strive to displace man with new and various figures
of becoming. Man as the paradigm for human activity is first unseated by
becoming-woman, a portal to the more profound transformations dubbed
“becoming-animal” and “becoming-imperceptible.” Deleuze reads Spino-
za’s ethics as an ethology to forge an understanding of Spinozism com-
patible with becoming-animal. I conclude with a discussion of ethology
as a possible alternative to the humanist morality that opposes humanity
to “things,” including animals. This chapter is thus a critical effort to ex-
probe the limits and promises of an ethics and politics beyond the image
of man.

\textbf{The Beast Within}

To date, Spinoza’s scattered remarks on nonhuman animals have been
discussed in relationship to an agenda of animal rights or a deep ecologi-
cal stance toward nature.\footnote{Environmental ethics does not necessarily entail animal rights, but these are the terms
that have been used in the debate around Spinoza’s place in the environmental movement. For a
treatment of the antagonism between the two, see Hargrove, \textit{The Animal Rights/Environmental
Ethics Debate}.} By virtue of his remarks on animals, scholars
object to the ecological appropriation of Spinoza. They claim that his anti-
anthropocentric metaphysics does not translate into an argument for self-
imposed human restraint when it comes to the exploitation of animals or other aspects of nonhuman nature. Indeed, they find that it is precisely Spinoza’s anti-anthropocentrism that leads him to disregard nonhuman animals, since, by virtue of being unexceptional, humans have no obligation of stewardship toward nonhuman nature.10 The argument concerns whether his rather lamentable attitude toward nonhuman animals is compatible with an ecological agenda. What this argument misses is that Spinoza’s concern with beasts is almost entirely unrelated to the codification, legal or moral, of human behavior toward nonhuman animals. When Spinoza mentions animals, he is concerned, above all, with the desire to retreat from human community and to emulate nonhuman animals. In my view, Spinoza is not interested in nonhuman animals in their own right, but rather in the eruption of an anticivilization ethos that treats beasts as exemplars for humans to imitate and to admire.

Spinoza’s ethics and politics remain necessarily inscribed within his naturalism, such that “reason demands nothing contrary to Nature” (E IV p18s). Living the best life in accordance with reason in no way entails belief in a uniquely human code that contravenes the brute forces of nature. By “nature,” Spinoza, of course, does not mean primal wilderness, uncontaminated by civilization. Spinoza is not a protoromantic philosopher who encourages humans to discover the call of the wild. Indeed, he rejects back-to-nature cults as childish (E IV appXIII). Just as he is critical of humans’ imagining themselves to be quasi-gods, able to transcend the laws that determine the rest of natural existence, he rejects the elevation of nature into something higher than humanity.11 Spinoza’s opposition to supernaturalism is based on the notion that it is precisely the norm of a godlike human who obeys a “higher law” that prompts so many philosophers, theologians, and moralists to look upon humanity with disgust. Indeed, he hopes that viewing humans to be like any other thing in nature contributes to social harmony (II p49s), for when we view each person, including ourselves, as the unique cause of his actions, we are overcome with hate, an urge to destroy the cause of harm (V p10s). But the best response to the deification of humanity, implicit in today’s humanism, is not


11. For this reason, within my own text, I do not preserve Spinoza’s capitalization of the word “nature” unless I am referring to the ideological tendency to revere Nature. This can be awkward, since lower-case nature refers to finite natures, or essences, and upper-case Nature designates infinite nature. Nevertheless, context can distinguish these natures sufficiently and avoid the misleading ideological implications of an overarching Nature that transcends finite natures.
the humiliation of man, understood as the association of ourselves only with our weakness (III p55s). A common psychological response to the idea that we ought to be like God (infinite forces of thought and will) too easily mutates into contempt for those, including ourselves, who fail to determine themselves, who “see the better but do the worse” and proceed to repentantly associate themselves and our kind with sadness (III p51s). In some cases, contempt for humanity prompts a celebration of bestial existence as more natural, more harmonious, and, paradoxically, less brutal. These cases are the subject of Spinoza’s remarks on beasts.

Those who decry Spinoza’s notorious “antitheriophilic” remarks neglect the primary object of his critique. Spinoza, we will see, is not making pronouncements on human-animal relations in general but addressing those who romanticize “brutish” existence, seek a bond with beasts, and evince a preference for animal over human community. Spinoza takes aim at the (human) representation of animals as exemplars to be emulated and admired. Rather than a doctrine concerning the lives of flesh-and-blood animals, Spinoza’s remarks issue warnings about tendencies of human imagination and identification. Although what he says about animals appears to many to reinstate anthropocentrism, I will argue that the imaginative tendencies he diagnoses and challenges are precisely those of the anthropocentric and narcissistic imagination.

A number of thinkers in the deep ecology movement find, with Arne Naess, that “[n]o great philosopher has so much to offer in the way of clarification and articulation of basic ecological attitudes as Baruch Spinoza.” In addition to Spinoza’s staunch rejection of human exceptionalism, deep ecologists appreciate his view of reality as an “inter-connected whole” in which each and every being, be it a river or an antelope, is endowed with a conatus and strives toward “self-actualization.” While ecological interpreters tend to obscure the fact that, from a Spinozist perspective, computers, landfills, and consumer culture are equally parts of nature, they have also been taken to task for sidestepping Spinoza’s “speciesism,” evinced in his commitment to human well-being over and against that of nonhuman animals. Naess defends his interpretation by alluding to what others have called Spinoza’s “antihumanism.” Whereas Lloyd claims that

12. Wolloch, Subjugated Animals.
14. See, for example, Mathews, The Ecological Self.
Spinoza’s morality can never be anything but anthropocentric, Naess insists that Spinoza’s affirmation of all right as natural is anathema to the moralism involved in a calculus of human versus animal rights. While Naess’s point is certainly valid, and I will build upon it in the final section of this chapter, he evades the problem of understanding Spinozist hostility toward a movement like deep ecology, which demands that humans radically limit their impact upon other life forms through, for example, aiming to decrease our population. Naess does not directly confront Spinoza’s claim that “whatever there is in Nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage [utilitatis] does not demand that we preserve it. Instead it teaches us to preserve or destroy it according to its use, or to adapt it to our use in any way whatever” (E IV appXXXVI).

The claim that anything other than fellow humans may be “used” to “our advantage” appears to exemplify “speciesism”: “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those members of another species.” As I argue in chapter 3, however, Spinoza does not understand “use” or “advantage” (utile) in instrumental terms. Spinoza affirms that “to man . . . there is nothing more useful than man” (E IV p18s) and that “when each man most seeks his own advantage [utile] for himself, then men are most useful to one another” (IV p35c2). “Use” has no derogatory connotations for Spinoza. A relationship of “use” implies neither exploitation nor instrumental utility. Humans are most useful to one another because we enable one another to affect and be affected in increasingly diverse ways, which enhances the receptive and active powers of our minds and bodies (IV p38). Moreover, the principle of utile implies not an exclusive good but rather a self-enhancing impulsion to community with others, where “community” ought to be understood as a (not exclusively human) multiplicity, able to communicate and join forces effectively. Nonetheless, Spinoza insists that our “advantage” consists in the cultivation of bonds and associations with other “similar things,” above all, other “men.” “Similar things” are those with the most corporeal commonalities. These commonalities are essential to our thriving, since those properties our bodies share include the common notions, the foundations of reason.

Given the privilege that Spinoza accords to similar things with which

18. For a good philosophical introduction to the deep ecology movement, see Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future.*
we might best be able to “join forces,” he holds that we are only prudentially obligated to preserve other natural beings that are useful to us. We can note an element of his antihumanism here, in that we are likewise, for better or for worse, only prudentially obligated, driven by our interest (utile), to preserve and enable other humans. There is no special duty to preserve human life as such, but the prudential mandate to augment the powers of our fellow humans is stronger in the case of those whose minds and bodies we can most enjoy (E IV appIX). The dictates of reason teach us to dedicate our energies to the preservation of any being that enhances our agency, understood as our active and passive powers to affect and to be affected by other bodies. Certainly, we are justified in interpreting the category of useful beings broadly to include much of nonhuman nature, as our survival clearly depends upon clean air, pacemakers, sewage treatment, and the myriad microorganisms in mutual symbiosis with our bodies.

Nevertheless, Spinoza puts humans capable of reason in a special, maximally beneficial category and explicitly allows for killing animals. He denies the desirability of alliance or identification with nonhuman animals. It is not with Spinoza that one will “run with the wolves.” He rejects even sympathy toward the plight of slaughtered animals. He contends that “the law against killing animals is based more on empty [vana] superstition and womanish [muliebri] compassion than sound reason” (E IV p37s1). This assertion, along with Spinoza’s repeated insistence that our bodies require “continuous and varied food so that the whole body may be capable of doing everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently, so that the mind may be equally capable of conceiving many things” (IV appXXVII), suggests that a Spinozan case for vegetarianism is not forthcoming. While we might argue that, in many cultural contexts, meat eating results in a less varied and imaginative diet, there appears to be no “manly” moral argument for curtailing human interests in order to promote the “self-actualization” of animals. There is no room in Spinoza’s philosophy for a justice movement on behalf of animal flourishing for its own sake.20

Still, we must understand why Spinoza is so concerned with the “womanish” tendency to sympathize and identify with brutes that he introduces it no fewer than four times in the part of the Ethics dedicated to a study of human servitude. We can observe that Spinoza’s remarks on “brutes” arise in similar contexts. The topic of animals usually appears

in the context of an acknowledgment of the preponderance of human irrationality and the near inevitability of violent conflict among us. In what remains of this section, let us consider his remarks systematically. Spinoza’s “antitheriophilic” mentions of bruta can all be found in part IV of the Ethics, on human servitude. Spinoza refers to beasts in the discussion of three separate propositions and in one of the essential points listed in the long appendix. Three cases concern those who seek out animal community, or even prefer it to human association (E IV p35s1, IV p37s1, IV appXIII). The fourth case, which I will treat separately in greater detail, is an account of someone communing with beasts rather than with another human. The person who identifies with brutes over humans is no other than “the first man,” Adam. Spinoza offers a peculiar account of the Genesis story in which the Fall is explained by Adam’s mistaken belief (or perhaps “womanish” feeling) that the beasts in his vicinity resemble him more than his human mate, Eve (IV p68s). This rather odd interpretation of the human creation story—a text Spinoza surely studied with great care—suggests that he is eager to make a didactic point about the dangers of idealizing relationships with nonhuman animals. In fact, a zoophilic and misanthropic figure appears so many times in the Ethics that it may even signal a recurrent anxiety of Spinoza’s. The misanthropic zoophile represents a perversion, a turning away from one’s fellows (“similars”), by virtue of compassion for or mutual affection with beasts. I argue that the zoophile marks Spinoza’s concern with a deification of nature as the inversion of human arrogance. The zoophile, rather than displacing it, succeeds only in inverting the image of an anthropocentric cosmic order in which the natural world reflects and serves human caprice. Nevertheless, we might glimpse in the recurrence of the zoophile a repressed challenge to his assertion that the affects of beasts are simply “different in nature from human affects” (IV p37s1). The zoophile might trouble Spinoza because it destabilizes the species frontier and the ethical community it promises to circumscribe, a permeable frontier according to Spinoza’s relational ontology.

The zoophile first appears when Spinoza is in the course of demonstrating that reason’s dictates urge each to “love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead a man to greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can” (E IV p18s). At this point in the Ethics, he seeks to demonstrate that our basic drive toward self-enhancement leads not to a war of all against all but to the most robust expression of human community. Although passions can render people opposed to one another
(IV p34), insofar as we “agree in nature” we are necessarily good for one another (IV p31c). “Things which are understood to agree [convenire] in nature are understood to agree in power” (IV p32s). Thus, insofar as we act, or use our reason, we convenire, come together, fit, or form an enabling composition. The passions that prompt humans to “disagree in nature” are not fixed features of the human essence but rather expressions of our finitude, our inability to surpass those infinitely many forces in nature that do not accord with our striving (IV p3). We are not bound to enmity but easily become opposed to one another as well as ourselves by virtue of the passive affects that contradict our vital efforts. Although we can never bring it about that we are not subject to passions (IV p4), if we acted only from the laws of our singular natures, we would live in accordance with the adage “man is a God to man” (IV p35s).

Yet, as Spinoza frequently laments, very few live in accord with reason’s dictates, and as a result, humans are so often “burdensome to one another.” The dangers and inconveniences of social life, however, are exaggerated by some to the extent that they elevate the life of brutes over that of humans.

So let the satirists laugh as much as they like at human affairs, let the theologians curse them, let melancholics praise as much as they can a life that is uncultivated and wild, let them disdain men and admire brutes. Men still find from experience that they can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require, and only by joining forces can they avoid the dangers that threaten on all sides—not to mention that it is preferable and more worthy of our knowledge to consider the deeds of men, rather than those of brutes. (E IV p35s)

Who are these melancholic admirers of brutes? Who disdains humanity and endeavors instead to enjoy a savage and brutish existence?

Montaigne could conceivably have been the “womanish” melancholic Spinoza had in mind. In his essay “On Cruelty,” Montaigne confesses that he is easily perturbed by the death of an animal.

21. The “we” here is problematic from the point of view of contemporary political theory. Spinoza privileges rational or potentially rational actors. While one must be careful to understand by “reason” naturalized reason and to include many in the potentially rational category, his focus on power and capacity might neglect certain portions of “the least well off.” I plan to discuss this elsewhere.

22. Nadler suggests that Spinoza read Montaigne, and the moralism inspired by him was alive and well in seventeenth-century Europe. See Nadler, Spinoza: A Life, 111.
For myself, I have not even been able without distress to see pursued and killed an innocent animal which is defenseless and does us no harm. And as it commonly happens that the stag, feeling himself out of breath and strength, having no other remedy left throws himself back and surrenders to ourselves who are pursuing him, asking for our mercy by his tears . . .

With the mention of the stag’s tears, Montaigne evokes the mention of his own tears a few pages earlier: “There is nothing that tempts my own tears but tears.” Montaigne describes a communication of affect between himself and nonhuman animals. He does not acknowledge a firm distinction between humans and animals and avows a human obligation toward not only animals but all beings with “life and feeling,” including trees and plants. The community of feeling, the involuntary imitation of affects that circulates between human and animal, prompts his declaration: “We owe justice to men, and mercy and kindness to other creatures that may be capable of receiving it.” Certainly, the stag whose tears and moans implore human mercy ought to be admitted into a community of moral consideration, for Montaigne.

What is melancholy in Montaigne’s appeal? Is openness to animal affect necessarily a recipe for sadness and impotence? Not only is Montaigne a defender of “womanish” compassion for animals, he stands for a whole movement of moralists who viewed animals not only as rational and moral but as more rational and upright than human beings. Animal figures were seen to play a didactic role, serving as exemplars of distinctive virtues that humans should strive to imitate. The study of nature and nonhuman animals up until the seventeenth century was seen as a way of learning the moral order of the universe. As Peter Harrison puts it, “the behaviors of animals are so many representations of human passions, virtues, and vices, presented in a living pageant, accessible to the meanest minds, to the end that we might all learn moral rectitude.” Such a view is anathema to Spinoza’s ontology for multiple reasons. Nature as a teleological moral diorama points only to man. On this model of Renaissance humanism, we ought to study animals and natural phenomena because they point to God’s design for us and not to anything outside of us. “Animals are ciphers, insignificant in themselves, yet useful for humans

24. Ibid., 381.
25. Ibid., 385.
at every level.” Thus, Spinoza’s rejection of anthropocentrism, even if it does not disapprove of cruelty toward animals, rejects this particular use of them. Animals are not for us. They are not role models that God placed on earth to teach us specific virtues. He condemns using beasts as indications of who we are and how we should behave. Spinoza’s objective in his remarks on animals is to reject the notion that nonhuman animals are moral exemplars whose virtue and sagacity ought to be emulated by humanity, who, by virtue of our estrangement from nature, our “infinite difference” from things, tend toward corruption.

Montaigne’s theriophilic celebration of natural virtue sits comfortably alongside an extraordinarily demanding moral paradigm for humanity. The very same essay that condemns cruelty against nonhuman animals could be viewed as a remarkable act of self-laceration. The opening pages hold up Socrates and Cato as models of human virtue. Montaigne expresses profound admiration of the pleasure and beauty Cato and Socrates found in their deaths.

Witness the younger Cato. When I see him dying and tearing out his entrails, I cannot be content to believe simply that he then had his soul totally free from disturbance and fright; I cannot believe that he merely maintained himself in the attitude that the rules of the Stoic sect ordained for him, sedate, without emotion, and impassible; there was, it seems to me, in that man’s virtue too much lustiness and verdancy to stop there. I believe without any doubt that he felt pleasure and bliss in so noble an action, and that he enjoyed himself more in it than in any other action in his life. He so departed from life, as if he rejoiced in having found a reason for dying.

We ought to cultivate souls that would be “grateful to fortune” for such extraordinarily painful deaths to test us. For the virtuous, the pain of losing their entrails is an occasion for self-admiration, prompting secret joy like that of someone watching a tragic play.

Montaigne’s is a classical vision of a life that is measured by its death, which ought to be experienced with Stoic equanimity. Montaigne’s particular representation of these ideals consists in both holding them out as exemplary and punishing himself (and, implicitly others) for any natural

27. Ibid.
29. Cf. Descartes’s letter to Elisabeth, May or June 1645.
inclination toward virtuous action. Montaigne thus anticipates a Kantian suspicion toward morality prompted by inclination.\textsuperscript{30} When we are naturally drawn to appropriate behavior, ours are “counterfeit virtuous actions” that merit blame rather than praise.\textsuperscript{31} Only when a higher nature is acquired with great effort is the pleasure in virtue deserved. We must admire Cato and Socrates and even imitate them, but there is little hope that any of us will approximate the virtue they represent. They serve in Montaigne’s own reflections as an occasion for self-castigation, since even though he has appropriate moral attractions and aversions, he owes them to a good father, his noble “race,” and the ministrations of his tender nursemaid. His path to virtue was not arduous, not guided by reason or engendered by a “deliberate stiffening of the soul.” Even when he is good, or rather even because he is good, he feels bad. Compare this to Spinoza’s equation of virtue and power (\textit{E IV def8}), his frequent claim that virtue is an expression of self-love, whose only reward is the joy and power that accompany it (\textit{IV p18s}). Montaigne and his theriophilic followers in the seventeenth century are good candidates for that self-abnegating, melancholic admiration of beasts that concerns Spinoza.

Spinoza defines melancholy as a sadness in which “the body’s power of acting is absolutely diminished or restrained” (\textit{E IV p42d}). The “absolutely” suggests that melancholy is the ultimate expression of powerlessness. Elsewhere, he affirms the exigency of combating such total pain, which might be considered trivial by virtue of being emotional. “For why is it more important to relieve our hunger and thirst than to rid ourselves of melancholy?” (\textit{IV p45c}). The transformation of our passionate disposition is as fundamental to our well-being as the basic factors of hydration and nutrition. Melancholy, applying as much to the soul as to the body, indicates a generalized impotence. Melancholics feel devoid of any capacity to improve their lot or that of others.

The importance of curing melancholy arises in the treatment of the proposition “Hate is never good” (\textit{E IV p45}). Envy, mockery, disdain, and vengeance are all among affects that flow from hate: “sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause” (\textit{III p13s}). Hate and its derivatives are often a consequence of measuring humanity against a supernatural, unattainable norm, as I have argued throughout this book. The more we affirm humanity as a part of nature, subject to the same necessary determinations as any other being, the less we are prone to antipathy (II p49s,

\textsuperscript{30} Kant, \textit{Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals}.
\textsuperscript{31} Montaigne, “Of Cruelty,” \textit{The Complete Works, 376}. 

V p10s). If we come to terms with our irreducible subjection to passions, we can better avoid being anti-pathetic, fleeing our inevitable condition. To invert Sartre, for Spinoza, we have a tendency to flee our servitude. The more we can renaturalize the idea of man that governs the social imagination, the less intense conflicts that issue from hateful affects will be. Hate, however, often has its way with love. When this happens to individuals, they can become melancholic such that their disgust with humanity mutates into a blanket valorization of the nonhuman. The failure to be a Cato or a Socrates can prompt one to seek the beast within (the inner beast rather than the inner child) as a site of freedom from the threatening ideal of man without.

The admiration of brutes is one reaction to human ideals predicated upon the transcendence of nature. The cult of the noble beast expresses hopelessness, a despairing urge to give up on one’s own cultivation and to insulate oneself from suffering at the hands of other humans. Freud called this recoiling from any and all suffering, the withdrawal from relationality in general, “the death drive.” When the demands of a rational life appear to be too great, one can come to desire a-rationality, the paradoxical desire for nothingness, the desire not to desire any longer.32 For Spinoza, melancholy names the radical attenuation of drive, the overwhelming experience of being diminished, reduced to near total passivity.33

Further remarks concerning the melancholic appear in the appendix to part IV, which details key points to retain from Spinoza’s examination of servitude. The note concerning animals appears on the heels of his reminder that “it is especially useful to men to form associations, to bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people out of them, and absolutely, to do those things which strengthen friendships.” As usual, he qualifies his affirmation of the ethical and political desirability of becoming a single community built on friendship and mutual empowerment with a lament that too few live according to reason. When made to suffer the evils of men, humans are generally “more inclined to vengeance than to compassion.” Great “art” and “vigilance” are required, he counsels, to deal well with our fellows, to understand them in terms of their peculiar

32. Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle.
33. Since there are only positive drives in Spinoza, this cannot be understood in precisely the same terms as Freud’s death drive. Nevertheless, Butler may have a point when she claims that Spinoza’s ethics has a place for the consideration of the death drive, in “The Desire to Live,” 127. In my discussion of this article, I give her insufficient credit for this insight, although she does not consider the appropriate textual evidence. See Sharp, “Melancholy, Anxious, and Ek-static Selves.”
dispositions, and to respond to them in constructive ways when they are hateful. Notably, the attraction to brutes appears, again, in close connection to misanthropy.

But those who know how to find fault with men, to castigate vices rather than teach virtues, and to break men’s minds rather than strengthen them—they are burdensome both to themselves and to others. That is why many, from too great an impatience of mind, and a false zeal for religion, have preferred to live among the brutes rather than men. They are like boys or young men who cannot bear calmly the scolding of their parents, and take refuge in the army. They choose the inconveniences of war and the discipline of an absolute commander in preference to the conveniences of home and the admonitions of a father. (E IV appXIII)

The comparison between those seeking to escape human society to live among savage brutes and impertinent adolescents who flee home to join the army may seem rather peculiar. This juxtaposition characterizes the youthful, zealous soldier and the misanthropic zoophile as similarly perverse. The admirer of brutes may fancy himself an iconoclast who enjoys unconstrained and natural freedom, but Spinoza suggests that he is rather like the impassioned soldier who desires an ineffable law, a law with no explicit rationale, that offers an alternative to the delicate art of constituting a life in common with others.

Both the young soldier angry with his critical father and the misanthrope disgusted with human frailty present melancholic figures. The desire to emulate wild brutes or yield to an anonymous commander instead of the all-too-knowing and familiar father indicate felt powerlessness. Like the boy who flees the authority of one father only to end up with another patriarch, a patriarch even less responsive to his idiosyncratic needs and desires, those whom Spinoza calls the “melancholic admirers of brutes” are bound in a spiral of misanthropy: they escape the demands of the moral law only to institute a new one, the law of brute Nature. Those who prefer community with beasts have much in common with the melancholic who is diminished to the point of giving up on enhancing his own agency through the most effective means, the cultivation of human association and friendship.

The *animi impatientia* resent the suffering of passions, a painful reminder of the human condition as one consisting of greater patience than agency. Spinoza admonishes nameless philosophers and theologians for surrendering the arduous task of educating and improving others, tak-
ing refuge in misanthropic criticism, and endeavoring to disable mental power through extolling the virtues of beasts as signs pointing to God’s wishes for man. He accuses the moral zealot, of whatever cast, of relishing the defects of his fellows. Spinoza detects a sadistic pleasure of tearing out one’s entrails among moralists. Even if one is vulnerable to violent death at war, the adolescent moralist finds consolation in the high and patriotic principles animating a soldier’s life. In contrast, a virtuous education, on Spinoza’s model, entails coming to understand oneself and others as vulnerable in perhaps a more radical way. All of one’s relationships and contacts come to matter as constitutive determinations of one’s being and power. Rather than being vulnerable to violent death—which is, of course, Hobbes’s greatest concern—one is vulnerable to the transformations that genuine education provokes and the burden of continuing to transform oneself and others.

Throughout these propositions, *bruta*, while they are admired by those who feel impotent in the face of human evils, represent to Spinoza bellicose and violent tendencies. Those who prefer an uncultivated existence are analogous, according to Spinoza, to those who pursue war rather than a social human life. Spinoza’s association of animals with warlike behavior, of course, has a long history. Grotius, for example, warns humans against the imitation of beasts: “Violence is characteristic of wild beasts, and violence is most manifest in war; wherefore the more diligently effort should be put forth that it be tempered with humanity, lest by imitating wild beasts too much, we forget to be human.” Spinoza is not unique in associating humanity with peace and violence with brutes. Yet he does not claim that there is a “human way” of interacting inscribed in each human heart that only needs to be heeded. No, men are inclined by nature to enmity (*TP* 2.14). Thus the misanthropic zoophile erupts regularly to qualify Spinoza’s exhortations to human unity.

The connections Spinoza draws between religious zealotry, animal admiration, and war, moreover, imply that it is precisely the spiritual norm against which man is measured that produces solace to be had in war. Linking animal emulation to religious zealotry points to what I am calling the “antinomian dialectic,” since war is the state of exception that suspends law. When the goodness at which spiritual education aims excludes most flesh-and-blood human beings, it easily yields repulsion at human frailty. Such disgust mutates from an excessive enthusiasm for the spiritual law into a rejection of human order altogether. Spinoza suggests that

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the desire for the uncultivated life represented by the brute is akin to the desire for the absolute, indifferent, and unsympathetic regulation of the commander. The soldier receives no detailed rationale but only the principle that what he does is for God and Country. Similarly, the zoophile bows to the law of nature as something uncontaminated by human design and thereby unknowable. The Commander and Nature are brute, beyond and higher than the natural light of reason.

For the zealot who turns to nonhuman animal exemplars, man is fallen and beasts offer a path to salvation. Beasts appear to be untethered by the unforgiving human ideals that lead to self-castigation, misery, and misanthropy, but they remain mere expressions of those ideals insofar as they imply human failing. Spinoza’s words on beasts diagnose the desires and affects engendering the figure of the animal as a model for human virtue. The image of the animal is not an animal in its own right but a wild, uncultivated anti-man and therefore an image of man (in both senses of the genitive). In turning away from the demands implied in the reigning model of man, they erect a new law, the law of nonhuman nature, the law *avant la lettre*, or, rather, *contre la lettre*.

If Spinoza rejects the standards of what became the hallmarks of liberal humanism—unconstrained will, disembodied mind, and incorruptible rationality—he also objects to a protoromantic naturalism that embraces animal instinct and disdains human order. What alternative does he provide? The resources for another kind of ethical norm—a philanthropic norm that avoids implying that we are either supernatural or subnatural—is implicit in his account of “the first man.” Let us turn to the story of the garden of Eden to see how a politics of renaturalization might avoid both the deification involved in human exceptionalism and the turn to wild nature as ideal.

**Animal Affects (and) the First Man**

A parable for the human condition, the story of the expulsion from the garden of Eden is, of course, one of the most discussed stories in the Jewish and Christian traditions. It gives voice to a notion of human self-consciousness as that paradoxical grasp of ourselves as perfect and close to God but also weak and alienated from the natural world. What dualism attributes to the difference between our spiritual and our corporeal natures, the Fall portrays in temporal terms. Our sense of immortality, infinite intelligence, and uniqueness is a primordial memory, which was lost by virtue of an original sin, through which we were condemned to be,
in the words of Augustine, “mortal, ignorant, and enslaved to the flesh.”

To scan the history of philosophy and theology for interpretations of the story is to find innumerable accounts of what human perfection consists in and what precipitates its loss. For Maimonides, an example surely well-known to Spinoza, Adam’s original perfection was his flawless intellectual grasp of truth and falsity, which, by virtue of appetite, devolved into the lesser, practical knowledge of good and evil. In contrast, as Nancy Levene points out, for Augustine prelapsarian perfection consists in a perfect will, which is imperfectly exercised by the first man. Original sin is the paradoxical necessity of the entirely uncoerced will, which, in its total indetermination, can choose evil as easily as good.

Spinoza invokes the story a number of times to illustrate aspects of the human condition (E IV p68s; TTP 2.14, 4.9–11; TP 2.14). Spinoza thereby participates in the tradition of treating Adam as an exemplar of humanity, an archetype of typical human existence, and, as we might expect, he puts his characteristic naturalist spin on the well-known tale. Adam serves, especially, as an example of our limitations, with which we must come to terms if we are to optimize our natural powers rather than fantasizing about a lost resemblance to divinity. Spinoza retells a rather peculiar version of the story in the Ethics, in which Adam’s identification with beasts precipitates the Fall. In contrast to other philosophical glosses on the story, Spinoza’s Adam is not originally perfect in either intellect or will. He is, in mind and body, “like us . . . subject to affeets” (TP 2.6). The only perfection in the garden that Adam lost was the perfect accord between himself and Eve. Although she barely appears in his retelling, the only intimation of prelapsarian perfection in Spinoza’s account of the Fall is the “mate, who agreed completely with his nature,” or rather the perfect suitability of the pair, the fact that “there could be nothing in Nature more useful to him than she.” Yet Adam forsook the perfect communion (convenienitia) he might have enjoyed with Eve “after he believed the beasts to be like himself” and “began to imitate their affeets” (E IV p68s).

The didactic story of paradise lost, on Spinoza’s naturalized rendition, instructs us, just like his other remarks on beasts, that as detestable as human behavior can be, the perfection of our power can be had only in the human bond. Thus, Spinoza’s account of “the Fall” reveals that even if he is sharply critical of the philosophical pillars maintaining humanism,

he in no way advocates a turn away from humans. Insofar as it is true to Spinoza, then, the politics of renaturalization must, at the same time, negate human exceptionalism and seek human unity more than anything else.

Let us consider more closely his account of “the first man.”

And so we are told that God prohibited a free man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as he should eat of it, he would immediately fear death, rather than desiring to live. Then, man having found a mate who completely agreed with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in Nature more useful to him than she; but that, believing that the beasts were similar to him (bruta sibi similia esse credidit), he soon began to imitate their affects (see III p27) and allowed his freedom to escape.

In an unusual version of the story in which neither Eve nor a deceitful animal seems to do anything, Adam loses his freedom by virtue of a belief in his similarity to nonhuman animals, which prompts him to incorporate brutish affects. The “social psychology” of the Ethics describes an involuntary circulation of affect among those beings we imagine to be similar to us (III p27), which, as we see in this case, is not restricted to fellow humans. As we noted above, Spinoza is opposed to “the law against killing animals” on the basis that animal affects are “different in nature from human affects” and do not agree with ours (IV p37s1). The lack of accord between human and bestial bodies, however, does not prevent them from communicating with one another. If our affects are different in nature, they are not so different that we are not highly susceptible to genuine transformations provoked by animal affect. If the affects of beasts disagree with our natures, it is because they decompose our power. We can observe Spinoza erecting a boundary between man and beast precisely because nothing actually prevents profound community between us. The frontier between human and beast is sufficiently permeable to prompt Spinoza’s repeated concern that animal attractions will divert us irrevocably away from “the rational principle of seeking our own advantage,[ which] teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the beasts” (IV p37s1). However (un)justified we may find Spinoza’s concern with grizzly men and cat women, his worry is that humans may come to prefer beasts to one another.

Adam, in particular, had before him in the garden another human

38. See Montag, “Imitating the Affects of Beasts.”
whose nature (essence) agreed perfectly with his own. Recall that to agree in nature is to agree in power (E IV p32d), and thus Adam and Eve might have joined minds and bodies to engender great joy and lively ideas. Had he turned toward Eve rather than undergoing the affects of beasts, Adam might have enjoyed the freedom that emerges when “two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another,” composing “an individual twice as powerful as each one” (IV p18s). There was no other being in the garden with which he could have combined powers more joyously or to better effect. Yet despite the fact that he “knew that there could be nothing in nature more useful to him than she,” his feeling of kinship with the beasts disrupted the human bond that might have allowed him to live, like philosophers, beyond good and evil (Ep 19).

Spinoza’s odd recapitulation of the Fall follows the proposition that reads, “If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remain free.” The counterfactual in the proposition suggests that Spinoza does not, like other interpreters of the story, maintain that Adam was originally free and thereby equipped with perfect knowledge. Indeed, he begins his account of the Fall elsewhere with what I have deemed the fundamental thesis of renaturalization.

Yet most people believe that the ignorant violate the order of Nature rather than conform to it; they think of men in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. They hold that the human mind is not produced by natural causes but is directly created by God and is so independent of other things that it has an absolute power [potestatem] to determine itself and use reason in a correct way.

Spinoza proceeds to meditate again on the Fall and concludes that “it must be admitted that it was not in the power of the first man to use reason aright, and that, like us, he was subject to affects” (TP 2.6). Thus, in contrast to Maimonides’ account, Spinoza’s Adam does not begin with a perfect intellect that is corrupted by appetite. The story of the Fall, through his eyes, is not a story of the infinite mind limited by its earthly body. Rather, Adam shows us that, originally and irreducibly, the human condition is one of “intellectual vulnerability.” Our minds are vulnerable, moreover, not because they are entwined with our bodies, but because they are “produced by natural causes.” Minds, no less than bodies, are

bound in a community of cause and effect, necessarily affecting and affected by ambient forces, including nonhuman ones, like beasts.

Neither Adam nor any of us is born free and omniscient. Spinoza takes “as a foundation what everyone must acknowledge: that all men are born ignorant of causes” (E I app). As a result, we are compelled to look to a “model [exemplar] of human nature” and to form concepts of good and evil relative to this model. “I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves,” and by evil “what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model” (E IV pref). Thus, as for Maimonides and in contrast to many in the Christian tradition, knowledge of good and evil is not an index of our perfection. Maimonides invokes what is “well-known to every Hebrew scholar” to resolve the apparent contradiction whereby Adam and Eve seem to become wiser by virtue of eating the fruit. Namely, he claims that “and ye shall be as Elohim knowing good and evil” (Genesis 2:3) likens humans not to God (one possible meaning of Elohim) but rather to “princes” (a justifiable and more plausible meaning, on his account). Knowing good and evil, then, does not elevate human knowledge but demotes it to the imaginative, practical wisdom of rulers.

Heidi Ravven argues that for Maimonides and Spinoza, moral knowledge, the adjudication of good and evil, is necessarily imperfect, imposed by the limitations of the intellect. Thus, for Maimonides, “Adam’s fall signals a regretful turn to a life focused on a lower ideal, a negative ideal, that of self-control, social justice and harmony.”40 Likewise, Shlomo Pines remarks that for Spinoza and Maimonides it appears not that Adam illicitly tasted knowledge of good and evil and was thus punished, lest he become too powerful, but that knowledge of good and evil, being an inferior mode of knowing, is itself the punishment!41 Put more naturalistically, moral knowledge is a consequence of our finitude. The human condition forces us to act like princes, such that we are constrained to calculate the relative virtues of good and evil in a given situation to remain viable. To have a moral sensibility means that we must, like Adam, affect and be affected with highly imperfect knowledge of what our decisions will yield. We reach out for the means of becoming more powerful, but there is never

40. Ibid., 13.
any guarantee that we will discern the best means, or that we will become more powerful in the ways anticipated. Like a prince, as Machiavelli tells us, we must remain ever vigilant and responsive to the vicissitudes of fortune.

As compelling and instructive as the comparison with Maimonides is, we can also note differences precisely in relationship to the question of the animal. For Maimonides, prelapsarian Adam enjoyed a perfect intellect, but appetite derailed his powers and constrained him to a lower ideal of self-regulation. To those who see knowledge of good and evil as an increase in human perfection, it may imply that, prior to the Fall, “God originally intended for humanity to be ‘like the beasts, devoid of intellect.’” Maimonides is keen to reject this notion on the basis that Adam must have been rational in order to receive God’s command. Yet perfect knowledge of God’s directive is precisely what Spinoza denies. For Spinoza, we find Adam originally embedded in nature, subject to aff ects, and unable to discern what is conveyed by the natural light. “The command given to Adam consisted solely in this, that God revealed to Adam that eating of that tree brought about death, in the same way that he reveals to us through our natural intellect that poison is deadly” (Ep 19). Adam’s idea of the noxious fruit was confused and inadequate, and he thereby believed he was prohibited from eating the fruit rather than warned about potential ill effects of doing so. For Spinoza, then, it is not that humanity came to think prudentially like a prince but that God, or nature itself, appeared “as a kind of legislator exclusively with respect to Adam” (TTP 4.9). What, adequately conceived, is nothing other than the natural fact of disagreeability between Adam’s body and the fruit was perceived imperfectly as a rule that he could obey or disobey.

Whether Spinoza tells the story as one of decomposition provoked by toxic fruit or of the affects of beasts, it is a story of a finite, imperfect being, undermined by a disabling relationship. Adam loses freedom (power) because he does not know what kind of being he is. He does not adequately understand that he is a part of nature and therefore profoundly affected by his involvements with others, human and nonhuman. The abstraction of the garden of Eden allows one to see a man in relationship to some of the greatest influences on his freedom and power: God/nature, woman, and beast. We observe the human tendency to imagine God as a legislator, his

43. Deleuze forcefully brings out Spinoza’s naturalistic account of good and evil on the model of poisoning in Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, chap. 3.
human mate as a helper, and beasts as worthy of emulation. We see several mistakes of religious consciousness, according to Spinoza. Humans go astray when we dream that we are God or beast and thereby estrange ourselves from those to whom we are most similar. The tragedy of the Fall is a tragedy Spinoza observes every day: it is the failure to regard the human bond as the most essential source of power and freedom. At least one moral of the story, on my interpretation, is that despite his denial of a self-same human essence, Spinoza avows a need to consider ourselves to be human. When he refers to our “desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature to which we may look,” he warns us against striving to be other than we are. He notes that “a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect” (E IV pref) to remind us that no being is liberated by transcending its nature. To engage in liberatory practices, “it is necessary to come to know both our nature’s power and its lack of power” (IV p17s). Adam, our archetype, reminds us that we will never enjoy a mind “so independent of other things that it has absolute power to determine itself and use reason in a correct way” (TP 2.6). Yet Adam’s story is not such a tragic story, since the portal to freedom has not been closed, even if it can be difficult to produce the conditions under which we might enter it. He, and perhaps we, need only to overcome our estrangement from Eve. If only we did not feel the allure of gods or beasts. Yet we will not cease feeling torn in different directions, because we are still part of nature, still mutating in response to the human as much as the inhuman.

The temporal aspect of the Fall points to our inevitable reliance on norms. Because we are in time, we cannot apprehend all that happens to us sub specie æternitatis. We must act, which means we must respond to and enter into relations with others. These others are not under our control or fully known to us, just as we remain largely unknown to ourselves. Thus, we conjure and act in light of ideas of human nature to help us to identify those with whom we might relate in the most enabling ways. Finitude thereby imposes morality on us, but we can think about this morality in different ways. For philosophical humanism, moral norms follow from the idea that to be human is to be capable of reason and responsible for subordinating our actions to universal principles. Morality gestures toward our infinite natures, our putative ability to transcend inclination and affect, in favor of reason. But for Spinoza, Adam tells us no less than

44. Spinoza is thus not a friend to “transhumanism,” a peculiar philosophical vision of technologically produced immortality. See Wolfe, What Is Posthumanism? xv.
our own experience that “it is no more in our power to have a sound mind than a sound body" (TP 2.6). Perhaps following Maimonides, Spinoza tells us that the need for moral law, and the corresponding image of man to guide our actions and identifications, is an expression of our finitude, our inability to be determined only by what we perceive to be true and false.

Spinoza believed, for better or for worse, that the figure to guide us in our practical effort to persevere in being and enhance our power must be human. Spinoza acknowledges that we often resist thinking of ourselves in relation to “the universal idea of man or animal” (E III p55s), but he hopes that we can form an idea of humanity that will be a source of strength, even if it will never be purely rational. Much of the Ethics concerns itself with the disabling effects of a superhuman ideal, a godlike being who does not suffer the natural determinations of cause and effect. To dismantle this ideal, Spinoza undoes the whole theological architecture upon which supernaturalism depends. Yet he also warns us not to err in the other direction by subordinating ourselves to a figure of unadulterated nature. Even if philosophers are more prone to illusions of grandeur than to self-debasing melancholy, it is important to take heed of his lesson for several reasons: First, it underlies the constitutive impact of fantasy. Adam imitates the beast, and insofar as the Fall marks a genuine transformation in his existence, we can see that affects and emotions are not transient experiences. Who we think we are and those with whom we identify matter. Affects materialize the contours of our bodies and selves. Second, to entertain a false idea of ourselves is to overlook one another and thus the real sources of our power. To dream we are either God or beast is to forget that it is all about Eve.

Spinoza’s naturalism aims to regard singular beings, especially “men,” as he says many times, as they are, and not as we would like them to be. If we were free, we would not require these exempla that abstract from the singularity of each individual. But, no less than Adam, we are born ignorant of the causes shaping our desire and our fantasies about ourselves. Our bondage is such that we desire in relationship to an exemplar, a norm that embodies what we hope to become, but we must be wary of any disabling features of this ideal. Spinoza’s suspicion of universals notwithstanding, he maintains the need for provisional boundaries to our exempla in order to avoid allowing our fantasies of other kinds of beings to govern our guiding fiction, the human ideal. Spinoza’s story of the Fall suggests that Adam suffered because his self-ideal excluded Eve. Despite Spinoza’s insistence elsewhere that women are naturally inferior to men (TP 11.4),
sexual difference does not diminish the perfect agreement between Adam and Eve. We might even see in Adam’s mistaken identification with beasts an acknowledgment, probably unconscious, on Spinoza’s part of the barrier posed to human community by (male perception of) sexual difference. If Adam had been perfectly free, he would have acted on his clear and distinct perception of the perfect agreement between his body and Eve’s. Moreover, he would have done so not because he viewed himself and her to be equally human but because he perceived their distinctive natures to be perfectly compatible with one another. Without perfect awareness of which bodies best agree with ours, Spinoza thinks we can lay down a general maxim that agency is most fortified by human community and friendship. Adam’s exemplarity reveals that, first and foremost, humans need compatible partners to enhance their minds and bodies. An enabling exemplar of humanity shows that paradise is regained when we “so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body” and men “want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men” (Ethics IV p18s; cf. IV p68s, conclusion of the parable of the Fall).

Much of the Ethics makes the point well recognized by current social criticism that when our models are supermodels we can come to feel hateful toward ourselves and others. The less recognized lesson is that humanity appears equally defective if it is measured against the model of the beast, where “beast” stands for unmodified natural instinct or unmediated harmony with the natural order. Spinoza’s remarks on beasts, including the tale of the Fall, concern animals as images of man. The story of Adam warns us about how not to think of ourselves as parts of nature. While it is absolutely necessary to affirm that we are part of nature, this does not imply a natural ideal for human existence, especially where “natural” connotes nonhuman or antihuman. Spinoza diagnoses a turn away from humanity toward the emulation of beasts as a corrosive despair in relation to one’s own kind. Thus, even when our models are hairy and shameless, they may be expressions of self-hatred.

Deleuze reads the parable of Adam as a great challenge to moralism. With Spinoza’s naturalistic model of good and bad, he takes ethics beyond the bounds of Spinoza’s philanthropic antihumanism to a more radical posthumanism. As part of an effort to think without the crutch of a human exemplar, an avowed fiction in Spinoza’s philosophy, Deleuze reads the ethics as an ethology, a horizontal plane of beings affecting one another and striving to form fruitful compositions of agency. In the final
section, I will explore Deleuze’s alternative to Spinoza’s insistence on an exemplar of man to avoid the temptation of imagining ourselves as divinities or noble savages.

Ethics as Ethology?

The flight to nonhuman nature is not a practice of renaturalization but a flight from (our) nature. To strive to act from joyful affects, Spinoza commands that we love ourselves and our fellows, warts and all, for better and for worse. He insists that we be guided by an image of man, rather than of God or animal, superman or anti-man, because his project is philanthropic. Spinoza identified a desire for a self-loving and self-emancipating exemplar of man, against the background of quasi-divinity and pseudo-brutality, but today there is a desire for something stranger, something other than either man or even humanity.

If in the seventeenth century Spinoza identified a powerful “desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to” (E IV pref), in the second half of the twentieth century, Deleuze and Guattari suggest displacing man with various alternative figures of desirous becoming. Man as the paradigm for human activity is first unseated by becoming-woman, which comprises a portal to even more transformative becomings in the form of becoming-animal and, ultimately, becoming-imperceptible. Deleuze’s suggestion that Spinoza’s ethics should be read as an ethology is proper to an understanding of Spinozism compatible with becoming-animal. Deleuze displaces anthropocentric moralities with ethics as ethology.

Deleuze claims that because an “individual is first of all a singular essence” or “a degree of power” rather than a class of being, Spinoza’s ethics should be considered to be an “ethology.” Ethology is the study of animal, including human, behavior. It thus treats human and nonhuman animals on the same horizontal plane. From the perspective of ethology, “animals are defined less by the abstract notions of genus and species than by a capacity for being affected, by the affections of which they are ‘capable,’ by the excitations to which they react within the limits of their capability.”

Deleuze proposes ethology as a matrix of intelligibility for Spinoza’s ethics for several reasons. First, he aims to mark the distance between Spinoza’s ethics and moral theories, which are generally predicated upon the uniqueness of humans as a class of being opposed to animal or natural

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being. To undermine a system of generic laws grounded in human exceptionalism, Deleuze’s somewhat peculiar appropriation of ethology highlights the irrelevance of species boundaries. He accents how Spinoza’s philosophy destabilizes ontological differences between beings, as much as between Being (God or Nature) and beings. Likewise, because ethology concerns effective singularities rather than generic types, it is better able to treat transindividual powers, or what are called “assemblages” in Deleuze’s vocabulary. The notion of ethological ethics strives to renaturalize human existence and underscore the genuine alternative that Spinoza’s philosophy offers. In this section, I will proceed to explore what ethics as ethology entails and conclude with a consideration of whether it escapes the concerns that Spinoza raises with respect to animal emulation as an expression of misanthropy.

For Deleuze, Spinoza’s ethics must be understood in opposition to morality. Whereas morality implies a doctrine of what rational beings ought to do, ethics concerns the question of liberating what it is “a body can do.” Ethological ethics is an affective alternative to a spiritual rationality, which circumscribes the moral community within a zone of prescriptive principles or universal laws. Rather than aiming to define the moral community based on shared spiritual or moral powers, as humanism and politics of “personality” inevitably do, ethology ascertains singular units of agency, where agency refers to the power to affect and to be affected. “Singularities” name provisional effective assemblages rather than stable, selfsame spiritual identities or indivisible souls. Deleuze’s understanding of singular being recalls Spinoza’s definition: “if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing” (E II def 7).

Ethology, for Deleuze, concerns the capacities of individuals as singular degrees of power, while “consideration of genera and species still implies a ‘morality.’”

46. Lloyd and Gatens also discuss this aspect of ethology in Collective Imaginings.
47. On Spinoza’s thought as a rejection of ontological difference, see also Negri, The Savage Anomaly.
48. Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 27. Deleuze clearly adopts a somewhat peculiar notion of ethology, however faithfully, from Jacob von Uexküll. For others, ethology belongs precisely to a mode of thinking in terms of species norms and regularities. A very different argument for the relevance of ethology for ethics makes the following claim: “To the degree that human nature is homogenous, the very general principles according to which men may flourish, or fail to flourish, as individuals or groups, will also be homogenous. And it is such principles on which both morality ultimately depends, and ethology may be expected to shed some light.” Meynell, “Ethology and Ethics,” 291.
A taxonomy of genera and species “implies a morality,” because morality subordinates individual cases to general laws. As Hegel’s unhappy consciousness illustrates, morality is most basically the subjection of the changeable to the unchangeable, the submission of the natural and evolving self to the unyielding eternal law. A moral perspective encounters a singular being, event, or circumstance and refers it to the principles appropriate to its type, class, or natural kind. Moral reasoning affirms that to be human, for example, is to conform one’s actions to a stable, universalizable principle valid for all rational beings (divine, human, and/or alien), rather than to inclination, impulse, or biological “nature.” Thus universal, spiritual principles unify apparently diverse individuals by guiding and judging their multifarious actions and life choices.

Morality often functions by using one notion of nature (human nature) against another notion of nature (mere or animal nature). As the moral perspective evolves from Descartes to Kant and Hegel, “human nature” becomes “personhood,” which isolates the spiritual and rational from sensuous determination, aligning moral agency only with the rational aspect of ourselves. In other words, human existence is increasingly defined against nature, as antinature. What distinguishes and unites humans is their being thinking things, entities who operate according to a purely spiritual logic, freed from natural determination, unencumbered by the forces governing corporeal life. In Spinoza’s time, Descartes is clear that morality involves the mastery of nature, in the form of both the body and external nonhuman beings. Arguably, the perspective of morality reaches its most nuanced expression in Hegel, who finds that ethical life composes its necessary ground and supplement. Even as the body and nature are not reduced to pure instrumentality in Hegel, they are progressively internalized by Spirit, which aims to know itself as the whole of reality. Moreover, this realization of Spirit must take the form of “forgiveness,” since nonconforming nature will stubbornly erupt and disrupt Spirit’s self-concept. Nature always remains a problematic factor for Hegel, which must be either domesticated or forgiven for ethical life to reach its highest expression. The perspective of morality in the humanist tradition elevates

49. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, chap. 4, sec. B.
50. Poole argues that the opposition of person to human has disastrous consequences for moral thought (“On Being a Person”). Posthumanists go even further by suggesting the cleavage between human and nonhuman is likewise disastrous and, as I have suggested, has become inextricable from the notion of humanity.
51. Humanism is, in truth, to use a Hegelianism, transhumanism.
the human species out of the natural order of cause and effect precisely through a process of dominating, mastering, or “educating” brute nature within and without. Morality is an expression of the anthropocentric cosmos that bifurcates spirit and nature, self and world, mind and body. By virtue of the ostensibly unique ability to act in accordance with a self-authorized law that is valid for one’s species as a whole, morality endows humanity with a “second nature” that subordinates its given nature. Humanist politics absorbs a notion of morality as the force by which brute nature, the nature of brutes, becomes properly human nature, a nature that is increasingly antinature.

Morality entails an attractive universalism whereby all those who fall into the category of human are due, in contemporary terminology, “equal consideration” or “respect.” Moral arguments have been and will likely continue to be important political tools by which women, racialized groups, and more recently (humans on behalf of) nonhuman animals can insist on the injustice of being treated as means to the ends of others. The ongoing struggle among humans and nonhumans to be included within the class of humankind, however, reveals how particular universal categories remain. The duties and obligations that follow from a moral law vary depending upon whether one is recognized as belonging to the human species, or whether one is “sufficiently” and “relevantly” similar to humans. One hardly needs to point out that those from another nation, culture, religion, or ethnic group, as well as those who are not recognizably gendered, often receive a different sort of moral consideration than those who belong to the type with which one identifies. The category of humanity is always subject to interpretation by the dominant institutions, as Foucault demonstrates so clearly in his career-long examination of the “human sciences.” Yet given the appeal and effectivity of moral strategies, however imperfect they may be, it is not surprising that efforts to improve the lot of nonhuman nature generally aim to extend rather than problematize the category of humanity. Deleuze and others suggest that perhaps a greater challenge to human imagination and narcissism is in order. Rather than extending human principles, posthumanists suggest that we embrace an ethical perspective that interrupts them altogether. Given the mixed success of humanist arguments, a nonjuridical activism inspired by ethology rather than morality is a promising alternative. A perspective that advo-

52. I am alluding here to Regan’s language in The Case for Animal Rights.
53. Rodman presents a trenchant critique of this strategy in “The Liberation of Nature?”
cates equal respect based upon a shared ability to subordinate our natu-
ral to our spiritual selves involves significant losses along with any gains,
from the perspective of renaturalization. Even so, given that we stand to
lose the moral grounds for demanding equal respect, what do we stand
to gain by pursuing a nonmoral, ethological ethics?

Deleuze finds that, rather than “laws,” ethology involves a complicated
and “lasting prudence.”

Such studies as [von Uexküll’s tick], which define bodies, animals or
humans by the affects they are capable of, founded what today is called
ethology. The approach is no less valid for human beings, than for ani-
mals, because no one knows ahead of time the affects one is capable
of; it is a long affair of experimentation, requiring a lasting prudence, a
Spinozan wisdom that implies the construction of a plane of immanence
or consistency. Spinoza’s ethics has nothing to do with a morality; he con-
ceives it as an ethology, that is, a composition of fast and slow speeds, of
capacities for affecting and being affected on this plane of immanence.

Ethology demands a patient and tentative prudence that entails experi-
mentation and “the construction of a plane of immanence or consistency.”
Rather than internalizing a set of principles that will be valid for any occa-
sion and situation, ethology constructs and organizes a plane, a flat hori-
zon of action and passion. As obscure as this may sound, with the notion
of the “plane of immanence,” Deleuze suggests that there is only one order
of being. Thus, there is no superior aspect of the self, or realm of being,
that might order the other part. There is no rational principle that ought
to command the “natural,” corporeal, affective, or sensuous aspect of one-
self or the world. The plane of immanence expresses an ontology with a
“flat geography.” The plane of immanence, what he sometimes calls “the
univocity of being,” names a horizontal field of powers and counterpowers
that can be arranged from within in more or less enabling ways from the
perspective of distinct agents, or “degrees of power,” but that cannot be
directed from without to reflect an external or higher principle.

Deleuze and Guattari call Spinoza “the prince of immanence” by virtue
of his comprehensive effort to eliminate any distance between God and
nature, Creator and creation. Spinoza affirms that God is an “immanent

54. Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 125.
cause” of all that exists (E I p18), which dissolves any gulf between the spiritual and the natural. All that exists is in God, and God is in all that exists (I p15). As Spinoza’s Ethics progresses, God “disappears” into nature and we are left with an infinitely complex but flat horizon of being. If everything is nature, for Spinoza, there is no extracausal realm of freedom, truth, or reason to which bodies, impulses, and feelings ought to be made to conform. Likewise, there is no corrupt or defective nature that needs to be realigned with a given natural harmony. Neither Nature nor Spirit functions as a normative horizon against which to judge actually existing beings. The plane of immanence eliminates any external standards.

Ethological ethics, therefore, must be enacted within a terrain of horizontal relationality rather than upon a vertical axis of subordination. Since the relationships that constitute one’s power and vitality vary for each and every being, we must become practiced at arranging and rearranging our affective communities. Rather than internalize universal laws of self-governance, the ethological agent slowly acquires prudential rules of composition and becomes alert to forces of decomposition.

Deleuze proceeds to make the rather abstract claim that ethology entails “a composition of fast and slow speeds.” This remark refers to Spinoza’s physics, upon which his ethics is based (Ep 27). Bodies retain their singular integrity only by virtue of preserving a certain “ratio of motion and rest” (E II p13L6). To persevere in being, bodies must be able to undergo many changes, interact with myriad ambient beings, and avoid entering into composition with those beings that can destroy their “natures” or “essences.” A human body that enters into composition with a sufficient quantity of arsenic, for example, will no longer be able to retain its essence. It will undergo an alteration beyond what its nature allows and mutate into a new form (i.e., die). One who frequently has occasion to note Oscar Wilde’s observation that “alcohol, taken in sufficient quantities, produces all of the effects of intoxication” may transform her body to the extent that its nature (essence) is extinguished. One may appear to maintain a continuous identity, but, Spinoza notes, death does not require a corpse (E IV p39s). How often we transgress our characteristic threshold of motion and rest is an open question in Spinoza’s text, but it is clear that fatal decomposition takes many forms.

In the other direction, Spinoza highlights the enabling composition.

56. The imagery of “disappearance” comes from Montag, “Spinoza: Politics in a World without Transcendence.”
into greater and greater communities of affect, such that singulars of the same nature might join and become twice as powerful (E IV p18s). Deleuze underscores how virtue names the enhancement of one’s vital power, such that ethological ethics becomes a sometimes unconscious, sometimes knowledgeable, praxis of entering into relations with other beings in enabling ways. Such compositions will not necessarily be recognizable, and the threshold of transformation, as Spinoza implies in multiple places, does not remain confined to individual or specific identity.

Ethology, with its focus on affects rather than individuals or species, is especially well equipped to renaturalize a conception of agency. A qualitative examination of affects foregrounds concrete and particular compositions of power. Ethology takes the “body as model,” never presuming in advance that anyone knows what a body can do. If the body is a model, it is not a blueprint, since Spinoza emphasizes the opacity of the body. Like a body, agency is a provisional effective unity of myriad diverse parts. The prudential cultivation of agency, then, is not the transparent light of the moral law. Spinoza clearly rejects the dualist model of agency as self-rule implied by morality. Action within a plane of immanence opposes any notion of activity that depends upon the transcendence of one’s situation, impulse, or causal environment. Action becomes an endeavor to cultivate a sensuous receptivity, in order better to determine the relations of composition that most enable one to think and thrive. Since one can exist and act only by virtue of the affects that circulate in one’s environment, ethological ethics entails the development of mutually beneficial affective compositions.

The musical metaphor that “composition” suggests is apt, since it points to the passivity involved in listening as well as the need to hear not only discrete notes but the involvement and play between them. While agents as composers certainly act, we are constrained by the tones available and guided by the relationships between them, what they do in concert with one another. Spinozan ethics involves contact, receptivity, and openness to the effects that various encounters and combinations yield. Spinoza’s ethics does not involve a blanket embrace of all others, since there are certainly many bodies that will decompose our own, including, of course, fellow human bodies (E III p34). Yet, he emphasizes throughout that one exists only among a multiplicity of others. We must strive to join forces with those others with whom one can compose ever more vital assemblages, ever more potent arrangements. Ethics imagined as ethology

57. Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 17.
may galvanize more surprising and enabling encounters than Spinoza allows with his emphasis on humans with a corporeal basis for reason.

Nevertheless, if we take our cue from Deleuze and embrace an ethological language that emphasizes the zoological aspect of life as political animals, we ought to bear in mind Spinoza’s concerns. A turn to the animal, to be liberating, must not be an expression of melancholy or felt powerlessness. Antipathy and misanthropy will, according to Spinoza, infect any political program with sad passions that will ultimately hamstring any efforts at liberation. Spinoza’s invocation of the adage “man is a God to man” serves as a rebuttal to Hobbes’s suggestion that humans have an irreducible lupine tendency that political organization must suppress, precariously and constantly. For Hobbes, one must not forget that “man is a wolf to man,” even if the sword can maintain godly relations among citizens.\textsuperscript{58} Although humans can be political animals, this possibility, for Hobbes, must be vigilantly maintained by the pact and the sword. If the natural condition of humankind that is never overcome for Hobbes is one of perpetual fear and restless desire for more in order to maintain a precarious security against our rapacious fellows, we see the necessity by which he deduces a need for absolutist government. It is a sad politics, motivated and preserved by anxious passions. This is but one example of how an image of man can motivate self-negation rather than the discovery of those who might be standing beside us, already in perfect agreement with our natures. In Hobbes’s state of nature, one sees the threat of the wolf, responds in kind, imitating his affects, and overlooks Eve.

Spinoza asserts that the difference between himself and Hobbes is that he maintains “natural right in its entirety,” as much in the state of nature as in the civil order (\textit{Ep} 50). Indeed, Spinoza is arguably more concerned with the possibility that civil order will turn us into brutes than with the inability of sovereigns to suppress our viciousness (\textit{TP} 20.6). Nevertheless, Spinoza’s renaturalization of humanity such that neither language nor reason distinguishes man finally from beasts\textsuperscript{59} may render Spinoza even more vulnerable to the accusation, so often hurled at Hobbes by his contemporaries, of animalizing man.\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, there is no clear moment of anthropogenesis for Spinoza. The lack of opposition between humanity and nature, however, is precisely what I find so promising for a politics of renaturalization. At the same time, I want to keep in mind the reasons

\textsuperscript{58} See the epistle dedicatory to Hobbes, \textit{On the Citizen}.

\textsuperscript{59} Melamed notes that even rocks may be said to possess common notions, in “Spinoza’s Antihumanism.”

\textsuperscript{60} See Ashcraft, “Hobbes’ Natural Man.”
Spinoza asks us to hold onto a distinctive sense of ourselves as particular kinds of beings. Holding certain characteristics in common, having bodies and minds that can potentially agree and form powerful unions, is important for Spinoza to counter the melancholy to which we are prone in the face of violence, social strife, and enmity. Without some sense that we genuinely need and benefit from one another, community with Eve remains a lost possibility for freedom and power.

Today, in taking up a politics of renaturalization inspired by Spinoza, the term human appears in a markedly different landscape. Human was, for Spinoza, a rallying call to oppose sectarian conflict and deny that some peoples are favored above all others by God (TTP 3.5). In our own epoch, we may need a new universal, a new image to assist our efforts to assemble our powers effectively to promote our continued vitality and flourishing. I suspect human-animal alienation is a greater danger to us than human-animal identification. Remaining faithful to Spinoza’s imperative that we find ways to love ourselves as parts of nature with distinctive capacities, the politics of renaturalization can learn from the posthumanist claims, found in figures like Deleuze and Haraway, that an exclusionary paradigm of humanity that exiles dogs, plants, and robots from our sphere of primary concern may be precisely a self-negation, a separation of ourselves from our own power. In disavowing that we are who we are only by virtue of bacteria, nematodes, pacemakers, affections and labors of companion animals, and so many other involvements with nonhumans, we mutilate ourselves and the sources of power in our midst. Just as Adam was weakened by forgetting his need for Eve, we are diminished if we disregard our need, to take only the example of beasts, for animal affection. There is clear evidence that our minds no less than our bodies are enabled by relationships with nonhuman animals. We are enabled not only by instrumentalizing them as food or test subjects for pharmaceuticals but by simple attentive co-presence or companionship. Alzheimer’s patients, for example, show improved memory upon friendly interaction with cats or dogs.\(^61\) Research reveals a “cardiovascular benefit” for males with dogs (perhaps Adam had a heart defect?). Children who have difficulty reading can be helped significantly by a canine audience, and mere pet presence improves arithmetic calculations, something Spinoza would surely appreciate.\(^62\)

\(^61\) Hines and Frederickson, “Perspectives on Animal Assisted Activities and Therapy.”
\(^62\) Garrity and Stallones, “Effects of Pet Contact on Human Well-Being.”
The “animal holocaust” that is our food industry notwithstanding,\(^63\) it would be difficult to deny that many nonhuman animals deeply enjoy their relationships with humans. Moreover, not all human-animal relationships are products of conquest. It is suspected, for example, that wolves deliberately entered into cooperative relationships with humans for food, shelter, and companionship.\(^64\) I hope that the politics of renaturalization can promote and nourish the enabling relations we enjoy with nonhuman animals and call into question the many destructive relations that ultimately threaten our existence as much as theirs.

Yet in our struggle to find new and better ways to honor the nonhuman in and outside of us, Spinoza’s words on beasts suggest that we ought to be wary of any reactionary antihumanism that may animate our turn away from the human. Misanthropy is easily observed in the ecological movement, for example. In lamenting that humanity has ceased to be a part of nature, research biologist David Graber declares that “we have become a plague upon ourselves and upon the Earth. . . . Until such time as Homo sapiens should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along.”\(^65\) Less drastically, some animal rights activists argue that humans should voluntarily withdraw contact from any nonhuman animals. The fantasy that humans could voluntarily circumscribe the effects they have on nonhuman nature, however, is a perfectly humanist ambition predicated on an empirically false human exceptionalism. It is a moral vision that erects an illusory wall between the human world and the natural world.\(^66\) It imagines that humans might undo having been constituted by their nonhuman animal relations, such that our encounters with animals are contingent and optional. In other words, it preserves the antinaturalist notion that humans are a “dominion within a dominion.”

Spinoza warns that a turn to nonhuman nature, if motivated by sad affects, represents only a perverse effect of an anthropocentric worldview and hence a reactionary politics that can only promote the moral fantasies of beautiful souls. Thus, even as I endorse a politics of renaturalization that is not governed by the image of man, or even the human, ours must be a philanthropic posthumanism, lest we remain captive to our melancholy. Spinoza’s words on beasts remind us that affirming ourselves as

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\(^63\) This is an allusion to Coetzee’s provocative novel, *Elizabeth Costello*.  
\(^64\) See Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*.  
\(^65\) Graber, “Mother Nature Is a Hothouse Flower.”  
\(^66\) As much as I admire the uncompromising character of the argument in this book (as well as his legal work for animal rights), I am thinking of Francione, *Animals as Persons*. 
parts of nature is not tantamount to subordinating ourselves to Nature. Although we have no special value as preferred parts of nature and we are not the reason for nature's existence, neither are we a perversion of nature's order. In order to avoid destroying the very powers by virtue of which we exist, we have to learn to love ourselves, to feel the peculiar and distinctive joys that make us who we are. Otherwise, we will remain alone in paradise.